

TELLING YOUR FAITH STORY, BEGINNING YOUR SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY, LEAVING A LEGACY

By June Begany

Lillian Daniels in her book *When "Spiritual But Not Religious" Is Not Enough*, states that what people who are seeking and in particular seeking out a church are looking for is community and connection. They are seeking the experience of connecting to others who have been through life's ups and downs. They are seeking relationships. They are looking for engagement.

Many of us come from traditions where we do not share our faith stories. We keep these experiences private. We also often overlook the experiences of God in everyday life, those experiences that remind us of God's presence. In Diana Butler Bass's latest book *Grounded, Finding God in the World*, she points out that more and more people are seeking and finding God present with them. They do not necessarily seek the church as a place to find God. But they do seek others with which to share their experiences.

The following exercise is a way to begin to look at your own life's experiences with God, the divine, so that you can share your faith story. This may be the beginning of your spiritual autobiography. It may allow you to share with family or church family your particular experiences with and of God/Christ/Spirit. You will need 1 sheet of paper 8^{1/2}" x 14" or larger and at least 2 pens or pencils with different color inks or leads. This may be done by yourself. It may also be done in a group, at least as you talk about the big picture of what was happening in each decade.

1. Fold the paper in half length wise so there is a fold going down the middle. You may choose to ink that in so it is plain to see.
2. Unfold the paper then refold it again the short way so it is folded in half.
3. With the paper folded in half width wise fold it again then a third time.
4. When you unfold the paper you should have 8 columns. At the top of the column furthest to the right, at the very top write 2010-.
5. At the very top of the column second from the right put 2000-2009. Moving to the next column put 1990-1999.
6. Continue putting the decade headings on columns. The column furthest to the left should say 1940-1949. You may need to turn your sheet over to add other decades.
7. Put an X on that center line in the column of the decade in which you were born.
8. If you like, make a very brief note at the top of the column for each decade (i.e.: Great Depression, WWI, JFK Assassination, Watergate, Rock 'n Roll, Housing crisis) to remind you of the larger context
9. Starting as far back as you wish, list the major events in your life i.e. graduations, marriage, jobs, children, etc. If these were positive events for you, note above the middle line. If these were not so positive, i.e. death of a parent, loss of a job, list these below the line. These will be brief notes to remind you of these events.

10. When you have finished with your life events, take a different color pen or pencil and begin to note experiences with and of God. These may involve joining a church, or teaching Sunday school. More important will be a time when you sensed God's presence, perhaps during an illness or crisis. Perhaps it will be walking along a shore and having your breath caught by a sunset. Perhaps it will be the smile of a child receiving food. There may be negative experiences – anger at injustice or at a death. All of your experiences need a reminder on your chart.
11. Reflect on what you have written. Do your life and God experiences intersect? Where? Are there gaps? Are there times the experiences are far apart? Divergent from your life?

As you reflect on your life events and your personal experiences of God what do you see? What have you learned? What can you share with others, those who may be seeking God?

Rev. June Begany served as an Associate Pastor for 24 years at a downtown Cleveland church, as an interim pastor for 2 years and is now retired. She is also a licensed social worker, has taught history in the Cleveland school district, and is certified to administer the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. She completed her capstone project for certification in the Older Adult Ministry program in 2014. She has recently served as secretary to the POAMN Executive Committee.