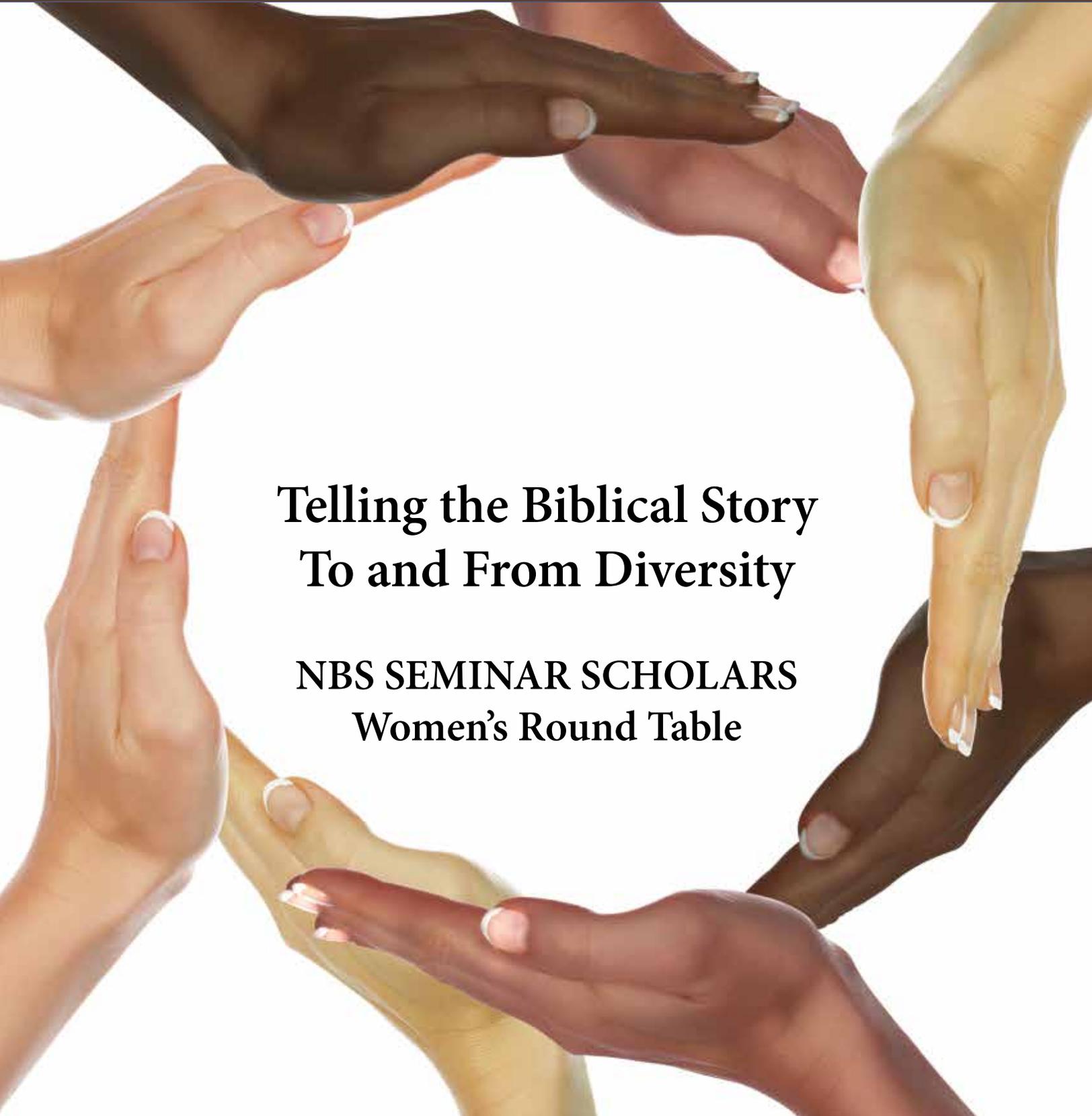


THE BIBLICAL STORYTELLER

Outreach Issue 2015

A Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. Publication



**Telling the Biblical Story
To and From Diversity**

**NBS SEMINAR SCHOLARS
Women's Round Table**

Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l.

2015 Festival Gathering of Biblical Storytelling



One Story, Many Voices

workshops . networking . worship . stories, stories and more stories!

National 4H Center

Chevy Chase, MD Near Washington, DC

Epic Telling: Acts of the Apostles

August
5-8, 2015

Marvin McMickle

Keynote
Speaker



President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and Professor of Church Leadership. He is a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. International Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA.

THE BIBLICAL
STORYTELLER

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 or order memberships and subscriptions online: www.nbsint.org

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**Please remember the Network
in your will!**

Are You Listening to Me?!

“You’re not listening to me!” he shouts at her as he slams the car door. “Yes, unfortunately, I am!” she replies, shooting her response into his face with an uplift of her chin and a small amount of spittle. “Each of you is only hearing your version of the truth,” the weary counselor sighs after a rehash of their well-rehearsed argument. “Neither of you will win this battle of words. To save your relationship you have to really listen to each other.”

Dang it. I hate it when that happens. As a storyteller, words come easily to me; listening, not so much. I have to make a conscious effort to listen and I practically have to chain myself to a chair to listen with intention, especially when I think I’m right and I’m just letting the other person speak out of a sense of Southern politeness.

It’s hard to listen to someone else with our whole heart!

Have you ever tried to get a word in edgewise with a two-year old who is in love with the sound of their own voice and those fabulous new words they want to show off? About the only time you are allowed to talk is when they fall down and skin their knee. When they are hurting and need comfort, then they want to hear the soothing sound of your voice!

But then we all grow up, sort of. Except that a lot of us are still two-year olds with skinned knees who would like for all the things we hear from others to be exactly what we want to hear, please, with some whipped cream and a cherry on top. And then it happens—someone goes and says something unpleasant or confrontational. They go and say something that shakes us out of our worn-around-the-edges security blanket and we get tossed into the cold of their reality.



Donna Marie Todd
Inspirational Storyteller and Writer

Ouch! We’re often frightened by another’s reality. But we’re adults—we can’t let our fear show; that would be so childish! Adults don’t get scared—we get angry. Have you listened to talk radio lately? There are lots of angry little kids with banged-up knees on talk radio.

So, if we all agree that what we’re doing isn’t working, then how do we build skill sets for new conversations? How are we supposed to digest all these uncomfortable words “the others” want to say to us? Maybe the weary counselor is right. Maybe we need to stop talking, take a deep breath and listen.

Would it help if we realized we only have a few more chances to listen to each other?

Whether you’re the married couple on the brink of divorce (and that’s 50% of married couples according to apa.org) or you are a world citizen on the brink of annihilation (which I believe, last time I checked, is all of us), listening is the only thing that can save us. “You that have ears to hear...” the Bible says.

Do you have experience creating interfaith dialogue through biblical storytelling? If so, please email your experiences to me for an upcoming TBS article!
donnamarie@donnamarietodd.com



The Festival Gathering of Biblical Storytelling will have a new home this August 5-8! Storytellers from across the globe will come to the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC, for the preeminent conference on biblical storytelling!

This annual conference of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. is an open, welcoming, ecumenical event that has celebrated the Bible as story for over 37 years.

Some things will be different in 2015! With the DC metro, more public transportation is available and conference goers from the Northeast can even access the conference via rail service instead of driving a personal car. One of the biggest (and most welcome) changes is that the Epic Telling (the Acts of the Apostles) will once again take place in a church sanctuary. The congregation of Chevy Chase United Methodist will open their doors for the evening performance. The beautiful historic sanctuary is just down the street from the conference center. This performance will be open

to the public, which was not possible in our previous conference setting due to space limitations.

Some things will be the same. The conference center offers ample room for the multitude of great workshops offered each year. (Visit us on the web at nbsint.org/workshops to see this year's offerings and read about our workshop leaders.) The National 4-H Center's auditorium has comfortable theater-style seats from which to enjoy the powerful and thought-provoking presentations of our keynote speaker, Dr. Marvin McMickle, President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, as he takes on the subject of telling the biblical stories to and from diversity! Expect this dynamic speaker, who is a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr., International Board of Preachers in Atlanta, to turn your ideas about terrorism and racial diversity upside down! (See page 10 to read an interview with Dr. McMickle.)

Israeli storyteller Noa Baum is our featured storyteller for 2015. This amazing woman took her theatrical training both at Tel Aviv University and at New

York University, where she received her MA in educational theater and studied with the renowned acting coach Uta Hagen. Much of Noa's work now is focused on the use of storytelling for community building, to facilitate transformation and healing across the divides of identity and build bridges of understanding and initiate conversations about peace.

In addition to our great keynote speaker and storyteller, this year's Festival will provide plenty of good food for festival goers. Warning: the all-you-can-eat buffet in the center's dining hall might present a challenge for those watching their waistlines! Especially since the ice cream machine is available during both lunch and dinner! The NBS Board of Directors held their annual retreat at the center last January and found the food to be fresh and plentiful. (But beware, the cookies are big and tasty and they go great with ice cream!)

Some members have asked how the move to DC came about, so we asked the NBS Board of Directors President, Ron Coughlin, what factors went into

the decision. "When it came to the question of relocating the Festival Gathering, the Board was aware that while Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina was a beautiful location for the conference and reasonable in terms of the cost of accommodation, it was not easily accessible and the location was expensive to fly into. For many people coming from the West Coast, Midwest or Northeast, it involved two or three flights and expensive cab fares from the airport. It was felt that if we wanted to grow the organization, we needed to move to a more accessible location. So two years ago, a small task force was formed to investigate alternative sites for the Gathering and then, after researching sites that were available, recommended the National 4-H Center. A survey of our membership revealed that 80% of respondents said a move to the Washington DC area was either preferable to the North Carolina location or made no difference to them."

Many members are already planning sight-seeing trips, before or after the Gathering, to explore the Washington DC area and the historic areas around it, such as George Washington's Mt. Vernon. Area attractions members can consider for a fun vacation include

night-time bus tours of the monuments, boat tours on the Potomac, the Smithsonian museums, the National Zoo (with the panda exhibit!), the Art Museum of the Americas, Arena Stage, the National Cathedral, the Folger Shakespeare Library and the historic Ford Theater. Not so well-known attractions include the National Spy Museum, Hillwood Estate and its famous Japanese Garden and the National Air and Space Museum.

DC is famous for its restaurants and nightclubs as well. Walking tours and bike rentals offer opportunities for a leisurely stroll or ride under the cherry trees or through historic Georgetown. History is everywhere! Tours of every kind are available from morning to night in case you don't want to navigate the American capitol by yourself.

The National 4-H Center itself is located in a very safe and tony suburb and is fully handicapped accessible. The Center is very family-friendly and some rooms are equipped with bunk beds for the youngsters. A fully loaded game room is also available to families staying at the Center for the conference. Room arrangements are made directly with the 4-H Center and if you bring your family along, they will need to purchase meals in advance from the Center. For more information you can call the center's front desk at 301-961-2801.

Reservations for the conference itself are best made at nbsint.org. Discounted registrations are only available until May 1, 2015. Order your registration today for the best sleeping accommodations and the \$100 discount!

The Festival Gathering of Biblical Storytelling is an amazing, four-day immersion experience in scripture. Opportunities to hear and tell the holy text abound. Pastors, laity and Christian educators will find opportunities for enlivening conversation and new storytelling skills for education and ministry!

The National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, MD

The National 4-H Center is situated on 12 beautiful acres in the upscale neighborhood of Chevy Chase, Maryland. The center first opened in 1959.

Since then, the Center has continuously expanded and now features hotel rooms for 800+ guests, flexible meeting space and the Clover Cafe, the hotel's all-you-can-eat dining buffet.

The main artery of the campus is a beautiful, porticoed brick building surrounded by lush lawns and shady areas for leisurely conversation.



Sleeping rooms are available in several configurations, ranging from standard hotel room doubles to quad rooms that are perfect for families with children or younger conference attendees.



Workshop and breakout rooms are plentiful and easily accessible from the main plenary space.

The center is minutes away from major tourist attractions in DC.

TWO STEP REGISTRATION PROCESS

1. Order your Festival Gathering registration, meals and CEU credits online:

nbsint.org/purchaseregistration
If you need an invoice you can email the office:
nbs@nbsint.org

2. Call the National 4-H Center for your lodging at 301-961-2801.

MISSION: *Philippines*



NBS Vice President Beth Galbreath headed up an international mission trip in October of 2014 to the Philippines, an archipelago of over 7,000 islands lying about 500 miles (805 km) off the southeast coast of Asia. Only about 7% of the islands are larger than one square mile, and only one-third have names.

So how did it all come about?

“This mission was conceived in 2011, when I was on a mission trip with my church, visiting the home congregations of Filipino members of our congregation.” Beth told us. “My husband, a pastor, preached on Luke’s resurrection story at all the churches we visited, after I told Luke, Chapter 24. And everywhere, folks said, ‘Come back and teach us to tell the scripture!’ So the trip in October of 2014 had been in gestation since February 2011. These efforts cannot be rushed.”



While a lot of time, energy and planning goes into a mission, both Beth and NBS Director of International Relations Juliana Rowe consider finding a strong local partner the most difficult and critical aspect of an international mission. Beth says, “I worked for several years to find a dependable partner on the islands; all fell through. But a chance meeting with the United

Methodist Bishop of the Manila area led to an invitation to teach at a youth assembly at Christmas, 2013. That was crucial because it allowed me to meet face-to-face with Wycliffe Philippines leaders who ultimately became our partners. So I’m convinced that there is no substitute for a mission leader’s presence in a preliminary trip, making face-to-face connections and plans with local partners, unless the leader has previous relationships with someone on the ground, such as a missionary.”

The mission team of Beth, Larry Paul Gusto, Carole Danby, Jim Cyr, Penelope Ferguson, Phyllis Hostmeyer and Karl Hallsten departed for the Philippines on October 19 on a 1:00 a.m. flight to Manila and returned home on October 30, 2014. The ten-day mission included two biblical storytelling institutes and culminated in the founding of NBS Philippines.

On Monday (October 20) the team rested and held a team meeting. Tuesday they did a little shopping (huge malls are a part of the urban Philippine culture) and made a visit to the Museum of the Philippine People, which provided a deeper understanding of the nation’s history and culture.

On Wednesday, October 22, the actual work began and the team flew to Davao, on the island of Mindanao, for a two-day institute, returning to Manila on Saturday, October 25. Next, the team held a 3-day institute at Quezon City in the Manila metro area October 27-29. On the 30th they boarded planes for the 30 or so hours of travel back home, exhausted but thrilled with the mission’s success.

The trip was intentionally scheduled for semester break, so students were able to participate in the NBS Institutes for Biblical Storytelling.

The Philippine people are very young: 53% of the population are under the age of 25, and another 37% are between the ages of 25 and 54. In Davao, Dr. Julie Bustamante and her local team had arranged for students to get school credit for attending the institute, so large groups of enthusiastic teens as well as some older pastors and teachers participated. The team found the younger students thrilled to gain a new skill to



offer in church (besides being in the praise bands which are in nearly every church in the Philippines).

The team found the cultural norm of deference to age (a hallmark of Filipino culture) a challenge. When their elders were present, the younger folks were less likely to ask questions and had to be strongly encouraged to tell in front of the group! In Quezon City, the older pastors and professors had no hesitation in asking challenging questions, so the Q&A sessions were lively. And it was these pastors and professors who met the next Monday with Wycliffe leaders Rev. Dr. Romerlito Macalinao and Rev. Dr. Larry Paul Gusto, NBS partners in the mission, to found NBS Philippines.

The team also encountered differences in language skill. Although the national languages of Tagalog and English are taught in school, the heart language of many folks in Mindanao is not Tagalog but Bisaya (Visaya). So in Davao, even the Tagalog-speaking teacher and group participants had to slow down! The younger attendees were extremely tech-savvy. Smart phones were everywhere. Thanks to their enthusiasm NBS Philippines had a Facebook page before the return flight was off the runway!

More international trips are in the making, including one to Botswana. So, what does Beth say to others who may feel led to be on or even lead a team? "For me, the most important aspect—especially the patient, exacting and sometimes frustrating work of a team leader—is the knowledge that we have accomplished something important for the Reign of God in the 21st Century. We have set in motion ripples of passion for telling God's story in a new way, a way that will spread far beyond the participants in our workshops. We have laid the groundwork for dozens of other workshops and encouraged hundreds of new tellers to learn and tell the scriptures by heart!"

PHILIPPINE TEAM REFLECTIONS

Carole Danby,
Australia



My time in Davao in the south and Quezon City near Manila with five Americans from the Network was fascinating and deeply confronting, challenging and amazingly blessed. As someone who is quite active in children's ministry, the most powerful time for me was when a team of young people and the very humble female minister Dindo Diaz invited us to climb into the back of their van and visit the Payatas (dump site) where a church service was conducted for the children who live there. Storytelling and music were featured and small group discussion and prayer. After the service, some adults provided hot food with rice for all the children. This was so moving and humbling.



Jim Cyr,
New Jersey



I said "Yes!" to this mission because I had a desire to put my skills in biblical storytelling to use in spreading this vital skill for sharing the Good News. It cost me approximately \$2,000. Immersion in Filipino culture was a great learning experience. The chance to work with our Filipino brothers and sisters was very moving due to their love for Jesus and their excitement in sharing the good news. If you're considering being on our next team I'd say, "Do it!"

HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR AN NBS INTERNATIONAL MISSION

Tips from NBS
Philippines
Team Member
Phyllis Hostmeyer



Physical:

Begin walking and building endurance for long days.

Mental:

Study your stories and practice with real audiences. *Read about the country* you will be visiting so that you understand their culture and learn as much as you can about their history, government, needs, and people. *Study maps* to understand where you will be.

Emotional:

Be ready to deal with anything that comes your way. Problems with flights, long days, poor weather conditions, long waits, new foods. It is all part of the adventure and the more you embrace the challenges the more joyful your experience will be.

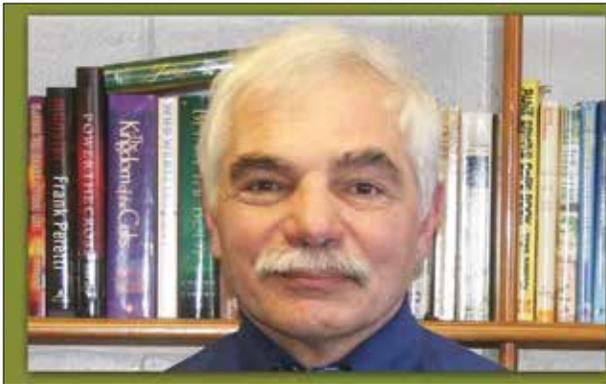
Spiritual:

Pray for God's guidance; pray for your teammates and your leader.

WANT TO GO ON AN NBS MISSION?

Email Juliana Rowe,
NBS Director of International Relations:
boodydede@aol.com





Biblical Storytelling and the Small Church

Part Two in a Series
with Author Anthony Pappas

Many pastors serving small churches would like to have a Scripture by Heart group but wonder how they can identify people in their flock who would make the necessary commitment to spending time internalizing the scriptures. All churches have some things in common while other factors are congregation specific. Small churches tend to embody a particular world-view that we can speak generally about, but also there are numerous qualities that define each particular congregation. Of necessity I will paint with a broad brush, but, hopefully, the picture will be in focus enough to be of help to you.

I think the first, most fundamental step is that the role of scripture involvement, even immersion, must be communicated to the congregation at large: a sermon series on Psalm 119, Bible studies on the importance of scripture in forming our spirits and promoting faith and obedience, testimonies of spiritually growing members, etc. You can bring this home to the membership by sharing the dynamics of body life (constructive, complementary relationships) and spiritual giftedness (blessing others without burning out). For the latter, I like *Network*, published by Zondervan, (though there are a number of other tools available), because it brings together giftedness, style and passion.

Now, how to identify parishioners? Imagine yourself, pastor or lay leader, as Sherlock Holmes. Your keen (spiritual) eyes are on the look out for

means, motive and opportunity! Their intersection is the solution to this case. Elementary, my dear Watson. (Except that in practice it is not so elementary, at all!) Like the great detective, you must look for three things: Means, motive and opportunity! Let's look at these one at a time.

Means: This refers to the capacity to tell "the scriptures by heart." Who has a passion for this work?

Motive: This refers to the energy that comes from within. (For years my pastoring comprised supplying the energy from without ... with markedly minimal results!) Who exhibits self-motivation? Who is a natural scripture memorizer? Who is in the local theatre troupe? Who loves to perform in front

As the worship experience is being shaped, leave adequate room for the storytelling. Emphasize it. Introduce it. Reinforce it.

of others (this, though, can be a two-edged sword)? Who wants to grow spiritually? Who is complaining about not being fed!!?

Opportunity: Here I refer to both the space to tell and modeling of telling.

Since small church people do better with imitation than cognition, biblical storytelling needs to be modeled. So pastor, start—lay leader, begin. Since I am a lousy memorizer, I would start small, maybe "Jesus wept." And build from there!

There is something exciting when storytelling is done from the heart and offers the opportunity for it to be caught! As the worship experience is being shaped, leave adequate room for the telling. Emphasize it. Introduce it. Reinforce it. Change seldom happens magically—it takes some blood, sweat and tears!

Some NBS pastors who serve small churches have noted that members of the small church are often resistant to new ideas. "We've never done it that way before." What are some ways that pastors could encourage people to push past their reluctance to participate? Small churches are tradition-based fellowships and inertial organizations. So introducing positive change requires leadership and elbow grease! Here are some approaches that will increase the odds:

*Rummage around in the history of the church; find the old records, ask the older members, consult the town historian. Was biblical storytelling practiced in the congregation? Was memorization perceived as an integral part of obedience? Was biblical storytelling used in Christmas and/or Easter pageants, during Vacation

Bible School, etc. If you can find even one instance, biblical storytelling can be re-introduced as “the way we used to do it” in “the good old days”!

*Find a respected and trusted member of the congregation who wants to do it. The personal dimension offers initial traction.

*Never introduce it as a permanent change—who wants to buy a pig in a poke? Always introduce it as an experiment, something to try and test and see if it fits the culture of the congregation.

*Utilize storytelling in a limited way initially. For example, designate one Advent Sunday and two Lenten Sundays as storytelling Sundays. Then as it catches on, build from there.

Another frequently encountered dilemma is that only one or two members take part in the storytelling and people think of it then as “those two.” This is a tricky situation. Often in small churches two is a crowd; and getting two people to do anything is a coup! However, if it is the “wrong” two, the enterprise will stall and peter out due to congregational eye rolling! And then there is the giftedness issue; you want those who are energized by the process not enervated. But there are ways to encourage the folk. At the Network of Biblical Storytellers Festival in August, during the epic storytelling of Matthew, one section was told by a group playing the parts, a small playlet. This is an excellent way to involve more people; have each play a voice in the passage or recite one or two verses; or structure the recitation with a “Greek chorus.” In the church I pastored (the Harbor Church, Block Island, RI), each year Roll Call Sunday is celebrated. Upon the calling out of their names, members are asked to offer their favorite Bible verse—with some encouragement from me I could have increased the “by heart” experience. If your small church has youth, start there! They are an excellent group

to begin as storytellers—especially pre-teens who may be less inhibited!

Another solution to resistance may be to point out the obvious. Church buildings, once a source of great pride, have become in numerous cases an albatross around the neck of the faithful few remaining members. The paradigm for church is shifting. No longer will folk “go to church” (in a big, old and expensive edifice) and sit and

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passively hear the Good News (articulated by the official articulator—the seminary trained pastor!). Increasingly, the Body of Christ will go out into the world in the form of its individual members! Maybe meeting in the back room of a coffee shop, a pub, or the town library. And given articulation by the lives and words of individual Christians themselves! So knowing “scripture by heart” will become more and more important. And as our culture moves deeper and deeper into post-modernism, doctrinal arguments, as valid as we may think they are, will increasingly fall on deaf ears. People will respond to stories, the stories of our lives and the stories of scripture. I doubt this change will occur tomorrow, but maybe the day after, and it won’t hurt to be ready for it!

Rev Tony Pappas is an internationally known writer and speaker on small church issues and congregational dynamics. Currently he is working on small church adaptation to the post-modern world. He is available to do small church training or congregational consulting, and can be reached at pappas@tabcom.org.

STORYWORKS

Creative small groups of NBS

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The Chosen Ones: Racism Then and Now

A Discussion with Dr. Marvin McMickle
2015 Festival Gathering Keynote Speaker

Q. You are the keynote speaker for our 2015 Festival Gathering, “One Story, Many Voices: Telling the Biblical Stories to and from Diversity.” Throughout history words from the Bible have been used to justify wars, political agendas and genocides. As storytellers, we internalize stories, not excerpts. Do the “stories” of the Bible reveal an acceptance of diversity or an emphasis on peace that aren’t present or obvious in an excerpt?

A. I think the stories of the Old Testament (OT), which talk about this ancient God of Israel as a divine warrior who clears the land, makes a space for the chosen people and, at many points, instructs them to lay waste to the native populations—in these stories there’s no denying that a strand runs through at least what could be referred to as the historical narratives: Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings, and 1st and 2nd Chronicles. In those books there’s no getting around the fact that violence is divinely directed and approved.

Then God’s preference reverses. Not much longer after Israel occupies the land there is a reversal of the narrative

and all of a sudden, Israel becomes the victim of the attack. The Syrians appear, the Babylonians wipe them out, the Persians oppress them, the Greeks, the Romans—all oppose them.

But even in these historical books, there is a counter narrative. War is always there; sometimes God orders Israel to attack, and in other instances God allows other nations to prevail against Israel, theoretically for disobedience. Now, whether or not you can justifiably use an Old Testament war to justify a 21st century battle plan is an unsupportable argument. The OT is time and place specific. I don’t know how you can take the conquest of Jericho and extrapolate from those stories that a European country or the United States has the right to invade another or justify our modern wars by using the OT.

The nature of war itself is that if you look at most ancient battles (with the exception of sieges on cities, like Jericho, for instance), today’s war is so much more invasive. There are no more battlefields, today’s warriors hide among the citizens. How we are fighting war today is different—then, only

soldiers were fighting, and, with few exceptions, in isolated places designated as battlefields. Today, the soldiers are hiding among civilians and that has changed the very nature of war.

Q. Can societal conditioning keep us from seeing themes of peace and diversity in the scriptures? If so, how do we overcome these obstacles to our own understanding?

A. I think the Bible has been trying to make the point that from one blood, God has made all nations of the earth to live together on the earth from the very beginning. Even in the story of Israel, while it seems to suggest a preference from God for them, God is saying, “I’m not putting you here to be honored; I’m putting you here so that other nations can see how you honor me and come into relationship with me.” You go from the God of Israel to the God of the whole of creation, who makes everything in the six-day span. Not just Israel, but the whole earth—all the places, all the subsequent people. Societal patterns have been used to biblically justify racial preference and the abuse of theoretically inferior people—the Nazi’s strange use

of selected verses to justify genocide. Our own American history used scripture to explain slavery and master/slave relationships as matters that should prevail into perpetuity, never embracing the fact that God has no favorite nation, no favorite race. Here are two songs: One says “God bless America;” the other says “He’s got the whole world in his hands.” Which one do you think is God’s favorite song? Sometimes racial prejudice keeps us from seeing things through God’s eyes.

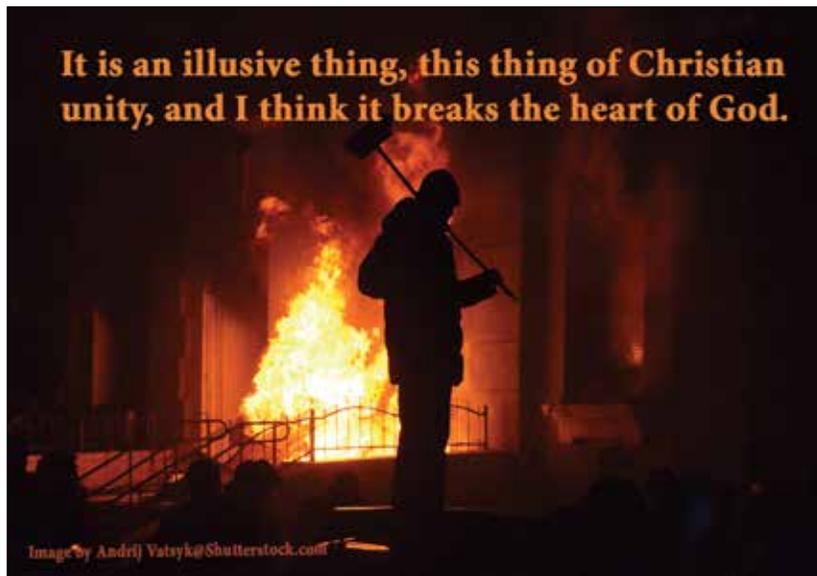
Q. Divisiveness often has a louder voice than agreement. Did you find threads of unity inside the Christian community as you researched and wrote *The Audacity of Faith: Christian Leaders Reflect on the Election of Barack Obama*?

A. Let me put it to you this way: voices of unity are becoming increasingly more difficult to find as the Christian church becomes increasingly splintered. Sadly, we’re becoming splintered over social practices, not theological issues. There’s a strong divide between progressive theology, those who are ready to advocate for equality of gender, sex and race, versus those who think that these things are not supported by scripture. The roles of women in the church and homosexuality are driving ever wider wedges.

Within the global church, in those denominations where there is both a global presence and an American church (Episcopal and Roman Catholic, for example), the divisions are just as broad. It’s very difficult to sustain a conversation in the Anglican church about female bishops for instance. While the Episcopal church in the United States has already seen its first female bishop, in other parts of the

Anglican world, most notably in the African continent, Anglican bishops deny the role of women in the church! In Kenya, Uganda and central African nations that voice is really strong and it’s really conservative. There’s a lack of unity within denominations. Within the church family, we’re having a hard time staying together. Christian unity has been troubled as far back as 1st Corinthians, when Paul laments to all the branches, “no one died for you but Christ.” We seem to always be finding some reason to be against each other. We find ways. It is an illusive thing, this thing of Christian unity, and I think it breaks the heart of God.

My book, *The Audacity of Faith: Christian Leaders Reflect on the Election*



of Barack Obama, was a collection of essays from quite a wide variety of Christian writers: young, old, white, black, Hispanic; and the one thing they all agreed on was that the election of a single person would not be sufficient to redirect the course of racism and class division in this country and that we probably over-expected that the election of President Obama could have had such an effect. There is every indication that his election has sped up the realization that we are in the throes of racial division. It’s hard to get persons on one side of an issue to see the issues of the person on the other side. We can’t hear each other.

Q. What new conversations did President Obama’s election create within the Christian community? Does our Christian commitment to evangelism tend to override opportunities for conversations that honor diversity with Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist people of faith?

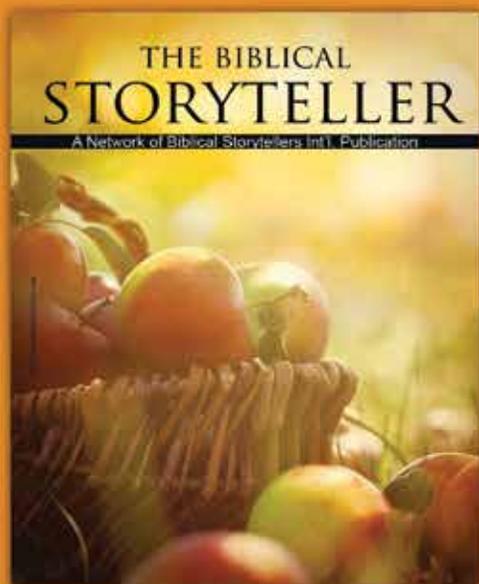
A. I don’t think any new conversations were created, nor do I think they should have. Except for one and that is: how do you honor our national diversity? A lot of energy was expended on this xenophobic question: Is he really a Christian? There was an enormous effort on the part of the conservative Christians early on to represent Obama as a Muslim. First off, there is no evidence that places

him in an Islamic community. Secondly, we also know what church he belonged to in Chicago. He was a member of Trinity UCC. We have no evidence that he is or was a Muslim. But, so what if he was? If this is a secular society, if the US constitution says in Article 6 there should not be any religious test for holding any elected office, then so what if he is a Muslim? What you’re saying is that to be a Muslim is a deficit and a matter that can be

used to attack, and in that extent we have uncovered a layer of anti-Islamic sentiment. There is the coincidental fact that those who attacked us on 9/11 were Muslim extremists. But there were 20 of them; there are 1 billion Muslims in the world and yet we use 20 to justify our attitude about all of them. If you were to combine all the total number of people who are ISIS or al Qaeda, there are fewer than the whites who belonged to the KKK in the 1940s and ‘50s. If the idea of terrorism is what is driving the conversation, we need to realize that a lot of

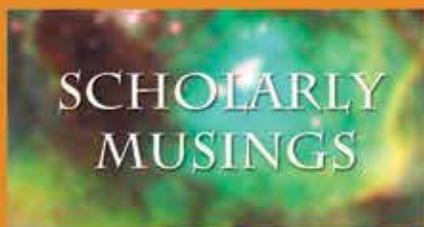
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"The Chosen Ones," continued from page 11

people have been experiencing terrorism in this country by white people in robes, burning crosses. When 9/11 happened, you didn't see a lot of African Americans who were traumatized by the terrorism, because they were familiar with acts of terrorism: lynch mobs, freedom riders being burned on a bus and then beaten when they came out of the fire. I find it interesting that we can target terrorism that we do not perform ourselves but are blind to the terrorism being perpetuated by white Christians in this country. And let us not leave out of this conversation native Americans.

Q. As the President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. International Board of Preachers at Morehouse College, do you believe seminaries have an opportunity to host new dialogues about peace and diversity?

A. We are responsible for demonstrating the diversity that exists, within scripture, as we move into the New Testament (NT). A great biblical example is Acts 6, where the office of the deacon is invented. These are persons who serve, just under the apostles, as leaders of the church of Jerusalem. People kind of forget the context in which the story was told. It begins by saying that the widows of Greek-speaking Christians were complaining that they were not being given as much of what they needed to survive as what is going to the Hebrew-speaking Christian's widows. Two things are going on: One, there is great cultural diversity in the early church and two, there are already those who believe they deserve more.

Within the first 100 years the Christian church included virtually every nation in the world. If you took a map and mapped out every place that heard

Peter's sermon on Pentecost, every country of the world heard that Pentecost speech. The early church was a multi-cultural, lingual and racial world. The real struggle was how you act that out in real time. And Acts 6 says even then, there was a leaning toward prejudicial treatment. The Jewish wives felt they deserved more than the Asia-Minor born Christians.

We are a global church, and have been for over 2000 years, yet we still have those who believe they deserve more, who think their worship styles are more appropriate, their theology better. It's important to realize that the church became a global community that was unable to outgrow this idea that there were those who deserved more. And we're still looking at issues about who deserves what. Gays are not as fully human as those in monogamous, heterosexual relationships; women are not as qualified as males. God has moved out ahead of us, making a global church—we haven't caught up with him yet.

As for seminaries, I think the seminary curriculum (Bible, church history, ethics, practices of ministry, administration, conflict resolution) become occasions when this issue of diversity can be celebrated as God's intention.

Seminaries have a chance to set the record straight. **Somebody has to come along and say, "Come on people, that's not what the Bible says."** Think of when Hitler was trying to replace Jesus with himself. Most Germans just fell in line; they accepted this group called the confessing church, led by Bonhoffer and others, and they have suffered the consequences of that.

There has always been a need for someone to say, "This is what the Bible actually says; this is what being

Biblical Performance Criticism Resources

The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance

Edited by Holly Hearon, co-editor of this Wipf and Stock series, and Philip Ruge-Jones, Texas Lutheran University (2009). This collection of essays by outstanding scholars provides an excellent introduction to biblical performance criticism for students and scholars alike.

From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible

James Maxey, The Nida Institute of the American Bible Society (2009). Based on his own field research in Cameroon, Maxey proposes a highly original model for translation that takes account of orality both in the original and in the contemporary contexts.

The Case for Mark Composed in Performance

Antoinette Clarke Wire, San Francisco Theological Seminary (2011). This remarkable book lays out a scenario for the Gospel of Mark composed by a series of performers and generated by women in the early church.

Oral Tradition in Ancient Israel

Robert Miller, Catholic University of America (2011). This book provides a comprehensive study of "oral tradition" in ancient Israel and the remains of it in the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible.

Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity

Peter J. J. Botha, University of South Africa in Pretoria (2012). Botha's clear and carefully crafted essays covering a wide range of subjects represent some of the best work in the field on the complex relationships between orality and literacy.

Translating Scripture for Sound and Performance: New Directions in Biblical Studies

Edited by James Maxey, The Nida Institute of the American Bible Society, and Ernst Wendland, Lusaka Lutheran Seminary in Zambia (2012). This cutting-edge collection of studies challenges assumptions of traditional translation practices and offers innovative proposals for exegesis and translation in a variety of world contexts.

Oral and Manuscript Culture in the Bible: Studies on the Media Texture of the New Testament—Explorative Hermeneutics

J. A. Louber, South Africa (2013). Ground-breaking studies on many aspects of the oral and written dynamics of the Bible, with illustrative essays on various writings of the New Testament.

Text and Tradition in Performance and Writing

Richard Horsley, University of Massachusetts (2013). The author brings together a series of pioneering studies on Old Testament traditions, Ben Sira, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Q document, and the Gospel of Mark.

The Oral Ethos of the Early Church: Speaking, Writing, and the Gospel of Mark

Joanna Dewey, Episcopal Divinity School (2013). This is a highly readable collection from one of the leading voices in ancient media, with essays on Paul, the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Mark, and the role of women in storytelling.

From Text to Performance

Edited by Kelly Iverson, Baylor University (2014). This collection of essays by leading scholars demonstrates that an appreciation of performance yields fresh insights into the narrative readings of the Gospels.

Messiah of Peace: A Performance Criticism Commentary on Mark 14-16

Thomas Boomerahine, United Theological seminary (2015). This highly innovative work offers a first-ever performance commentary on biblical narrative, correlated with video performances of the passion narrative of Mark in Greek and English.

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What is Biblical Performance Criticism?

"After about twenty centuries, we are seeking to recover something that has been lost, eclipsed, long gone from the experience of the church and from the experience of Christians—namely, the sacred art of telling biblical traditions. In the first and second centuries, the lively telling of stories took place as an ordinary part of life in the villages and communities and gatherings of early Christians. But since that time, the New Testament writings ... have been broken up into small lectionary segments to be read in worship. Furthermore, these segments have been read rather than told from memory.

But here we are in the twenty-first century, seeking together to recover the ethos of storytelling in the first century—and not just individual stories but gospel narratives as a whole. In fact, we think that the gospels, along with the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation, were each originally told in their entirety at one time. The same was true for the letters in the New Testament ... because if you heard only part of any one of these you might misunderstand it. Remember, none of these writings were yet in a New Testament canon until a few centuries later. They were not written as Scripture nor were they treated as Scripture when they were first heard ... they were stories to be told by memory before the firelight at night or in the market places or in public buildings or house churches."

From *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, edited by Holly Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones, used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers.

A Review of NBS Founder Thomas Boomershine's New Book
Messiah of Peace: A Performance Criticism Commentary on Mark 14-16

by NBS Seminar Coordinator Dr. Philip Ruge-Jones

Many times I have heard Tom Boomershine, founder of NBS, sharing insights he has gained through years of studying, internalizing, and performing the passion narrative of Mark's gospel. The perspective he has formulated is many faceted. I continually want to ask him to slow down and unpack a claim he has made, "That is very intriguing, Tom. Could you help me to see how you reached that conclusion?" But before I ask, he is off to make another provocative claim that makes me want to ask a whole other set of questions. I have wanted a better grasp of the argument that lay beneath Tom's work.

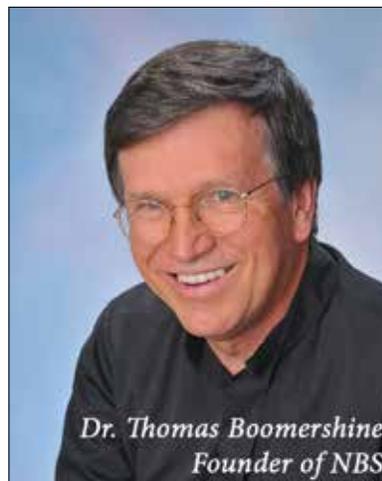
In January of 2015, we will finally be able to read a careful laying out of Tom's theses in a single volume, *Messiah of Peace: A Performance Criticism Commentary on Mark 14-16*. This is Tom's mature thought on multiple issues in a format that allows for detailed arguments about his foundational insights. Each section of the commentary that deals with individual periscopes is linked to performances in English and Greek. Five theses that Tom develops in a sustained way include:

1) The gospels were experienced as performances in the ancient world. This changes interpretation on every level.

2) Jesus is portrayed as a non-violent Messiah of peace calling for people to be reconciled with their

enemies. This memory serves as an alternative to the violence associated with the Roman-Jewish war.

3) This gospel spoke predominantly to non-Christian, Hellenistic Judeans rather than to Christian Gentiles. The narratives were structured in order to cause such audi-



ences to identify with the disciples so that they would come to follow Jesus as their Messiah.

4) The gospel depends on rhetorical strategies developed earlier in the Hebrew Scriptures. A rhetoric of alienation-condemnation and one of involvement-implication moved the audience towards transformation.

5) The gospel offers us what it first offered to its original audience: a way toward global peace.

Boomershine states these five themes up front, but more importantly uses them to enrich en-

gagement with each of the specific stories of the narrative.

This book will come out just in time for Lent and it explores the oldest account we have of Jesus' death and resurrection. Astonishingly, in the Revised Common Lectionary, the texts of Mark 14-16 only come up twice in the entire year B! On Passion Sunday a large portion of the passion is read and then on Easter Sunday, Mark's resurrection story is one of two options. Other than that, this primary story of our faith is ignored for the rest of the year.

I want to give people an opportunity to understand this story in all its details, so I hope to use Tom's book to develop a six-week Lenten series to help the brothers and sisters in my congregation engage this story through Bible study. I would love to have NBS members make a commitment to do the same, culminating with mini-epics of the Passion Narrative on the Sunday before Easter. Will you accept the challenge and join me?

Philip Ruge-Jones is an Associate Professor of Theology at Texas Lutheran University in Seguin, Texas. He has served as the convener of the NBS SEMINAR for the past several years. He is a storyteller and scholar who has taught courses to university students in the area of Performance Criticism. His books include "The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media" which he co-edited with Holly Hearon.

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Message from the President of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l.

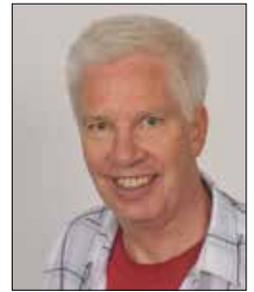
Greetings to you. As the President of the Board of Directors for the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l., I would like to update you on the work of the Board and its many programs. The Board met following the Festival Gathering in August and had a two-hour conference call in early November. We always have a full and lively agenda as we try to keep on top of the many activities of our network and think of ways to promote and expand our work.

First of all, I want to offer a word of thanks to Gail Losch. Gail has been the NBS Treasurer and Secretary for many years. She has been a constant voice for fiscal responsibility and brought an orderly system of budgeting to our organization. Gail had decided this past year to step down as Secretary and Treasurer as of December 31, 2014, but unfortunately, with the illness and death of her spouse, Larry, was not able to carry on through the summer and fall. The Board is deeply appreciative of all the gifts and talents which Gail has brought to the Network, and she has been appropriately thanked by the Board.

We have also been blessed with new leadership. Susan Meers, a member of the Board for one year, has stepped up to take on the role of NBS Secretary and Past President Dina Ferguson has rejoined the NBS Board, after a two-year absence, as our Treasurer.

During our meeting following the Festival Gathering we spent some time evaluating the Festival. We noted that generally there were very positive comments about our theme speaker, Vicki Garvey, and our featured storyteller, Vanora Legeaux. Worship and music was rated very highly and our workshops seem to be getting better and more varied. The Epic Telling was a marathon over two evenings as we

told and heard the entire Gospel of Matthew. We are looking forward to our move to the Washington, DC area and are hoping that this change in location will attract more people to our Festival in the coming years.



The Board has decided to reach out to the National Storytelling Network and the National Association of Black Storytellers to see if we can have a presence at each other's conferences and promote each other's organizations. We also were asked to build a relationship with the US Navy Chaplains Corp who seem interested in biblical storytelling. We heard about the very successful mission trip to the Philippines led by our Vice-President, Beth Galbreath and the news that the trip to Botswana has been postponed for the time being.

Administratively, we have updated our Standing Rules, Policies and Procedures document and decided that those who are listed on the NBS website as a Storyteller will need a current membership and will be encouraged to update their information annually. The Board is also considering launching a financial campaign to provide a financial base for future projects and international missions.

As president I am very grateful for a Board that is very active and responsible as it shepherds our mission to encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories. We welcome your questions, suggestions and comments.

We value our members' input! You can reach President Coughlin by email: RonaldKC@aol.com.

What is an NBS Ambassador?

As Ambassadors of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, we encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories. Ambassadors are NBS members who promise to spread the good news about the Network. We invite people to the Festival Gathering each year, we distribute literature about the Network, copies of our magazine and Festival Gathering brochures, and we network in our churches and denominations to introduce this fabulous community to all people everywhere.

Ambassadors tend to be biblical storytellers with high enthusiasm and an indomitable spirit.

This year we have 65 NBS ambassadors. Our task is to spread the good news of the Network in all the settings we find ourselves. We distribute copies of *The Biblical Storyteller* magazine every time we present biblical storytelling. We set up displays in the exhibit hall or marketplace at the annual meetings of our denominations, conferences, synods, associations or dioceses. We meet people, tell them about biblical storytelling and invite them to become involved. We write articles for denominational or church-wide magazines.

Our best practice is the old-fashioned evangelism of simply telling the story of Jesus and then inviting a friend to come along to learn to tell it too. Networking is a cornerstone of the NBS Ambassador program.

This year, five Ambassador Leaders will meet quarterly to discuss new initiatives. Each leader will stay in contact with a particular group of

Ambassadors to encourage spreading the good news of NBS throughout the wider church. Our new Ambassador Leaders are John Freidheim, Polly Green, Bill Wieland, Cindy Maybeck, and our leader of leaders, Carol Wolf.

We have a story to tell the church about the greatest story ever told. When we tell biblical stories, our faith and our love of God shine through our voices, our words and our presence. Biblical storytelling will revitalize the church, ecumenically and internationally.

Consider the NBS Ambassadors to be the bullhorn of your good biblical storytelling. We want not only your congregation but also your denomination to hear the word. We want not only your town but also your region to touch the story.

We want to expand the joy and grace of biblical storytelling, until every Christian everywhere learns and tells a biblical story.

The NBS Ambassadors meet in person at a special luncheon during each year's Festival Gathering.

Ambassadors are asked to commit to promoting NBS at their local and regional denominational events.

If you would like to take a more active role in promoting the Network in your area, we would love to have you join us.

Contact Carol Wolf :
caroldickwolf@cs.com

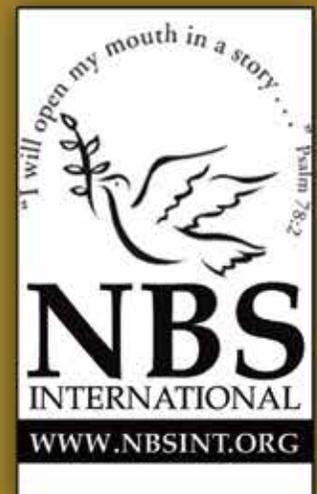


LEGACY

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NBS SEMINAR SCHOLARS WOMEN'S ROUND TABLE



Rev. Dr. Dina Ferguson



Rev. Dr. Cynthia Park



Dr. Joanna Dewey



Dr. Tracy Radosevic

A deceptively simple question was posed to four NBS Seminar biblical performance criticism scholars:

“Does Biblical Performance Criticism reveal new things about women in the Bible? If so, how?”

Rev. Dr. Dina Ferguson *A consideration of performance aspects of Genesis 3:1-7*

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Let’s take the question back to the very beginning. Does biblical performance criticism reveal new things about our (traditional) interpretation of Eve in the story of the fall in Genesis 3? As a storyteller, I think that performance criticism provides a way to open up things that have always been there but have been missed or misconstrued. Since performance criticism typically

focuses on a story or a fulsome stretch of scripture, we tend to look at things in a larger context. We also make sure to clearly identify who is in the story and how they interact with one another. Plot and characters are basic to the craft. Storytelling focuses on these elements and how they come through in the telling. Storytellers have to figure out how to include all that is in the story, both how to say it and how to embody it.

So as we work this story, right from the beginning we must account for the presence of three characters, not two. Even though Adam is not mentioned until verse 6, he has been there all along. We don’t have an entrance or a scene shift to allow his entrance. The story simply notes

“and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.”

A performance of the story would make clear to the audience that all three characters are present all along. The words, non-verbal gestures and expressions as Eve considers the serpent’s proposal can make Adam’s presence obvious. Eve’s first word is “we,” and gestures can mark Adam’s

presence right next to her. After the serpent speaks, her examination of the tree and the fruit can express mutual delight through gestures and expressions. Finally, after she herself eats, her casual gesture offering the fruit to Adam, right next to her, shows him to be right there.

The traditional assumption that Adam was not present during the conversation and that Eve took the fruit and then seduced an unsuspecting Adam to eat does not hold up in performance. In performance we see that although the command not to eat of the tree is given to Adam before Eve is created (in Genesis 2), still this is a command to her as well (explicit in her conversation with the serpent). We also see in performance that the disobedience to this command comes as both Adam and Eve listen and believe the serpent and in an act of free will both eat the fruit. The fall is a mutual human desire for power and knowledge—to be like God—not a sexual trick perpetrated on Adam by Eve the seductress.

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Park
On Telling Ruth

I learned to tell the book of Ruth by heart for a special project last summer. Like many women, I had always alleged that it was one of my favorite books. But now, studying it, living with it, and thinking about its characters, plot line, and sexual intrigue, I found myself wondering on what basis I considered it a favorite. What, after all, did I really know about it besides the passage so often offered at weddings from the bride to her groom, which is ironically a monologue in the text that is delivered from one woman to another?

Like booster rockets, three men all die off in the first chapter and the scene has only a widow and her two foreign daughters-in-law sort of suspended in deep space. In the way that good stories develop, one might imagine that Naomi would continue in her life in Moab as an alien with her new Moabite family, where she has lived for the past decade. Yet, one daughter-in-law returns home, and Naomi sets out to return to Bethlehem, having heard rumors that the famine is over. Strangely, her daughter-in-law Ruth elects to remain with her [cue the famous monologue], determined to begin her life anew as an alien in Bethlehem—quite the plot twist.

In the second chapter, Ruth devises a plan to find a man. And in the third chapter, Naomi devises a plan to persuade the man that Ruth finds to actually marry Ruth. The concluding verses are a hymn of praise to God who has come through in the end, and the proof that it is God's awkwardly appended family tree that links Tamar's son Perez (the offspring of a honey trap of her father-in-law Judah) down through the generations to David, the great king of Israel. Mentioning David provides a bookend to the last verse in the book preceding Ruth in the canon, Judges, describing the era when there

was no king in Israel and every person did what was right in his own mind. Finally, there is a king and it would appear that all's well that ends well.

I compare and contrast here two events around the book of Ruth—in one case, treating the composition as a text for exegetical and linguistic study and in the second case, performing the book by heart one morning for a group. The first event took place over several months when Ruth was the text I used to teach two classes in beginning biblical Hebrew. I met twice a day with two groups of adult students, men and women, and we painstakingly went through the grammar and vocabulary of the book, and inched our way through the chapters during the long and dark winter months. The classes held a mix of denominations and ordained persons as well as laity (including a Roman Catholic monk from a Trappist monastery).

In the second event, I presented the book in a single morning's performance, telling the story to a group of senior-aged lay women who are part of a denominational prayer group. The entire group consisted of women about the same age, all Caucasian, all lay, and all from the same socio-economic class in a wealthy urban parish. This group appeared to be completely homogenous in contrast to my highly diverse group in the Hebrew class.

To my surprise, however, the lively discussion in the second instance was much more what I had imagined might have come out of the first group—a group more obviously diverse in content. Telling the entire story without pause left very little doubt about the manipulative contrivances of not only the main characters of Naomi and Ruth, but eventually of Boaz. As I told the story, standing not five feet away from those women seated nearest to

where I stood, I tried to temper my performance, mindful that the average age of those in attendance must have been seventy. I do not think it was my imagination that the more I restrained, the nearer in they rolled their wheelchairs. Barely an expression changed on their faces, and it was not entirely clear whether or not they could hear well, and might have been only politely looking in my direction.

I finished the telling and prepared to begin the part of my program where I discuss the date of the book's composition and some literary notes about its construction and grammar. One woman interrupted my presentation and shouted, "Whoa! Not so fast!"

I braced for a challenge of my performance that had highlighted the sexual innuendo of Ruth's visit to Boaz at the threshing floor. Or, perhaps they had taken offense with Naomi's explicit directions to Ruth to groom herself for the upcoming sexual tryst. But, no! She wanted to know whether I thought the book was composed by a woman for women to help them understand that "harem love" (I swear, her words) between women was approved by God and intended for their mutual comfort and companionship. Stammering through a response, I was relieved to see other hands raised. Her initial comment had sparked off a lively conversation around love, the components of community, what it means to be a confidante, and what survival looks like when you live in society's margins. To this group, the literary device of eliminating the men early on in the story was little more than a technique to emphasize that it wasn't a story about men and women, but a story about the power of women to shape their lives within the context of a world usually dominated by men.

According to the women that morning, the witnesses' "blessing" Ruth by invoking the names of Rachel, Leah,

continues on page 20

and Tamar as Boaz claimed Ruth for his own wife was a significant point not to be missed. The composer had not invoked the name of the patriarch Abraham's wife Sarah, but rather three women who were all involved in treachery around misbehaving men. That is, Ruth was being blessed through the invocation of female ancestors who were survivors despite their mistreatment at the hands of the men in their lives.

I am convinced that the different responses from the groups had to do with the presentation model—piece-meal teaching versus oral performance of the whole. The oral performance had the effect of revealing the diversity of the group, despite the group's apparent homogeneity. Whereas, the piece-meal teaching had the opposite effect of concealing or leveling the nuances of a diverse group and preventing momentum from building, because each week we were beginning from scratch in terms of the text's inherent dynamism.

The take-away lesson to me in both situations centers on the two-fold pieces of the power of a performance to evoke passionate conversation and the degree to which performing a story, rather than studying it over time in a piecemeal fashion, highlights the raw materials of the composition. It is able to do this by setting them in the more natural context of narration, rather than isolating them for inspection under the unnatural light of an exegetical microscope.

As an academic, I continue to hold exegetical work in high esteem. Yet there is no getting away from the fact that, from the perspective of a therapist and a priest, I have come to appreciate and respect the power that scripture performance unleashes in a community and in an individual.

Dr. Tracy Radosevic *Femininity in the Bible*

Biblical performance criticism is about nothing if not how embodying the biblical narratives and, in so doing, connecting with the various emotions/attitudes/experiences of the story, sheds a unique light on how to interpret and understand those texts.

As a woman, I find this somewhat amusing (and vindicating!), because much of the Church's history has been influenced, either directly or indirectly, by the ancient philosophy that human beings consisted of mind and matter. Males were associated with the mind and thus considered superior; females were associated with the body and emotions and thus considered inferior (actually, some philosophers/theologians went so far as to believe that females were an aberration of creation, a mistake). Therefore, to be a part of an organization (NBS) that has contributed so strongly to the kind of shift in biblical interpretation that not only embraces the body and emotions but deems them critical in trying to understand the original intent of our sacred texts, is liberating, to say the least!

It doesn't take much delving into the pages of the Bible to see that females get short shrift. First of all, their stories are significantly out-numbered by the stories devoted to males. Secondly, a high percentage of their stories that did make the "final cut" portray them (or, more disturbingly, have been interpreted) in less-than-ideal ways. Sure, we get to see plenty of the guys' dark sides but for many of them it's also made clear that, despite their faults, they're still chosen/favored/loved by God. Moses is a murderer ... and he's chosen to head up the main event of the Hebrews' story, one that continues to be retold every year at Passover. David is an adulterer and murderer, among other things, and yet he's described as "a man after God's

own heart" and is commemorated to this very day in Jerusalem via David's Citadel, David's Tower, David's Tomb, King David Street and David's Village, just to name a few. Simon (Peter), one of Jesus' BFFs, denies he even knows the guy, and yet he's the bloke Jesus renames Peter ("Rock") and then announces, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Oh, and Jesus also gives him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. I could go on, but you get the idea.

Now, I'm not opposed to the Bible making clear, over and over again, that imperfect humans can still be called and used by God in amazing ways. The bone I'm picking is that the same treatment hasn't been applied to the biblical women.

There are days when I think about this and all I can do is roll my eyes and sigh. "Really?? This is all they thought there was to women?" Not to downplay or denigrate pregnancy, childbirth, or the monumental task and responsibility of nurturing children, on all levels but to condense the complexity and significance of each female life into not much more than a uterus is incomplete, degrading, and potentially dangerous. I can possibly be persuaded into acknowledging that, due to lack of sophistication and scientific research, it made sense back then to think that that's all women were for. They are the ones, after all, with the uteruses and the milk-producing mammary glands. If women aren't here to birth and feed babies, then what are those all about?? So maybe for the people who wrote these stories down, most likely men, it wouldn't have occurred to them that there was anything else to focus on since women's identities were wrapped up in whom they had (and hadn't) managed to birth.

That certainly seems to be the case with most of the matriarchs and the women in Matthew's genealogy, not to mention Lot's daughters. I would argue, however, that there's also a potential sexual connotation for some of the women where children (or lack thereof) aren't a part of their recorded story. For instance, David found Abigail fetching enough that, as soon as her husband died, he wasted no time marrying her (even though he already had multiple wives). So was it her generous hospitality alone that saved the day or the fact that she was attractive and possibly used that to flirt with David to get her way? In other words, if she had been ugly or old or infirm, would her gifts of food have been enough to convince a man who was, in essence, "breathing threats and murder" to change his mind?

I don't mean to perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes here. Women are obviously more than sexual connivers! We're strong and determined, resourceful and compassionate, intelligent and creative. But you know what? So are men. Pretty much the only thing that's uniquely ours is our femininity, and all that goes with it. So, if I'm trying to uncover fresh insights into the women of the Bible, then it behooves me to particularly explore and play around with those dimensions of these characters. And if one thing we know about these characters' contexts is how "sexualized" they were, and how often the only "weapon" they had to right a wrong or to garner themselves some dignity or to ensure survival was to exploit some aspect of their sexuality, then that's not an inappropriate path of potential discovery.

Dr. Joanna Dewey
Telling Women's Stories

Telling women's stories found in the Bible is an important activity. It helps make the women alive in our imaginations and it is our imaginations

that need to be transformed. But just telling the stories as the Bible reports them is not enough. Performance criticism teaches us that traditions were not static but were always adapted by individual storytellers and adjusted for each particular audience. And there were always women storytellers. We need to go beyond our printed texts in our tellings.

I first began teaching about women in the New Testament in the beginning of the 1980s. At that time there were practically no resources. So I had students read through the gospels determining as best they could where women were present and where only men were present. This is still a good exercise, showing that women were generally present even if our imaginations have been trained to assume only men were present. Then in 1983 the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza clearly demonstrated that the women who appear in our New Testament are only the tip of the iceberg, that much of women's history has been lost.

In the first centuries of the common era, literacy was a rare skill. Over all, only about five percent were literate, and most of those were men.

It was educated men who composed the writings that came to make up the New Testament, and educated men who chose the writings to be included. The women have tended to be written out.

I compared the healing stories of women with those of men. The men's stories predominate in number; they are longer on average than the women's stories. The men speak more in their stories than the women do in their healings and Jesus speaks more to the men than to the women. All of this tends to make the men's stories more vivid, thus more memorable.

Now if we had lived in the first centu-

ries and heard women telling gospel stories, I expect they would have put more emphasis on the women's stories; the situation would be reversed. But the women's versions did not make it into our New Testament.

Performance criticism suggests that we expand our women's stories to help restore women to their important role in the formation of early Christianity.

The composer of the Gospel of Mark tells us fifteen verses before the end of his gospel that there were women followers of Jesus, and they have been there all along: "Now some women were observing from a distance, among whom were Mary of Magdala, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. These women had regularly followed and assisted him when he was in Galilee, along with many other women who had come up to Jerusalem in his company." But this mention of the women disciples is too little and too late to modify the picture in our imagination of a world in which only men accompany Jesus.

Our imaginations need transforming. So for 25 years I have been retelling a version of Mark's story centering on the women followers from the beginning of Mark's narrative: the women are called, they follow, they go out and preach and heal, they are at the last supper, they watch Jesus be crucified and they discover the empty tomb. Performance criticism and our knowledge of the first century media world provides the rationale for my telling. We need, as far as we can, to recover the women of the first centuries and embody them in our tellings.

NBS MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Elizabeth Adkisson and the *River of Life*

Women's Life Skills
Training Center



I utilize my biblical storytelling in my work as the site director for The River of Life in Woodville, Texas, a life-skills training program. The program is free and open to adult women seeking change in their lives for any reason.

We offer two 10-week sessions each year and can accommodate up to six women per session. All the teachers are volunteers and all our operations are funded by donations. We promote renewal inside and out and offer experiences in building self-esteem and in connecting to a faith source for strength and guidance. Classes are offered in computer programs, emotional and interpersonal interaction skills, job search skills, job retention skills, nutrition, grammar, and personal appearance. Each woman receives a work-appropriate wardrobe during the third week, as well as a professional hair and make-up makeover and must then come to class as if they were going to a job.

When I took over as site director in the spring of 2014, I decided to ask the students to learn and present a Bible story during their graduation program, in addition to the requirement of a short talk about their personal journey through the program.

The first scripture we used was Hannah's petition to the Lord. There was much gnashing of teeth at first—theirs and mine. The women discovered that each of them connected to a different part of the story, so I assigned each of them the part with which they identified. In doing so, Hannah's story became their story. Working on the



scripture gave the women confidence in speaking before the public and they were relieved that they did not have to write the words themselves. The audience was most impressed by the presentation. It was the highlight of the evening.

In the current session, the women are learning Elijah and the Widow of Zaraheth. Again, this set of women connected to the story from their own experiences. This time I began by using the workshop I developed for

my Academy of Biblical Storytelling certification program and conducted a workshop with the five women and five of the volunteer teachers. The workshop was a terrific jump-start. The women were amazed at how quickly they internalized the story. Women with language and grammar issues have the most difficult time.

They really have to struggle when verbs move from present tense into past tense. Even internalizing the action and images does not completely overcome a general struggle with language. While the women are not held to the standard of complete accuracy, their language issues hinder even the simple telling of the story.

Each woman tells one episode in the story. They are having a great time surprising themselves when asked to tell the story in different genres. The Bible story frees them to speak for themselves in their personal talk at the graduation and it also greatly grows the connections they have been making with each other.

Thanks to biblical storytelling in the River of Life program, the women can now identify the role of God in the lives of the characters and in their own lives. What more can we ask?

A Storytelling Vacation Bible School

Looking for something different to enliven your Vacation Bible School (VBS) this year? Look no further than a midrash biblical storytelling of the fantastic story of the Exodus from Egypt. There's an evil king and a stuttering hero, locusts and frogs, plagues and rivers of blood. It's a storyteller's dream come true. When you add a Bible study based on provoking questions and art and music centers, you'll have a VBS to remember!

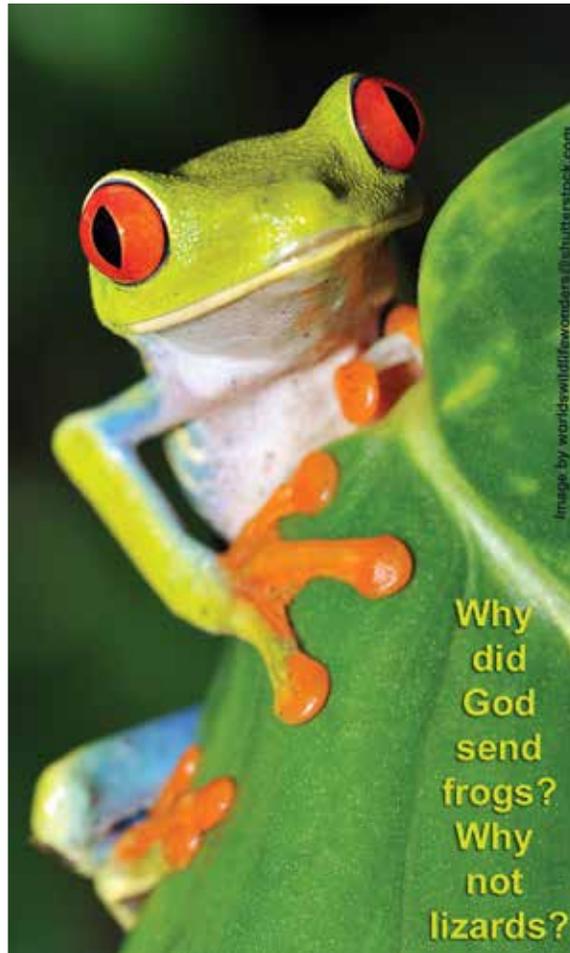
In addition to you, the storyteller for the week, you'll need someone to lead the music and someone else to spearhead the art projects. To double the fun, feed the kids thematic snacks like "snake" cheese sticks with caraway seed eyes (press out the end of the stick to make a head), red "rivers of blood" jello cubes, unleavened bread with hummus, and "frog leg" marinated chicken drumsticks. If there is a Mom in the congregation who knows how to have fun with food, recruit her!

Bible study for the week will be done in the Paideia style using provoking questions and group discussion. This style of learning is popular in many programs for gifted students and affords kids a chance to think about the story they've heard and make powerful connections through conversation.

Art projects can include green and yellow pipe cleaner locusts, modeling clay pyramids, drawings of the sea parting, milk carton chariots with cardboard wheels and teeshirts that say: "Let My People Go!"

Music can include the fun camp song "Father Abraham" (with all the motions) and "Go Down Moses."

Here's an overview of the stories (which are long, so paraphrasing parts of them might be necessary) and the Bible study questions, based on a five-day event:



Day One:

Story: God Calls Moses, Genesis 3:1-15, 4:1-17

Provoking Questions: Why do you think God came to Moses in a burning bush? Why did he make the staff turn into a snake and do those things to Moses' hand? What do you think it felt like for Moses to be in the presence of God and to feel his power?

Day Two:

Story: The First Plague: Water Turned to Blood, Genesis 7:1-23

Provoking Questions: Why do you think God let Pharaoh's heart harden?

Why do you think the first few miracles were ones the Pharaoh's sorcerers and magicians could do, too?

Day Three:

Story: More Plagues: Frogs, Gnats, and Flies, Genesis 8:1-32

Provoking Question: How many frogs were there? **Why did God send frogs? If all the dust became gnats, what would that be like? Is a fly worse than a gnat?**

Day Four:

Story: "God sent more plagues, plagues that hurt the Egyptians but not the Israelites. He sent a disease that killed the Egyptians' animals and boils, big sores that covered all the Egyptians and their animals. Then the Lord sent lightning and hail that stripped the fields and smashed the trees. But Pharaoh would not let the people go. And after all that, Pharaoh's heart was still hardened and he would not let the people go. So God sent locusts and they ate every plant and every piece of grain that the Egyptians had. And still, Pharaoh would not let the people go. So the Lord killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians..." Genesis 12:29-36

Provoking Questions: Can you remember all the signs and plagues God used against Pharaoh? Why was Pharaoh so stubborn? Have you ever been stubborn with God?

Day Five:

Story: Pillars of Fire and the Parting of the Sea, Genesis 13:17-18, 21-22; 14:1-30

Provoking Questions: What would it be like to walk day and night to get away from someone like Pharaoh? Would you have been afraid? Why? What would it be like to walk past a wall of sea water? What do you think the fish would be doing?

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Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l.
**2015 Festival Gathering
of Biblical Storytelling**



One Story, Many Voices

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August
5-8, 2015

**National 4H Center
Chevy Chase, MD Near Washington, DC
Epic Telling: Acts of the Apostles**

**Keynote
Speaker**

Marvin McMickle



Marvin McMickle is the President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and Professor of Church Leadership. He is a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Int'l. Board of Preachers at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA. He has authored 14 books and numerous articles for professional magazines and journals.