

A FAITH AUTOBIOGRAPHY

As with journaling, a Faith Autobiography can give you (and those members of the Missioners mutually discerning with you) a sense of theme and pattern in your spiritual life. Writing your faith autobiography can give you a sense of those themes, people, events, and experiences of your spiritual life which have shaped you. It can also give you an idea of what questions have pursued you over the years.

It is in writing this autobiography that you can gradually come to understand how seemingly unrelated facets of your life can be understood in all their interrelatedness. More importantly, it is here that you may discover Christ in your life, and more clearly recognize how He has been actively present and “at work” in your life, inviting, guiding and drawing you into the fullness of life.

It is not particularly difficult to write a faith/spiritual autobiography, though getting started is usually the greatest challenge. It primarily demands time, a willingness to seriously reflect on your life, and openness to God. This exercise is meant to be more than just supplying the Missioners with your story... it is meant to provide you with an opportunity for deeper reflection on God’s work in your life, from your earliest experiences up to today.

General Parameters/Suggestions

- † The autobiography should be approximately 2000 to 3500 words in length, or roughly 3 to 6 single-spaced pages. Please try to stay within these parameters!
- † The autobiography focuses less on the particular people, events, and experiences of your life and more on what these people, events and experiences meant for you and how they formed or shaped the course of your life.
- † The autobiography should include experiences and people (whether these events seemed “spiritual” at the time or not) that impacted your moral development, as well as those that impacted and/or shaped your worldview.
- † In general, you experience in interpersonal relationships, both family and friends, *can* be applicable... but you will need to use discretion in this area, as it could easily take up the entire given space. Think of key relationships of influence (both positive and negative) that helped shape the person you are today.
- † As well, your experience of *community*; meaning, how you related to and within groups is definitely applicable. Did you experience life/God as a loner and/or outsider? Have your experiences with groups/communities (whether faith-centered or not) been enriching and sources of affirmation, or taxing and sources of rejection?
- † A major point here is not to indulge on an ego trip, and for this particular purpose, it is not asked that you digress into your own version of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. It is to help you define what you’ve come to truly believe, as well as to provide a focus on those questions which you still want to pursue.

Overall, the best way to approach your Faith Autobiography is to first simply tell your story. For some, it may be helpful to start with a rough outline, though again, it should be a story, not simply a collection of random thoughts and reflections such as a spiritual journal. It should possess an interior organization and cohesion and, in some manner or another, describe the progression from when you began to where you are today. *It should not be the story of your life. It is not your “series of events” autobiography; it’s your faith/spiritual autobiography.* You will need to be selective in the material you choose – what to leave in and what to omit.

General Suggested Format/Basic Components

I LIFE OVERVIEW

Your life overview begins at birth and continues until today. You are looking at your relationship with Jesus Christ, with God and with a gathered faith community (the Church) as well as how you live it out. The intention is for you to work with significant broad strokes with about half of the paper dealing with the life over view. You will need to be selective in what you include.

A. *Childhood*

- † You can begin with your parents' religious background and general spiritual approaches. Your early life might include messages that were communicated to you; early experiences that had impact on your subsequent spiritual journey; even if religion was not part of your upbringing, there may have been spiritual influences from either parent – what were those influences? Who were the people that most influenced you during this stage?
- † You can then explore your early experiences with organized religion; how you were initiated and integrated into a religious community (parish); particular events that may of impacted you; persons who influenced you spiritually. Did the Catholic school play any role in these years? The local parish? How did you experience God in these years?
- † How did you come to know Jesus? Was Jesus part of your life in your home – through family prayer, talking about Jesus, opportunities for retreat?

B. *Life as a Teen, Young Adult, Adult*

- † You can then mention your teen, young adult and then adult years. What connections do you see between significant people, events, experiences, and ways you experienced God as active in your life. What role, if any, did the Catholic school play in your life? The local parish? How did you continue to experience God in your life? How did you come to know and experience Jesus?
- † You can explore your experiences with organized religion; your understanding of your relationship with Christ; commitments you have made as a result of your experiences; any sense of Christian vocation which has emerged; ways that you have matured in your spiritual life and patterns in your religious / faith life. How do you see yourself within a formal church community: Sunday Eucharist, church teachings, parish life?

II SOME PARTICULAR AREAS FOR REFLECTION

- † ***On suffering:*** in general how have the sufferings of your life impacted your spiritual / faith journey?
- † ***On prayer:*** what role has prayer played in your life? What type of prayer experiences have you had? What unanswered prayers? Have you had opportunities for retreat?
- † ***On sin:*** what have your experiences been with the concept of sin, heaven and hell? What beliefs do you hold now about these?
- † ***On doubt:*** have there been times of doubting in your spiritual journey? What doubts have you struggled with? How do you approach the questions that come to you in your faith life?
- † ***On justice and peace:*** has your spiritual journey been impacted by the Gospel vision of justice and peace? What contact have you had with the poor and suffering?

NOTE: The Missioners of Christ will consider this a confidential document, and access to it will be restricted to those who are participating, both directly and indirectly, in the mutual discernment process with you.