**Gathering Stories and Generating Insights.**

**What we are doing**

The Diocese of Leicester is undertaking a project to understand more deeply how churches, fresh expressions of Church and our faith communities are discovering the new ways the Kingdom of God is revealed amongst us.

The ‘Gathering Stories, Generating Insights’ process uses a storytelling inquiry model. We are gathering stories across the diocese so that we can reflect and discern our future direction. We had originally intended to carry out this process over a much longer timescale, but the Coronavirus, the associated impacts of the lockdown(s) on our society and economy have caused us to move faster than anticipated. Thus, we are focussing on our experience of being members of a community of faith throughout the lockdown(s) imposed as a result of the Coronavirus and seeking to discover how we can carry our learning and experiences forward into the future, whilst honouring all that has gone before.

Whenever we gather together, we share stories. We gather around the story of Jesus, we remember the stories of God’s grace, we tell each other stories that identify us as Church. Church in all its glorious complexity, unpredictability, and interdependence.

We tell stories of our own wellbeing, of the health of our communities, and of those who care for us, and for whom we care.

We tell stories of justice and highlight stories of inequality and injustice. We challenge the stories that have become dominant in our society. We invite people into a different story.

Stories reveal us and reveal God at work within us.

We are paying attention to our story, God’s story, and the questions that form within us.

The times beg us to ask questions like:

* What is going on?
* How is the Kingdom of God being expressed in these times?
* What can we learn from how people are acting during these times?
* What are the new forms of spiritual feeding that are emerging?
* How might we shift our work and ministry to support new expressions of the Kingdom of God?

When we consider the stories that we tell together we will see patterns emerging. Gathering many stories is necessary to discern patterns and create new knowledge and meaning.

This is a **Participatory Narrative Inquiry** process that works with complex situations and the stories people tell about their experiences. It invites people to share small anecdotes of their experience, and to answer some questions about their story. Within this process we will gather hundreds of stories and begin to examine patterns in the stories that can help shape responses at many levels. This will reveal our diocesan learning and will in turn feed into our future planning.

We are inviting as many people as possible to contribute their stories to our overall story. We are purposefully seeking stories from those we have habitually excluded or diminished. We are not simply seeking affirmation of a dominant version of our joint story. We are seeking a level of engagement that is deeper and wider than anything we have done before.

The compelling and present reason for doing this is the continual revelation of God’s love for this world. In our diocesan ‘world’ we are becoming more aware of our constraints, and yet also of God’s abundance. In our lockdown world(s) we are hearing the call of not returning to ‘normal’, of not ‘recovering to the past’ but of finding a new future way of being. What is going on in the world makes our work important.

The process is **Participatory** in that it includes a diverse group of people as designers of the project, and hundreds of people to tell their stories. The process is **Narrative** in that we are gathering stories and allowing story tellers to interpret those stories. And it is **Inquiry** based in that the stories and the patterns that are revealed provide material to stoke the curiosity of people and groups who may wish to learn and support promising emerging practices. Our stories are of our past, our present, and our future.

We aim to collect over 500 stories to give a sense of some of the patterns that are at play and that ignite our spirit-filled curiosity.

**How to take part individually**

To share your story just use this link <https://is.gd/unozox> and follow the instructions.  If you have heard someone else’s story and they can’t share it online themselves, please feel free to share it on their behalf (with their permission).

You could also share this QR code in a newsletter with your faith community as another way to engage with the same story gathering process:



If you know someone who wants to share their story but **doesn’t have access to the internet or would just rather not do it directly**, they can contact Josh CrickdeBoom, the Bishop’s Research Assistant, and he can arrange for someone to phone and collect the story.  Please contact Josh on josh.crickdeboom@leccofe.org or 0116 270 8985.

Again, if you have any questions or queries about taking part, please do contact Josh in the first instance.

**How to help others take part**

Story collection can happen in a myriad of ways. As well as people filling out the online tool, we can gather stories from interviews and story circles, where groups of people share stories about their experiences. If as a faith community (fresh expression of Church, school, church etc) you would like to have a facilitated story circle, where as a group you tell your story and hear others before capturing them for us, please get in contact.

**How this process could help in your own faith community as well as the whole diocese**

If as a fresh expression of Church, church, benefice etc you would find it useful to have the insights of your own group to talk about locally, please let us know and we can provide a specific link to the story collection (without any of the story contributors being named) and then give you a local set of insights for your own use. If you are interested in this, please contact Josh CrickdeBoom on 0116 270 8985  josh.crickdeboom@leccofe.org

**What will happen next**

We look at patterns-using a process called “Catalysis” in which we identify interesting patterns that can catalyse new actions. Software called NarraFirma (<https://narrafirma.com/>) provides material for us to work with both quantitative and qualitative data sets. Interesting patterns are identified, and these are brought to different groups for sense making and action.

We look at the actionable insights generated– in groups of people who are largely the story contributors, look through selections of stories to illuminate interesting patterns and consider how those insights might reveal promising new approaches to worship, ministry, spiritual experience and network building.

**Confidentiality**

The process uses the stories of individuals and invites many of those individuals into a process to discuss the stories further. It is therefore not anonymous, but it is confidential. The story of an experience could be recognised by someone familiar with the situation and you may be in a discussion groups talking about a story that you contributed.