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ELCA REGION 5 · NOVEMBER 5, 2026

The Stories We Tell

Participant Worksheets

How to use this packet

- Your facilitator will tell you when to turn to each page.
- Write a word, a phrase, or a few lines. There are no wrong answers.
- No one will collect these pages. Share only what you are willing to share.
- Please bring a journal, or have paper to write on.

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MODULE 1: SEE

Four Quadrants Check-In

Take a deep breath. Scan your body. Notice where you are right now, then travel to each quadrant in turn. Write a word, a phrase, or a few lines. No one will collect this.

HEART **What stirred in me?** *Feelings, longings, what moved you.*	**SOUL** **Where did I encounter God?** *A word, a moment, a presence.*
MIND **What challenged me?** *Ideas, assumptions, questions.*	**BODY** **Where do I feel this in my body?** *Tension, warmth, heaviness, breath.*

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MODULE 1: SEE

My Story Map

Each of us carries inherited stories about who counts, who belongs, and who is neighbor. You did not invent them. You learned them somewhere. This map is for noticing, not judging. Begin with honesty, and write a word, a phrase, or a few lines.

1. The Story I Was Taught

Finish each sentence the way you first learned it.

I was taught that good people are…
I was taught that neighbors are…
I was taught that churches should…
I was taught that America is…

2. The Storykeepers

Where did I learn these stories?
Who told them to me, in words or in silence?

3. Who I Imagine as Neighbor

Think of the people in your congregation and community.

Who is naturally imagined as neighbor?
Who is harder to imagine as neighbor?
Who is rarely imagined at all?

4. The Story I Protect

Stories that feel unquestionably true are often the ones we guard.

We can't afford…
We've never…
People like us…
Where does generosity feel like loss to me?

5. What the Story Does

Myth-busting begins not by attacking a story, but by becoming curious about it.

Who benefits from these stories?
What might they prevent me from seeing?

6. The Story Yet to Be Told

What am I curious about now?
What would I want to learn, in order to tell a fuller, more truthful story?
You do not need to know the answer today. Begin by naming what you don't know.

MODULE 1: SEE — SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

What do the Scriptures reveal about how we see?

Choose one question for each text and write a few words. No one will collect this.

CENTRAL QUESTION

How have the stories I inherited shaped the way I recognize human dignity, neighborliness, and deservingness?

Genesis 1:26–27 — Imago Dei

The mirror: *Human dignity is given by God, not earned through identity, status, or belonging.*

- **What have I been taught, explicitly or implicitly, about whose humanity matters most?**
- **Where might my inherited assumptions contradict the truth of Imago Dei?**

Luke 10:25–37 — The Good Samaritan

The mirror: *Jesus challenges the boundaries we place around neighborliness.*

- **Who did I learn to recognize as a neighbor, and who was considered an outsider?**
- **How does Jesus' instruction to become a neighbor challenge the way I see others?**

Matthew 20:1–16 — The Generous Landowner

The mirror: *Jesus exposes our assumptions about fairness, comparison, and deservingness.*

- **What about the landowner's generosity troubles me?**
- **What might my reaction reveal about my understanding of fairness and belonging?**

CLOSING REFLECTION

What is one assumption about dignity, neighborliness, or deservingness that Scripture is inviting me to examine?

A QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What am I beginning to see differently?

MODULE 2: NAME

The Congregational Story Map

Every congregation has a history. But the story a congregation tells about itself is not the same as everything that happened. This exercise invites you to notice which stories have become part of your congregation's identity, how those stories are preserved, and what may remain outside the telling.

Congregation: _____

1. The Story We Tell

When someone asks about your congregation, what story do members usually tell first?

Think about founding, traditions, accomplishments, hardships, or defining moments.

2. The Storykeepers

Who or what keeps that story alive?

Consider longtime members, pastors, anniversary celebrations, photographs, archives, worship traditions, and memorials.

3. The Story We Celebrate

Which people, events, and contributions receive the most attention or recognition?

What does your congregation's remembering suggest about what it values?

4. The Story Outside the Frame

Whose experiences or contributions are rarely included in the story?

Think about people who left, were excluded, experienced conflict, or lived in the community before the congregation was established.

5. The Story We Protect

What familiar story about your congregation might be difficult for members to question?

For example: We've always been welcoming. We're like a family. We don't have those problems here.

6. The Story Yet to Be Told

What would you want to learn to tell a fuller, more truthful story of your congregation?

You do not need to know the answer today. Begin by naming what you don't know.

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MODULE 2: NAME — SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

What do the Scriptures reveal about the stories our communities tell?

Choose one question for each text and write a few words. No one will collect this.

CENTRAL QUESTION

How have our congregational stories shaped who belongs, whose contributions matter, and who has authority?

Luke 10:25–37 — The Good Samaritan: The Boundaries of Collective Memory

The mirror: *Jesus names the person our stories would leave outside the frame.*

- **Whose stories does our congregation remember as central to its identity? Whose suffering, contributions, or experiences have remained outside our collective memory?**
- **How might our understanding of neighbor change if we remembered those stories?**

Matthew 20:1–16 — The Generous Landowner: The Authority to Belong

The mirror: *Jesus exposes who we believe has earned the right to define the community.*

- **Who has traditionally earned the right to shape our congregation's identity?**
- **When newer or previously excluded voices begin influencing the community, what reactions emerge? What might those reactions reveal about the myths we carry concerning deservingness?**

CLOSING REFLECTION

What congregational myth becomes more visible when we examine our community's stories through these Scriptures?
(Look back at your Myth Inventory.)

A QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What story are we being invited to question?

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MODULE 2: NAME

Myth Inventory

A myth is not necessarily a lie. It is a story told so often that it begins to seem like plain fact. This is not a place of judgment or shame. It is a place of naming. Read each myth below and ask whether it sounds familiar in your congregation or organization. Mark what you notice and add your own.

Congregation or organization:

_____

PART 1 — Myths We Carry in Congregational Life

Stories about who belongs, whose voice carries authority, and what welcome means. Sub-myths of the "genuine Lutheran."

The myth	Does it sound familiar?	How does it work?
The Genuine Lutheran: "Only those from German or Scandinavian backgrounds have the right to call themselves genuine Lutherans." *From Giacomo Cassese. It leaves everyone outside that ethnic tradition feeling like an "illegitimate son of Martin Luther."*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The European Lutheran: "The real Lutheran way is the European way: its worship, music, food, and customs." *The deep embodiment of European culture becomes the standard for what it means to be Lutheran.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The Myth of Uniformity: "To belong here, you have to worship, sing, eat, and take part the way we do." *Every space has its own culture. The problem comes when difference makes people feel inferior.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The Welcoming Church: "We are a welcoming church. All are welcome." *When race has not been investigated, welcome goes uninvestigated, and it can carry a caveat: you are welcome to come and be like us.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	

“We built it and we paid for it, so newcomers should be grateful.” *“That’s only fair.” Fairness and ownership become the reason for who gets to define the community.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
A story we tell so often it feels like fact:	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes	
A story we tell so often it feels like fact:	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes	

PART 2 — Myths America Lives By

From Richard T. Hughes, Myths America Lives By. National stories often enter congregational life without anyone noticing. How do these myths show up in the church?

The myth	Does it sound familiar?	How does it work?
The Chosen Nation: “We are uniquely favored by God, called to a special mission in the world.”	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
Nature’s Nation: “Our values and ideals simply reflect the natural order of things.”	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The Christian Nation: “Our identity and our conscience are rooted in Christian faith.”	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The Millennial Nation: “We have a providential role in history.” *The belief behind manifest destiny and the expansion that came at others’ expense.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
American Capitalism: “Our capitalist economy is the natural and fair way to organize life together.”	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	
The Innocent Nation: “Our nation cannot do evil.” *Hughes names this as the myth that rests on self-delusion.*	☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Not here	

MODULE 2: NAME → MODULE 3: RECKON

From Familiar Story to Faithful Question

Look back over Parts 1 and 2. You do not need to solve anything today. The aim is to choose one myth to carry into Module 3.

1 RECOGNIZE: Which myths sound familiar?

Star the two or three that feel most alive in your congregation or organization.

2 EXAMINE: What does this story make possible?

Choose one starred myth and look at it closely.

Whose experience or contribution is centered? Whose is less visible?

Who has the power to preserve, repeat, or challenge this story?

Who might this myth hurt? Who does it protect?

How might this story shape who is recognized as neighbor, or who is seen as deserving of belonging?

3 CHOOSE: One myth to carry into RECKON

I want to examine this myth further:

One truth, experience, or question that complicates this story:

I do not need to solve it today. One question I want to bring into Module 3 is:

LOOKING AHEAD: RECKON

In Module 3, return to your selected myth and ask: What is true? What harm or exclusion may need to be acknowledged? What would repentance and repair look like in one concrete, faithful next step?

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MODULE 3: RECKON — REFERENCE CARD

Guilt, Shame, Repentance, Repair

Follow along as the four terms appear on screen. Write a few words under each, in response to its question. No one will collect this.

REMEMBER

Reckoning is not about proving our goodness. It is about responding faithfully to what we now know. Acknowledging harm matters, but acknowledgment alone does not repair what has been damaged.

GUILT	Recognizing that something we have done, supported, or failed to address has caused harm. **What have I done or left undone?**

SHAME	When the recognition of harm becomes a judgment about our worth or identity, making it harder to respond. **What does this say about who I am?**

REPENTANCE	Acknowledging harm and turning toward a different way of living and acting. **What must change?**

REPAIR	Taking responsibility through concrete actions that address harm and help restore right relationship. **What will we do differently?**

A QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What is God calling us toward?

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MODULE 3: RECKON — SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

What does Scripture call us to do with what we now know?

Return to the one myth you chose in Module 2. Let Scripture turn what you now know toward faithful action. Write a few words. No one will collect this.

CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it mean to become a neighbor through repentance and repair?

Luke 10:36–37 — Go and Do Likewise

The mirror: *Jesus redirects attention away from proving our goodness and toward faithful action.*

- **What is the difference between recognizing harm and responding to it?**
- **How might repentance require our congregation to change something it has long considered normal?**
- **What would repair look like beyond an acknowledgment, statement, or resolution?**

ONE MYTH. ONE TRUTH. ONE NEXT STEP.

One Myth *What inherited story have we identified?*

One Truth *What truth do Scripture and our examination of history ask us to acknowledge?*

One Next Step *What concrete action could help us live differently as neighbors?*

A QUESTION TO CARRY FORWARD

What is God calling us to do differently?