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# SCIENCE & RELIGION

## Stories of Medicine & Religion



MUSEUM OF LIFE & SCIENCE

EXPLORING COMPELLING NEW STORIES  
★ AND THOUGHT PROVOKING IDEAS ★





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**SCIENCE & RELIGION**  
TRUE STORIES WELL TOLD



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## STORIES OF MEDICINE & RELIGION

### Museum of Life and Science

#### PROJECT BACKGROUND

This public program was developed as part of a three-year project, *Think Write Publish—Science & Religion*. Through a series of programs, fellowships, and a writing competition, the project sought to explore the relationship and intersections between science and religion. Rejecting a common narrative that the two are necessarily at odds, this project explored a different proposition: that science and religion can reinforce each other to allow a more nuanced, profound, and rewarding experience of our world and our place in it.

The project resulted in 12 creative nonfiction stories, as well as five experimental public programs designed to promote productive conversations about the relationship of science and religion in museums and other cultural spaces. Each program was inspired by one of the project's creative nonfiction stories, and was designed for a different audience using an appropriate programmatic format. The public programs were held in communities across the United States: Phoenix, Arizona (led by Arizona State University); San Francisco, California (Children's Creativity Museum); Durham, North Carolina (Museum of Life and Science); Boston, Massachusetts (Museum of Science); and Saint Paul, Minnesota (Science Museum of Minnesota). In addition to providing a safe space for multiple and diverse audiences to consider the relationship of science and religion, a larger goal of the programmatic effort was to explore techniques for addressing potentially polarizing topics in ways that are constructive and build bridges among different perspectives and experiences.

#### CONTENTS

This package contains:

- Program overview document
- Summary of program evaluation findings

#### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

**Title:** The Monti, the Museum of Life and Science, and the Carolina Theatre of Durham present: *The Monti: Stories of Medicine and Religion*

**Target audience:** Adult public

**Format:** Live storytelling event

**Setting:** Theater

**Length of program:** 2 hours

**Inspired by:** *Faith in Nursing*, a creative nonfiction story by Sarah Christensen.

**Overview:** In partnership with the Monti, the region's premier storytelling production company, the Museum of Life and Science held a Friday evening event at the Carolina Theatre, one of the region's most distinguished theatre venues. The event featured five speakers, each telling a 10-

15 minute long personal story at the intersection of medicine and religion. The speaking was unscripted, but speakers participated in extensive preparation with the Monti's storytelling coach in advance.

**Story summary:** Sarah Christensen's story, *Faith in Nursing*, describes her experiences as a pediatric nurse and Christian, who cares for children with cancer. She reflects on this moment in time, when advanced medicine and dedicated medical professionals still cannot keep children from suffering and dying. She considers that God is just as brokenhearted as she is when one of her patients does not survive, and derives strength from this idea.

**Key ideas:** Despite their rich, interwoven history, "science" and "religion" are often portrayed as opposites in nearly every way, irreconcilable by definition. Indeed, our increasingly polarized societies seem to encourage the proposition that these two ways of knowing the world cannot productively co-exist, that they encounter each other through conflict and contradiction. There is perhaps no arena in which the two are more intertwined than in that of medicine—where body, soul, and spirit might all be the source, or the target, of healing. This event highlighted on the contradictions, the connections, and the conundrums, that reside at the intersection of medicine and religion. Through the power of personal stories, the event aimed to advance a different proposition: that science and religion can reinforce each other to allow a more nuanced, profound, and rewarding experience of our world and our place in it.

**Program goals:** Participants will:

- Find the program to be interesting and relevant;
- Consider conversations about the relationship of science and religion to be timely and important;
- Experience insight(s) or new ideas about the relationship between science and religion;
- Reflect on their own values and consider the relationship of science and religion in their own lives.

## **ADVANCE PLANNING**

This event requires several months of advance planning, with more intensive planning work beginning about four weeks prior to the event.

**Identifying partners and sponsors:** You may want to partner with other organizations to accomplish your program goals. Partners might provide resources such as funding, space, or equipment; expertise in storytelling, video production, marketing, or the subject matter; or relationships with storytellers or audiences. You will want to establish your relationship early on, with plenty of time to establish common goals, define roles and responsibilities, and work out a timeline and plan. You might consider capturing key aspects of your agreement in a memorandum of understanding, including:

- Workthreads and timeline
- Roles and responsibilities
- Deliverables
- Ownership of intellectual property

- Allocation of costs and revenues to different parties
- Success metrics
- What occurs should a party or parties fail to meet their obligations

**Choosing storytellers:** Stories and storytellers should be selected to provide a diversity of tones, story types, and perspectives. Having diverse individual will help audience members connect with, be surprised by, and ultimately reflect on of the stories that are being told. A balance of tone (e.g. sad, funny, intense, reflective) is also crucial to a positive audience experience.

Our storytelling partner, The Monti, selects speakers through a combination of recruitment and an open call for proposals. They have a mailing list of several hundred people, who have attended past Monti events or who have otherwise signed up for communications. This list is augmented by a following on social media, in particular the Monti Facebook page. The call for proposals is put out via these channels, as well as via the Monti web page. Individuals pitch their ideas via e-mail; the Monti develops a short-list from these for conversation, and eventually selects the final set of speakers for story development and practice.

In the *Stories of Medicine and Religion* program, we looked for speakers who would present diverse perspectives on the relationship between medicine and religion. To complement Christensen, who agreed to tell her story live as part of the program, we ultimately selected four other storytellers: a medical student with a background in religious studies; a doctor and writer; a scholar whose research focuses on religion and neuroscience, and who is also a comedic improviser; and a clinician and vocational specialist who works with adults with severe and persistent mental illness.

When you have identified prospective storytellers, have an initial conversation with them. Discuss the goals of the program, what perspective you think they bring, the way the program will be planned and implemented, what their obligations will be, and the timeline.

**Choosing a host:** You will also need a host who serves as a master of ceremonies. This person ideally will be practiced in this role, able to set the tone for the event and smoothly transition all aspects of the program. You may choose to have additional hosts, such as representatives of the sponsoring organizations, who might have a more limited role (for example, welcoming the audience at the beginning).

The medicine and religion event was hosted by Jeff Polish, founder and executive director of The Monti, who also teaches Storytelling in Medicine and Health at Duke University. We also had an executive representative of the Museum of Life and Science, who provided additional commentary.

**Choosing a venue:** You'll need a quiet space with seating, an area for your speakers to stand or sit that is visible to the audience, adequate lighting, and a sound system. A theater, auditorium, or similar space is ideal. The size of your venue may determine the capacity of your

show, or you may seek out a venue that is right for the capacity and degree of intimacy you seek.

You may have an appropriate space within your own organization that you can reserve for this program. If you don't have the right kind of facility, or you would like to reach a wider/different audience by hosting the event elsewhere, you can develop a partnership with another organization. This might be a vendor-client relationship for rented or donated space, or it might be partnership that includes a collaboration on the content of the program.

The original program was held at the Carolina Theatre in Durham, NC, which seats over 1,000 people in the main hall. The theatre has full facilities for a professional stage event, including lighting, sound engineering, and ticketing.

**Production planning and rehearsal:** Determine any stage production requirements, and communicate with the venue. Determine requirements for recording the event (video / audio) and identify relevant engineers and creative talent. Hold a rehearsal, ensuring all technical engineering (audio, recording, lighting) is prepared.

**Audience reflection:** To promote reflection among participants, you could suggest that they talk with their group about any insights or ideas they might have and/or provide an opportunity for written reflection.


At our event, during intermission we handed each guest a “postcard to my future self,” along with a golf pencil. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experience. We also had a set of standard questions for evaluation purposes; each card had one of these questions printed on it, with a random distribution of cards ensuring a sufficient set of responses to each question. Postcards were collected at the conclusion of the program (by volunteers stationed at the exits). The side of the card with responses was scanned for data entry and archiving. The postcards were then mailed back to participants three months later. An example of the card is shown below.

The image shows two sides of a postcard template. The left side is the front of the postcard, titled "POSTCARD TO MY FUTURE SELF". It contains a paragraph of text: "As tonight has been about stories, we thought it might be nice to capture some of yours, as well. Please take a moment to answer the two following questions, and write your address on the flip side. In a month, we'll put a stamp on it and mail it back to you. We are not are not collecting any personal information and your responses will remain completely anonymous." Below this are two questions: "a. How relevant are the connections between medicine and religion to you and your life?" and "b. How did this event make you feel? Did it bring a story to mind? What would you like to remember about tonight?". Question 'a' has a scale from 1 to 5, with "not at all" above 1 and "a whole lot" above 5. The right side is the back of the postcard, titled "MEDICINE & RELIGION". It features logos for "MUSEUM of LIFE + SCIENCE", "The MONTI", and "THE CAROLINA THEATRE". There is a wavy line indicating where to fold, and a box for an address. At the bottom right, it says "2017 NOV 03".

A simple notecard would also suffice for reflection and data capture.

We also established a hashtag for participants to use if posting about the event on social media, and a page on a popular social media platform. At the beginning of the program, the audience was asked not to post during the stories, but only afterwards/in between speakers. At the end of the program, the audience was prompted to share their thoughts about what they heard or how they felt after listening to the evening's stories.

**Publicizing the program:** Develop and execute marketing/promotional strategy in partnership with your sponsors, venue, or other partners. The medicine and religion program was promoted by all three partnering organizations, which helped it to reach a large audience: The Monti, the Museum of Life and Science, and the Carolina Theatre of Durham. Marketing was done online, using graphics and messaging developed by the Museum of Life and Science and The Monti. An example can be seen below:



THE MONTI, THE MUSEUM OF LIFE & SCIENCE, AND CTD PRESENT  
**THE MONTI: STORIES OF MEDICINE & RELIGION**  
 Friday, November 3 | 8 PM

Three iconic organizations of the Triangle — The Monti, the Museum of Life and Science, and the Carolina Theatre — have partnered together to bring you a unique and thrilling evening of storytelling about medicine and religion.

The Monti has been inviting members of the community to share their stories with a live audience in sold-out shows all across North Carolina for nearly a decade. The stories on this stage are often poignant, frequently hilarious, and always, always revealing. The only rules in this no-holds-barred storytelling is that it must be true and it must come from the heart. It seemed inevitable that The Monti would eventually team up with the Museum

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No Cameras  
 No Outside Food or Drink  
 No Backpacks  
 No Video Recording Devices  
 No Weapons

<http://www.themonti.org/>  
<https://www.lifeandscience.org/>  
[Facebook](#)

THE CAROLINA THEATRE OF DURHAM  
 309 WEST MORGAN ST / DURHAM, NC 27701

**919** 560-3030 P  
 560-3065 F

[f](#) [t](#) [v](#) [i](#)

© 1926 — PRESENT  
 CAROLINA THEATRE 

**Coaching storytellers:** Prepare storytellers to deliver their stories without reading or memorizing them, and to express emotion with body language. The Monti has a well-

established method for training speakers to tell compelling, unscripted stories. Key elements of the method include:

- Establishing the key point or takeaway
- Establishing the desired tone(s)
- Simplifying and/or clarifying the story
- Developing an arc for the narrative
- Developing a compelling opening and closing
- Ensuring an emotional connection with the audience

If you don't have a similar coach to partner with, the following are some useful resources:

- [The Moth](https://themoth.org/share-your-story/storytelling-tips-tricks) – Storytelling Tips & Tricks (<https://themoth.org/share-your-story/storytelling-tips-tricks>)

## **MATERIALS & RESOURCES**

### **Stage production and recording:**

- Microphone
- Spotlight
- Stool or chair for storytellers (optional)
- Audiovisual equipment to create video recordings of individual stories for distribution online (optional)

### **Other materials:**

- Program booklet
- Signage
- Marketing materials

### **Written reflection:**

- "Postcard to my future self" (or other card)
- Pens
- Collection boxes
- Postage to return postcards

## **SETUP**

Work with your venue staff, A/V staff, and others to prepare the stage, audiovisual equipment, and audience seating.

## **PROGRAM LENGTH**

The program can run 1-2 hours. The medicine and religion event was approximately two hours, with five storytellers, each speaking for 10-12 minutes.

## **DELIVERY & TALKING POINTS**

This event is a single-person storytelling event. The program includes:

- Introduction and transitions by the host

- Each storyteller comes out in turn and presents their story
- Audience is invited to reflect on the experience

Potential variations on this approach include:

- Augmenting the story with projected images (video footage, animation, slides, or captioning), which would make the program more accessible to deaf people and those with difficulty hearing
- Allowing for a story to be delivered by more than one person
- Choosing storytellers from the audience based upon a pre-marketed theme, rather than selecting them in advance
- Including a gap in the program wherein audience members could turn to someone they don't know, and share a personal story on the topic
- Having a space set up in the lobby to videotape audience member stories on the theme

## **SAFETY**

Usual precautions for a theatre venue event, following local laws and ordinances.

## **CLEAN UP**

- Pack up the audiovisual equipment, furniture, signage, and other materials as appropriate.
- Retrieve collection boxes with reflection postcards. Make a copy if you want a record of the responses. Ensure they all have addresses, then mail them back after the stated period of time.

## **VIDEO EDITING & POSTPRODUCTION**

**Instructions:** Review recorded footage, and edit into individual stories for distribution and posting online. Create smaller segments as desired for use on social media.

You can see examples of the final video assets from the medicine and religion program, edited and produced by the Monti: [Sarah Christensen \(https://vimeo.com/252061635\)](https://vimeo.com/252061635); [Andrew Aghapour \(https://vimeo.com/252066289\)](https://vimeo.com/252066289); [Naina Khera-McRackan \(https://vimeo.com/252049767\)](https://vimeo.com/252049767); [Ben Frush \(https://vimeo.com/252047220\)](https://vimeo.com/252047220); and [Kristyn Yelton \(https://vimeo.com/252043547\)](https://vimeo.com/252043547).

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **Mitchell Sava**

Vice President of Innovation, Learning, and Engagement  
 North Carolina Museum of Life and Science  
[Mitchell.sava@lifeandscience.org](mailto:Mitchell.sava@lifeandscience.org)  
 919.220.5429 x328



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Inspired by an original creative nonfiction story, *Faith in Nursing*, by Sarah Christensen.

Program event held as a partnership of the Museum of Life and Science, The Monti, and The Carolina Theatre.

Thanks to The Monti for their leadership in all aspects of the program planning, marketing, and production.

Museum Liaison for the project is Rae Ostman at Arizona State University.

Director of the project and programming is Michael Zirulnik at Arizona State University.

Program evaluation conducted by the University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness at Arizona State University.



# STORIES OF SCIENCE & RELIGION

We asked: Can we bring new, compelling, and true stories about harmonies between science and religion into public discourse?

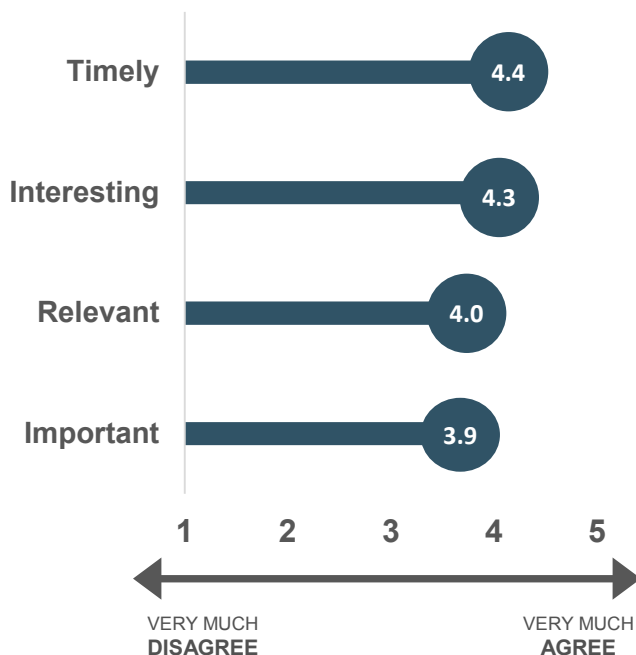
## STORIES OF MEDICINE & RELIGION: MUSEUM OF LIFE + SCIENCE

This event was an evening of storytelling that reflected on the intricate relationships between medicine and religion through the lens of personal narratives. Seven hundred guests explored how understanding of science and medicine informs faith. The storytellers in this event used their unique perspective to dive into their past experiences and reflect on what they've found. This event was inspired by the narrative, *Faith in Nursing* by Think Write Publish Fellow Sarah Christiansen.

"This experience reminds me of the strength and fragility—both—of science and religion. Often, the two are positioned at war with one another, though I've always seen them as holding hands."  
- Event Attendee

## PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

Below we illustrate average agreement from attendees (n=150) on statements about conversations about science and religion. Most participants agreed that these conversations are **timely**.



We thematically analyzed participants' written responses. The word cloud illustrates the themes that emerged from those responses. The **size** of the word is related to the **frequency** of the theme.





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**JOHN TEMPLETON**  
FOUNDATION



**Consortium for Science,  
Policy & Outcomes**  
at Arizona State University

**CREATIVE  
NONFICTION**  
True stories, well told.