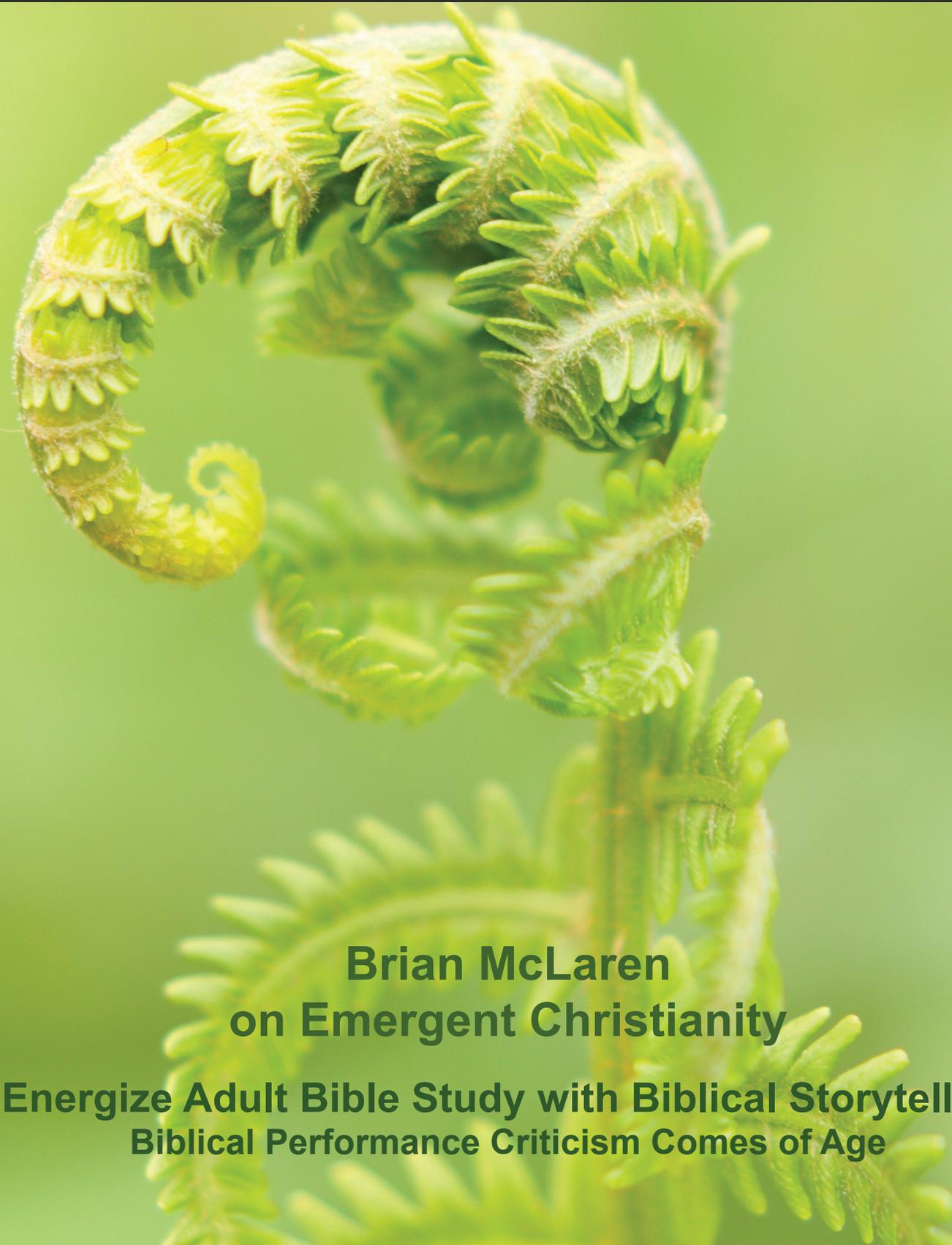


Special Outreach Issue 2013

THE BIBLICAL STORYTELLER

A Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. Publication



**Brian McLaren
on Emergent Christianity**

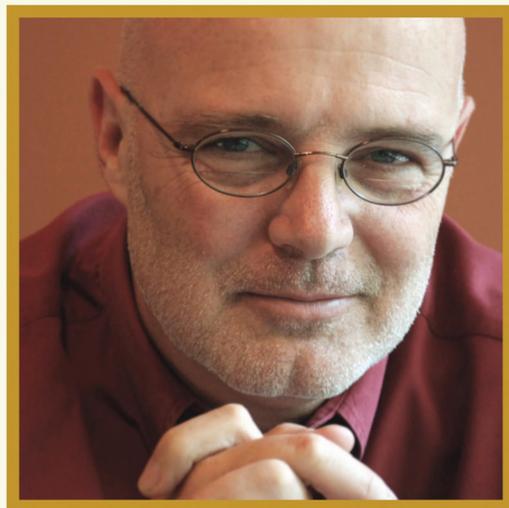
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The Biblical Storyteller is a publication of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l., an ecumenical, international, non-profit organization of scholars, clergy, and laity whose mission is to encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories. We provide and develop resources for telling biblical stories through audio, video, and computer technologies as well as telling them face-to-face. Subscriptions to **The Biblical Storyteller** are \$25 per year. Call 1-800-355-6627 to subscribe or mail your check, payable to NBS, to the address below. You may also order online:
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No more right answers...

An original story by Donna Marie Todd



Donna Marie Todd
Storyteller, Writer and TBS Editor

Her lithe young limbs raced across the ice covered grass, past the stained glass and into the house. Her voice lifted with excitement but it was silenced, yet again, for being too loud and full of questions. Grandfather didn't like loud noises or questions and he never left the house anymore.

Once, he had been very powerful. Everyone respected him. Well, almost everyone. He had the answers to all the questions and decided right from wrong. But a day came when the old answers didn't fit. Even the questions had changed. And when that happened, he didn't leave the house anymore. He found her questions annoying and ridiculed her for asking.

He was dying but she didn't understand that. She loved him. He was all she had ever known. Once he had lifted her high above the ground, above the clouds and into the celestial places, with his words and grand music. In time, his thunderous voice grew hoarse. When she leaned in close to hear his whispered words they were venomous and mean, until finally, he couldn't have a conversation anymore. There was nothing left to say. And in the silence, death came.

The ice was melting around the new grass the day they laid him in the ground. Cherry blossoms were peeking out, forced from their beds by the sun. She

stumbled around for a while, distraught. Who would answer her questions now? Who would decide right from wrong?

Then almost all at once, the questions themselves were enough. Her voice lifted with excitement and spoke words of peace. Being right just didn't seem important anymore. She knew the sting of ridicule, so she did not silence the others, but instead invited them to embrace their own questions. She simply stood with them in love, supportive of the asking, sure of her own heart and comfortable in this peaceful way of being.

His death was overwhelming, hard to see, hard to bear. But she lived through it and then, strangely, found herself. Her lithe young limbs ran over the rich, dark ground, past the stained glass and the cherry tree, out into a new world. A world that was waiting for her to ask the right questions.



biblical storytelling in parish ministry

How four pastors use storytelling with Presbyterian, United Methodist, UCC and Episcopal congregations

Photograph: © VJMatthews/Shutterstock.com

Q. You've been involved in the Network of Biblical Storytellers and attended the Festival Gathering for many years. As a pastor, what tools do you receive for your ministry from the keynotes and workshops at the Gathering?

Bert Ambrose: The keynotes the last few years have provided insight about the stories or about the way church is changing and how to look at the stories through those lenses.

The workshops about voice and breathing have been personally useful for my storytelling. I've used ideas from the marketing workshops, even though they were directed toward storytellers, to "get the word out" about the congregation I serve and our ministries. Even though I have not been able to use it yet,

the digital media workshops have provided a wealth of information about how to use digital media in worship and develop a social media presence for the congregation.

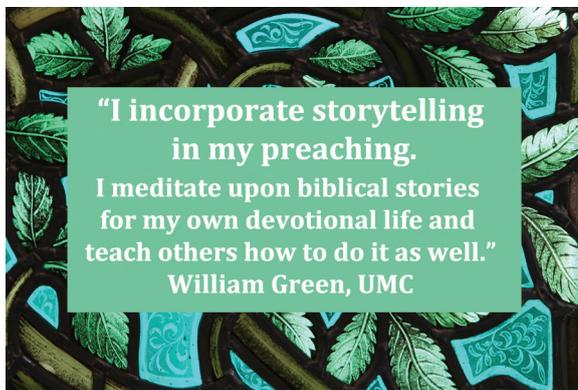
Dennis Dewey: I have stolen everything I could over the twenty-plus years that I've been attending the NBS

Festival Gatherings! I put it all to good use in planning worship, preparing sermons, teaching the Bible and supporting our resident team of biblical storytellers at the church that I pastor (Stone Presbyterian Church in Clinton, New York—www.stonepres.org). Several of our Stone Storytellers have attended a Festival Gathering, and I encourage

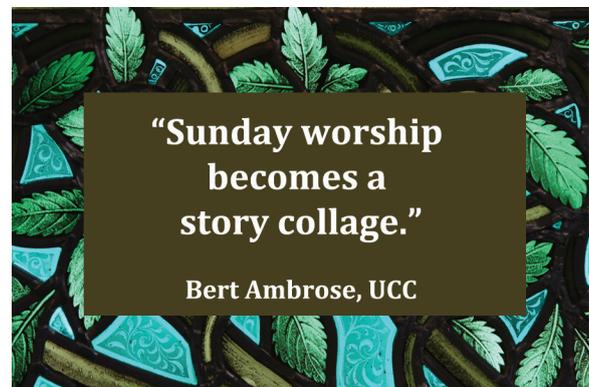
them all to become members of NBS and to use the website and other great resources available through the Network.

Dina Ferguson: I've gained ideas from workshops at the Festival Gathering about incorporating story into preaching. From the keynotes of the Festival Gathering speakers, I've received background information that can inform my preaching and teaching.

William Green: The keynote speakers help me to see the link we have as storytellers to: a) what is going on in the world regarding peace and justice issues; b) the vast amount of change in our culture and soci-



**"I incorporate storytelling in my preaching. I meditate upon biblical stories for my own devotional life and teach others how to do it as well."
William Green, UMC**



**"Sunday worship becomes a story collage."
Bert Ambrose, UCC**

ety; c) the personal hunger for transcendence among people today. The workshops have given me a few good ideas of how to find personal connections to the stories we tell.

Q. How do you use biblical storytelling in your parish ministry?

Bert Ambrose: I strive to tell the sermon scripture every week during worship, as well as at Life Celebration Services (funerals). Sometimes a particular story comes to mind when helping someone walk through difficult times and struggles. Hymns, songs, prayers and pieces of the liturgy frame the scripture story and sermon story. In this way, Sunday worship becomes a story collage.

Storytelling has taught me to be a story listener, as well. I listen both for and to the stories of others in the parish and this has become an integral part of my pastoral ministry. It takes patience to hear all the pieces of a community story or to put different stories from the past together but it lets me know my parish in a deep way. When I hear stories that compare to the Bible narratives, I then use those narratives to assist in guiding the congregation.

Dennis Dewey: Nearly every Sunday one or more of our Stone Storytellers tells the lessons in worship. We typically use the First Testament, Epistle and Gospel Lessons according to the Revised Common Lectionary, and it's not uncommon that all three will be told by the different members of our team.

The Stone Storytellers got started soon after I was called as pastor six years ago, so some of them are now telling these stories and passages for the third time. Although we encourage each other to learn and tell new stories, some stories have become so identified with specific tellers that those stories "belong" to them. The congregation has come to expect that the scriptures will be told each Sunday rather than read!

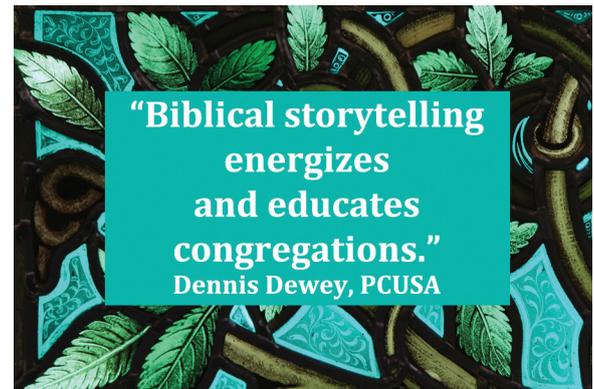
For two years we have sponsored a village storytelling festival, and we have encouraged the art of storytelling by partnering with the Kirkland Art Center for occasional "story swaps." There is more about our Stone Storytellers at <http://stonepres.org/stonetellers080411.pdf>.

Dina Ferguson: I often tell the gospel in worship. There are other storytellers in the parish who occasionally tell the gospel or a lesson.

I used the videos that NBS co-produced with The Seed Company for a Bible study class last fall to good success.

William Green: I have committed to heart several hundred scripture references that I use in my pastoral ministry when I visit persons in the hospital or counsel persons who are in a crisis situation.

I incorporate storytelling in my preaching. I meditate upon biblical stories for my own devo-



tional life and teach others how to do it as well. I have given performances in prison, at church events and at retirement homes (Jonah, II Timothy, Philippians, the Sermon on the Mount).

Q. What do you wish your denomination's leadership understood about biblical storytelling?

Dennis Dewey: I wish they understood that biblical storytelling is a profound spiritual discipline; that biblical storytelling engages congregations in a way that reading does not; that biblical storytelling energizes and educates congregations; that the print culture in which our (Presbyterian) denomination was birthed is passing away; and that biblical storytelling is both ancient and new for a digital communications culture that is "secondarily oral."

Dina Ferguson: That they understood that it is engaging for the people to hear. That it is authentic, that is, there is an academic foundation for telling vs. reading scripture.

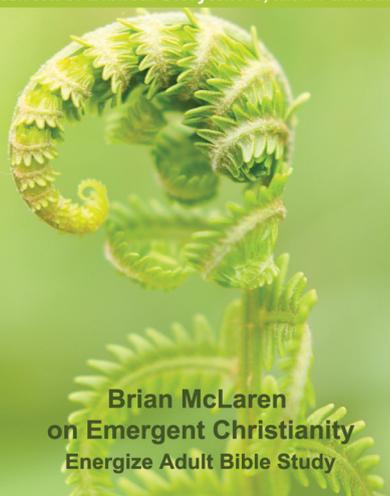
William Green: I wish that we would use biblical storytellers at our Annual Conference each year for the worship services.

continued on page 6

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Brian McLaren
on Emergent Christianity
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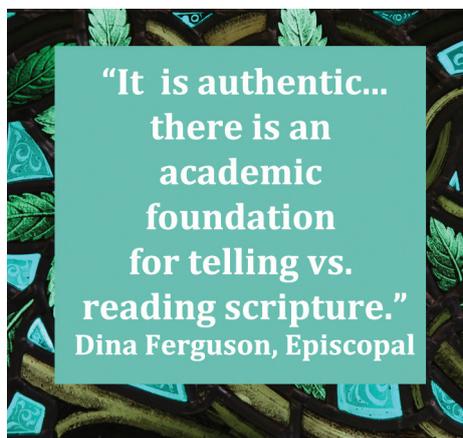
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Storytelling in Parish Ministry
continued from page 5

Q. Do you have any special storytelling projects coming up this year in your parish?

Bert Ambrose: Storytelling will continue to be an important part of my parish ministry. I also am working on a series of stories and will teach some storytelling classes outside of the parish.

Dennis Dewey: We have done a gospel each of the past four years as a springtime "Epic Telling." We hold it in the evening and always have a full house for this open-to-the-public event.



This year we have decided to do the first 15 chapters of Exodus as our Epic.

Dina Ferguson: We will continue with The Seed Company videos. We finished the Old Testament stories and will go on to the New Testament stories.

William Green: In the coming year I would like to learn by heart and tell Galatians. I heard Dennis Dewey do it several years ago. It really inspired me.



About the Pastors

Bert Ambrose, OH
is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ who gives biblical storytelling performances, educational programs in biblical storytelling and storytelling electives for judicatory lay ministry and licensing programs.



Dennis Dewey, NY
is ordained in the PCUSA and is the former Executive Director of NBS.



He has performed and led storytelling seminars all over the United States and Canada as well as in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Israel.

Dina Ferguson, CA
is an ordained Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Los Angeles and is



the immediate past president of NBS. She holds a D.Min. in biblical storytelling and tells the Gospel for worship services, retreats and workshops.

William Green, NC
is ordained in the United Methodist Church. He and his wife Polly lead the storytelling ministry at First United Methodist in Cary, NC. He offers performances, consultations and biblical storytelling workshops.



Contact these pastors to learn more about using storytelling in your ministry! Go to our website and click "Storytellers." You'll find an alphabetical listing with contact information.



NBS GUILDS

Stay connected with regional and online groups!

Northeast US

Green Mountain Guild

The Green Mountain Storytellers Guild is a teaching and learning group at Westminster, Vermont, led by Joel Hill. Email: jhill@jhsph.edu

Metro NBS Guild (New York)

The Metro Guild in New York City can be contacted through Marcia Powell-Bent at Facebook.

Western New York Guild

The Western New York Guild centers around Niagara Falls, and is a very active teaching and learning connection. Leaders are Carol Ann Gleason and Carol Wolf. Email: GLEASON306@aol.com or caroldickwolf@cs.com

Women of the Well

Women of the Well "Storytellers giving voice to women yesterday and today through performances and retreats" is headed by Gloria Ulterino (585)586-3279 Email: gloriabf@aol.com

Brockport, New York Guild

Contact Krista Cameron for information on this newly forming guild. Email: revkrista@juno.com

Mid-Atlantic US

Greater Lansdale Guild

Tellers in and around Lansdale, PA, led by Paul Lutz. Email: plutz@trinitylansdale.com

Maryland Guild

Tellers in the Baltimore, MD area. The contact person is Rabbi Rachmiel Tobesman. Email: projectshalom1@aol.com

Southeast US

Tidewater Tellers

Tidewater Tellers is a regional network centered in the Norfolk, Virginia area. The contact person is Fred Archer. Email: seadog114@yahoo.com

Shenandoah Valley Guild

Shenandoah Valley Guild is an active teaching, learning and performing guild led by David Downey. Members are available for individual storytelling presentations and to encourage new tellers in local congregations. Email: davedown80@msn.com

Living the Story

Living the Story is the Greater DC area guild of the Network. Contact Janice Langholz. Email: jangholz@msn.com

Good News Tellers

Longtime NBS member Danette Rosenberg leads this teaching and learning guild in the region around Cherryville, which is northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina. Email: danetteoverall@hotmail.com

Midwest US

Central Indiana Guild

This Indianapolis region guild is a teaching and learning group blessed with the presence of NBS Scholar Marti Steussy and NBS Coordinator Ellen Handlin. Contact Marti Steussy. Email: Msteussy@cts.edu

CinDay Guild

Learning and telling stories in the Cincinnati-Dayton, OH region. Contact Joyce Orr. Email: CinDayNBS@gmail.com

Northern Ohio Guild

To contact the Northern Ohio Guild, email longtime NBS members Jim Kulma or Bert Ambrose. Emails: jkulma@cox.net and bcambrosejr@att.net

Prairie Wind Guild

The Prairie Wind Guild is a group of folks in the Chicago-Northern Illinois-Lake Michigan area who are passionate about learning by heart and telling sacred stories. Contact Beth Galbreath. Email: beth@bethgalbreath.com

Canada

NBS Canada

Canadian tellers sponsor an annual Festival Gathering in the fall, in the Ottawa-to-Toronto region. Contact Ron Coughlin. Email: ronaldkc@aol.com

Africa

The Cameroon Guild is headed by Rev. George Minang. Email: vimensi@yahoo.com

Australia

This very active group hosts its own storytelling Gathering. Contact the co-presidents for more information or visit their websites: ausbiblicalstorytellers.blogspot.com <http://www.nbssa.blogspot.com>

NEW! ONLINE GUILD

New this year is an online guild: NBS TOgether. Contact Beth Galbreath or Joyce Orr to learn how to participate!

Emails: joyceorr4@gmail.com or beth@bethgalbreath.com



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A Letter from Ron Coughlin

The First International President
of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l.

I have two nieces and when they were younger, I was privileged now and then to read them a bedtime story and put them to bed. Once, when Sarah was four years old and Emily seven, after I had read Sarah her favorite story, she took the book and placed it on the floor and stood on it. I was puzzled. I looked to Emily for some explanation. Emily said, "She wants to enter into the story."

We biblical storytellers "enter into the story" in a variety of ways as we live with, ponder, pray and learn by heart the biblical story. I find it is a privilege to enter into the story week by week as I prepare to tell it in worship each Sunday.

I did not always do this. No, my life was changed when I met Dennis Dewey at a continuing education event at a United Church retreat centre nine years ago. I came away from

that event committed to learn by heart the scripture passage for each Sunday and tell it dramatically in worship. And I have kept my commitment.

Then seven years ago, I went to my first Festival Gathering and came to know all the wonderful people who make up this Network of Biblical Storytellers. It is amazing what has transpired

My hope for the Network is that we will continue to grow and make connections with the many people who do not know about us, but would love to learn about and tell biblical stories.

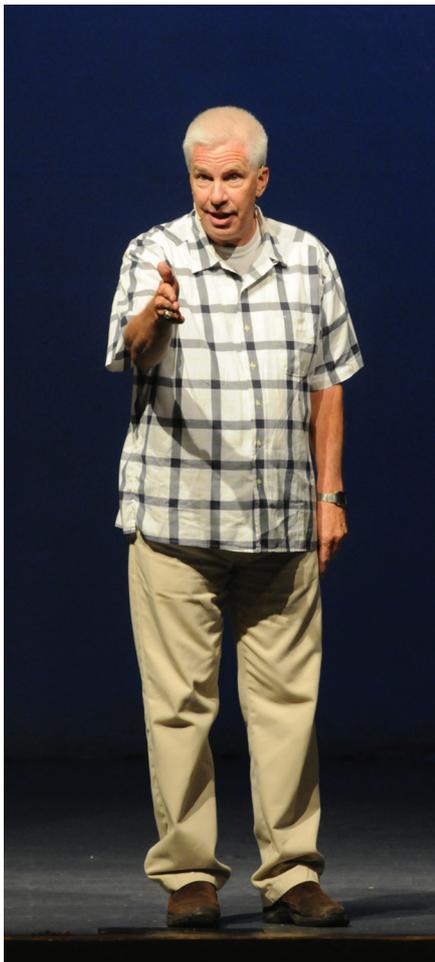
since that weekend in August. I have completed the Basic and Master Level Certificate from the Academy for Biblical Storytelling, have been elected to the Board of Directors and now look forward to serving as the incoming President of the Board. Also,

I have accepted the challenge from Juliana Rowe to join the storytelling team to go to Cameroon this February. What a rich life this is!

I want to share with you a little bit of information about myself and then share some of my hopes and dreams for the Network. I am an ordained minister with the United Church of Canada. Since 1973 I have ministered in a variety of parishes, taught at a seminary, and served at our church head office with responsibilities for candidates for ministry, internships and lay education. I am now retired but have continued to work as an interim minister, currently in my third appointment. Along with others in Canada I have founded the Network of Biblical Storytellers-Canada and have helped to organize three Festivals here in Canada. People who know me know that I am very well organized, love

to teach and inspire others, and bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm to any task I undertake. I look forward to exercising these gifts with the Board of Directors of the Network.

My hope for the Network of Biblical Storytellers, International is that we will continue to grow and make connections with the many people who do not know about us, but would love to learn about and tell biblical stories. We have a new program that began just this past year called NBS Ambassadors. These are people who have



Canadian Ron Coughlin, storytelling during the Festival Gathering's Epic Telling.

made a commitment to spread the news about NBS in all the venues in which they currently operate, like church conference meetings, professional gatherings and regional meetings. I am grateful for these Ambassadors and the work they are doing. You might want to join with that group.

I also believe that we at NBS have a gift to offer to the world, and so want to encourage and support the International Missions that are taking place and are being planned for the future. I also believe that there are a wide variety of ministry settings where biblical storytelling can be effective, and so hope to encourage the members of the Network to reach out in creative ways to prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, libraries, etc. Finally, as we all know, offering this ministry requires financial resources and so I hope that our development work will find creative ways to raise more funds and provide a stable basis of funding for future ministry. As a wise minister once said, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that there is enough money to accomplish all our ministries. The bad news is that it is still in your pockets."

I pray that with God's help and your support, I and the Board of Directors can continue to make biblical storytelling an effective method of conveying the biblical story to a world that longs to hear Good News. Thank you for the privilege of being a part of this Network.



NBS INTERNATIONAL MISSION PLANS



Juliana Rowe
Director of International Relations

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LOGOS for Kids and Biblical Storytelling

by Ginny Soll



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It was LOGOS ministry that brought me into Christian Education. I became involved as a parent when my children were young and through my volunteer activities in LOGOS I felt a call to leave nursing (I am an RN) and go to seminary for Christian Education. I have served as a national trainer for LOGOS and am a firm believer in its benefits to the Christian community. LOGOS is “a retreat every week.” It provides in-depth and well-rounded Christian nurture for children and youth of the church. It is designed to engage the entire family and to promote the growth of intergenerational relationships that bond the members of a congregation into an authentic community of faith.

LOGOS is an ecumenical program that draws its leadership from many denominations and can work in almost any denomination’s congregations. It is usually held mid-week and lasts between three and four hours, depending on the congregation’s preference. It has four components: Bible Study,

Worship Skills, Recreation and Family Time. The family time is intergenerational. Kids are assigned to “table parents” who are adults in the church, but not their biological family. The kids who attend this program know from their “family” that people in the church love them. When they participate in LOGOS, children pray, play, study and eat together as a church family. It’s very powerful. LOGOS has now expanded into the GenOn ministry. What I love about this expanded ministry is that it goes right to the heart of what Phyllis Tickle urged us to do at the 2012 Festival Gathering – get the stories of the Bible into the family again!

It’s not hard to start a

LOGOS program if you have a team. Over the years we’ve found that the most effective way is to form a team, and then there are specific steps outlined on the website (GenOn.org) that help you with that. It is important to talk about your churches’ strengths, to visit churches that already have LOGOS to see it in action and then go to the training sessions. The training is a Friday evening and all-day Saturday event and it is offered all over the country. You can also contract with a trainer and take the training at your church.

“I have found that LOGOS provides many families with their only experience of being part of a faith community.”

Ginny Soll,
Church Educator, PCUSA



Photograph: © Zurijeta/Shutterstock.com

This ministry is volunteer and parent intensive. It's a great way for new members to enter the community, because it uses any and all gifts that members may have. But it does take a lot of volunteers to make the program work. Generally, there are as many parents and adult volunteers as there are children.

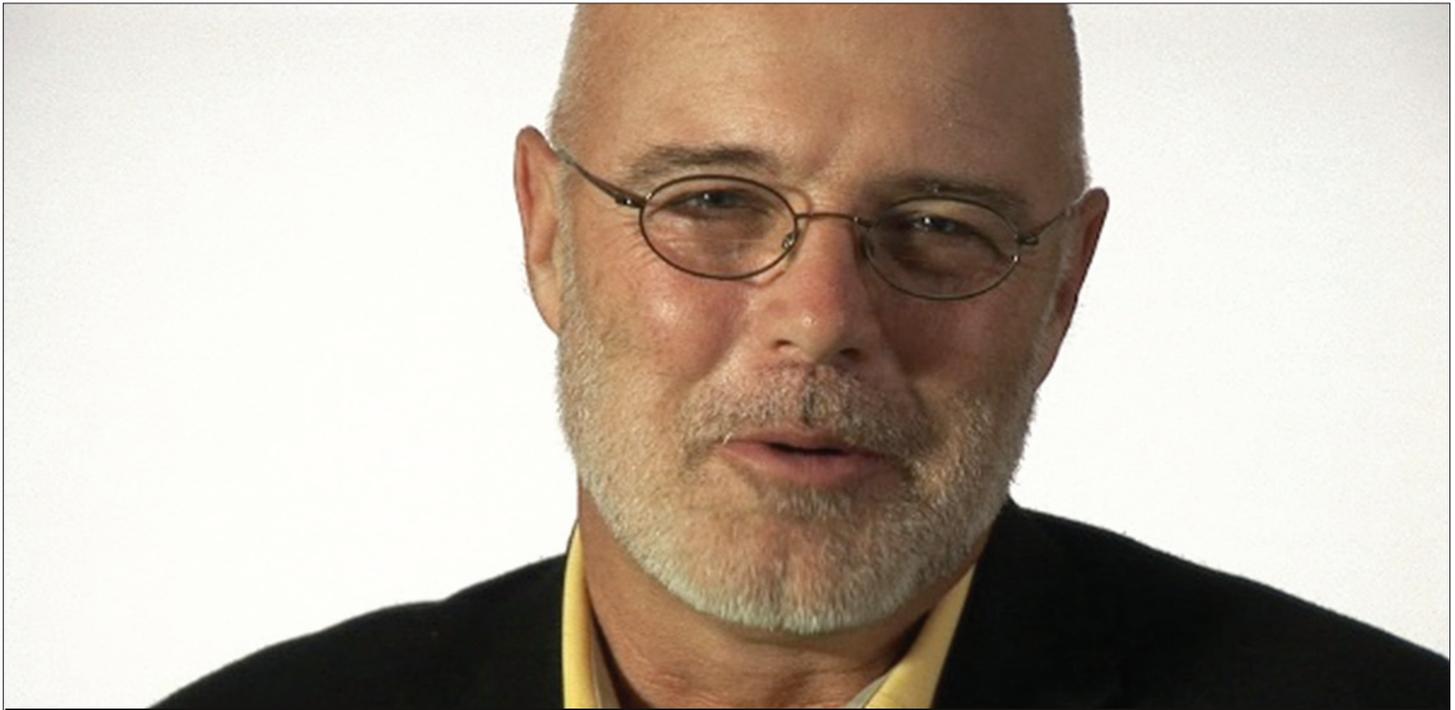
I have found that LOGOS provides many families with their only experience of being part of a faith community. Our program attracts families and requires parental participation. For some, this is their only experience of being part of a faith community. Some churches run their program from K-12 and have very strong youth programs during the week. My church uses the K-5 model with more traditional youth programming on Sunday night.

This year, I decided to use biblical storytelling in our Bible study component. When I was at Union PSCE we had to learn and tell a story. I remember I picked the Road to Emmaus story and did it as midrash. As a child, we acted out Bible stories in Sunday school. When I met Donna Marie Todd about ten years ago, I learned about NBS through her work and I was very interested in ways to incorporate it into my Christian Education ministry. I attended my first Festival Gathering in 2004. After the 2012 Festival Gathering, hearing Phyllis Tickle speak and then taking Amelia Boomershine's workshop on telling stories to children, I was excited about bringing biblical storytelling to our LOGOS program. I met with the Bible teachers for LOGOS, and we decided to use Amelia and Tom Boomershine's "Story Keepers" literature. Our Bible teachers chose to use the teaching curriculum and then internalize the stories and tell them to the children instead of using the videos. The teachers wanted to be the storytellers! I thought that was very exciting.

The children enjoy hearing the story from their teachers. They delight in learning the story and then telling it in worship. It takes a lot of coordinating to bring them into worship to share the stories, but it's worth it. To see a group of kids sharing a Bible story with the congregation is great for them, but the congregation loves it and is pleased to see the kids learning the stories. I highly recommend incorporating biblical storytelling into your Bible study programs for children. It's fun for everyone!



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A CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN MCLAREN

Q. Our 2012 Festival Gathering speaker, Phyllis Tickle, called you “The Martin Luther of Emergence.” Your writings have clearly been provocative, even outright infuriating if you believe all the press. But you speak as one who is clear in his own mind about a problem that needs a resolution. When did you first find yourself at odds with what “the church” was doing and why were you so moved to talk about it?

A. I grew up in Christian Fundamentalism. “My people” were the kind to question whether Methodists or Lutherans were actually members of “the true church”—and forget about Roman Catholics! We were strict biblical literalists on 6-day creationism, on the silence of women in church, on divorce as cause for exclusion, on

literal hell for all who don’t believe in our preferred theory of atonement, on homosexuality as unacceptable (although we hedged on stoning!), and on the demonic nature of rock and roll (that was a bit harder to find Bible verses to condemn—but we managed!).

What I discovered as I ventured from the far right to the center

That’s why
I’m such a big
fan of NBS.
I think that
narrative
and
storytelling
are our
main genres!

was that many of the differences were not in kind, but degree. In other words, more moderate Christians had stopped fighting some of the old fundamentalist battles, but they hadn’t really questioned the deeper assumptions on which they based their arguments. I suspected that we needed to deal with those deeper assumptions sooner or later. Oddly, both in my evangelical/fundamentalist context and in the Roman Catholic Church, it was strange to see widespread retreat from that needed critical thinking from the 80s to the present. In the 60s and 70s, we had Vatican II and the Lausanne movement, but since then there has been a rather shocking retrenchment and retreat. Sad, really, even tragic.

All this intensified for me when I went to graduate

school in literature and realized that we were passing through a profound intellectual and cultural shift from a modern/colonial/ Enlightenment/industrial world to a postmodern/postcolonial/ post-Enlightenment/post-industrial world. Retrenchment wasn't going to be a great long-term strategy!

The real turning point came, though, when I became a pastor. Those philosophical and cultural issues I had seen earlier had filtered down to street level, and people came into my office saying, "I feel like I'm losing my faith. I need help with these issues, or Christianity is over for me."

Q. You are a best selling author and lecturer. We as the Network of Biblical Storytellers are thrilled to have you as our keynote speaker in 2013. This interview is coming fresh on the heels of your UK tour to promote your new book, "Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed Cross the Road?" What prompted you to write this book?

A. I should answer that in two ways. First, to be very blunt, since September 11, 2001, I've been increasingly worried that extremist Christians, Muslims, and Jews could blow up the world in the name of God. So I started studying religious hostility and I became more and more convinced that Jesus "got" this—and so did Paul—and we needed to rediscover what they saw and taught and lived in regards to peacemaking, reconciliation, love for "the other."

Second, I'm certain that many Christians are leaving the faith because they are unsatisfied with our two main alternatives—a strong Christian identity that is hostile toward other faiths, and a weak Christian identity that is tolerant of other faiths. We need to articulate a strong Christian identity that is benevolent toward other faiths. Just as the Christian faith has grown over the centuries—outgrowing anti-semitism, the support of slavery, the support of monarchy as divinely sanctioned, chauvinism and patriarchy, and so on—I think it's time for us to grow beyond the strong/hostile and weak/tolerant polarity. In so doing, I believe we will become more faithful to Jesus and better neighbors, too.

One of the huge questions—that is highly relevant to NBS—is the question of violence in the Bible, especially violent images of God.

Closely related is our language for God in general. For example, the imagery of thrones and swords and so on was contemporary imagery to the biblical writers. But now, it's at best quaint and at worst outmoded and misleading. By using that language, do we unintentionally send a message to people that God ... pardon my frankness here ... has a literal backside that sits on a literal throne up in the sky? How do we preserve that precious biblical imagery and yet also discover new imagery that is as fresh in our day as that imagery was back then?

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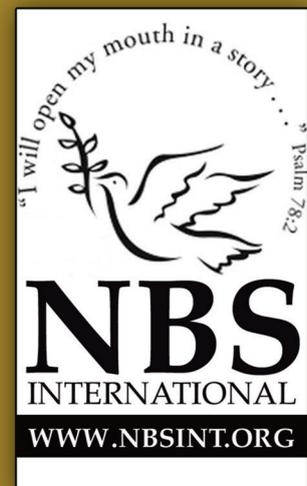


LEGACY

1) money or property left to someone by a will 2) anything handed down as from an ancestor 3) a heritage

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When your earthly voice falls silent, how will the Word continue to have breath?



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Thank you!

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NBS Director of Development
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email: lynn@trinityccfw.org

Q. These days it seems like everyone is “spiritual” while few claim to be “religious.” How do you think Christianity can remain true to its identity and still be relevant in the spiritual plurality so present in our world culture?

A. That’s really what my most recent book was about. I think that if we properly understand Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God, we will see it as a spacious and gracious reality that embraces our religions, just as it embraces our own lives, and simultaneously challenges them to grow toward greater maturity.

Q. Is the concept of personal purpose important to the foundation of the church that is emerging? Have we hidden too long behind our corporate stained glass walls?

A. I think we need a deep sense of personal purpose, absolutely, rooted in Christ. And that personal purpose must be integrated with a larger sense of purpose—can I say social and even cosmic purpose?—that is equally rooted in Christ. Because I think the Christian vision

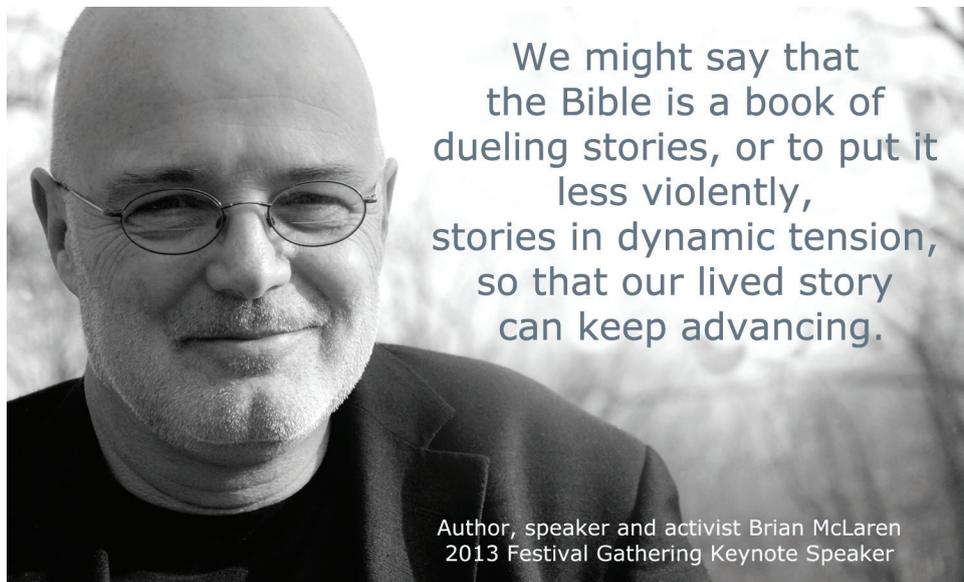
is always personal, social, and cosmic, too. Today’s world gives people lots of products, but little purpose ... lots of options, but little direction ... lots of opportunities for temporal consumption, but too little in the way of spiritual productivity.

Q. We are a community of storytellers and we delight in the power of our oral medium. What role, if any, do you see for narrative and storytelling in the emerging church?

A. Ah, that’s why I’m such a big fan of NBS. I think that narrative and storytelling are our main genres! If we believe in

short-form fiction, intended for oral telling and retelling?

One of our great challenges as we move ahead is something I learned a lot about from Tom Boomershine. It is, I think, our next great theological frontier. We need to learn a greater narrative fluency that goes beyond telling a story and trying to convey its “moral,” to seeing the meaning that emerges from stories in conversation and argument. We might say that the Bible is a book of dueling stories, or to put it less violently, stories in dynamic tension, so that our lived story can keep advancing.



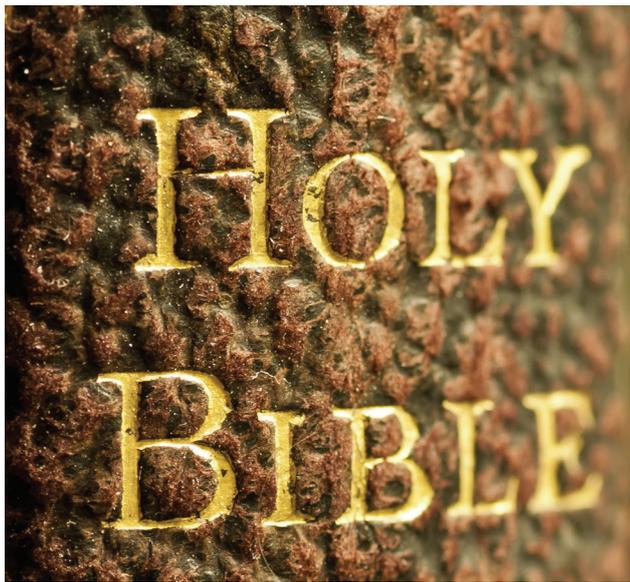
We might say that the Bible is a book of dueling stories, or to put it less violently, stories in dynamic tension, so that our lived story can keep advancing.

Author, speaker and activist Brian McLaren
2013 Festival Gathering Keynote Speaker

I love what the social theorist Ivan Illich said. If you want to change a culture, you must tell it a new tale, one so compelling that it makes sense of our past and one so intriguing that it gives us hope and direction for the future. The failures of our leaders in every

a Creator who sets the stage of space and time as a kind of narrative space—a space where things can happen and unfold, where characters can develop and plots can emerge and climaxes build and tensions resolve and new tensions arise, then we’re being most true to the Creator when we delight in storytelling. And then look at Jesus: what are parables but

realm today—political, cultural, economic, ecological and religious—are in many ways a consequence of the inadequate stories we are living by—and imprisoned by. May God give us the vision to see and learn and tell a new story, a story of good news of great joy for all people.



Tom Boomershine on the Development of Biblical Performance Criticism

Photograph: © hring/Shutterstock.com

Biblical performance criticism is a relatively new term, and I think that explaining the origins of this term and the new paradigm of biblical study that it informs would be helpful for most of our members. Biblical performance criticism is essentially an extension of historical research into the original context of the Bible and the medium of communication. There's been a lot of work over the centuries on the content of the Bible. However, this work did not look into the forms of communication that were prevalent in the ancient world or the development of language, both of which are critical to our understanding of the Bible. Now many scholars are researching both the oral nature of the Bible and ancient communication forms. These two areas of study are informing the work of biblical performance criticism scholars, many of whom are in the NBS Scholars' Seminar. The Network has been vitally important in the development of biblical performance criticism. The NBS Seminar, which takes place each year before

the Festival Gathering, gives scholars an opportunity to come together to discuss new findings and share their work with others in the field. This information is then shared with the NBS membership so that it can inform the work of biblical storytellers.

Prior to biblical performance criticism, it was assumed that, once the Bible was written down, it was received the same way as it was in the 18th and 19th century, when books were readily available and the culture was literate. That is to say there was no historical study of the communication culture of antiquity associated with form criticism. We now know that less than ten percent of the ancient world could read or write. So, there were several things that contributed to a reexamination of that. In the 20th century there has been a lot of study of communications media. In the mid-20th century Marshall McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy, Understanding Media*) was a central figure in launching media study as an area of research. He was

a mentor to Walter Ong (*Orality and Literacy*). Ong expanded McLuhan's research and explored how the transition from orality to literacy influenced culture and changed human consciousness. This early research has had a big impact on my work.

When I started my Ph.D. program, my goal was to study the forms and media of the New Testament. In fact, that was the subject of my field research, which had not been done before. Then, my colleague Werner Kelber and I read Walter Ong and became very interested in the oral and written forms of the gospel, which prompted Werner to write a major book, *The Oral and Written Gospel*. At the same time I organized "The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media" group for the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). I did my dissertation on Mark as a storyteller. My conclusion was that the book of Mark was oral narrative that was told to audiences. So I studied, then,

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Mark's story as a story—as an oral narrative. I made recordings of Mark's passion narrative in both English and Greek. So that was very early research. One of the major sources for research in biblical performance criticism is media studies--the media of the biblical world and the communication culture of the biblical world.

The second stream that has contributed to the field of biblical performance criticism is narrative criticism. The primary methodology for the study of the Bible in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was source criticism. Source criticism focused on identifying the sources the authors of the Gospels used to create the final text. The quest for the historical Jesus, an attempt by scholars to use historical methods to construct a historical portrait of Jesus, grew from this research. The search for the original strands of the Gospel narrative all grew out of source criticism. Narrative criticism was an extension, in the biblical field, of what was called the "new criticism" in the study of contemporary literature. In particular narrative criticism studied the novel. I studied under one of the pioneers, and probably the single most important narrative critic, Wayne Booth at Earlham College. He was my principal academic advisor and I remember going with him to the British museum each day while he was working on the footnotes for his major book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. So

I got first-rate training in narrative criticism or what was called the "new criticism" in my college work with Wayne Booth. Another thing I did in my dissertation was to apply rhetorical criticism to the interaction between the storyteller and the audience and that became, in the 70s and 80s, a major development in biblical scholarship. David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, Robert Tannehill and Robert Bower also led the way in this new exploration of the scriptures.

The foundational discovery was the exploration of the media culture of antiquity. It's become clear that most people couldn't read, that books were not generally available and that manuscripts were memorized in order to be recited. It's become clear that the culture of the ancient world was a memory culture and the role of writing was to record the instructions for performance. While there are instances of silent reading, almost all reading was done aloud for audiences. So this is a new, primary recognition:

The Bible is a series of compositions that were composed for performance for audiences rather than a book of manuscripts that was meant to be read by readers.

Source criticism is wedded to the concept that the ancient world was a writing culture and most books in the Bible were written to be read by readers



silently. We now know that this was not, in fact, the case. Research in archeology and media studies further verify the basis of performance criticism. The discovery of ancient manuscripts shows the same character of manuscripts we had before. All the letters are simply written right next to each other without paragraphs or sentences. They're just strings of letters—it's very difficult to read. The function of that kind of writing was to record the sounds of the story so they could be remembered. The function of the manuscript was very different than what we had thought. Everything leads to this same conclusion.

Matthew has been shown in works of art writing the Gospel with other manuscripts spread out on a table like in the eighteenth century, but they didn't have tables until the Middle Ages! That's why the texts are written in short columns! That was the width of the letters you could write on your leg! The archeology of ancient manuscripts is congruent with this picture of the ancient world.

In the last 40 years performance criticism has been a major development. We have a much more detailed and accurate picture now than we did years ago.

In 1983 I founded the “Bible in Ancient and Modern Media” group in the Society for Biblical Literature. The term performance criticism was first used by David Rhoads in this group.

What needs to be recognized is that we’re talking about a whole new framework about what the Bible was in antiquity and how the Bible can now be understood.

When you change the medium in which something is studied and interpreted, everything changes. The understanding, the way it’s communicated—all that changes.

Prior to the founding of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, it was thought that when biblical story was told it couldn’t last more than three or four minutes. I argued about that because—look at Homer! Storytelling was something that went on all evening in antiquity! That was a pattern throughout oral culture, and the ancient world was an oral culture. We had no way of imagining how stories could be told as long stories because we, in modern times, had never experienced it. So the Network has been involved in primary biblical research throughout its history. It was the first group formed around telling long biblical stories, and that has proven

to be enormously productive in helping us understand more about the ancient culture of the Bible.

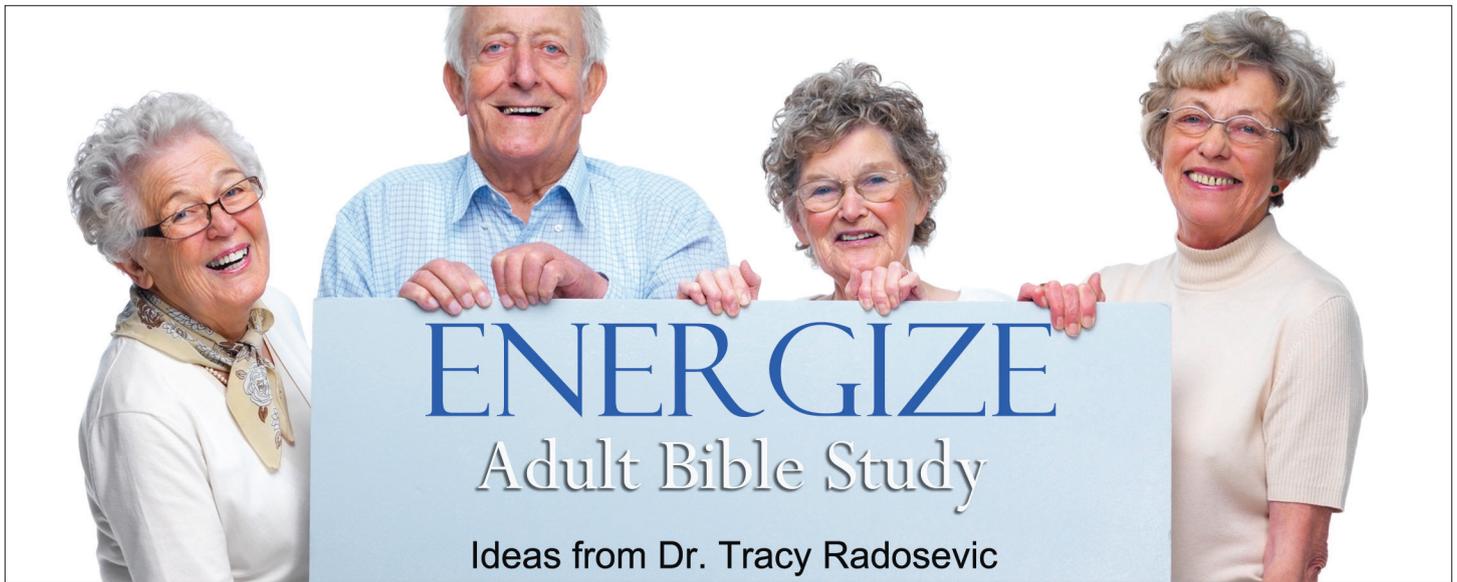
There is an explosion of research and various pedagogies and liturgical developments in biblical performance criticism now. In virtually every field that is touched by biblical study and biblical scholarship itself there is a revolution taking place. The SBL turned down our first two attempts to form the “Bible in Ancient and Modern Media” group because they thought no one would be interested. But, this past year there were about 25 to 30 different groups exploring different dimensions of this primary recognition of the communication culture of antiquity. So there are hundreds of scholars who are working on this now, both Old Testament and New Testament scholars.

This research and understanding will change the way we worship in the future. The first primary change is that the scripture lessons will be more intimate and will be done from memory. And when they are read from a book, they will be read much better and there will be more energy and life in the performance of the scriptures in worship. There will be more storytelling and performances of stories than sermons. Even sermons will become more interesting, because they will grow out of the vital energy and experience of the stories. There will be more intergenerational engagement with the Bible because the learning and telling of stories of the Bible is acces-

sible and can be done by young people and people who don’t have a high literary education. This will bring a much broader participation and more engagement in the Bible to churches. The performance of the scriptures will have more of the original energy and spirit and life that was present when they were originally composed than is currently the case, and that can change everything. We’re at the very beginning of that.

Internalization of the stories in the Bible to memory is foundational for spiritual formation, prayer and social action. Without this, the empowerment of people is marginalized. For healing, for health care, for the repair of those incarcerated, the internalizing of the scripture will bring life and power. It will add to the globalization of the Bible. It will make the Bible available to the 50% of the world that still can’t read. This is what we’re doing with our international missions program. Again, NBS is pioneering that development and the members of the Network have been very enthusiastic about these vital missions.

In all other major developmental shifts in religion, the reinterpretation of the Bible has been a primary focus of the church. This is true again for our time. We will re-imagine the Bible for a digital culture through our informed understanding of its original culture.



Photograph: ©Yari Arcurs/Shutterstock.com

Obviously, I'm biased, but I would say that biblical storytelling is the best way to lead adult Bible study. In my years of working in Christian Education I've come to think that we're all overgrown little kids and our child-like voices need to be heard and expressed. In kindergarten you're able to learn using your whole body, but with each successive year of education that part gets removed and it all starts to move to the left side of the brain. Now you can learn things that way but the left side is the logical side and the right side is more of the creative and imaginative, expressive and emotional side. So I think that when you only do one or the other you're not getting the whole experience! If you look at how young children are taught, there is very little left-brain stuff and yet they seem to learn a lot. Thinking with just one side puts us off balance. Thinking with the

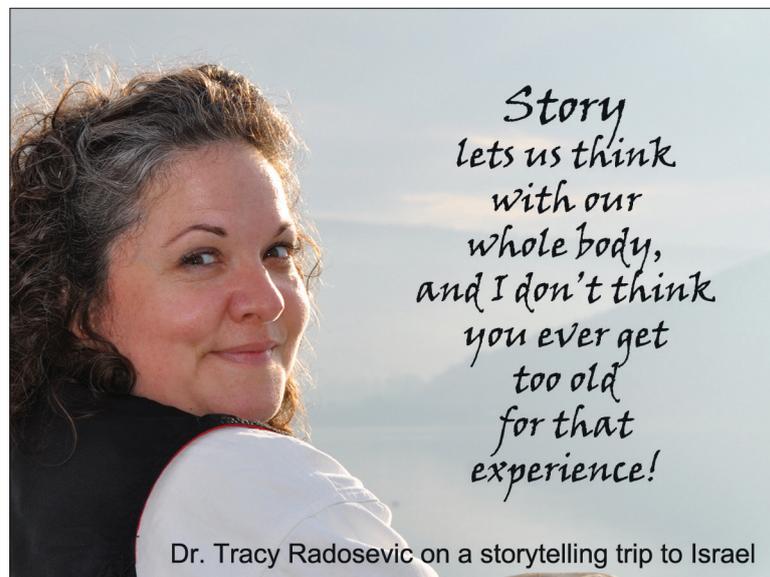
whole body is more kinesthetic and multi-dimensional; it's not just thinking about it in a one-dimensional way. I think that is what story does: it lets us think with our whole body, and I don't think you ever get too old for that experience. Left-brain learning is what has been modeled for us, but using story brings the whole self into Bible study.

My master's thesis (at East Tennessee State University in storytelling) was all about using storytelling to lead Bible study. Now, this takes more time on

the front end for the teacher. I'll admit that. You have to prepare by learning a story and learning it well using the NBS method: sticking close to the Bible with 75% word accuracy, 90% content accuracy. You're getting the integrity of the text using the words that were originally developed for audiences. Tell that story using as many dimensions of your body and voice as possible when you practice. Some people draw out a storyboard and other people put it to music, some even study as they exercise. Try to get your body moving as you internalize the story,

because movement brings in the right side of your brain. Meditate on the story, pray the story, come at it from as many different directions as possible. Get outside your left brain to broaden the experience both for yourself and your class.

Once you know the story well, the method of using it



for Bible study would be to ask your class (before the story) to watch for any red flags that go up during the story. Now, a red flag is anything that gets their attention. Ask them to try to hold onto that for the discussion after the story. You tell the story and you tell it well and afterwards you say, "Okay, so what did you notice? What were some of the things that got your attention?" You write down their comments so everyone can see them and then use them for discussion. When I teach this way, there are certainly things about the story's history or context or how the original audience would have heard it that go right over their heads. And I want to make sure that my audience understands these things, so I'll intentionally put things into the story that create red flags for the listener so that instead of lecturing about this, in a traditional Bible study way where someone is listening and someone is talking, the process is student-driven, not teacher-driven. You've written all their comments on the board and then you discuss them; because they gave you the information you hold their attention. It becomes an interactive process.

After you've done that, then ideally you tell the story again, but now they're hearing the story through the lens of the discussion that they've already become involved in. It's a very energizing process!

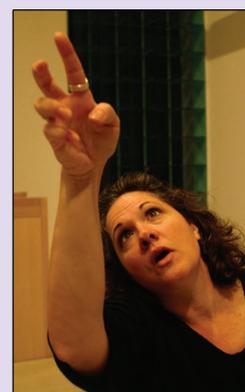
If you're looking for written resources about using storytelling for Christian Education, I'd suggest Tom Boomershine's

Story Journey as the first book for your storytelling shelf. It still remains the Bible of biblical storytelling. I recommend it for a preaching series, an educational series or learning the theory, practice and methodology of biblical storytelling. It's a tremendous reference. Another book, *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media*, has a somewhat funky title, but it's a collection of works by scholars on the forefront of exploring biblical performance criticism.

Anyone can learn these storytelling techniques. If they want more intensive work or course credit, I teach biblical storytelling at the Ecumenical Institute of Theology in Baltimore and also at Wesley Seminary in Washington. These are how-to classes that teach you how to utilize biblical storytelling. If you don't happen to live in the Baltimore, Washington area you can participate in the Academy for Biblical Storytelling (ABS)—the NBS school without walls, of which I am dean. We've had people from Australia and Canada so you can come from almost anywhere. There are two face-to-face meetings, one of which is at the Festival Gathering. We take advantage of all the wealth of learning and exposure to storytellers of every possible style and then we meet for two days after the Festival. It's a calendar-year certification program involving rigorous self-study, in addition to the two face-to-face meetings. A pre-requisite for admittance to the program is at least one

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Storytelling Intensive Equip Yourself for a Post-Modern Ministry!



Dr. Tracy Radosevic, Dean

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Energizing Adult Bible Study
continued from page 19

prior attendance at a Festival Gathering. What the Academy does is teach people how to tell biblical stories and how to teach others how to tell biblical stories. In 2014 we will begin another basic program. Registration is limited to twenty people and each person receives one-on-one mentoring. If you want to participate in the 2014 basic certification ABS program you need to attend the 2013 Festival Gathering.

I want to encourage you not to be afraid of using biblical storytelling! Sometimes the person you think will be your harshest critic will be the one most moved by it! Here's a little story about that: One of the NBS members in Baltimore many years ago got permission to tell the passion narrative on Good Friday at her very traditional, book-bound Episcopal church and she was more than a little nervous. She told the passion story well, the service went on; and afterwards, hordes of people came up to her after the service and told her how meaningful it was saying things like: "This was one of the most powerful experiences I've ever had," and "I've heard this story so many times before but I'd never really heard it." In the midst of all this, she saw the rector emeritus regally coming down the aisle toward her and she thought, "Oh no, here's the criticism I've been waiting for." Frowning from under his bushy eyebrows, he strode



Dr. Radošević at work, teaching with story

up to her and said: "You know, when I was in seminary they taught us to read the scriptures with no emotion whatsoever. Boy, were they wrong!"

If you're actually learning the story yourself, instead of using videos where others have done the work, and you've never learned a story before, it's a lot of work. But it's like riding a bike. It takes a long time to learn how to do it but once you know how, it's easier each time. There is a steep learning curve; but once you become secure in the techniques, it is quite feasible to learn a story every week. We have lots of members who learn and utilize a new story every week.

How many times have you sat through a worship service where the children's moment was a story and the sermon was a traditional sermon and you could remember the children's story months later but couldn't remember the sermon later that afternoon? Stories stick with us and because the stories have sticking power, they are transformative for people's lives. When everything became focused on left-brain learning, we forgot that. It's time to rediscover the power of stories for adult Bible study!

Four New Board Members Elected

Four new board members were elected by the Network membership at the 2012 Festival Gathering. All will serve three-year terms on the NBS Board of Directors.

Bert Ambrose, OH, is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ. He will be working in the area of human relations on the board.



Mike Brower, TN, is a long-time member of NBS who will bring his expertise in digital technology to his work with the board. He will serve on the Communications Committee.



Cynthia Park, GA, is an Episcopal priest in Atlanta who is currently completing her Ph.D. dissertation. She is serving on the board as the liaison from the NBS Scholars' Seminar.



Cynthia Maybeck, MA, is pastor of Trinity Church in Northborough, MA. An ABS graduate, she will serve the board in the area of membership.



The Festival Gathering

We gather to hear the stories of the Bible



We take turns storytelling long into the night. Someone usually brings chocolate.

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2014 Festival Gathering
August 6-9, 2014



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www.nbsint.org



Jason Chesnut, Wisconsin

John Epp, Canada



Five Great Reasons

You Should Attend the 2013 Festival Gathering

REASON NUMBER ONE:

OUR AWESOME KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Brian McLaren, best selling author, theologian and activist is coming to stir up our hearts about storytelling and its role in the emergent church. Don't get left behind. You need to hear this.

Richard Davies, author of *St. Paul's Corinth* will provide eye-opening insights on the places and people in Paul's ministry. This is a travel guide to Acts. It's awesome stuff. Trust us.

REASON NUMBER TWO:

OUR WORKSHOPS

We have absolutely fabulous workshops for beginners through masters level storytellers with a "How to Do This at Home" emphasis that will give you real storytelling skill sets for ministry.

REASON NUMBER THREE:

OUR WORSHIP

We are an ecumenical community of storytellers who love to hear the Word told. We love to see imagery and music wrap around the stories to deepen their presence in our prayers. We have the most amazing worship you'll ever experience. No sermons, no dogma—just honest hearts sitting together inside the Word. Did we mention it's an amazing experience?

REASON NUMBER FOUR:

OUR FELLOWSHIP

You'll meet storytellers from all over the world and the networking opportunity is unlike any other. We haven't met many boring storytellers by the way. We think, no we **know**, you'll find us to be a fascinating group of friends!

last but never least

REASON NUMBER FIVE:

OUR EPIC TELLING

One of the most beloved and unique traditions for the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. is the Epic Telling at each year's Festival Gathering. The Epic is where we tell an entire book of the Bible in one sitting. This year we will tell I Corinthians and no, there's nothing like it anywhere. We're pretty sure about that.

How does it work? Storytellers vie for storytelling slots in the Festival Gathering Epic. Competition for certain passages is

fierce, and each storyteller must have a first, second and third choice for telling.

To see an Epic is to see a full book of the Bible unfold before you. While this was common practice in the ancient Middle East, few people outside the Network's circle have seen an entire book of the Bible presented by heart, let alone heard the nuances and interpretations that arise when thirty-five different voices lift up the sacred text. It is an evening unlike any other!

This special Epic presentation is the only part of the NBS Gathering that is open to the public. This year's presentation will begin Thursday, August 8th at 7:00 p.m. in the main Rhododendron auditorium at the Ridgecrest Conference Center. Seating is limited for this popular event, so visitors are encouraged to arrive early.

Want to be a storyteller in the Epic Telling?

New Bidding Rules for 2013:

1. You must be registered for the Festival Gathering (FG) before placing your bid. You do not need to secure your room reservation, only your FG registration, which can be done online at www.nbsint.org or by calling the NBS Office at 1-800-355-6627. The registration cost is \$259.

2. DO NOT submit a bid prior to noon EST Friday, Feb. 15, 2013. Place your bids using our online bidding form at www.nbsint.org/epictelling, or if you do not have internet access, call the NBS Office at 1-800-355-6627 and leave a message.

3. Submit your first, second, and third choices. Bear in mind that if there is a popular text, there will be many first-choice bids on it, and you are more likely to get your second or third choices. Please note that starred texts in the list below are only open for bidding by tellers who have participated in at least two previous FG Epic Tellings.

You will be notified by the end of February what text you will be telling.

I CORINTHIANS TEXT DIVISIONS FOR BIDDING

1:1-9	7:25-31	14:20-25
1:10-17	7:32-40	14:26-40*
2:1-11	8:1-13*	15:1-11
2:12-16	9:1-14	15:12-19
3:1-15*	9:15-18	15:20-28
3:16-23	9:19-27	15:29-34
4:1-7	10:1-13	15:35-49*
4:8-13	10:14-11:1*	15:50-58
4:14-21	11:2-16*	16:1-12
5:1-13*	11:17-26	16:13-24
6:1-11	11:27-34	***Only storytellers who have taken part in at least two previous FG Epic Tellings should bid on these texts.
6:12-20	12:1-13	
7:1-11	12:14-26	
7:12-17a	12:27-13:13*	
7:17b-24	14:1-19*	

Other important guidelines for Epic storytellers are online. Please visit www.nbsint.org/epictelling to learn more and place your bid.



ByHeart, Delaware

Pam Faro, Colorado



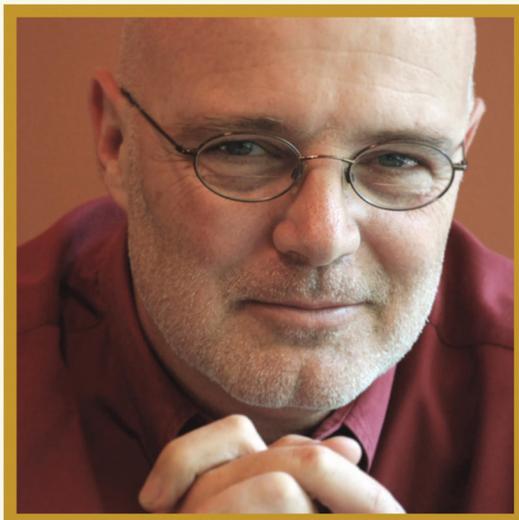
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Keynote Speaker: Brian McLaren

The Back
Story



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To Register: Visit nbsint.org or call 1-800-355-6627

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