



Outcome Stories: The Key to Year-Round Stewardship

By Mike Ward, CFRE



Introduction

Churches seek to do year-round stewardship these days. I couldn't agree more that we should, but we often fail to realize what this means. Year-round stewardship is not asking for money all year; instead, it is setting up an environment where people want to give more to the ministry because that ministry is making an exciting impact.

And the best way to communicate that impact?

Stories.

Unfortunately, most congregations fail to focus on telling these stories of impact. Instead, they tell people about *activities*. We look busy and that feels important, but underneath, people are worn out and uninspired. They're limiting their participation because activities are just one more thing to do. For impactful ministry to flourish, we need to better articulate what God is doing, not just recounting the ways we're busy.

Stories of impact generate excitement – even among people not involved in that particular ministry. It is fun to be part of a community that is making a real difference in the world.

This ebook will teach you how.

Why Tell Outcome Stories?

Imagine that you're leading a church that is sending youth to camp.

If you share a story about the faith development that has happened in the past for youth who went to camp, people will be excited that the children from their church are growing in faith—even if they don't have kids participating in that ministry.

On the other hand, if you simply tell people that signups are available for kids to attend camp, it seems like just one more thing that's happening; and, for parishioners who don't have kids in the program, they won't give much consideration to the potential of this critical ministry.

We need to tell these stories all the time. It is the **cumulative value** of these stories that creates an environment where people feel as if they're investing in ministry rather than paying bills. When people are investing in ministry that makes a difference in the lives of others, they will give far more generously than when they feel they are just keeping the lights on.

Becoming an outcome storyteller takes work. We default to just telling people "what" we do because it is easier. Outcome storytelling takes time and effort. We have to think about what stories we want to tell, who has the story we need to discover, and then we need to figure out the best place to tell that story for maximum impact.

Practices of Good Storytelling

As you work to develop impact stories, consider these keys to good storytelling:

- +** Start with a clear story that shows how someone experienced God in his or her life in a profound manner.
 - Don't tell every story available from this situation, just the most profound one that you can fully develop.
- +** Discern the key needs of your audience (who will hear the story) and align the story with their needs.
 - When I was working at camp, I knew that parents wanted their children to have a faith that would sustain them through even the toughest situations in life. We also knew that they wanted to know their children were being loved unconditionally. Therefore, we looked for stories that reinforced these key needs.
- +** Define the ministry goals that activities are supposed to address. Then, look for stories that indicate that you are achieving these goals through the activity.
 - For example, serving on the altar guild should lead to deeper spiritual life as you set the table and care for the paraments. Ask those who have served in this capacity how it has impacted their own faith and worship experience. Then, next time you need to recruit for altar guild, tell outcome stories instead of just asking people to work.

How to Develop and Share Outcome Stories

Look ahead at the calendar of upcoming ministry activities and decide where you will be looking to proactively develop impact stories, such as youth trips, Bible studies, special worship services, service opportunities, and other new ministries you are launching.

Determining how to communicate outcome stories is also critical. They can be shared live in worship as a testimony, or recorded via video. Sharing stories in writing also works. When doing so, focus on the headline and the opening statement to draw people into the article. Often, you can pull a quote from the witness statement to draw people in. Or include a picture of the person being quoted to humanize the words on the page.

Example Outcome Stories

What follows are examples of outcome stories that you can use to guide your own outcome story creation. The first story is a recent outcome story that the North Carolina Synod of the ELCA shared. It received 418 page views, which is two hundred more views than normal articles they post to their website. The goal of the article is to connect the raising up of leaders with the synod-sponsored youth event.

STORY 1

"I Wouldn't Be Who, or Where, I Am Today without LYO"

LYO has always been committed to equipping leaders for the sake of sharing the Gospel. Picture a weekend in late February filled with the organized chaos of a giant game of "rock, paper, scissors" with about five hundred old and new friends; music led by a band of teenagers that are fairly new musicians and a few adults who care deeply about them and the music they play and sing; faith stories and reflections shared by some of the brightest and best ninth through twelfth graders around; a bishop who tosses out free T-shirts and preaches/presides at worship; intentional faith formation in small groups; 129 pizzas consumed as a late-night snack; and lots of fun and very little sleep. This is just a snapshot of what happens at the NC Synod's annual Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) Assembly. And for the past twenty-five years, Deacon Tammy Jones West, Assistant to the Bishop, has been the staff person responsible for this yearly event.

The Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) of the North Carolina Synod is open to all youth in grades 6 to 12. Youth are members by virtue of being a member of any NC Synod ELCA congregation. Every year, Lutheran youth across North Carolina gather in February for an assembly. At LYO Assembly, youth spend time with each other in small groups, singing with the band and growing in faith. The strength of LYO in North Carolina comes from the youth themselves. The LYO Board (board members are grades 9–12) see to it that LYO Assembly is always youth-planned and youth-led.

Chandler Carriker was a high school senior when he served as the LYO president from 1995 to 1996. "I'm pretty sure it was Tammy's first year, and maybe we had just transitioned from LYNC (Lutheran Youth in North Carolina) to LYO." Following high school, Chandler graduated from North Carolina State University and Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, worked eight summers on staff at Lutheridge and Lutherock, including two summers as associate program director, and is a deacon in the ELCA. He recently left his call at Lutheran World Relief and accepted a call as the vice president of program and engagement at Novus Way Ministries. Deacon Carriker shares, "My time as an LYO president continues to be a foundation for all of the leadership opportunities I've had in the twenty-five years since then. I experienced letting people down, and how to learn from that and grow better as a team. I experienced the joy of achieving goals as a team. And I learned from leaders like Tammy, who placed the grace of Jesus at the center of what they do. Those things have always stayed with me."

Likewise, Ethan Overcash, a seminarian from Faith Lutheran Church in Faith, North Carolina, who is currently doing his internship at Grace, Boone, served on the LYO Board from 2007 to

2009. Ethan shares, "I wouldn't be who, or where, I am today without LYO. I certainly wouldn't be in the seminary process. LYO opened the doors of the church to me and gave me a place to belong where I could discover and use the gifts God has given me. LYO empowers youth to serve and lead, and I discovered my call to ministry while serving on the LYO board. Through LYO, I discovered that the church is so much bigger than my own small-town congregation, and my understanding of the church as a whole will forever be impacted by the church I witnessed in the holy places of LYO. I continually give thanks to God for the gift of ministry that is Tammy and LYO!"

This year after the LYO Assembly, where those gathered gave thanks for Tammy's twenty-five years of service with the children, youth, and adults of this synod (and beyond), she shared in a Facebook post, "So grateful for the past twenty-five years serving in the NC Synod. The friends who became family and the job that became a call to ministry. Thank you LYO 2019 for the beautiful new stole and the ELCA frame with all the memories and journeys yet to come. Tired but blessed."

LYO has always been committed to equipping leaders for the sake of sharing the gospel. Whether the gospel is shared by someone in a youth leadership position that becomes a call to ministry, someone in a job that becomes a call to ministry, or by youth and adults who are equipped for leadership, LYO is truly equipping leaders for the church now and in years to come.



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STORY 2



Outcome stories don't have to be this long. I favor the method of sharing outcome stories in worship at the time of the offering. As you start collecting the offering, share a thirty-second outcome. I remember visiting a Baptist church in Orlando where the pastor walked forward with the plates and said something along the following lines.

Before we collect your offering this week, I want to share quickly how your gifts last week made a difference. A single mom had stopped for help because her car broke down. We were able to use your gifts to buy the part for her car, and some of our members installed the part. She can now get her kids to school and herself to work. Here is a portion of a thank-you note she sent: "Pastor, I want to express my thanks for helping me get my life back in order as you helped me fix my car. You and your members showed me what love and compassion look like. Thank you."

STORY 3

Outcome stories don't have to be from your own ministry; they can be shared from other settings. Many churches offer space to outside groups such as Head Start or Alcoholics Anonymous. Though there are confidentiality concerns with these groups, the leaders can share stories with you. I once heard a pastor share that he was stopped in the hallway of his church building by someone from AA. The man said, "Preacher, I just want to thank you for saving my life." Needless to say, this statement caught the pastor's attention. The man went on to say he is confident that without AA, he would be dead now, and he credits the church with saving his life because they offered the space for him to stay sober. Telling this story to the congregation gave them a sense of the impact of sharing their space and helped them see a ministry value that far exceeded any inconveniences that hosting the group may cause them.



Conclusion

Always be on the lookout for outcome stories in the ministry that you are doing and ways the lives of people in your congregation are being impacted. If you are having trouble finding these stories, you might want to consider whether you are truly carrying out your mission and vision. Often, discovering outcome stories is just a simple matter of asking people to tell how God, the life of faith, or some aspect of your ministry has made a difference in their lives. It takes some work to get started, but once you begin sharing outcome stories, you'll be surprised at how many you'll discover—and how others in your congregation will discover them, too.

The above material exists in part as Appendix A in my book, *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity* published by Fortress Press, 2020.