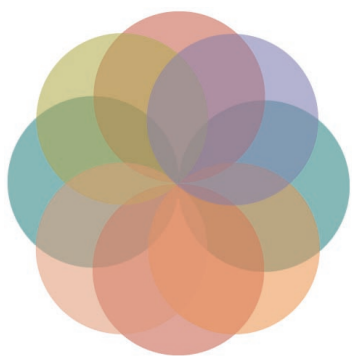


fistula STORIES

EXPLORING FAITH AND ACTION
TO END FISTULA IN THIS
GENERATION



**the story
of faith** SESSION II

Session Goals

To explore the connections between faith and action as well as between ourselves and women dealing with fistula.

Healing Song

(Use a drum or rattle or the Ceremonial Songs CD/ track 20, to create a beat; the beat signifies the heartbeat of the Earth and invokes unity)

Aina yano yana
Yana wana yo.
Aina yano yana
Yana wana yo.
Aina yano yana
Yana wana yo,
Yana wana yo iyana xane,
Yana wana you iyana Xane yohui.

(I am healing you,
Everything is Water spirit,
Everything sings with Water spirit)

RESOURCES FOR THIS SECTION:

Coahuiltecan Traditional Ceremonial Songs, by Carlos Aceves & Mario Garza, Produced by Indigenous Cultures Institute, July 2010 (language manual with recorded songs on CD). <http://indigenoscultures.org/coahuiltecan-songs-cd>

LEADER'S NOTES

Lead your group in the opening activity—be sure to plan ahead so that everyone brings the materials they will need. You may want to schedule a longer meeting or break this lesson up into more sections.

Opening Activity

Print the pictures of each woman suffering from fistula from Session I. Also, print the Image of Coyolxauhqui - Moon Woman in Mexica Tradition (included at the end of Session II). In the middle of the room place pictures alongside offerings representing the four elements: **Earth** (sand), **Wind** (feather), **Fire** (candle), **Water**. If sage is available, and burning it is permissible, offer participants to 'cleanses' themselves' by waving the smoke of the burning sage over their bodies- mainly over their heads and hearts.

Gathering in the spirit of healing, acknowledge the darkness by dimming the lights or turning the lights off; acknowledge hope by lighting a candle. *Pain thrives in the darkness of our selves; by shedding light on the pain, healing begins.* Ask participants to bring mementos/objects relating to maternal health/women's bodies to offer into the community altar that will be built for this session. Let the participants know that the altar is in dedication to women who suffer from fistula and to the babies who died during childbirth, and that by creating this altar we create a healing energy. These mementos/objects can be anything that comes from the heart, including words scribbled onto a piece of paper, drawings, photos, books, clothes, art, candles, corn, herbs, stones, sand, flowers, fruit, food, plants, water, tobacco... as the participants place their offerings on the altar, take this time to read aloud the quotes from women suffering from fistula taken from Session I

Halima Gouroukoye

Halima was married at 18 and became pregnant soon after. Following three days of obstructed labor, she was taken to a hospital... there she received an emergency Caesarean section, but her son died after two days. Four days later, she began leaking urine. When Halima returned home, the community ostracized her. 'I will never be able to erase this experience from my memory,' she said.

Fatima Lawal Aliyu

When Fatima began to experience labor pains, she went to a hospital, but was turned away. She returned the following evening and was admitted to the facility, but received inadequate care. "On the fifth day of labor, I finally had my baby, but by that time it was too late; I had already lost my child," she said.

Awatif Altayib Mohammad

Awatif did not have a choice in her family's decision for her to marry when only sixteen years old. "After seven days at the hospital, I felt severe pain and paralysis in my right leg. I knew there was something wrong with my urine," says Awatif, "at that time, I had no idea about fistula."

Martina Labia

"I came here to represent other women that have fistula and to ask political leaders to help these women get treatment," said 62 year old Martina Labia, speaking before a group of fistula survivors... Married at the age of 15, Martina developed fistula after her first pregnancy. She labored for two days before beginning a daunting journey to the hospital, which included a four-hour bicycle ride to the nearest junction. By the time Martina reached the hospital, her condition had worsened and the doctor had to use forceps to assist with the delivery. Martina would spend the next 35 years of her life leaking urine.

Sarah Omega Kidangasi

Sarah was sexually assaulted at age 19 and, as a result of the rape, became pregnant. When it came time for the delivery, the doctors there lacked supplies to treat the obstruction, so she was referred- after 18 more hours in labor- to yet another hospital. By the time she reached this third facility, the baby had died.

Shahin Akhtar

When her labor pains started, Shahin Akhtar, age 12, didn't know what was happening... "At first I was in a lot of pain, then I had convulsions and lost consciousness," she recalls, "When I woke up, I asked my aunt what had happened. She told me the baby was dead. After seven days, urine started to leak out of me." She was cast out of her home. "Most people told me, 'You will never be cured,' When they said that, I would cry all day,' she remembers, 'But a few said I could be healed. That made me very happy!'

Place each woman's picture on the altar. Invite the participants to sit in a circle and explain their personal connection with their memento/object and have each participant place the memento/object in the center of the circle as an offering into the altar. As you direct participants to do this, recognize the power of each direction- **East, West, North & South** and explain to participants that the altar shall face East, signifying a new beginning, *like the sunrise, this altar will awaken the warrior spirit in us all as we stand on the side of justice in the spirit of healing for women all over the world whose wombs suffer.* Place items in the West to signify "letting go", for this is the direction where the sun sets and carries the *possibility of transformation.* Items placed in the North are to signify our ancestors/predecessors, *in recognition and respect for all knowledge before our time.* In the direction of the South, place items that signify our inner selves, as this is the direction of internal reflection where we *create, reflect and discover our place and purpose on this earth.*

After the mementos/objects have been placed, explain that in many indigenous societies, people would humbly gather in prayer by sitting in a circle inside of a temazcal or sweat lodge. The circle is representative of the continuous cycle of life and of our connections with each other, time, and the spirit; the temazcal/sweat lodge is representative of Mother Earth's womb. For the purpose of this gathering, participants will imagine themselves in this humble setting, within the womb of mother earth. Ask participants what that means to them.

LEADER'S NOTES

Present the picture of Coyolxauhqui as the Moon Goddess in Mesoamerican indigenous societies, and in a 'story-teller' spirit, read the creation story aloud. Next, read aloud the Medicine story. Afterward, reflect on Coyolxauhqui's story and on the Medicine story; have each participant share their initial reaction to the stories, then invite participants to interpret the meanings and metaphors within the stories.

Part I: Creation and Medicine Stories

A Creation Story

In a time before darkness knew of light, Coatlicue (Mother Earth) birthed the moon, Coyolxauhqui. It is said that Coyolxauhqui was a very powerful, yet jealous daughter, and she had total control of the sky and the waters; her fullness dominated the heavens and commanded the stars. Her mother, Coatlicue, also very powerful, was a very noble woman who had birthed many gods and goddesses. One day while tending to the temples of the land and sweeping the altars Coatlicue noticed a bundle of quetzal feathers flutter down from the heavens above. In awe of the many brilliant colors of these plumes, Coatlicue gathered them, keeping them under her skirt. Later, when she reached for the plumes in her skirt she realized they were gone and that she was pregnant! Upon hearing the news that her mother had been impregnated by the heavens, Coyolxauhqui became enraged, realizing that another celestial being would be born and she would not be the sole dominator of the skies! And just as she suspected, when Coatlicue went into labor, she gave birth to the sun- Huitzilopochtli, and he attacked Coyolxauhqui, dismembering her into 6 pieces! Now, when we look up into the sky we can see Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui continue their celestial battle... at night, the moon in pieces- waxing, waning, half, quarter, full, new, and the sun shining all day.

A Medicine Story

The revelation came through a woman's dream. She was lost from her band, they say. She had fallen back from the wandering group of hunting men and root-gathering women when her labor pains began.

Had she been in her home village there would have been other women to tend the mother while birthing—to care for both her and her babe, to sprinkle ashes on the cut navel cord, to bring the mother lukewarm unsalted corn gruel. Here she was alone. Out of this desolation, the woman heard a voice speak to her. "Eat the plant growing beside you," it said. "That is life and blessing for you and all your people."

Weakly, the woman turned her head against the earth. The only plant in sight, besides the bush that sheltered her, was a small cactus. It was without thorns, and its head was divided into lobes. She reached for the plant, and it seemed to grow outward to meet her fingers. The woman pulled up the cactus, root and all, and ate the head.

Strength returned to the woman immediately and she was able to birth her child. It was dawn; the sun was just about to rise. She cut the navel cord with a stone knife from the pouch at her waist and raised her child to her filling breasts and fed it.

Then, gathering as many cactus plants as she could find and carry, she rose and walked forward. Something wonderful must have been leading her, for by evening she had reached her people again.

The woman took the plants to her uncle, her mother's brother. He was a man of great wisdom and was much respected by his people. "This is truly a blessing," the uncle said when he heard the woman's story. "We must give it to all the people."

Part 2: Our Stories

- [1] Both stories use pregnancy and birth to convey a message. When societies do not tend to women during pregnancy and birth, what message is being sent to women?

- [2] Women have many sides to them and many roles in society, just like the moon has many phases. How do women today relate to the moon? Does the moon affect you? Does Coyolxauqui's story affect you?

- [3] Pain and suffering are present in both stories, yet the creation story has a vivid element of violence. Do you think the story contains a lesson on how to recreate violence into something positive? How have the women suffering from sexual violence and fistula taken hold of their experience to create something positive? How can you create something positive for those women who suffer?

LEADER'S NOTES

Have the participants reflect and answer the following questions on a piece of paper. In respect of the participants privacy and in recognition of the value of the participants words use a "talking stick" to acknowledge their space if they choose to share. The "talking stick", a decorated stick with red, white, black and yellow ribbons, should be prepared ahead of time. Invite discussion after the participants have shared their answers, still using the talking stick.

[4] In the beginning of this session, you were asked to imagine yourself within the womb of mother earth, just as Coyolxauqui and Huitzilopochtli once were in the womb of Coatlicue (Mother Earth). What was that experience like? Did you imagine yourselves as vulnerable or powerful? Is this sacred space?

[5] During menstruation, fertilization, childbirth, and menopause indigenous peoples acknowledge these times as powerful, conducting various ceremonies and rituals in recognition of that. How do we value ourselves in our own cultures? How do we value women in different cultures?

[6] When creating the community altar in recognition of women and their wombs, how did you feel?

[7] When the woman from the Medicine Story received her vision, what did she do? Do you have a vision? What do you plan to do with that vision?

Part 3: Vision Quest

Before our next meeting we/I will:

Closing Prayer

(CD track 25)

Anua im nakue xai yo wayo
Anua im nakue xai yo wayo
Anua im nakue xai yo wayo
Anua im yo wayo
Anua im yo wayo.

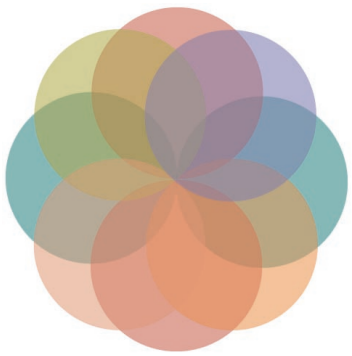
(At the moment of birth
We join the moon
in a primordial cry.)

LEADER'S NOTES

Have participants take their memento/object from the altar and ask if anyone is inspired to create an altar in their home and if anyone is inspired to uplift the women who suffer from fistula. Have the participants take the time between now and the next meeting to think about how they will continue to advocate for women and how they will inspire others to support the cause, this will be their personal vision quest. Still in a circle, using a drum or rattle or the CD, sing/chant the closing pray and if permissible, burn sage at this time.



Coyolxauhqui
Moon Woman in Mexica Tradition



**the story
of action** SESSION III

Session Goals

To more closely examine our role in working to end fistula in this generation.

Opening Prayer — Mother Earth/Father Sky

(CD track 23)

Tap, tai, tap tai,
Nakamestia Tap tai,
Tap tai, tap tai,
Apel Xanai, Apel Xanai
Nakamestia Apel Xanai
Apel Xanai, Apel Xanai
Xane yohui
Xane yohui

(I pray to Mother Earth and Father Sky
with all that I am)

LEADER'S NOTES

Recall the offerings to the altar at the last session. Discuss what 'visions' (manifested in thoughts, dreams or signs) the participants had between the last session and now.

Part I: Remembering Their Stories

The Creation Story

- [1] How are women violated in this story?
- [2] What is created from the violence?
- [3] Is healing possible after violence? How?

The Medicine Story

- [1] What visions happened in this story?
- [2] How/Why was the vision induced?
- [3] What did she do with her vision?

Part 2: I Am You, You Are Me

Sarah Omega Kidangasi



Turn back to page 8 and remember Sarah Omega Kidangasi's story. She ended by asking of other fistula sufferers, "how will they know there is still hope?" They will know in part because of the work Sarah has been doing as an ambassador to governments and the United Nations—raising awareness, concern, and money to bring an end to fistula in this generation.

In 2008, Sarah came to Washington DC to advocate on behalf of the millions of women who die each year in childbirth or suffer from related injuries, speaking with US government representatives and dignitaries and encouraging their support of a resolution to reduce maternal mortality in the US and abroad. At a press conference on Capitol Hill she said, "Living with obstetric fistula is a life full of stigma...It is a condition that has left many homes broken. It denies you the freedom to intermingle with others. You live a lonely life, and you are rejected. The worst thing about obstetric fistula is that you become a social outcast." The day after Sarah's visit, the resolution guaranteeing US commitment to reducing maternal mortality that had been introduced by Congresswoman Lois Capps was passed by the US House of Representatives, supported by every Democratic woman member of Congress.¹

And then in 2009, Sarah traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to address the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, whose yearly focus was Global Public Health. The council met especially to discuss the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDG), including MDG 5, which aims to improve maternal health and reduce maternal death—the goal where the least has been achieved to date. The 400 attending ministers of health, ministers of foreign affairs, and ambassadors at the ECOSOC High-Level meeting listened to Sarah tell her story and were confronted with the grim facts that every minute a woman dies needlessly in pregnancy or childbirth, and for every woman who dies, 20-30 women suffer a serious birth injury, of which one of the more devastating is obstetric fistula. Since this meeting, maternal health has been on the radar screen of the United Nations in several ways, including the creation of an Adolescent Girl Taskforce and movements to more fully integrate gender and gender justice work at all levels of the United Nations.²

LEADER'S NOTES

Look back at Session I and have participants read aloud Sarah Omega's story, and then read her continued story on this page. After you have finished reading, answer the questions on the next page. Next, share with participants the above phrase, "I am you, you are me"—which is a philosophy that many of the indigenous peoples of the Americas lived by in order to emphasize humanities intimate connection with one another. Ask participants to imagine themselves as Sarah, living her life, and in this state, have them envision how they would want the global community to respond to and help. Have participants respond to these questions with this in mind.

¹ UNFPA, *Fistula Advocates Visit Capitol Hill: Maternal Mortality Resolution Passes House*, 22 May 2008 <http://www.americansforunfpa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=729>

² Leyla Alyanak and Katia Iversen for UNFPA, "Advocates Rally World Support to End Fistula: Safe motherhood on the forefront of important UN meeting," 06 July 2009.

[1] What visions happened in this story?

[2] How/Why was the vision induced?

[3] What did she/you do with her/your vision?

[4] How are the women violated in this story?

[5] What is created from the violence?

[6] Is healing possible after violence? How?

Part 3: Journeying with the stories

Before our next meeting, we will brainstorm action ideas, beginning with visiting www.fistulastories.org/action. In addition, I/we will:

Closing Prayer — Four Directions Song

(CD track 24)

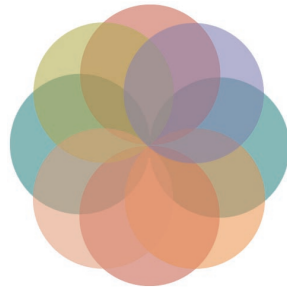
Nakamestia Xanai
Nakamestia ota'ume
Nakamestia se'ta
Nakamestia we'fta
Nakemestia haya'mta
Nakemestia Xanai
Xanai, xane yohui
Xanai, xane yohui

(repeat four times)

(I pray to our God
in the direction of the East,
South,
West,
and North.
I pray to our God
with all that there is.)

LEADER'S NOTES

In the next session, the group will decide together what action we will take as we continue to journey with all of the stories we have heard. The group should commit to visiting www.fistulastories.org/action and reviewing the ideas for action there to discuss in the next session.



fistula STORIES

Cemelli de Aztlan AND Sandra Iturbe

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY CONSULTANT

Meagan Manas

FISTULA STORIES CURRICULUM WRITER
AND GRANT COORDINATOR

Rev. Ann Tiemeyer

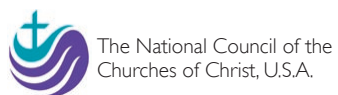
NCC WOMEN'S MINISTRIES PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Robert Brunson

DESIGN

Special Thanks To:

THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND
OPERATION HEALING HOPE



The National Council of the
Churches of Christ, U.S.A.



www.fistulaSTORIES.org