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PASTORAL CARE THROUGH A LAY CARE MINISTRY:
A NARRATIVE MODEL

By

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B.S., Tennessee State University, 1963
M.Div., Church of God School of Theology, 1989

A Doctoral Dissertation
submitted to the faculties of the schools of the
Atlanta Theological Association
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
at
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ABSTRACT

PASTORAL CARE THROUGH A LAY CARE MINISTRY:
A NARRATIVE MODEL
by
Harry Monroe Johnson, Sr.
May 1995
68 pages

The dissertation addresses, through a biblical narrative model, the disharmony at Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. It exposes and addresses the relationship between themes, issues and problems of four lay persons and the themes, issues and problems of the congregation. The dissertation presupposes that the factions of the congregation are manifestations of factions in families that make up the membership. The problems that are unresolved in families show up in interpersonal relationships in the church family.

The biblical narrative model used the favorite stories of a test group of caregivers, such as favorite Bible stories, favorite fairy tales and stories heard from visitations to discover disruptive themes in their personal narratives.

The themes of the caregivers were themes, for the most part, that surfaced in the narrative of the congregation. From the favorite stories of the caregivers it was also possible to frame the "world view" of the congregation. A common world view appears to be the bonding agent that keeps this congregation, with its frequent disruptions, together.
The results of this dissertation answer, in part, the search of a pastor for ways to address the pastoral needs of four lay persons as these persons are being trained to give care to other members of the congregation. The results show that by addressing the pastoral needs of members of the congregation through the group process, the narrative of the test group can be "reauthored" and the story of the congregation can be "restoried."

Through the process of training the laity, an important aspect of self-sufficiency can be realized as the church community is drawn to be a healing community.
DEDICATED TO
LEN TA
MY DEVOTED AND COMMITTED WIFE
TO
MELANIE AND HARRY, JR. (MONTE)
OUR LOVING CHILDREN
AND
XAVIER JAHMAL
OUR GRANDSON
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am pleased to have the opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who have guided me through this process.

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Dr. Randall C. Bailey who forced me to consider other possibilities of interpreting the Psalms and other narrative texts.

A special acknowledgment to Dr. Stephen C. Rasor who lifted me out of the pit of despair from the D.Min. Core Seminar to the conclusion of this process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the story of this congregation with its themes, problems and issues by attending to the stories of four lay caregivers. From the themes, problems and issues of these caregivers I expect to discover how attending to their stories, organized human experiences can help reveal the nature of the story and problems of the congregation. From a pastoral perspective, the information obtained from this project is expected to provide new insight into the nature or root cause of disruptive behavior that has plagued this congregation for several years.

Because of a limitation of time and space, four members of the congregation were chosen as the test group for the project. The selection of these particular persons was based on a previous request by them to receive training in home visitation ministry.

From the test group, information was gathered from their stories and from the stories of persons visited by them during the course of the project. I expected to gather sufficient data from the group that would provide an answer or answers to the stated ministry issue.

The test group will also serve as the core of the lay care ministry that will be instituted at this church. These caregivers will assist the pastor as the issues, themes and problems of the congregation are addressed. The involvement of the laity in the ministry of the church is an important aspect of my image of ministry. While this project is designed to address the most pressing church issues, the conduit for doing so is through
an empowered laity which, throughout this dissertation, is referred to as lay caregivers. Lay caregivers are non-ordained persons from the congregation who have expressed a need to fulfill a vocational call.

It is anticipated that there are common themes that the lay caregivers share with the membership at large. Furthermore, it is expected that the themes, issues and problems of the church are intricately interwoven with those of the laity and influence the ministry of the church. The ministry of the laity of the church is significant. The next section introduces this significance.

**The Significance of the Laity**

Messer, Tan and others have documented the biblical and theological significance of the laity in the ministry of the church.¹ According to Messer, the clergy and the laity are joint partners in ministry. He writes, "God places different, but equal, demands on clergy and laity."² It is my task to assist lay persons as they seek to understand their significance in the ministry of this church.

The ministry of the laity has been significant throughout the twenty centuries of church history. It was especially important in the life and ministry of the first-century church. The importance of the laity was overshadowed during the Middle Ages by an excessive emphasis on the clergy. However, during the Reformation there was renewed emphasis on the importance of the laity in the ministry of the church. The importance of the laity in the ministry of the church today has been cited by Messer because it provides a "broad base for evangelizing the church and the world."³
From the perspective of this dissertation, a group of four lay persons can provide important insight into the ministry issue raised by this project as they enhance their visitation skills in pursuit of their ministry. If these caregivers are to be effective, they must first be willing to engage their own stories. From the themes and problematic events in their lives they should acquire the means of empathetic encounter with other members of the church as common themes surface. The ministry issue addresses the common needs of the test group as well as the congregation. The ministry issue and its context are stated in the following section.

**The Ministry Issue and Its Context**

The ministry issue is stated as a question to facilitate, focus and clear direction in my search for an effective approach to ministry in this local church. The statement of the question is as follows:

*Can a biblical narrative model of pastoral care be used successfully to identify the themes, issues, and problems of Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America as four members of the congregation, the test group, receive training as lay caregivers?*

The aforestated question is raised to address some ministerial issues that have plagued every effort to develop a healthy Christian community at this church. It has been affirmed that community does exist here, but at times it is less than redemptive. It is more of a condemning one. I have noticed an unhealthy competitiveness among various groups at the church. From these aggressive encounters scars have been inflicted that do not heal very easily.

From the themes, issues and stories of these four caregivers, insights into the nature of the themes, issues and attending problems of this congregation were expected
to surface. The search for the cause of the unrest of this congregation is the motivation that shaped and molded the question. The problem of disharmony that this question seeks to address propels this pastor to seek the root causes of the fighting that plagues this church.

Searching for the answer to this question became my passion. If this church is to survive, it must come to grips with some critical issues which this project expects to raise. Could pastoral care and preaching of the gospel bring healing to this church? My motivation for receiving the pastorship of this congregation was to provide pastoral care to this fragmented body that called itself Christian.

This church is able to sustain only a part-time pastor. Time became a critical issue to address as I assumed the pastorate of this church. The time allocated to provide ministry at Freedman Chapel had to be efficient and managed very carefully. Mid-week Bible studies are presently used to provide a form of group care. Pastoral care is presently practiced on an as-needed basis for individuals and couples. The mid-week Bible study has been utilized in such a way so that when issues surface, either from the biblical text or from individuals, they are considered themes for pastoral care. This approach has been very helpful, but it has not been the best setting to address the more serious personal themes that have surfaced. It was not practical to consider, from the perspective of time management, individualized pastoral care on a large scale.

Training the laity provided the answer because it is efficient from a management perspective. From a theological perspective, it fulfills my basic belief that we are a "priesthood of believers" (1 Peter 2:9), and ministry should be open to all priests
whether ordained or not. The solution to the problem confronting this congregation is grounded in the initiative that a person in the congregation takes in confronting issues that affect their own lives. As these lay persons become empowered by confronting troubling themes, they will enhance the possibility for the congregation to edit themes and confront problematic issues. The proposed solutions are discussed in the following section.

**Proposed Solutions**

Information gathered from this project is to document the feasibility of using a biblical narrative model of pastoral care to train a group of four lay caregivers at Freedman Chapel Church. These persons will assist this pastor in the ministry of providing ministerial care through a lay caregiver’s ministry.

Pastoral care was a presupposed need because of the disharmony that plagues this congregation. These conflicts were believed to be motivated by latent disruptive themes and issues that need to be addressed by a loving and caring community. In the weekly meetings of these caregivers there was an intentional effort to create a sense of community. Because of the size of the group, not only was a sense of community established but a real sense of family was realized. It was important for members of the test group to perceive this group as its family of origin to enhance the possibility of helping them confront repressed family issues. The basic objective of these initial meetings was to establish a feeling of trust. Once trust had been established this suspecting group was ready for serious work.
The interrelationship of these group members as members of their own individual families and as members of the families that comprise the congregation provided an emotional connectedness. This emotional connectedness provided the means of understanding the issues and themes of the congregation as group members came to grips with their own themes and issues. It was presupposed that the nature of the problems confronting these four individuals and those confronting this congregation are interrelated.

The project is designed to test the feasibility of training a group of lay caregivers using a narrative paradigm to assist in the process of helping members of this congregation identify and process tormenting themes and issues that comprise their life's story by:

1. Teaching caregivers the importance of their stories;

2. Helping them identify some important themes and issues that comprise their stories;

3. Helping to provide a healthy atmosphere in the weekly gatherings of the four participants that builds trust and confidentiality;

4. Providing an opportunity for open group discussions whereby group members assist each other in the process of confronting troubling themes;

5. Acquainting the group with the linkage of favorite stories such as fairy tales and Bible stories to our own stories; and

6. Helping the group to understand the importance of the laity in the operation and function of the ministries of the church.

The question raised by this project lays the foundation for dealing with the core problem at this church. The problem, simply stated, appears to be a crisis of identity. This crisis is manifested in the form of a loss of self-understanding. Theoretical
formulations for narrative counseling have been advanced by Bagarozzi and Anderson\textsuperscript{4} and White and Epston.\textsuperscript{5} These two sources provide the theoretical grounding as the search is made for a definitive solution to the problem confronting the test group and the congregation. Narrative counseling has been tested in various counseling settings. The effectiveness of the narrative counseling model is beginning to receive favorable support in the counseling circle.

**Biblical Narrative and Counseling**

Most of the parishioners hold the Bible in high regard at this church. Very often we are told that the strength or means to endure trying circumstances was received through inspiration of a Bible story.

The events and themes that make up the life experiences of most of the parishioners are "storied experiences," experiences that are organized by means of stories.\textsuperscript{6} The storied experiences of the test group served as a starting point for training lay caregivers as they exercise their ministerial gifts while pursuing their vocation in the local church.

A biblical narrative model provides the opportunity for individuals to lay claim to their biblical grounding. It also provides an opportunity to tell one’s story and have that story heard by empathetic ears.

The effective use of a biblical model of pastoral counseling has been documented by Wimberly and others.\textsuperscript{7} Wimberly’s model is significant for this study as we test the feasibility of adapting many of the principles set forth in a narrative model. However, developing a lay care ministry at Freedman Chapel Church must be open to any new and
innovative ideas as they surface. Special attention is drawn from an excerpt from Anne Wimberly’s latest book *Soul Stories*. This book seems not only fitting for Christian education but opens the horizon for an integrated narrative approach throughout every aspect of the ministry of the church. The pain articulated in various stories is very often a cry for help in the struggle and search to mend the broken pieces that grieve the very souls of our people. This pain is most often hidden in the themes and plots of the stories that are told by them.

The yearning and stress if reflected in the following quote from *Soul Stories*:
"African-Americans often tell of a deep inner yearning. This deep inner yearning is their soul’s search for liberation and vocation. Globally, their deep inner yearning for liberation is their desire to experience themselves as whole or moving toward wholeness."8

One goal of this project is to develop a lay caregiver’s ministry that can give direction in the search for wholeness in a fragmented world. Wholeness for this test group is to respond to vocational call; a call and vocation that will assist other members of this congregation as they identify frustrating themes and issues that sabotage a healthy communal relationship between members of the church. The initial task of the group was to learn to apply the dimensions of the narrative counseling model. These seven dimensions are cited below.

**Seven Dimensions of a Biblical Narrative Model**

The seven dimensions of a Biblical Narrative Model of Counseling begin with:

1. attending to the presenting problems;
2. attending to the mythology;

3. identifying the nature of the mythology;

4. mapping the influence of the mythology;

5. attending to the preferred story;

6. setting goals and re-authoring the mythology; and

7. re-authoring or modifying of the stories that dominate and frustrate the counselee’s life.¹⁰

In addition to the seven dimensions of a counseling model forestated, the eight dimensions of the soul’s quest for liberation were significant for the group process. The eight dimensions assisted the group as they searched for themes and issues in their own search for liberation. These eight dimensions are:

1. knowing one’s life as a gift and one’s self as a valued human being.

2. to have the wherewithal by which to receive and maintain, at a minimum, the basic necessities of life.

3. to be equal participants and beneficiaries in the political, occupational, educational, residential health care, and civic systems of the community and nation.

4. that persons experience respectful and just treatment by others.

5. that people can see possibilities of breaking out of narrow boundaries of thought, knowledge, feelings, and limited beliefs in the self’s ability to act.

6. that people recognize their need to share themselves and their stories with another.

7. that liberation results when persons have been changed by God and allow the story of God and the good news of Jesus Christ to direct their lives.

8. persons are never fully liberated until they become aware of others’ need for liberation and accept as obligatory their responsibility for contributing to the liberation of others.¹⁰
The seven dimensions of a Biblical Narrative Model of Counseling served as one of the key aspects of the basic training that the caregivers received at the weekly meetings, whereas the eight dimensions of liberation provided serious dimensions with which each caregiver had struggled from time to time in their search for liberation.

Another important aspect of a narrative counseling paradigm is the religio-psychological role theory, and the interactional system that is open to the participation. According to Kallstad:

A reader of the Bible can identify himself, for example, with a voice from the Book of Psalms. In such case, he acquires definite expectation of how the God of the Bible who dealt with earlier generations will deal with him. The God speaking in the Book of Psalms will be experienced as reality by the reader of the Bible. Taking the role of a human being and making the Psalmist’s words his own, he adopts at the same time the role 'God'; God being the partner of the human being in the Bible.\textsuperscript{11}

This phenomenon, interaction with characters in a text, is not a new concept in the African-American Church. It was experienced by this writer in the course of Sunday School, church and other religious settings. Hjalmar Sunden, a Swedish psychologist, has provided theoretical grounding for these experiences that are common place in the African-American Church and has been helpful throughout the course of this project. This technique will be a significant aspect of this project as participants explore the stories of African-Americans and Bible stories.

The solution to the problem is rooted in the fact that an empowered laity can be an enduring value long after a pastoral change occurs. The proposed solution is grounded by empirical and theological support and addresses various contexts that impact the problem.
The solution begins by focusing on the personal histories of each person involved. Each person was requested to make at least one routine visitation to a hospital, nursing home, church member and/or other persons in the community. These visitations and interactions generated stories for group discussion. During the dialogue that took place at the weekly meetings, special attention was given to stories, anecdotes and other illustrations used to make conversation. The group functioned as a safe community in which important issues that impact the lives of each member were discussed. The conversations moved beyond small talk to a more serious clinical dialogue. The discussion opened the door for the wounded to make a start on the path toward wholeness.

The solution to the problem proposed by the question presupposes that there are stories of individuals as well as the congregation that need editing. The question also reflects the theological persuasion of this pastor, that the ministry of the church is a cooperative endeavor involving both the laity and ordained clergy.

Through the process of observing interpersonal relationships that become combative for no apparent reason, I was led to believe that persons in the congregation struggle with personal frustrating themes. This problem is deep-seated and will require the assistance of persons who have had some training in counseling techniques. I believe that the solution lies hidden in the forgotten story of this congregation and in the stories of families that make up this congregation.

At the conclusion of this project each member of the group was expected to begin to affirm his/her own story by identifying some of the important themes and issues that
comprise it. Each group member began to apply the seven steps in the narrative pastoral care model to stories presented in the group.

In recent years literature has become available that supports the importance of the laity in the ministry of the church. There has also been important literature published that reflected the renewed interest in narrative theology and narrative counseling. In the following section relevant sources of some of the current literature is presented.

**Literature Search**

In this section, literature related to lay ministry is reviewed and relevant literature from the narrative perspective is introduced.

Over the past thirty years, according to Tan, there has been a significant interest in lay counseling. Tan dates this renewed interest in the early sixties after the release of a United States Government report on mental health. In *Lay Counseling: Equipping Christians for a Helping Ministry* by Siang-Yang Tan, an effort has been made to survey the field of Christian lay counseling up to 1990. Tan provides an evaluation of lay counseling programs that are mentioned in the book. A strong biblical ground for lay counseling is provided. A summary is then made of all the more prominent models and programs of lay counseling. This book is very significant for any church considering a lay counseling program. Tan has documented the biblical and theological basis for laity’s involvement in a counseling ministry.

*Liberating the Laity* by R. Paul Stevens, published in 1985 by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, is a book designed as a resource to clergy who are interested in training lay persons for lay counseling. The over-arching concept is not equipping of the
laity, but the creation of an environment. Stevens seeks to equip the church so that there is a unity of calling. "Every believer has been called to be Jesus' disciple and to serve in the kingdom." According to Stevens, "there are no clergy-laity distinctions." 

**Pastoral Care for Lay Persons** by Frank Wright provides a discussion of the reasons for pastoral care. Wright stresses the need for counseling centered around the three ages of man: "adolescence, a period of acute suffering mentally and emotionally; middle age, a period of time and personal crisis; and elderly, a time about many needs."

Joan Sturkie and Gordon R. Bean in *Christian Peer Counseling*, published in 1989 by Word Publishing Company, seek to recapture the legacy of the church. A part of that legacy is the body of Christ caring for each other. They write, "the legacy of care giving and service to others was demonstrated, in fact, by the disciples and early church by their loving fellowship and communal life of sharing resources." They understand peer counseling as a solution to the burden on the pastor.

**Lay Ministry: Empowering the People of God** by Lawrence O. Richards and Gilbert R. Martin was published in 1981. It is developed from a theological perspective which focuses on the "identity of the believers." There are about six paradigms that identify the people of God as a caring and empowered people, gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister as lay persons, according to Richards and Martin.

Kenneth Haugh, a pastor, clinical psychologist, and educator is founder of the Stephen System of lay caring ministry. The Stephen System is one of the most successful programs with national recognition. It is a well-designed program offered to
churches throughout America. The initial fee to start such a ministry is about $1300 and entails travel to an initial conference with about 50 hours of initial training. *Christian Care Giving, A Way of Life* by Kenneth Haugh describes the basic program and its operation.

Dennis Bagarozzi and Stephen A. Anderson’s book, *Personal, Marital, and Family Myths: Theoretical Formulations and Clinical Strategies*, published in 1989 by W. W. Norton and Company, has had a significant impact on many who have come to realize the importance of narrative counseling in therapeutic encounters because of the importance of narrative in our daily lives. In this book a clear foundation is presented for a narrative model of counseling. This text has been very insightful in shaping and influencing a new direction and approach to pastoral care. This book provided much of the theoretical underpinning and strategies for corrective action.

*Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New. York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990) by Michael White and David Epston presents their concept of externalization which encourages persons in counseling to view their problems as a "separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed as the problem." In addition to the concept of "externalization" there are many helpful ideas and concepts for editing personal mythologies.

*Using Scripture in Pastoral Counseling* by Edward P. Wimberly provided the model for using scripture in the counseling process. A biblical model is important because scripture is normative for this test group and this congregation. This resource was especially helpful because it provides unique insights for counseling African-
Americans. From this text the seven dimensions of a biblical counseling model were taken.

*Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* by Anne S. Wimberly was instrumental in providing the concept of "story linking." 22 "Story linking" is very important in a narrative pastoral care model because it provides the wherewithal for persons and groups to grasp the hermeneutical task of connecting their stories with biblical stories. From this resource the eight dimensions of liberation were drawn. These eight dimensions provided the test group with a means to identify various aspects of their personal struggle for liberation.

From Donald Messer's *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry*, it was possible to gain a clear concept of the importance of the laity in the ministry of the church. Messer, from a historical, biblical and practical perspective, traces various images of ministry. This text was helpful in my effort to conceptualize and claim my paradigm of ministry. Messer grounds his concept of "imaging" 23 in his personal struggle and search for an image that was not only biblically informed but also informed by the history and tradition of the church.

David Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell in *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, published in 1993 by Oxford University Press, combine narrative methodology with selected biblical text to illustrate other dominant ways of reading biblical narratives. Gunn and Fewell propose to free the biblical text from one prescribed meaning.

The authors conclude their book with the following statement which underscores the importance of narrative that has been freed of the parameters that historical critical
scholars have advanced over the past centuries. They write, "voices from the margins, voices from the fissures and cracks in the text assure us that male sovereignty is contrived and precarious, that racial/ethical chauvinism is ultimately insupportable, that social elitism is self-deluding, that religious rectitude is self-serving." Freeing the narrative from some historical event or some leading character opens the door for many voices to emerge especially the marginal voices that have been silenced over the centuries.

The current literature has guided the search for answers to questions raised by this project. The historical context of the church is also instrumental in understanding the root cause of the problems.

**The Historical Context of the Church**

The struggle of Freedman Chapel Church is reflected in the image that it has of itself and how the community perceives it. The founding of the church was rooted in the struggle of the founding fathers' search for liberation and freedom from oppression. The founding fathers were freed men and women who were former slaves.

The quest for freedom in worship and to exercise their ministerial gifts was denied them in the churches of their former slave masters. Their image of worshipping in freedom of spirit and truth moved them, often at great cost, to overcome barriers that interfered with freedom in worship.

**Freedman Chapel and the Denominational Relationship**

For ten years the denomination studied merger of the First Cumberland Presbyterian Church (Caucasian) and the then Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church
(African-American). The recommendation of the study was abandoned in 1990 after the study group made a negative recommendation. Both groups realized that merger was not best for either. The extended study period sapped the life from the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America (African-American). The rejection dealt a crucial psychological blow to the African-American Church. Although the name has been changed to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America, The Confession of Faith that we use still bears the name Second Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The present Confession of Faith was adopted by both Presbyteries in 1984. The 1984 Confession of Faith had been adopted in 1814. This Confession of Faith was adopted based on the Westminster Confession of Faith, after revisions had been made. The revisions expunged the doctrine of universal fore-ordination and its legitimate sequences, unconditional election and reprobation, limited atonement, and divine influence correspondingly circumscribed.25

The founders of the CPC were Finis Ewing, Samuel King and Samuel McAdow. One founder to the church advocated slavery. This eventually caused division among the founding fathers of the church. The division over race and the moral concept of the brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind has followed the church in general since its founding. The issue of reconciliation has at times diluted the prophetic role that the African-American Church has played in the context of an oppressive society and church.

Lincoln has categorized the African-American Church by a set of dialectical polarities which serve to identify various functions that are fulfilled as it carries out its mission in the community. These tensions are broad and seem to be a way of
characterizing church leadership. The dialectic between resistance versus accommodation\textsuperscript{26} seems to be the present stance of this church. The narrative of this church tends to substantiate this dialectic.

W. E. B. DuBois adequately described the mind-set of the African-American. His description seems helpful in understanding this church. African-Americans of European American lineage are depicted as "two struggling souls within one dark body."\textsuperscript{27} This metaphor seems to be symbolic of the struggle of this congregation.

The responsibility of being a community that advocates reconciliation, but at the same time a community that is prophetic, dichotomizes the very soul of Black folk and especially this congregation. The reluctance to be a voice of helpless persons has affected the identity of the church in the community.

Before the Civil War began there were approximately 20,000 African-Americans in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Between 1860 and 1870 the first "Colored" Presbyteries were organized. It was during this period that freed slaves began to organize black congregations where possible. In 1868 trustees for Freedman Cumberland Presbyterian Church obtained land for a local congregation. It is believed that this church, the Freedman Church, was the forerunner of Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The church’s original influence and impact on this community was comparable to a lighthouse, guiding many families and individuals to a safe place--guiding them out of the turbulent waters of oppression.
The Church Today

The present church structure since 1927 has been located on Cleveland Avenue. In 1979, the wooden structure was brick veneered and a front entrance was added. Some period after the construction of the sanctuary, a basement was dug by hand. The foundation of the church was reinforced by walls poured from inside the newly dug basement. The basement could not restrain the water as a breach in the wall later developed. After extensive and very costly repairs the basement was finally repaired, but the mind-set of the congregation was that a move to higher ground was necessary. On September 12, 1993, the congregation dedicated a 3000 sq. ft. fellowship center to the glory of God for ministry in the community. The story of the complications with the basements of this church is symbolic of a serious breach in the foundation of interpersonal relationships. Unresolved family issues that carry over into the life of the church nearly destroyed the church. Today the church has a new lease on its life. This small church with approximately 50 members has every reason to have a positive self-concept. In spite of its size there have been unbelievable accomplishments.

Too much of the early history of the church is lost because many voices of the past have been silenced. Hopefully, as we continue the serious task of collecting various aspects of our story, exploring its themes and issues that fragments of the story will be gathered that will fan the flame of renewal and renewed sense of value and purpose.

Narrative theology and narrative counseling offer a possible solution to the distorted image that church members have of themselves and of the church. In the
chapters that follow, the nature and cause of the problem and proposed solutions are explored. The chapters are presented in the following manner.

Chapter II reflects some of the recent trends in narrative theology. A limited representation of narrative theologians who have influenced me in the course of this project are discussed. A complete picture of their theologies is not presented in a systematic way but in respect to their influence upon me as this project was conceptualized. The influence of these theologians has assisted in the process of providing theological grounding for the project.

In Chapter III there is a narrative accounting of the eight sessions of the caregivers. The narrative of the Woman with the Issue of Blood (Mark 5) and the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) illustrates their use to raise various themes that could be claimed by group members.

In Chapter IV, the final chapter, there are implications of the findings for future ministry for the church and implications for the church universal.

In the next chapter the importance of narrative theology is presented and a discussion of the renewed interest in narrative theology.
NOTES

CHAPTER I


3. Ibid., 66.


15. Ibid., 29.


CHAPTER II

NARRATIVE THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Narrative theology is becoming formalized in reaction to the domination of scientific structure; however, there are still many skeptics. The skepticism is in part due to a need for "conceptual clarity."¹

In recent years Gustafson and Nelson have written concerning the use of narrative but their writings have not considered the sufficiency of narrative as "a critical conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity, and displaying the content of Christian convictions."²

Niebuhr has been instrumental in a resurgence of narrative as a means of doing theology and ethics. His direction has been to recognize the duality of revelation. He uses the two-aspect theory of history as a paradigm for understanding the paradoxical nature of history. External history, observed by external spectators, and history as lived, internal history, this duality according to Niebuhr is not a metaphysical or meta-historical solution. The practical solution must be given "confessionally."³ The practical solution, according to Niebuhr, is "internal history"; the story of what happened to us, the "living memory of the community."⁴

Frei is also a strong advocate for the rediscovery of narrative theology. Whereas, Niebuhr’s purpose was for linguistic reasons, Frei’s motive is for hermeneutical reasons. Frei understands factual and realistic analysis of the Bible was the focus during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was at a time when literary criticism was

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developing around the historical and fictional literary genre. Biblical criticism continued to center its analysis on the validation of the factuality of the narrative, causing the importance of biblical narrative to be eclipsed and its importance as narrative was overshadowed. Frei concludes that in the biblical narratives are "objective and objectively transforming events, though the crucial evidence by which they become religiously certain is not external but internal to the soul."  

The validation of the story is in the transforming power of the story on persons and communities who make the story their own. Spectators, as analysts of stories whose motives are to test the viability of the events, are apt to miss the essence of the story. The essence of the story is the invitation to participate and be transformed by it.

MacIntyre has listed seven uses of narrative that are helpful in understanding the benefits of narrative from a practical perspective. They are:

1. intelligible human action is narrative in form;
2. human life has a fundamentally narrative shape;
3. humans are story-telling animals;
4. people place their lives and arguments in narrative histories;
5. communities receive their continuities through narrative history;
6. tradition receives its continuity from narrative history;
7. epistemological progress is marked by the construction and reconstruction of more adequate narrative and forms of narrative.

This use of narrative is basic in the understanding of personal identity. The story of humankind and its relation in community to others is understood in the history and story of communities. MacIntyre is bound to the fact that "practical rationality" is
inextricably tied to the moral transformation of "personal identity." This transformation is influenced by the "participation in communities and traditions" of communities. The community's narrative is the means of transmitting the virtues that shape and transform persons.

This recovery of narrative as a viable theological means is critical to the shaping and making of personal integrity. The essence of the variability of stories as fact or fiction is important but has at times overshadowed the experiential impact that stories have had in shaping and forming persons and communities.

The power of narrative is evident as one opens the pages of biblical narratives. The stories there are not just idle accounts of events, but they are accounts of personal involvement. They are stories of lives and communities radically changed as persons and communities become not only spectators but invigorated participants.

In the African-American community and especially the church, there has always been a recognition of the impact of narrative on persons and community. This belief is almost innate in that the African-American community has been shaped and formed by its history. Our history has been informed by the creative and at times the revelatory conjunction of African-American history and the narratives found in biblical text.

The importance of narrative for African-Americans has been pushed forward in recent years by the detailed work of Alex Haley's *Roots*. Haley's story, detailing the African-American's pilgrimage, verifies the oral tradition of the guru. The oral tradition was necessitated by the illiteracy of the African-American slave in this country. There was a serious effort by the slave master to force the slave to forget name, culture and
personal identity. At great cost there was an undying struggle to remember the story and trace the origin of one’s roots. This great cost of remembering the story of our origin has paid great dividends in this century as we are drawn once more to importance of story in liberating and giving personal worth as African-Americans continue the process of "restorying" our narrative.

Western Christianity, over the centuries, made use of abstract categories for doing theology. African-American religion was shaped by the need for personal and communal survival. The means of this survival has been transmitted in a "folk or narrative process."8

The fuel that fired the Civil Rights Movement was the story of Rosa Parks, a woman of courage. Ms. Parks challenged the traditional Jim Crow laws. The story of this great lady set the stage for the abolition of these inhumane statutes. Her story was the basis of hope that gave a picture of a brighter day for our people.

A fundamental basis of understanding the Christian story is by coming to grips with our own story, no matter how morbid. The possibility of grace and mercy is understood more clearly as we are able to recognize our own personal needs. If we cannot come to grips with our own story, the biblical story can never hold for us the same real promise as those who have offered themselves. As we offer ourselves, our total personalities, we can find transforming power as we experience a new creation. This new creation is the promise of the passion and resurrection narrative. Through the stories of the New Testament, we are able to touch the nail-ridden hands of the one who has become our Lord and Christ.
Finally, the methodology of this project is designed to test the feasibility of narrative in the local congregation as a means of training lay caregivers and identifying themes and issues of the church. The initial objective is to assist lay caregivers as they confront their own narratives. Through this process of self-understanding, we expect new experiences of the liberating power of the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, our Teacher, our Counselor, and our Guide. This new empowerment will come to us in community, in a safe place, a community of compassionate caregivers. The power of a narrative theological approach lies in the fact that our stories can be rewritten with the empowerment and freedom that a guilt-free narrative affords.

In the following chapter, the eight narrative sessions of the lay caregivers are presented. From the sessions that follows, the themes and issues of the caregivers give clues to the issues and themes of the congregation.
NOTES

CHAPTER II


2. Ibid., 2.


4. Ibid., 91.


CHAPTER III

A NARRATIVE ACCOUNTING OF THE SESSIONS

Session One

In the chapter that follows is a presentation of the narrative of the eight sessions with four lay caregivers, the test group. In the initial meeting each person was informed of the overall expectations from them. Prior to the first meeting the group was given a "Family History Profile" to complete. From the family history profiles, I was able to glean information concerning the relationship of the caregivers with their family or origin and significant others. The profiles provided clues to potential themes and issues to explore with group members.

In addition to providing information about the family of origin, the family profile raised the issue of confidentiality for the initial group meeting. The group really had concerns that "family secrets" told by them for the first time were in the hands of trustworthy persons.\(^1\) The new learning style to which these parishioners were being introduced was foreign to them. There was a consensus of the group that they had a problem with trusting authority figures.

From the themes and issues that surfaced as the caregivers related their stories and the stories heard from their visitations, the themes and issues of the congregation began to surface. The eight sessions served three purposes. They provided an occasion for group counseling with the caregivers. Secondly, the eight sessions provided the
foundational training for the four caregivers who will be the nucleus of a lay care ministry at the church. Finally, the sessions provided a manageable way by which to learn the themes and issues of Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Trust and intimacy were the dominant themes that emerged from the first session. As the symbolic authority figure in the group, I received from them the projection of the one who was not trusted. Trust was a theme that would be explored in future sessions as one confronting the congregation.

**Session Two**

The second session began with a brief discussion of materials in a prepared notebook that I distributed to each person. A group discussion followed.

The seven steps of a biblical narrative counseling model were introduced from *Using Scripture in Pastoral Care and Counseling* by Edward P. Wimberly. Each of the seven dimensions was discussed with the group. The eight dimensions of the soul’s search for liberation from *Soul Stories* by Anne Wimberly were discussed. Following the discussion of the dimensions from these two sources, the group departed with a spirit of excitement and some anxiety about making their first visitation. One group member, Pam, was to present an account of her visit to the group in the session to follow.

**Session Three**

**The Narrative of the Woman with an Issue of Blood**

Pam was scheduled to present an account of her visitation. Before Pam presented, I asked the group to explore the narrative of the woman with an issue of blood as a practical exercise of the skills they had acquired from the seven dimensions of
counseling. The Sunday following Session Two, I sat in an audience as one of the caregivers spoke from Mark 5:25-34, the story of the woman with an issue of blood. The narrative was used by the group as an exercise of the newly acquired insight from seven dimensions of the counseling model to which they had been introduced. The result of their efforts follows.

Step 1: The presenting problem. This woman had an incurable hemorrhaging condition. She bled constantly.

Steps 2 & 3: Attending to the personal, marital and family myth. She was ceremonially unclean according to Jewish law. See Leviticus 15:25-27. She could not attend the synagogue. Themes: She was isolated from her religious community. She was excluded from all social contact. She was alienated from family and friends.

Step 4: Impact of the presenting problem. The counselee was desperate, broke and she had used all of her resources. After consulting with many physicians, they could not help her.

Step 5: A preferred story. She had heard of Jesus. She was moved with contagious excitement about the story of Jesus’ healing. She was willing to risk insults from the crowd and from the disciples who wanted to have Jesus for themselves.

Step 6: Set goals based on the preferred story. Her goal was to get to Jesus and touch Him so that she would be healed.

Step 7: Re-authoring. She began to say within herself, "if I can just touch Him, I will be made whole."

The story of the woman with an issue of blood illustrated the use and application of the dimensions of biblical narrative counseling by lay caregivers. The Bible narrative was seen from a different perspective. It was understood from a practical perspective, a perspective that made connection with some of their themes. It was also a view from
the perspective of the application of new learning concepts that the group had just acquired. The illustration does not propose to be without flaws, but it was instrumental in helping caregivers understand the use of scriptural narratives and the importance of scripture for their ministry as they applied recently learned concepts of counseling.

Session Three is significant from another perspective. The group began to manifest signs of a serious working group. In an effort to capitalize upon their excitement, they were introduced to the concept of "story linking" after a detailed discussion of the prologue and the eight dimensions of liberation from Soul Stories. "Story linking" was important after the narrative of the woman with the issue of blood had been discussed and just before the group members began to relate their favorite fairy tales.

Session Four

Favorite Fairy Tales Identified by the Group

Listening to favorite fairy tales from the caregivers was an important aspect of the project. Two of the group members named "Cinderella" as their favorite fairy tale, and two caregivers named "The Wizard of Oz" as their favorite fairy tale. These tales were discussed in detail. One caregiver’s favorite character in "The Wizard of Oz" is Dorothy, while the other’s favorite character is the Tin Man.

Pat began to discuss "The Wizard of Oz." Her favorite character is Dorothy. Pat raised the following themes and issues from "The Wizard of Oz."

She (Dorothy) was one who was never heard.

She was always an obstacle and never taken seriously.
She felt invisible all her life.

She had an expectant spirit, however, that things can and will get better.

Stella was invited to join in since her favorite story is also "The Wizard of Oz."

Stella identified the Tin Man as her favorite character. She raised the following themes:

A bleeding heart.

The Tin Man felt he didn’t have a heart.

Leader (speaking to Stella): How does this relate to you?

Stella: I tend to keep people at a distance.

Leader: Say more.

Stella: I’m reluctant to get close to people. I had a girlfriend who was a very close friend, but after high school we never communicated again. My favorite character is the Tin Man. He felt that he didn’t have a heart.

Leader: How do you and the Tin Man connect?

Stella: Kind of distant to people. Reluctant to get close to many people.

Leader: What about relationships in high school? Were you close to anybody?

Stella: I had a very lonely childhood and teen years. There was one girlfriend who was a good friend, but after high school we have communicated very little. My best friend was my first cousin who was killed in Viet Nam.

Stella concluded by stating that her compelling issue is a need to help others. Pat and Sue were able to connect with "The Wizard of Oz" to identify some of their themes. Both Pat and Sue agree that family jealousy was a divisive issue in their families of origin. They understood the story of "Cinderella" as symbolic of the jealousy among their family members. From the previous stories by Stella and the group, the issue of family jealousy was raised. The group identified the issue of family jealousies as one
that was also a church issue. Pam stated that this was an issue in her family also. She also stated that there was one issue with which her mother could not deal. I asked Pam if it was an issue that evolved around family jealousy. She indicated that in a way it did.

Pat stated she had suspected that "there was something about Sue that was unusual, but "I didn’t want to pry." I asked Pat if she thought it was fair to Sue if she didn’t pry. Sue then expressed that she needed to talk about it so that she could "be free or released from the terror." After this discussion I asked Pat to prepare a didactic to present to the group using the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. Because of past counseling sessions with Pat and her husband, I was aware of the issue to which she was speaking. I used this narrative so that Pat would have the option to claim her issue if she desired to do so at that time. I felt that the story would also prepare the group for Pat’s issue as well.

At this point it seemed as if matters were moving rather fast. The group had begun to develop a sense of "cohesion." It was at this point that I realized that this group could and would do effective work as lay caregivers. However, I also sensed an unreadiness by the other members of the group. Sue was ready to take a leap. This giant step could become a setback for other members if they were not ready to do likewise.

We were now ready to listen to Pam as she shared with us the story of her first visitation. Pam informed us that she had two choices from which to make her first visit. One was an elderly man whose wife had recently died. The man is lonely and needs a
friend but she chose not to be that friend at this time. Instead, Pam chose to visit an elderly lady in her neighborhood.

Leader: Why did you choose the elderly lady instead of the lonely man?

Pam: She had one leg amputated and is expecting to have the other leg removed. She had also had four heart attacks within the last six months. Her granddaughter was living with her but she left to go live with her boyfriend.

Leader: So this lady feels abandoned and worthless because the granddaughter chose to live with her boyfriend instead of staying with her?

Pam: Yes, she stated that this was the second time this year that she had been left alone. She was taken to the emergency room where she lay bleeding with no help from the hospital staff. She said that she prayed to God while in the emergency room and God stopped the bleeding. She is very upset about being alone.

Leader: What do you know about being alone?

Pam: One Friday night I thought that I was about to die. My heart began to palpitate. My breath was short. I told my husband and he said, "I'm going to bed." In a few minutes I heard him snoring. I had to struggle with thinking I might die all by myself.

Stella: The same thing happened to me after coming home from surgery. I had an anxiety attack. I thought I was going to die and my husband didn't even talk to me about it. He went on to work.

Leader: I detect some anger.

Stella: Yes. I suppose so!

Death and dying surfaced as a critical issue. Suffering alone with feelings of abandonment was the sense of the conversation. Unresolved anger was also a prevailing issue. Even when faith in God is strong, we often feel abandoned and left to suffer alone when we struggle with serious issues.
Pam resumed her discussion by giving more details of her visitation after I asked her if she had spoken to Mrs. X about the heart attacks.

Leader: Pam, did you speak with Mrs. X about all those heart attacks? Maybe she wanted to talk to you about dying. With all of those heart attacks, Mrs. X may have needed someone to speak with her about how she feels about having had four heart attacks.

Pam: No, I didn’t! (an emphatic No.) I didn’t want to scare her to death.

**Session Five**

Session Five began with discussion of one of Pat’s visitations with an elderly woman who could not hear well.

Pat: I visited Mrs. X. She was in the kitchen cooking. We call her "Aunt." I asked Aunt how she was feeling.

Aunt: I’m not making it.

Pat: My daughter began to sing her a song and Aunt began to cry.

Aunt: I have relatives, but they don’t visit. My legs hurt a lot. My aunt died just one month ago.

Pat: Do you miss her?

Aunt: Yes, very much.

Pat: Are you grieving over her, Aunt? I know you miss your sister very much.

Aunt: Yes, I do. I love you and I’m proud of you.

Pat: At his point we both began to cry.

Aunt: I have a hearing problem and a bad heart. I also don’t see very well. I have tried to support my family in the past, but they have not returned the favor.

Pat: We will try to visit you more often and bring others by to visit with you.
Session Six

This session began with my presentation of a visitation with an AIDS patient in an institutional setting. The setting was the charity ward at a large hospital. At the conclusion, the group identified isolation as a theme. Also, the idea of a charity ward presented a problem.

Stella: We were never on welfare, but we went to the clinic where we never had to pay. There was some condemnation from the church. People looked down on us.

Pat: My family was raised on welfare. We were very poor. Mother had three children. We felt like outcasts. My aunt was the treasurer at our church, but we had not compassion from her nor from the church. My aunt denied me help because she felt that I would never amount to anything.

Stella: We grew up poor. There were some people in the community and church who seemed to feel that they were "better" than our family. They were poor also, but they had a little more than we did. But we had a good sense of self. Mother instilled in us that we were not to feel that we were better than others, but that no one was better than us.

Sue: I grew up in a family with thirteen children.

Pat: We didn't always have food.

Sue: We never felt that anyone was better than we were.

Stella: I have two younger brothers.

Sue: Families differ.

Stella: Daddy was an alcoholic. He was a construction worker and traveled to other cities to work. Often he would be gone from home for two weeks at a time. Upon his return, he often spent his earnings on women and alcohol. Our home was peaceful until Daddy got drunk. He was often threatening and verbally abusive, especially to my mother. As small children, Christmas at our home was fruit and candy and gifts from the Salvation Army.
Sue: Daddy often spoke of how God made a way for him and his family during the depression. I remember this story he related often. He was working in the field talking to the Lord as he worked. God spoke to him and told him to open up that knot in his coat pocket. When he did, he found a five-dollar bill. He proceeded to shout and praise the Lord. Daddy was highly respected in the community. He was a very wise man even though he lacked formal education. He had a lot of faith in God.

Stella: Daddy was very intelligent, but not respected because of his problem with alcohol. I didn’t respect him myself. I hated what his drinking problem did to our family.

Leader: Are you still angry with him?

Stella: Maybe both angry and hurt. My parents couldn’t help me financially upon completing high school so I left home. My father died six years after I moved to another state, Tennessee. There was little contact with him after I left home.

Sue: I was very close to Daddy. I knew he wasn’t a perfect man, but to me he was pretty near perfect. It seems that Mother used to boss him around because he couldn’t read or write. I was angry with Mother because I thought she misused Daddy.

Leader: There is definitely some anger with deceased parents. How do you deal with that? First, I think it’s important to confess that you have some anger and that may just be the first step on the road to recovery. Then you can move on to other important business.

Sue: I loved my husband’s mother, but I don’t know that I really liked her. She was the boss of the little church that I first attended with John. My husband, John, and his mother had a real conflict. I feel that John has some resentment for her that is transferred to me. She was very opinionated and bossy. She was definitely the boss of that little church.

Leader: How are the issues and themes that you just shared with us related to Freedman Chapel Church?

Sue: There are a lot of people here who want to do the bossing but they want someone else to do the work.
Leader: There does appear to be some connection between the themes and issues raised by Sue and the issues and themes that characterize concerns of the church. I felt that the door was opened to explore church issues. Sue, may I ask what is your favorite Bible story?

Sue: The story of Joseph.

Leader: What about this story relates to your life?

Sue: I always felt like I was not accepted as a family member. I felt like an outsider. Messages of Joseph . . . from rags to riches. Rejected by family members, but later became the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Leader: So you feel rejected by whom, your natural family or church family?

Sue: I have been at this church for over thirty years, but at times I still feel kind of on the fringe of the church family.

Leader: But you are a leader at this church. Why do you feel on the fringe and not fully accepted here?

Sue: There are core members here who exercise a certain amount of control mostly behind the scenes. They can get everyone here fighting among themselves.

Leader: How do the rest of you feel about this issue and how it relates to the church?

Sue: I feel that there are a lot of people who have a lot of unresolved ill feelings toward each other. There just doesn’t seem to be much forgiveness going on.

Stella: That does seem to be a real issue here. Some people seem to feel that they are losing control and that creates a certain amount of conflict.

Sue’s observations were confirmed by the overall consensus of the group. Every group member agreed that Sue had identified and described accurately many of the breaches in the relationship of the church family.
Session Seven

After giving the opportunity for personal concerns, the first business of the day was accounts of visitations. Sue gave an account of a visit to an elderly woman in the hospital.

Sue: How are you doing?

Patient: I went walking today and had trouble with my legs. I have a heart condition. The nurse was here earlier and stuck me several times. I told her if she stuck me one more time I would sue her because she used the same needle each time.

Sue: Mrs. X is a retired nurse. She had planned to work a few more years but her mother because ill and she had to retire earlier than expected to care for her ailing mother.

Patient: The nurse wanted to put a bandage on my leg, but I wouldn't let her. The patient has the final say, you know.

Sue: Mrs. X had a sore on her leg that wouldn't heal. I got the feeling while talking with her that she was afraid.

Leader: Why do you think she was afraid?

Sue: She feels that she is going to be alone.

Leader: What is it like to be alone, Sue? What do you know about being lonely?

Sue: Dad was my security blanket. When he died, my security blanket was gone. I miss my dad. I was not as close to Mother as I was Dad, but Dad’s spirit still lives with me.

Leader: Did you ever let him go?

Sue: Mother was very private. She would never talk. She would instruct you but Dad would talk about anything and everything. I remember him telling me, "When you marry, don’t just grab any man that comes along. Talk to the Lord about it." I really miss my dad.

Leader: You never really said good-bye to your dad, did you?
Sue: No. His spirit is always with me. Dad was my security blanket.

Stella: Why should she . . . let his spirit go?

Leader: I don't know, Stella. Why not, isn't he dead? Your security blanket is gone. A very "significant other" is gone. That must be a lonely feeling. Does this group give you any hope? Do you feel comfortable talking to this group about your loss?

Sue: Talking to the group releases me to get some things off my chest.

Leader: Thanks for sharing a part of yourself with the group. Next week we need to hear from Pam and Pat.

Session Eight

This session was the wrap-up session for this project.

Pam: I have always had a desire to work with children who have been abused sexually, verbally, or physically. I also wanted to work with children in a special education setting. As a child, I was taught to sit down and behave. In other words, to "be seen . . . not heard." As a young child I remember an event where a mentally retarded boy was mistreated. People pushed him around constantly. I felt he was really misunderstood.

Leader: Who did you want to help as a child?

Pam: I felt invisible as a child. When my parents started to divorce, I pitched a fit and they put the divorce off. Later on, I wanted them to get a divorce and I told them so. I could no longer stand the verbal abuse from my father.

Pat: Why did you do that?

Pam: Because of my dad's alcoholism, he deprived Mother of so much.

Sue: Do you have some resentment toward your dad now?

Pam: I suppose I do have.

Pat: Can you talk to him about it?

Pam: I suppose that I could.
Pat: Why don’t you?

Pam: I might just do that.

Leader: We’re getting some brave folk here now. What about it, Pat, are you ready to talk about Tamar?

Pat: Yes, I am ready.

Leader: Why don’t we read the story and different persons in the group take a role? We can ad lib with the reading of the text if you like.

After the story was read in detail I asked the group for some of the issues and themes or to discuss the story as they desired. Pat raised the following themes. Abusive misuse of Tamar by her brother. Her father, David, had very little concern for her.

Women were considered as nothing. Tamar had to live in shame and disgrace the rest of her life. Pam stated that "some fathers don’t do anything, they just show up."

Sue: I see or understand Tamar as Jesus.

Leader: What do you mean?

Sue: She was treated just like Jesus was and nobody did anything.

Leader: Well, who is Amnon?

Sue: I consider Amnon as the people in the world.

Leader: What about Absalom? He tries to help his sister.

Pat: What Absalom did was for his own benefit.

Sue: When these things occur, I want revenge. I want them punished.

Leader: We could go on with this but our time is up. If everyone didn’t get to say all that you wanted to say, we will meet again soon. You have been a great group.
The eight sessions with the four caregivers were an effective way to identify themes and issues operative in the stories of the caregivers. Narrative methodology proved to be an effective means to understand the nature of troubling themes from this group as well as troubling themes and issues of the congregation.

Personal themes and issues that surfaced in the group were identified as:

1. unresolved family issues typical of children from homes of alcoholic parents;
2. a feeling of being invisible as a child, never heard and never taken seriously by family members;
3. a struggle with close relationships, distant to people;
4. alienation from friends and family;
5. distrust of authority figures;
6. denial of feelings such as unresolved anger, shame and guilt.

These themes and issues represent the problems that trouble these caregivers. These themes and issues are not exhaustive, but are the most pressing at this time. The personal themes identified by the group laid the foundation for the group to explore the themes and issues of the congregation. The themes surfaced as the group identified their favorite fairy tale and as they listened to stories of members of the congregation. The relationship between the fairy tales, the group members, the Bible stories and stories from visitations was the basis from which dialogue was initiated.

The symbolic metaphorical relationship of the narratives presented for discussion such as the "Woman with the Issue of Blood", the Tamar story, and the fairy tales raised by the group provide a connection to the themes and issues of the group members.
The issues and themes raised by the group assisted them in the search for relevant themes and issues of the congregation. The relationship between the themes and issues of the test group and the congregation are presented in the next section.

The consensus of the group was that the following are church themes:

1. There are church bosses but few who assume responsibility.
2. Core members feel that they are losing control.
3. There is the absence of a forgiving spirit.
4. Some members, long-term members, still feel on the fringe.
5. Unresolved family issues carry over into the church family.
6. After the resignation of a former pastor, there are feelings of abandonment.
7. There was unresolved anger directed toward the former pastor and the members who deserted the church.
8. Some members, core members, attempt to make marginal members feel guilty over decisions and actions.

From the initial meeting and throughout each of the eight sessions, the issue of unresolved family problems continued to surface. Unresolved family issues carry over into the church family and surface in disruptive behavior at church sessions and fellowship gatherings. Many of the breaches in interpersonal relationships appear to relate to the issue of a loss of control by "core members." Many of the core members consist of those who are advanced in age and many of them are losing control of their physical faculties. The daily reminder of so many losses frustrate and complicate life itself. The infighting could be a frustrating attempt by these members to continue to feel
a sense of worth or value. Core members have been able through creative strategies to have the elite members make decisions that they, the core members, prefer.

The power struggle between the elite members and core members is conceptualized in the African fable, "Tricky Mr. Rabbit." This fable has been a helpful metaphor for understanding the strategic maneuvering of the core group.

In this fable, the hare desired to outwit animals much larger than he so he devised a plan to do so, exerting little energy of his own. The rabbit devised a plan that would cause the elephant and whale to pull against each other. The rabbit accomplished its task by secretly deceiving each of the larger animals, causing them to exercise their strength and power. Finally, the whale and elephant discovered that they were being tricked by powerless Mr. Rabbit. In the end, the powerless hare outsmarts the powerful elephant and whale, easily winning the power struggle.

This fable indirectly describes conceptually the means that core members use to maintain a significant amount of control by devising and laying plans that cause the decision-making body of the church to fight among themselves.

The final significant metaphor that was symbolic of the condition of the congregation is that of the church basement which held a significant amount of water after each rainfall. There was a breach in the foundation that opened as a free-flowing fountain almost every time fellowship gatherings were scheduled. The church was up to its neck in water. The very survival of this congregation was in question. By the community's assessment the influence of the church was at its lowest. The church's
"identity," that aspect of the congregation that expresses its self-understanding, had been badly damaged. 8

The water did not interrupt the social gatherings, but it caused both elite and core members to work as a team so that fellowship gatherings would not be canceled. The creative energy of both groups was consumed by "water in the wrong place at the wrong time." By the time fellowship was scheduled to begin, everyone was exhausted and irritable. This metaphor symbolized the fractured relationship of the congregation and families that make up the congregation.

Large amounts of money had been spent to seek a solution to the water problem. Finally, the new pastor suggested that we contact a company called "Be Dry." The elite members made a decision without the knowledge of the core members to implement the proposed solution.

The Be Dry Company solved the water problem and there has never been water in the basement since. The solution to the basement's water problem did not provide the solution to what I perceived as the most urgent need at Freedman Chapel C. P. C. The congregation, I felt, needed to seek higher ground. Higher ground meant constructing a fellowship hall that would provide accessibility to aging and handicapped members. In 1993 the congregation broke ground for a 3000 sq. ft. fellowship center and within six months this new addition was dedicated.

The plot had twisted and the result was reflected in interpersonal relationships at the church. Relationships that were once combative now became more harmonious among members of the church family.
The two narratives, *Tricky Mr. Rabbit* and the narrative of the "leaky basement" illustrate the importance of story as a search is made metaphorically to make sense of troubling issues and themes of individuals and congregations.

The story of this congregation is reflected in the idiomatic expression that is reflected in the daily interaction of congregational life. The pastor is viewed as the person of importance and one to be respected. That position is set aside for those who walk to a different drum beat than others in the congregation. The pastor and those ordained are the only ones who have access to the pulpit and the offering of the sacraments.

The pastor is expected to be the official representative of the people at all meetings and denominational functions. The pastor’s wife is seen as the first lady of the church. She is understood by many as the lady who is to be observed, looked up to, and kept in place. The manner of dress, the decorum, the activities in which she participates are all dictated by the unspoken standards of the congregation. The pastor’s family is seen as the "model family" and when either deviates from this expectation, a certain off balance is experienced among the members.

The study of this congregation cannot be understood unless one addresses the social context in which the church has existed since 1927. The uncertainty of its history is reflected in its struggle for identity today. The uncertainty is reflected in the church’s struggle for identity in the local community, the Presbytery, and the General Assembly to which it belongs.
The early period of the church reflects a vibrant church family of men and women who had experienced the shackles of slavery. The early families of this church were slaves from my home county and in particular from the same plantation as my grandfather. Patrick Spriggs, one of the founding members of Freedman Chapel, bears the same surname as my grandfather, both coming from Bradley County.

The founders were men and women of strong character and unflinching determination. Some left with the blessings of their slave owners to fight in the Civil War. At the conclusion of the Civil War, Patrick Spriggs returned to his former plantation, welcomed back as a free man by his former owner.

Other founders of this church lived with their former slave owners as members of their families. In fact, they were blood relatives of these former slave owners. They had been owned by these masters--body, mind and soul--at least that was the intent of the slave masters. These founders of the church, while enjoying the newfound freedom, were divided in their allegiance to the pursuit of absolute freedom with a need to be related to significant persons and authority figures in a meaningful way.

In McMinn County, as well as in my home county, there was a false atmosphere of freed men. The physical barriers were not as obvious, but the psychological barriers have never been resolved. The same divided mind-set is very much a part of the congregation today. It is reflected in the need for this congregation to be reconciled with the community in general and the denomination in particular.

Both the African-American and the General Assembly of the White Cumberland Presbyterian Church spent ten years seeking to be reconciled with the other.
Reconciliation would be symbolized in the merger of the two groups, but the issue of parity on ownership of property, ministerial ordination, and pastoral assignment could not be resolved. Both sides were relieved when a decision was reached to abandon the issue of merger.

The African-American Church interpreted this decision as abandonment and rejection. Although the African-American Church was relieved with the decision, there were still strong feelings of rejection. The theme of rejection and abandonment surfaced frequently in the test group. It is a theme that appears to be rooted in the systemic racial, economic, and social plight of African-Americans.

The data gathered from the project are significant in that they have provided objective information whereby further programming for the church can be developed. Implications for future ministry at the church are reflected in the next chapter.
NOTES

CHAPTER III


2. Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, 3d ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., 1990), 100. Corey understands trust is vital to group development. He writes, "without trust, group interaction will be superficial, little self-exploration will take place, constructive challenging of one another will not occur, and the group will operate under the handicap of hidden feelings.


4. Corey, *Theory and Practice of Group Counseling*, 116. Cohesion is necessary if serious group work is to be accomplished. It involved "a sense of belonging, inclusion, and solidarity." As the group opens up and honestly shares deep personal feelings, a sense of cohesion or togetherness is developed.

5. Ibid., 124. According to Corey, it is possible that too much disclosure can become a liability to the overall health of the group. In self-disclosure, if too much is disclosed, persons "may feel deprived of their dignity."

6. Melvin D. Williams, *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1974), 61-80. Williams defines elite members as those who are most aware of the instruments of mobility in their church and who are ambitious enough to articulate and capable enough to manipulate those instruments. Core members receive their power by allegiances with elite members. Core members represent ushers, deacons, trustees, etc.


CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE MINISTRY AT
FREEDMAN CHAPEL CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Implications for Lay Caregivers

The findings from this project dissertation have raised certain implications for ministry at Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America. The implications will be viewed from the perspective of the findings in relation to the institution of a lay caregiver's ministry at the church. Secondly, there are implications raised that support a need for continued group counseling. Thirdly, the findings raise issues that relate to the congregation and its narrative.

Findings from this project indicate the importance of involving lay persons in the total ministry of Freedman Chapel C. P. C. in America. The significance of the laity has been documented, both biblical and theological perspectives, by Tan, Messer, and others.

This project supports the effectiveness of utilizing narrative methodology to train lay group members using a narrative approach. Narrative methodology was an almost natural means for persons to engage disruptive personal themes and issues. The story process caused the "resistance"\(^1\) to be less a factor in recalling themes and issues from the past. Problematic themes and issues were projected\(^2\) onto the favorite or disliked
character from the caregiver's favorite fairy tale or Bible story. Each caregiver had disruptive themes and issues that needed to be "externalized."³

The narrative counseling model was successful with the test group because storytelling is a vital means by which basic beliefs have been transmitted. It is closer to the African-American oral tradition through which many "core beliefs" have traditionally been transmitted.⁴

Each caregiver had a story to tell that reflected issues and themes that were problematic to them. Group members seem to have a natural inclination for the narrative approach to ministry. After a period of review of information learned during the initial training period, the test group began the second phase of training.

The second phase of training for the lay caregivers exposed the group to intervention strategies such as "reauthoring" their stories, editing troubling themes, and role playing with Bible stories.⁵ In addition to the previous named counseling skills, caregivers were directed to make greater use of "story linking."⁶ The benefits of linking their stories to stories from the Bible and stories from our African-American heritage were reflected in a new vision of hope that can affect the entire congregation.

The goal of the "reauthoring" process is to develop a preferred story. A preferred story can be the liberating visions of human wholeness, freeing us for vocation and ministry in the local church as the church edits its disruptive themes. Assisting the church in the editing process was one of the most significant acts of ministry for this group of caregivers.
Implications for Ministry at
Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church

Ministry at church will be much more effective as narrative concepts are introduced as the basic methodology in all aspects of church life. The lay caregivers aided in this task by first completing their training and then serving as group facilitators beginning initially at the mid-week Bible study.

There are certain implications for the church reflected in the themes of the fairy tales from the caregivers. Both "Cinderella" and the "Wizard of Oz" presented a particular "world view" that tends to parallel that of the congregation. One of the themes that seems to be present in both fairy tales is the tension between despair versus hopeful expectation for a mystic solution to their problems. Both leading characters are expecting a "prince charming" or a "wizard" to make things right for them.

Freedman Chapel C. P. C. has, for the most part, viewed the pastor or some charismatic leader as its "prince charming." The founding fathers had Abraham Lincoln as their emancipator as they struggled to be rescued from the oppressive slave system. They lived in a despairing world but with hopeful expectations that they would be delivered. This same theme is reflected in the story of the caregivers and the story of the church. Hopewell writes, "In the household of a local church dwell mostly members whose idiomatic discourse projects a mutually recognizable world."7

Understanding the world view of a congregation is significant because the manner in which the membership treats its members reflects the "way it views the world."8 Because a congregation cannot be classified into any one congregation, I have classified the world view of Freedman Chapel C. P. C. as "canonic charismatic."9 The canonic
world view asserts the inevitable decline of the self. Whereas the charismatic world view portrays an escape from conventionality of life, the canonic story claims instead the certainty of life's pattern.\textsuperscript{10}

The cohesive element that tends to hold this congregation together is a common world view. Although there is a bit of fighting among the membership, there is a common view of the world which has had an impact on how this group viewed themselves and the perception that they understand the community has of it.

There is another significant implication for ministry at Freedman Chapel C.P.C. The church is operating without a clear understanding of its story. The image that it has of itself, its "self-understanding" and the image it perceives that others have of it has caused the church to become ashamed of its identity. The organizing theme of the founding fathers was liberation from an oppressive slave culture in order to worship in spirit and truth. The church must rediscover the purpose of the founding fathers as it edits its current disruptive story. The story of Freedman Chapel, when understood by the congregation and the community, can redirect the church to the theme of liberation that was the central theme of the founding fathers of the church.

The solution to the problems of the church and these caregivers is not in the expectation of some "prince charming," but in the fact that we have a significant story that needs to be told. There are various themes of the story that need to be edited.

The church was guided in the task of "restorying"\textsuperscript{11} its present narrative. Restorying requires the continued search for new and more liberating metaphors such as stories from the Bible and our African-American heritage.
Another significant implication for the church is that the story of this church must be told. It will be the task of the pastor and the leadership of the church to find new and refreshing ways to tell the story of the church. Hopewell relates three ways of how telling the story "develops the identity and mission of a congregation."

1. By establishing the setting of the story of a local church, its picture of the world, narrative, proclaims corporate nature.

2. Narrative provides . . . a ministry of characterization that particularizes the congregation by displaying in mood and incident the unique ethos of the individual parish.

3. Narrative thus acknowledges what we have been and done, but in the presence of the world story, the gospel, that gives the telos to even the small stories of local parishes.\textsuperscript{12}

In the process, telling the story of Freedman Chapel Cumberland, as the identity of this small group, is conceptualized in narrative. The congregation, according to Hopewell, by its story can "mediate the entry of the individual into the fulness of the world, making manifest how the biography of a member is woven into the story of all human society."\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In concluding this dissertation, I acknowledge that many questions have been raised and will be raised by those who see the feasibility of using Narrative Methodology as the underlying approach to initiating a lay care counseling program in the local church. I feel that it is important to share the criteria that guided me in the process of selecting stories for the group and in selecting stories as a resource for preaching.

1. The stories selected related to the themes and issues that were reflected in the themes and issues of the group. Some of the issues and themes of the group
came from a family history profile that was completed by each participant at the initial session.

2. The stories selected in some way reflected a common world view as that of the group.

3. The stories brought by group members were a valuable resource, such as favorite stories or favorite fairy tales of group members.

4. The stories were gender sensitive, reflecting the gender make-up of the group.

5. The stories selected were growth-oriented. The stories challenged the group to consider themes that were painful. Though the stories were painful, they had the potential to facilitate a healing process.

6. The stories selected led the group to consider text that could reflect a variety of interpretations. The stories were multivocal, giving the marginal character an opportunity to be heard.

And finally,

7. The stories, while giving the marginal persons an opportunity to be heard, provided the group with characters with whom they could identify.

The forestated criteria that guided me in the selection of stories to use in the group counseling process are not exhaustive, but they do reflect the basic parameters that I utilized for selecting stories to be used in training this group of lay caregivers.

I realize also the importance of providing these lay caregivers with a resources such as the leader’s guide as they continue their training, and as they train other lay persons as caregivers. The guide will include at least the following:

1. a theoretical and biblical basis for lay ministries in the church;

2. a basic introduction to biblical narrative counseling methodology;

3. an overview of the seven dimensions of a Biblical Narrative Counseling Model and the eight dimensions of the soul’s search for liberation;
4. an exercise that will assist the group as they identify themes and issues in their favorite stories will be helpful;

5. a basic introduction to story linking, connecting the group’s stories with stories from the Bible and our African-American heritage;

6. a section that guides the trainee through the process of externalizing disruptive themes and issues and editing these themes;

7. opportunities must be arranged for group members to share aspects of their stories with the larger community as an invitation for new participation;

and finally,

8. to provide some direction and guidance that will assist persons as they connect the stories of the group with the greater story of our faith tradition.

The purpose of this project dissertation was to search for answers to the problems of disruptive behavior at Freedman Chapel Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America beginning in Chapter I. In that chapter a broad overview of the dissertation was presented. The issue of disruptive behavior of the local church was identified and the plan formulated to address the problem.

The ministry issue was stated as a question. This question served as the general focus for the dissertation. The question proposed the formulation of a lay care training program at this church. The lay caregivers program was designed to test the feasibility of using four members of the congregation as a representative sampling of the congregation to search for troubling themes of the congregation by identifying personal themes from their own stories.

The story, or the narrative accounting of our lives, and narrative accounts of visitations of church members and persons in crises provided the resources for the stories
presented by the group. A second aspect of the ministry issue was to test the validity of using a narrative counseling paradigm to train this lay care group.

The narrative model was drawn from the biblical narrative counseling models of Bagarozzi and Anderson, White and Epston, and Edward Wimberly. *Soul Stories* by Anne Wimberly served as a vital resource for additional stories and the educational aspect of the counseling process.

In Chapter II current developments in narrative theology were discussed. The grounding from narrative theologians guided the search to claim narrative methodology as a viable means of practicing ministry in the local church in general and the African-American Church in particular. The importance of narrative as a viable conceptual means for practicing ministry in the local church was guided by insight from these theologians.

In Chapter III, a narrative accounting of the sessions was provided. From these sessions many themes were identified for both the group and the church. The stress of the lay caregivers reflects the stress and anxiety of the congregation. From the narrative sessions implications were raised that are summarized in this final chapter.

The effectiveness of the African-American Church has waned for many African-Americans. The loss of effectiveness, I believe, is related to the fact that we have failed in our efforts to connect the stories of our community to the stories of the Gospel.

The influence of abstract theological terminology has rendered the Gospel Story sterile and unrelated to the basic struggle of survival in an oppressive society. The gospel is a story, not abstractions of reality. The story of our communities is not told
in abstract theological symbols. It is reflected in the stress and pain caused by pressures from those whose reason for being has been overshadowed by a system that dehumanizes and alienates its citizens.

Narrative can be an effective way to recapture the essence and meaning of life for individuals in the community. Story can also be an effective way of understanding who we expect to become. Our story is not told in isolation but is linked to the greatest story ever told. The Gospel Story is a story of hope and liberation.
NOTES

CHAPTER IV


2. Ibid., 160. Projection, according to Corey, involved attributing our own unacceptable thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and motives to others.

3. Externalization is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. In this process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person or relationship that was ascribed as the problem.


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid., 57.

9. Ibid., 69.

10. Ibid., 79.

11. Ibid., 193. Restorying as conceived by James Hillman is the conscious employment of accounts by which its corporate life (the congregation) is structured and interpreted.

12. Ibid., 149.
13. Ibid.
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