

# purpose

STORIES OF FAITH AND PROMISE

## Themes 2016–2017

### **September 2016: Passing On the Story**

**Due January 10, 2016**

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Many congregations and families pass stories from one generation to another. They shape us and help us to find our place in the world. What are some of the stories that have been passed on to you? How have they shaped you? Are there common threads that run through some of the stories? Does Christian faith play a role? Not only do we hear stories, but we also tell stories to others. What do we hope to accomplish by keeping stories alive? What do you see as the value in passing along stories?

### **October 2016: Noticing God**

**Due February 1, 2016**

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God is with us all the time. Sometimes we notice, but other times God's presence is not as apparent. Take a look around you. Where do you see God today? Where is God at work in your community and in the world? Do you see God working in your life and in the lives around you? Are there special things you do to remind yourself of God's presence? Share stories that will encourage others to look around and notice God, too.

### **November 2016: Mary and Martha**

**Due March 1, 2016**

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We know the story: One sister sat with Jesus and listened to him. The other sister was busy with tasks, perhaps a little upset that her sister was merely sitting around and not helping. Yet Jesus said that it's better to sit with him than it is to be too busy. We all have times in our lives when we are distracted and worried, keeping us from spending time with God. We also have times when we sit and reflect on what God is saying to us. How do you take time to hear God's voice? Do you ever find that your tasks get in the way of truly listening to God? Or do you find that the tasks you do help you listen to God? Share about a time when you noticed, and listened to, what God was saying to you. How did it change your life?

### **December 2016: Food and Faith**

**Due April 1, 2016**

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Not only does everyone need food, but many people also spend a lot of time thinking about it! They may remember how delicious the Christmas dinner at Grandma's tasted, or wonder what they will make for dinner that evening. Perhaps a new cookbook will inspire and challenge. Sometimes food is used to create community through socializing, such as through church potlucks. Some people try the hundred-mile diet or other eating options. Share stories about the role of food in your life. Do you consider your Christian faith when thinking about food?

## **January 2017: Thankfulness**

**Due May 1, 2016**

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A new year is always a good time to reflect and be thankful for the many things that happened during the previous year. Many people are encouraged in knowing that God has sustained them through life events, and are thankful for the presence of the One who nourishes our souls. How are you mindful of what God has done? How does thankfulness shape your day and your decisions? Share stories about what you are thankful for, and how you remember to be thankful every day and throughout the year.

## **February 2017: Generosity**

**Due June 1, 2016**

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Sometimes we are blessed and can graciously give to those around us. Other times we may be on the receiving end of generosity. These exchanges keep us grounded in a community of faith and giving, a place of relationship and trust. Share stories about how you have experienced generosity, on either the giving or receiving end. How do you give to others, locally or globally? Have you observed that you are more generous with some things than with others? What kinds of things been generously given to you by God or other people?

## **March 2017: Always Learning**

**Due July 1, 2016**

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Many advertisements promote education for all ages. They remind us that we're never too old to learn! Though learning may take different forms over the years, from formal classroom education to the classroom of life experience, there is always more to learn. What do you enjoy learning about? How do you develop a learning environment no matter where you are? And in the learning process, what have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about God?

## **April 2017: Morning to Evening**

**Due August 1, 2016**

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"From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the LORD is to be praised" (Psalm 113:3). Each day is a gift from God. We fill our time with many things, even as we remember to praise God throughout the day. To what do you give attention each day? How do you take time to praise God? Has an ordinary day turned extraordinary due to remembering to give God praise?

## **May 2017: Surprise**

**Due September 1, 2016**

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A regular, ordinary day may turn into a memorable one if we are met with a surprise. Some surprises are good, and we welcome them in our lives. Other surprises are not good and may forever alter our lives. When have you been surprised? Did you notice God at work? Share a story about a meaningful, unexpected event that helped to shape who you are today. And not only do we experience surprises, but we also sometimes surprise others. Share about a time when you surprised someone else. How has it affected your relationship?

## **June 2017: Faith Journey**

**Due October 1, 2016**

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” So begins a proverb that highlights the importance of beginning an event or a project. And along the way there are many things that happen that can be profound and moving; joyful and adventurous. What journeys have you taken? What motivated you to keep going? Did you encounter sacred moments along the way? How have events shaped your faith story? Share about your faith journey, the things that you learned, and how it affected you.

## **July 2017: Fruit of the Spirit**

**Due November 1, 2016**

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are named in Galatians 5:22-23 as the fruit of the Spirit. When have you observed others practicing these characteristics? When have you made efforts to live these traits in your daily life? What difference does it make to live according to the fruit of the Spirit? Share a story about one of them, or combine several into one story.

## **August 2017: Staying Connected**

**Due December 1, 2016**

“Reach out and touch someone.” “Can you hear me now?” Both of these phrases were used in telephone and cell phone ads, all of them appealing to the human desire to connect with others. In our fast-paced world of many types of communication styles, how do you connect with others? How do you find time to relate with other people during the busyness of life? Share stories about how you connect with those nearby or around the world. What do you want to communicate with others, and why? What are some helpful ways to feel close to someone even when you’re far away? And don’t forget that it’s important to connect with God too! Share ideas that help you improve your relationship with God.