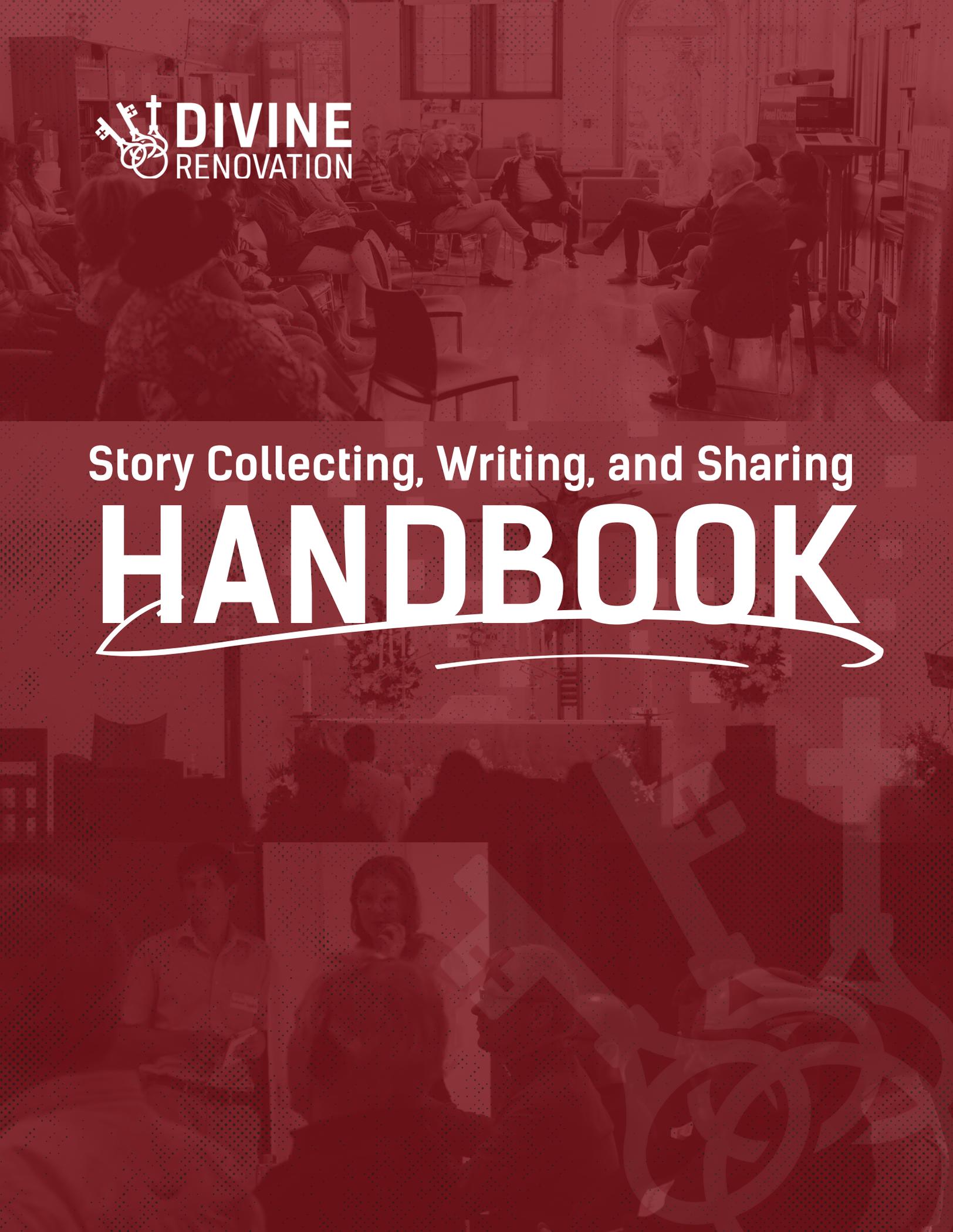


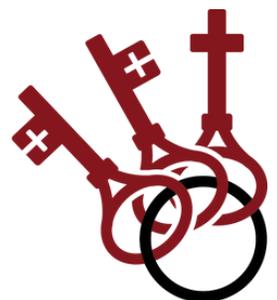


Story Collecting, Writing, and Sharing **HANDBOOK**



“Stories constitute the single **most powerful weapon in a leader’s arsenal.”**

Dr. Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard
Graduate School of Education.





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HANDBOOK

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Introduction

“Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story— those He redeemed from the hand of the foe, those He gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.” Psalm 107:2-3

When I was a child, my aunts would have frequent family get togethers resulting in enormous amounts of food, and inevitably, storytelling. As familiar as a scoop from a casserole dish, the stories passed down from: their parents, their childhoods, or the past week, were shared around the table.

Stories can hold opposites together, allow space for the unknown, the complicated, the confusing. They hint to the existence of things that feel too hard to intellectually fathom. To listen in, is to feel, to imagine, to enter into mystery – ultimately it is an invitation to community. As we listen, we participate in it.

In my family, despite the cozy setting of food and family, the notable lack of men spoke to the loss, divorce and a multitude of traumas endured by each of the women. These stories were there too, cloaked in humour, laced with a hard edge, or whispered to each other in quiet broken moments in the kitchen; while we children, unaware, ran wild in the next room.

All these stories, joyful and sad, became my own. Before I knew the words, they made up my DNA, the story of where I had come from and the people I was surrounded by. Love was my lineage, and I learned it one story at a time.

In this way, my aunts were mimicking Jesus. His first miracle was about food and family (and wine), and stories were his bread and butter. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) -- should it come as any surprise that his main modality was storytelling? Afterall, Creator God spoke and it was (Gen.1:3) -- literally story-making the earth into being. Similarly, our stories of faith tie us together, point to the initial spark of our creation and weave us into our spiritual lineage.

Metaphorically, in parish renewal we continue to gather around the table, our children playing in the background. We bring in the friend weeping in the kitchen and the one laughing on the porch, and we tell our own stories; we fill ourselves with the food of our redemption.

Pull up a chair – we all have a story to share.

So you want to gather a story?

Building out the “who”

1. Start with easy factual questions to set a person at ease (name, location, parish)
2. Background questions can build context and open opportunities for camaraderie through shared experience (Where did you grow up? What was your first experience of Church you can recall? What was the moment you felt the call to priesthood?)
3. Being curious is a great way to show you care: have them explain their parish geography or “vibe.” What was the first thing that stood out to them about it? How would they sum it up in a word?

Distilling “the problem”

What is their Holy Discontent? This can be a sensitive topic as many don’t want to sound too negative about their people/parish. You can personalize it and validate their experience: Eg. What did you feel was holding you back from leading a missional parish?

1. What moment pushed you to the point of change?
2. When could you no longer accept the way things were?
3. What had to change?

Meeting “the guide”

Usually this will easily answer the questions about the problem – basically you are asking “How did you connect with DR?”

2. How did you discover DR?
3. What did you think at first about the 3 keys? About if this journey was possible for your parish?

Describing “the call to action”

Basically you are asking how did they take action?

1. What were the first steps you took with DR and parish renewal?
2. Who were you connected with at DR? Did you attend an event? Coaching?
3. What was different for your leadership once you were supported?
4. How did being accompanied by DR change your trajectory?

Celebrating “the fruit”

Now ask: what changed – what was the result of those actions and decisions from the step above?

1. When did you start seeing a change in your leadership/parish?
2. What happened after you did that _____ (alpha/change/new ministry etc.) what was the result?
3. **Specifics, specifics, specifics!** Ask details: numbers of baptisms, RCIA participants, individuals stories
4. Ask for **specific stories** by following each question of change with “can you think of a specific example where you say that happen?”

Sum it all up

1. The journey of parish renewal can be long and hard, why do you feel it has been worth it?
2. What would you say to encourage a fellow leader just starting this journey?

So you want to tell a story?

Start with “who”

Father Tom has been a parish priest at Our Lady of Mercy for over twenty years.

Move to “the problem”

But for 19 of those years he felt a quiet desperation eating at his heart. His parish seemed content to dwindle into decline and at some point he became part of the status quo, numbly moving through the motions.

Meets a “guide”

At the recommendation of his Bishop he read “Divine Renovation” by Father James Mallon. He attended the DR ’23 conference with guarded interest. Father Tom felt as though his parish and its unique circumstances couldn’t be understood by a wider global movement. While he hoped to pick up a few helpful tips, he also dreaded the internal sense of failure that inevitability accompanied watching testimonies of thriving parishes and on-fire priests.

He soon found out he wasn’t alone. What happened next changed everything.

What happened to change that “The Call to Action”

Instead of shame, Father Tom was met with connection from leaders and brother priests who knew exactly what he was feeling. They had experienced maintenance mode and had come out the other side. Divine Renovation had equipped them and their teams for renewal. For the first time in decades Father Tom was inspired. He decided to take action and signed up for group coaching. He jotted down a list of parishioners he would like to invite to consider being a part of a leadership team as soon as he got home from the conference.

Success of where they are now “The Fruit”

Over the past year, he has discovered a path forward. With the support of a coach, he has formed a leadership team. He and his team have a clear vision for the parish and have moved to a missional trajectory. They are now starting their second Alpha and focusing on the primacy of evangelization. This has not only brought new people to Jesus it has also started to change the culture of the parish. People talk to one another...they are even starting to feel comfortable talking about their faith, something that just would not have happened a year ago.

Father Tom knows the road to renewal will not be a quick one, but is committed to the journey. He relates, “I have experienced a personal renewal in my own vocation. I am now the “on-fire” priest that I used to look at enviously.” Ultimately DR has helped “both me and my team to rely on empowerment by the Holy Spirit and it has changed not only my parish but me as well.”

Some other tips:

- Find ways to incorporate key quotes – it is always more powerful if the words come from the person and not DR.
- Look for simplicity and clarity in your storytelling.
- Try telling it orally first to someone who doesn’t know the story – it will help distill the main points

So you want to write a story?

Fill in the blank story form:

_____ (who) is the _____ (title) at
_____ (parish) in _____ (city, country). In _____
(year), they _____ (problem/challenge/holy discontent). This
was a turning point for them. Moving forward they knew they wanted
change. They encountered _____ (how they connected with
DR) which led to _____ (form of connection eg. coaching,
conference, genesis compass etc.). Now they are
seeing/experiencing _____ (fruit.)

**You do not have to follow the exact Storybrand Model*.
If you want deviate to your own form remember some key elements.**

Author Salmon Rushdie, narrows storytelling down to 6 things:

1. Whose story are you telling?
2. What is the story?
3. Why are you telling the story?
4. When does the story take place?
5. Where does the story take place?
6. How will you tell the story (tone, perspective, approach, timeline, structure)?

*Storybrand is a model we use at DR that positions the priest/parish as the hero and the ministry as the guide. The basic structure is: A hero, has a problem, meets a guide, creates a plan, is called to action, success/fruit.

Guidelines for protecting the story source

- Regard the story as secondary and the relationship with the one sharing the story as primary
- Let them know before you gather the story that the story may be held (ie. Not used immediately) people can feel hurt if they assume you were going to publish the story and then don't see the story used anywhere.
- Always ask permission to share, in writing (by email). Show the final edited draft letting them retract anything they feel uncomfortable with
- Feel free to send a story card thanking them for sharing their experience, and if not by mail do this my email. Remember that the act of sharing a story is an act of generosity, but that vulnerability can leave a person feeling exposed. Following up is an act of care.

User Generated Content (Volunteer Writers/PRGs/Parishioners)

Needs to:

1. Align with DR principles and values
2. Mention DR or DR parishes, priests, leaders etc.
3. Be approved by Storyteller/MarComm
4. Apply to/or be interesting for our global audience
5. Fit or be cut to DR blog length (400-800 words) or regional newsletter story length (150-250 words)

How to gather:

1. A call for stories through a “Speakpipe” link at the end of major events and email campaigns (eg. WIGS, PPR campaign)
2. A blurb at the end of blog articles stating: “Do you have a story to share? Email us at communications@divinerenovation.org”
3. Identify engaged participants to invite to write (eg. PRG’s, Conference volunteer, Parish SLT members etc.)

How to use:

1. Respond to volunteer writer with proposed edit or cut for publication
2. Get sign off to share (letting them know where it may be shared)
3. Ask author for accompanying photographs
4. Send link to author when published

Telling a story live and coaching testimonies

1. It is always better to have someone tell their own story, if they are present have them share it themselves.
2. If you are telling someone else's story it needs to put them in a positive light (never use a story to put down the protagonist or show DR as superior to the person in the story)
3. Avoid using a script or cards, know the key points of the story and memorize your starting point and your ending sentence to land the story
4. Know why you are telling this story and who the story is for – this way the theme of the story is focused on action, which is called an objective. What are you doing with your story?
5. If possible, walk the stage before hand with whatever mic set-up you will be using so that you can get a feel for the space.
6. Practice speaking a line to an imaginary person in each row of the audience as a warm-up.
7. If you are interviewing someone giving their testimony rehearse with them. They should know:
 - The starting and end point
 - What the mic situation will be and who is holding it
 - Where they are entering and exiting from
 - What stage blocking will be (eg. who will stand where)
 - Things to avoid – standing in a straight line with each other, too many people at once, mic awkwardness, someone not speaking into their mic, lack of rehearsal

Further Resources

- *How to Tell a Story: The Essential Guide to Memorable Storytelling from The Moth*, by Catherine Burns et al.
- *The Right to Speak: Working with the Voice*, Patsy Rodenburg
- *Building a Storybrand: Clarify Your Message So Customers Will Listen*, Donald Miller



**“There is something in us, as storytellers
and as listeners to stories, that demands
the redemptive act, that demands that what
falls at least be offered **the chance to be
restored.**”**

-Flannery O'Conner

