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Caring for Creation Through the Power of Digital Storytelling

Abstract:

Digital storytelling as a form of faith formation can play a role in easing discrete instances of polarization. It does so through nurturing hope and resilience while focusing on how one cares for Creation. This session will explore an ongoing research project which is working to help people learn how to tell their own stories, listen to other people's stories, and record them into digital formats for wider sharing. It seeks to do so by evoking stories about the earth, thereby embodying the sharing of place-based forms of knowledge.

Outline of the session:

The session will unfold in three discrete parts:

- (1) an introduction to the rationale and frame for using digital storytelling as an entry point into deeper engagement with issues having to do with "care for creation" (a specific theological phrase used within religious community settings)
- (2) practice in using a specific story circle exercise – breaking participants into groups of four using zoom's breakout function
- (3) introduction to and description of three specific digital tools available for use in multiple platforms

Story circle exercise (to be engaged in breakouts in zoom)

Remember: Everyone has a story to tell, and no one's story needs to be "fixed." This is an opportunity to share and listen carefully.

Move into groups of four people. Each person in a circle will have a chance to tell a story, and each person will have a chance to try three different listening tasks. The story listening tasks are: "listen for **facts** in the story," "listen for **feelings** in the story," and "listen for **values** in the story."

The basic process is to have one person tell a story, while the other three each listen for specific things (one element per person). After the person finishes telling the story (it should be short, no more than 3 minutes), the other people share what they have heard. Once all three listeners have spoken, the storyteller can offer – if they wish to, but it is not required – some responses. Then you move on to the next storyteller and rotate the tasks amongst the other three.

Take some time between each round. Here is the story prompt we will use:

Share a story of how your faith connects you to the natural world, and how it spurs your care for Creation.

Main concepts/issues:

This participatory research project asserts that we become who we are by the stories we tell, and the listeners who hear them. We know this from centuries of responding to God (here I am writing of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu responses). We know this from our own daily experience of relationship. But sometimes we convince ourselves that our stories aren't worthy, and once we've done that, we have a hard time hearing other people's stories clearly. At other times we live in such self-enclosed bubbles that the set of stories we have available is very limited.

This research project is working to help people learn how to tell their own stories, listen to other people's stories, and to do so by evoking stories about the earth, about place-based forms of knowledge. All of creation desperately needs us to hear its stories. I think about the hymn I grew up with, which has a line -- "the heavens are telling the glory of God, and all creation is shouting for joy" -- and then I think about the words of Valarie Kaur: "Joy is the gift of love. Grief is the price of love. Anger protects that which is loved. And when we think we have reached our limit, wonder is the act that returns us to love." (Valarie Kaur, xvi)

Creation shouts for joy with love of God. Have we lost our ability to hear that joy? Some of us have gotten caught up only in the grief which is all too present as we witness the devastation all around us. Or we are stuck in our anger, which has a vital role to play as a catalyst for action, but is not an emotion we can live within for the long term. So how do we come back to wonder?

This research project seeks to make a small difference by trying to create a space in which we can return to wonder, and in doing so, learn how to share that wonder with a wider community. This project is rooted in forms of knowing that have been preserved for eons by indigenous communities. Such communities learn and grow and preserve their knowledge in stories. Those of us who have grown up in predominately white places, places whose forms of knowing have been sharply narrowed, need to regain, regrow, return to an ability to tell and listen to stories. We can do this in story circles, and we have some hope of engaging across various forms of distance by using digital tools.

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