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Narrative and Personhood: A Paradigm for Hoping

Introduction

Narrative theory in recent years has developed as a significant approach in describing, interpreting, critiquing, and envisioning ways of reordering people's life experiences. This speculation contains several propositions. First, narrative theory proposes that people live an evolving narrative story. That is, building on Crites understanding of "narrative" or "story," life experience moves in an ordered fashion within the framework of context, time, and space.[1] Second, narrative theory proposes that people think in narrative form, and that their communicative process is inherently narrative. That is, according to Sarbin, people think, perceive, image, make moral choices and engage in discourse according to narrative structures.[2] Third, narrative theory proposes that people have the capacity to reflect their lived narrative. The works of Capps and Lester[3] suggest that this discernment enables people's see-

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[1]Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39 (September 1971): 291.

[2]Theodore R. Sabin, "The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology," in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore R. Sabin (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 4.

[3]See Donald Capps, *Reforming: A Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); and Andrew D. Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).

ing alternative directions in lived stories and re-framing stories according to their convictions and values. Fourth, people also participate in constructing and revising their stories throughout their lives.

Narrative Process as Paradigm

Narrative theory builds on the realization that storytelling has been an integral part of life across generations and cultures. The stories people told revealed the roots of their histories, aspects of lives lived in the present and lives imagined and hoped for in the future.[4] Moreover, narrative theology recognizes the narrative structure of the Bible in telling the stories of God and the importance of these stories in people's shaping a particular kind or character of story.[5] Thus, over generations and cultures, including Bible times, people have been a storied people. Because of this, narrative theory as a movement is not really new. What is new, however, is the effort to recover the importance of narrative by looking afresh at its nature and use as a paradigm for critical reflection and hoping.

Re-examining the nature of narrative and narrative process as a paradigm for critical reflection and hoping is, indeed, a particularly pivotal task for care givers to whom people come for guidance and nurture. This is because individuals come with their stories, at times either hesitatingly or animately expressed, at times with anxiety, with agony, grief,

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[4]Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African-American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 38; and Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care*, 33.

[5]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); and Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

or hope; and yet, always in search of understanding what has happened in their life's sojourn and what may yet occur. According to Hillman, they come to form a healing story.[6]

The intent in this presentation is to explore in detail various characteristics of story and to propose a process for engaging story in growth groups. As ministers with persons on an ongoing basis, we also need to engage in critical reflections in a narrative way, giving insight into what is occurring in our lives and in the lives of others. Moreover, it is important for us to examine the ways in which hope in our stories is seen as helping others to express their confidence. Helping others to visualize their hope is the task of pastor or what the writer calls the minister as "story guide." The analysis also moves us in the direction of critical reflection as story guides. This deliberation and guiding involve assessment of stories and facilitating story process in growth groups with those with whom we work.

We will be guided by the understanding that we and others live our stories in a particular cultural context. Recognition of the importance of cultural context is essential because pastoral care giving that does not consider this will be less effective in fostering hoping and healing. We will also be directed to understand that part of our context is Christian, shaped by the Christian story as recorded in Scripture. The essence of this story is hope. It is, according to Snyder, a comprehensive answer to the question of purpose, design, relations, and plot themes on which our hope centers.[7] This faith story is, indeed, an eschatological story moving history

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[6]See James Hillman, *Healing Fictions* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hall Press, 1983).

[7]See Howard A. Snyder, *Earth Currents: The Struggle for the World's Soul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

in a hopeful direction. This reassurance envisions (1) a worthwhile purpose in our own lives, (2) a design for our stories which is open-ended but has order, permits surprise, and is open to discovering beauty, (3) positive relations between ourselves, others and our histories, and (4) a plot theme that energizes or undergirds our efforts.

Helping people envisage hope in their lives is an essential element in personhood. This involves grounding one's life in meaningful stories that contribute to the self's progress as a differentiated yet relational, growing entity. Thus, reflecting stories is key to the development of selfhood. Therefore, the focus of this paper is pastors as story guides, assisting in the history of personhood and enabling persons to link their lives to stories, particularly stories within the Christian faith tradition.

Nature of Narrative

People tell stories which conform to understanding their experiences. They organize the various elements of these observations into a descriptive whole. The elements that formulate this process comprise the narrative content and disposition. Narrative content refers to specific descriptors of concrete reality that are disclosed by the storyteller. Narrative disposition relates to references in narratives to temporality or the dimensions of past, present, and future in narratives as well as the presence of affect in narratives. Narrative disposition situates the content according to time, and focuses attention on the storyteller's response to the content.

Both narrative content and disposition are helpful ways of engaging the assessment phase of pastoral care giving. That is, as the storyteller discloses the "whole" of the

story, the content and the disposition help the storyteller and the pastoral care giver as story guide to look critically at it. We will consider narrative content and disposition in more detail.

Narrative Content

In the author's *Soul Stories: African-American Christian Education*, six key interconnected components of people's lives compose the content of stories for which they seek help are identified. These include: self-identity, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, and story plot.[8] A description of each follows:

Self-identity. Stories disclose people's self-identities; persons provide clues about whom they perceive themselves to be in relation. Stories also disclose people's struggles with how they see themselves and the way they experience how others see them. The disclosure of self-identity may include personal myths about the cultural and family identity into which the storyteller was born and how this myth was shaped or changed by the storyteller's life within ethnic cultural context, family context, and the larger social context. People may also identify themselves through disclosing the roles they enter and exit and ones they do not.[9]

An example of self-identity as narrative content is the story told by Mary Johnson,[10] some of which is included in

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[8]See Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 40-43, for a summary of the six components.

[9]Ibid., 40.

[10]The name, Mary Johnson, is used here to protect the identity of the storyteller.

Soul Stories. Mary, an African-American middle-aged woman, describes herself as stuck at this time of her life, needing to move beyond the intermittent down times in order to find a new lease on life. She says:

> There are things in my life that I wish I could have changed, but being the mother of my children isn't one of them. All in all, I've found being a parent is rewarding. I'd have to say that I'm probably my most caring self as mother.

Mary then describes the impact that growing up African American had on the formation of self-identity:

> I remember when I was growing up. My parents always said, 'Never forget to stand up straight and hold your head up. Be proud of who you are.' It wasn't just a thing of posture. They were letting me know that I was a worthwhile person, and that I had a heritage to be proud of. Their words have remained with me. . . .
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> Oh, I've run into obstacles along the way. And I can't deny that, at times, they made a real mark on my self-image. I remember when students were being considered for the National Honor Society in the predominant white high school I attended. I was always on the honor roll and participated in a lot of school activities. My goal was to be tops, and I was a high achiever. But I was not chosen for the Honor Society. I found out that some of my white classmates whose grade averages were lower than mine were chosen. It was a terrible blow. I can remember crying and crying on my bed at home. I hated who I was, and frankly thought, 'Why bother ever

trying to excel and to be somebody again.' All my parents' talk about standing up straight and being proud went out the window, at least at that specific point in time. . .

But, the main thing was that I really didn't let the condition in that high school stop me cold. In fact, I credit that situation with pushing me toward becoming a teacher.

There were other things, too. . . When I was four or five years old, my brother suddenly stopped relating. He would not talk to me, sit beside me, or come near me in any way. His treatment of me didn't change until I was grown. I didn't understand why this was happening and whenever I would ask, my parents would simply tell me not to let it bother me. I felt as though there was something terribly wrong with me. And I felt abandoned by my brother, whom I idolized.

It was not until I was grown that I found out that my brother had been taken aside and severely scolded for playing too roughly with me. His response to the scolding was to completely ignore me for fear of getting into trouble again. But I do think that because of what happened, I'm much more demonstrative in showing affection than I might have been otherwise.

Mary concludes:

I wrestle with myself even now—with who I am, what I ought to be, and how to get free when I get into one of those places that triggers self-doubt. . . . Deep down inside. . . I see myself as a good person. . . Regardless what others think or do, regardless of my own getting in my own way, I believe God sees me as valu-

able. I just need to be reminded of that every now and then.[11]

In her narrative, Mary tells about her role as mother and teacher, the formation of herself as African American and the development of her identity as daughter and sibling. She also disclosed her present struggle with her identity.

Self-identity is a content component that can emerge in narrative. Recognition of it is helpful in the story assessment task undertaken by the minister as story guide with the storyteller. What the storyteller shares about this component may suggest questions that provide a basis for further exploration in the discourse between the storyteller and the story guide. For example, Mary's current struggle with her self-identity raises the question regarding the connection between her earlier identity-forming experiences and her current struggle. These experiences may play a haunting role in her current identity struggles.

Social Contexts. People disclose aspects of their social context regarding where they live, work, attend school and church, what these places look and feel like, and how they experience larger society. As narrative content, the nature of the social context also emerges in the ways people talk about the availability or non-availability of needed resources as well as the presence or absence of instrumental means for obtaining desired resources and social status.

Social contexts are related to self-identity. In narratives, people identify themselves in certain ways according to the qualities they attribute to their social contexts. They perceive themselves as like or different from others on this

[11]Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 51-53.

basis. They may also talk about themselves as valued or devalued by others on the principle of the social contexts in which they live.[12]

Through her inclusion of the home environment and the school, aspects of social context are interconnected with self-identity as part of Mary Johnson's narrative content. Mary's narrative highlights that her self-identity developed at least, in part, out of her experiences in these contexts.

In part of Ken Brown's narrative in *Soul Stories*, he, also an African American in his early thirties, reveals something of the nature of his social context:

> We lived on the poor side of town. I mean it was real poor. Mom worked in a dry cleaners, and my oldest sister worked part-time after she got out of high school each day. She also worked weekends. Even so, it just wasn't enough. There's not much to say about who we were, except that we were poor and we felt like society's castaways. We were trying to make it against all odds.
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> We wore hand-me-down clothes that were beyond mending, and we didn't always have shoes that kept our feet off the ground, if you know what I mean. We had food stamps, but, still, food stretching was an ordinary thing; and my mother always talked about how nasty the store clerks were when she would hand them the stamps.
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> I can remember Mom was a proud person and she tried to do her best with us kids. . . .We didn't go to church or Sunday school or anything like that, but we always said grace at the dinner table. I also remember

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[12]Ibid., 41.

many times hearing Mom praying while she was fixing a meal, tying to clean up the house, and doing other things around the house. Now that I think of it, I guess she had to pray in order for her to keep going in a house with seven kids.

I really believe my Mom's pride, her hope, her desire for the best for all of us, and her prayers made a difference in my life. . .

I know some folk don't think anything good can come out of the poor section of town, and that poor folk don't help themselves or anybody else. That may be true for some. But that's not true for all. There are proud, hard working, poor folk who want things to be different and who are working to make things different for themselves and others. My Mom was one of those folk. And so am I. I am worried about several of my brothers and sisters, though, because they can't seem to get beyond all the negatives. It is sometimes hard not to get discouraged when I think of them. I do what I can, but sometimes I think, 'How can I feel good about being who I am when they are having such trouble'?[13]

In this narrative, Ken describes his social context primarily in socioeconomic terms, disclosing keen awareness of his family's social status, the family's meager resources, and their limited instrumental means for supplying them. He also relates social contextual concerns with his family's identity as poor people and his own self-identity as survivor. He concludes by questioning his self-identity as the result of intense identification with the impact the social context had on his siblings.

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[13]Ibid., 53-54.

Social context is a content component that can emerge in narrative. As in the case with self-identity, recognition of this aspect of social context is helpful in the assessment task by the minister as story guide and the storyteller. That is, through this identification, the story guide is able to see the need for the storyteller's critical reflection surrounding self-identity issues which may be prompted by questions the story guide poses to the storyteller. For example, an important question for Mary has to do with whether her home environment had greater impact on her self-identity than the school and why. Ken's intense concern about his siblings identifies his need to explore why this anxiety derailed his own positive dealing with his social contextual experience.

Interpersonal Relationships. Narrative content includes past, present, and intended relationships with persons which occur in the various social contexts mentioned above. People relate to family members and friends in home and community; to others in church, school, community, and the workplace; and to others distantly known to them in the political realm and in public media. People relate to forces beyond themselves based on religious affiliation.[14]

Mary Johnson told something of her relationship with her children, her parents, her sibling, and school officials. Ken revealed something of his relationship with his mother, his siblings, and his mother's interactions in a community store.

An emphasis on interpersonal relationships is found in Mark Evans' story. Mark, an Anglo-American male in his early twenties, attended the homeless shelter which this writer directed. Over a three-month period we were in frequent con-

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[14]Ibid., 41.

versation, one of which was the relationship with his dad. Using occasional expletives, he said:

> Me and my dad never did get along. He's an alcoholic, you know—always in the bottle. Maybe that was why he was so mean. I don't know. God, I wish things could have been different. He never accepted me. It was like I could never do anything right. But, I ended up doing things for the family that he wouldn't do—like work a steady job, even though it was part-time. But that (expletive) didn't care one bit. It's like I could never do anything right. I even got through high school, and he didn't even come to my graduation. God, that was hard to take.
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> Anyway, (expletive), I got into drugs when I started working full time after I finished high school. That was my way out, I guess. As long as I was on a high, I didn't have to think about anything. My mind was off all that stuff that happened. You know what happened? Right? My dad found out about my drugs. The (expletive) put me out. Can you believe it? My mom never put him out, but she sure didn't say anything when I got put out.
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> I went to live with friends for awhile. That didn't work out too good. So, you know the rest. Here I am—homeless! I've called my house a couple of times. My dad won't talk to me. Mom said there's no way he's going to let me in the house. She said to me, 'You're on your own.'[15]

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[15]Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, "Companion Reports on the Circumstance of Homelessness: Personal Profiles Based on Immanuel Drop-In Center," TMs (photocopy), March 28, 1985, Evanston, Illinois.

During our conversations, Mark described in further detail his troubled relationship, not only with his dad, but also with his mom who always took his dad's side. When asked about his use of expletives and why he called God's name, he said, at first, that this was a habit from hearing his dad's constant use of the word. But, on further reflection, he said that he was just plain mad, and that was "mad" talk. About his references to God, he shared he was not a religious person, nor was he conscious of his use of the word. But, in thinking about it, he said that he needed God to do something about the situation with his dad; maybe God is the only one that could hear him, even if God didn't answer.

Mark admitted that he regretted using drugs. He also relayed that life is not suppose to be the way he has experienced it. He finally decided to enter a drug rehabilitation program. Before he left for the program, he shared that he remained troubled about his relationship with his dad. Even if he ceased using drugs, he feared this relationship would not change.

Interpersonal relationships of people contribute to narrative content. Recognition of this component is helpful in the story assessment task, for they suggest to the minister as story guide either the problematic or the promising nature of relationships in the storyteller's life. Recognizing these elements also helps the story guide to pose questions designed to move the storyteller into critical reflection on the story. Among the questions that such an assessment of Mary Johnson's and Ken Brown's stories raise for their further exploration is, for example, "How have the relationships described impacted the formation of bonds in their various social contexts?" Mark's story raises the question of what he will do if his relationship with his dad does not change after

he stops using drugs?

Life Events. Narrative content often includes vividly remembered life events which occur in people's social contexts or that emerge out of their relationships with others. Life events are positive and negative incidents, including those that people celebrate and those that are crises, inducing concern, hardship, or suffering.

The incident in Mary Johnson's story of her rejection as a candidate for the Honor Society was a crisis event for her during her high-school years. Ken Brown regarded occasions when his mom prayed as positive and helpful events. Mark Evans vividly recounted the life-changing events of his dad's non-attendance at his high school graduation and his dad's putting him out of the house.

During a series of family cluster meetings led by this writer, gatherings designed for African-American parents and teens to talk together about violence, fourteen year old Tracy Allen told about an incident that involved her friend. Relating the story, she trembled, and her eyes darted back and forth to her teen friends sitting in the circle. She said:

> Lisa was my best friend. One day when I didn't go to school, she was on her way to the school bus stop up the street from her house. There was this girl who hated Lisa. She was in some classes with Lisa. She kept telling Lisa that Lisa thought she was better than anybody else. Sometimes, when we were walking together, I heard her call Lisa names, but Lisa would always say, 'Don't pay her no attention,' and 'just keep walking.' And, Lisa would say she didn't want to get into no fights. But, Debbie, that's her name, said that one of these days she

was going to beat Lisa's 'you know what.'

So, anyway, this day when Lisa was going to the bus stop, this girl was waiting there ahead of her. When Lisa saw her, the girl had pulled out a knife. Lisa said she turned around to go back home, but the girl caught up with her. She cut up Lisa's face and arms real bad. The cops got her, but Lisa won't ever be the same. She doesn't want to go out now. Jesus, why did that have to happen to my friend? She never bothered anybody. Maybe if I would have been there, maybe . . . I don't know. Maybe she'd have cut me too. I go see her, but that's hard too. I don't want to be a bad friend. I don't know.

The incident with her best friend created a crisis for Tracy. The event was difficult to disclose, and she was suffering as a result of what had happened. It is interesting to note that, like Mark Allen, Tracy inserted religious language through her use of the word, Jesus, in her disclosure. However, in her case, this usage appeared in the form of a question. She addressed the question of why to Jesus, whom she later said was maybe the only one who knew why something like that could happen to her friend, because she surely didn't know and no one else seemed to have a good answer.

Life events contribute to the content of narratives. Recognition of these components helps in the story assessment task, giving credence that these have impacted people's lives. By recognizing these elements in what the storyteller discloses, the minister as story guide can then lead the storyteller toward critical reflection with key questions. For example, a key question for Mary Johnson and Ken Brown regards what they have learned over time about their approaches

to handling crises. An important question for Tracy is what she thinks when she didn't go to school the day her friend was attacked.

Life Meanings. Narrative content consists of meanings people assign to concrete realities of their lives. Through meaning-making, people make judgments about each aspect of their lives based on the beliefs and values they hold, ponder why their lives are unfolding as they are, and consider the purpose of their lives.[16] Let us consider this life-meaning content contained in the four stories already presented.

Mary Johnson's attempt to make sense out of her life is encapsulated in her review of the past. For example, this evaluation included her judgments about past happenings in her life and about who she currently is. We will recall her statement: "There are things in my life that I wish I could have changed, but being the mother of my children isn't one of them." The recognition of this statement as part of Mary's meaning-making process suggests follow-up questions regarding what Mary wished could have been different, why, and how previous events now impact her life.

Mary's meaning-making efforts are also evident in stressing her valued role as mother and seeing teaching as something coerced after being rejected as an Honor Society member. Both roles gave her meaning and purpose in life. But, we also see Mary's ongoing attempts at sense-making in her current wrestling with herself about who she is and the direction of her life. She believes in God who values her. On this basis, she sees herself as a worthy human being. But she still needs affirmation. The recognition of these aspects of

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[16]Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 41-42.

Mary's meaning-making process suggests follow-up questions to explore who she would like to be and what directions would she like her life to take.

Ken Brown's way of making sense of his life journey focused on that which made a difference. His mother's prayers had a transforming effect. He wanted to do something constructive with his life and to work to make things different for others. At the same time, Ken continues in his sense-making process, agonizing over what is happening in his siblings' lives. Family cohesiveness and helping family members in times of struggle are important values. Ken's concern about what to do for his brothers and sisters is an important aspect of his meaning-making process because he questions his ability to find full meaning in life, given their circumstance. Recognition of this dilemma suggests follow-up questions for Ken to explore how to carry out his life purpose in tandem with his concern for his siblings.

Mark Evans constantly grappled with the way his life unfolded, struggling to make sense of family relationships, and trying to excuse his dad's behavior on alcoholism. Mark's whole purpose in life seemed to be encapsuled in his search for a resolution to his relational problem. His reference to God's hearing him, even if God didn't answer him, is perhaps indicative of his subconscious effort to rely on a force beyond himself. This reference suggests follow-up questions for Mark to explore how he understands God and what God's listening to him really means.

Mark did not identify any desired direction for his own life, except to say that he recalled his mother's words: "You're on your own," and that he was going to enter drug rehabilitation. These aspects of Mark's sense-making process suggest follow-up questions to explore what his mother's

statement means to him, and what are possibilities for his life after drug rehabilitation.

Tracy also struggles to make sense out of her best friend's tragedy. In her sense-making process, she is trying to come to grips with why it happened. She addressed this question to Jesus, although it seemed not to be done consciously. Recognition of her reference to Jesus elicited her response that only Jesus could make some sense of what had happened. Her reply suggests follow-up questions for Tracy to explore what this perception of Jesus means for her life.

In her sense-making efforts, Tracy is also trying to come to grips with the meaning of friendship. She seems to equate her difficulty in visiting her injured friend with being a bad friend. Moreover, she is concerned with her vulnerability. Recognition of these aspects of her sense-making efforts suggest follow-up questions to explore what is difficult about her visits with her friend, what is the meaning of friendship, and how does she go about her life in light of what has happened.

Story Plot. The unfolding story plot of people emerges over time in their narrative content. This reveals how people choose to act over time, and whether or not the theme that undergirds their actions is positive and constructive or negative and destructive.[17] It is understood that these narratives may not be indicative of the plot that might emerge as these persons continue to share their stories. However, we may get a glimpse of the unfolding story plots.

We glimpse in Mary Johnson's short narrative the beginnings of an underlying positive and constructive way of dealing with life in spite of vicissitudes. Mary appears to

[17]Ibid., 42.

rebound after times of challenge and to discover ways of acting that bring positive meaning. And, she recognizes her periodic need for encouragement. However, it is important for Mary to identify and interpret what comprises her unfolding story plot, when and why she needs the reassurance, and what it means to her.

Ken Brown's short narrative also reveals his positive and constructive action in life as indicated by his identification of himself as a survivor. However, it is important for Ken to explore the nature of the survival he desires and how he sees this unfolding, given the goals he has for his life and his concern for his siblings.

Mark Evans' short narrative reveals a story plot that has destructive elements because of his drug use and "stuckness" in his family relational crisis. Although his move toward drug rehabilitation is a positive one, Mark appears not to see beyond it except in the potential continuation of the negative relationship with his dad. It is important that Mark sees how his story plot is unfolding and may yet unfold, given the description of his situation. It is also important for him to explore whether there are values and constructive actions that might support an unfolding plot for positive meaning.

Tracy Allen's short narrative shows the beginnings of a theme of honest questioning which is a choice to assist the unfolding plot. However, it is important not only for Tracy to raise the questions but also for her to try out her own answers, the values that guide her answers, and kinds of follow-up actions.

Summary on Narrative Content

By way of summary, the six components of self-identity, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, and story plot have been viewed as parts of the narrative content that people disclose in stories about their lives. These function as windows for viewing what is going on as people share their stories. They also lay the groundwork for the minister as story guide to raise key questions for the storyteller. The exploration of these questions is to guide the storyteller toward seeing hopeful directions and acting in ways consistent with that focus.

What is particularly striking from a cultural perspective is that key content of two of the three stories of African Americans centered on the African-American experience of racism. This suggests that the minister as story guide needs to be sensitive to this unique aspect whenever it occurs in African-American narrative content or in the narrative content of people from various diverse ethnic cultural groups. Although Mark's story did not display it, the stories of people who are in situations of homelessness often contain a sense of disenfranchisement.

It is also striking that all of the narratives contained some religious meaning, although in Mark Evans' and Tracy Allen's narratives, the insertion of this appeared to be accidental. These concerns will receive further attention in our later consideration of a process for hoping.

Narrative Disposition

Narrative disposition exists as one additional aspect of the assessment process. We will recall that narrative disposition is concerned with two matters. First, it is charged with the presence of temporality or the presence of past,

present, and future in the stories people tell. Second, it is interested with affect or feelings people have about what has happened in the past, what is happening in the present and what might happen in the future.

In his book, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Lester reminds us that "good stories include all three dimensions of time by having a beginning, a middle, and an end."[18] More specifically, people's lives are comprised of a past history and memories. The past provides people with a sense of being grounded and a context for constructing and viewing the present.

People also live in the present and are in the process of constructing a present-story dimension. The present is informed by the past, but at the same time, what is happening in the present informs how people view the past. And, people typically anticipate the future. This anticipation is comprised of "hunches, guesses, and predictions that shape . . .[people's] images of the future. . ."[19] This means that the present is not static. Narrative, then, needs to have a plot that predicts people's reaching a valued goal or a story line that points to a future filled with valued content. In this way, narrative reflects people's hoping.

In the narratives of the four storytellers disclosed earlier, only the narrative of Mary Johnson contained past, present, and future dimensions. Her review of the past began with "I remember. . ." She situated herself in the present with her words, "I wrestle with myself even now. . ." She engaged in anticipatory talk about what she ought to be and provided something of a hunch that would help her in becoming by saying that she just needed to be reminded of the value God

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[18]Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care*, 33.

[19]Ibid., 35.

bestows on her.

The stories of Ken Brown, Mark Evans and Tracy Allen all contained abundant references to the past followed by situating them in the present, but there was no clear vision of the future. Ken ends by talking about his present actions with his siblings and his thoughts about his present self-identity in light of his siblings' situation. The narrative of Mark Evans centered dominantly on the past, with scant reference to the present with the exception of his emphasis on his current state of homelessness and entry into drug rehabilitation. The narrative of Lisa also situates her dominantly in the past and ending with her statement, "I don't know." It is critical in cases such as these to help persons enter into the hoping process or envisioning a valued goal. The suggested questions raised earlier for exploration by the storytellers are useful ones in moving persons in this direction.

Now, some comments regarding affect as the second dimension of narrative disposition. People have feelings about and attitudes toward the things that happen to them in the past and present and what may happen in the future.

Mary Johnson's narrative identifies her disappointment and grief connected to being treated unfairly in the white high school and of feeling abandoned by her brother when he ceased to relate to her. As female, Mary tended to display a wider range of verbal expressions reflecting her feelings than the two males. There was a sense in which the female teen had limited experience sharing in a cross-generational group. In fact throughout her sharing, we will recall, her eyes darted back and forth to other teens as though she were seeking approval for what she was saying. She was reluctant to share fully in that context because full disclosure was reserved for the peer group.

Nonetheless, Tracy's fear is revealed in her trembling and in statements about what might have happened to her if she had been with her friend at the time her friend was attacked. Ken Brown's story identified his worry and anxiety about his siblings. Mark expressed his anger through the use of expletives.

The feelings and attitudes of the storyteller are important because of the impact they have on physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Consequently, it is important for the minister as story guide to see and tend to the affect or lack thereof in people's narratives and in their disclosure of the narrative. This includes tending to affect connected to experiences of racism and disenfranchisement that may appear in the content of people from the diverse cultural groups and people in special circumstances such as homelessness. The dominant message is concern for what is particular, indigenous, and unique in people's narrative content and narrative disposition.

A Process for Guiding Hopeful Stories Through Growth Groups

Consideration for diversity also needs to be extended to any process utilized for guiding people's unfolding stories. It is to the credit of pastoral counselors today that current operational models and supervisory attention is being given to differences of gender, race, social class, generation, and ethnicity.[20]

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[20]See Rodney J. Hunter and John Patton, "The Therapeutic Tradition's Theological and Ethical Comments Viewed Through Its Pedagogical Practice," in *Pastoral Care and Social Conflict*, ed. Pamela D. Couture and Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) for a discussion that highlights this development.

It is also important that we see faith issues as an integral part of our examination of the content of narratives and as part of any process for guiding hopeful stories. The narratives presented suggest that this is so. Rodney Hunter and John Patton contend that this is beginning to occur largely as the result of the rising interest in the theological importance of narrative. Indeed, they argue that, through narrative, "person" and "faith" intersect. Therefore, it is important to give credence to religious meanings intertwined in personal narratives.[21] This emphasis is also important when we are dealing with a process focused on hope because hoping, at its core, is deeply theological.

What constitutes a process for guiding hopeful stories? For the remainder of this presentation, the writer proposes a model for particular use with growth groups. Such are units that organize around sharing, study and reflection, and action. They are narrative oriented, focus on narrative content and disposition, committed to unlocking hidden barriers to personal growth and utilizing the Christian story in scripture and Christian exemplars in their ethnic/cultural heritage.

The model this writer is proposing and has utilized in her own work with African-American growth groups in the seminary and in the local congregation is found in *Soul Stories.* The model is story-linking, a process whereby growth-group participants intentionally connect parts of their everyday stories with the Christian faith story in the Bible and the lives of exemplars of the Christian faith outside the Bible.

In the story-linking process, participants connect with

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[21]Ibid., 33-34. Hunter and Patton contend that the operational tradition of placing the person and the pastoral relationship of the care giver over the formal content of its religious message is giving way for an emphasis on the latter.

Bible stories, using them as mirrors for reflecting critically the presence of hope appearing in their personal stories.

Participants also link their Christian faith heritage, hearing, and reflecting the stories of exemplars who chose a hope-filled way of living. By linking with Christian faith heritage stories, the intent is that participants become inspired by predecessors who have faced life circumstances with which they readily identify.

The story-linking process is to help participants reflect the content and disposition of their narratives, to consider what is going on in their lives that is hope-building or hope-blocking, and to participate in constructing and revising their stories in hopeful directions. In the process participants become the storytellers, either through shared personal stories or by talking through case material. In this procedure, the minister becomes the story guide.

Story-linking utilizes the six components of narrative content in four primary phases. In Phase One, participants engage the everyday story. This entails sharing personal stories focused on one or more of the narrative content components that are decided in advance. This emphasis on a specific narrative content helps to focus the attention of the group. It also aids the minister as story guide to form questions specifically related to the content being shared and to attend to the dispositional character of the narratives. Three activities comprise Phase One. In activity 1, the everyday story is disclosed. In activity 2, participants reflect the narrative contents, past, present, and future story elements, and evidences of affect. If case material is used, activity 3 is added in order that participants identify with this information by considering ways in which their stories are reflected in the case material.

Phase Two engages participants in the Christian Faith Story in the Bible. Five activities comprise this second phase. In activity 1, the Bible story/text is disclosed. The story/text may be drawn from the participants, or from what may be referred to as the "canon within a canon" formed within the indigenous culture, or from suitable lectionary selections, or from suitable devotional or other study materials.

In activity 2, the participants focus on the Bible story/text as mirror. In this way, they see what in the Bible story/text addresses, challenges or enlightens their understanding of the story content and disposition already shared. In activity 3, they enter as partner with Bible story actors and/or narrators. The intent in this activity is for participants to internalize what the Bible story/text is saying as a means of reflecting its usefulness for them. In activity 4, they envision God's activity in their lives today. The question is typically posed, "Where is God at work in your life?" And in activity 5, they anticipate their own ongoing response to God. This concerns the participants reflecting how they see themselves in relation to God and what this relationship means in terms of their hoping.

Phase Three links the participants with Christian faith stories from their indigenous heritage. Such stories may be drawn from collections focused on histories of the religious lives of predecessors. The phase is carried out through three activities. In activity 1, the Christian faith heritage story is disclosed. Activity 2 is designed to guide participants in getting in touch with its hope-oriented mindset. In activity 3, participants are guided in locating concrete hope-oriented actions and strategies appearing in the heritage stories.

The Final Phase is intended to engage participants in anticipating their future story in light of the concerns raised in the everyday story, input from the Bible, and input from

the heritage story. This phase is also concerned with decisions participants must make, resulting in a revised story. Phase Four is achieved through two activities. Activity 1 is designed to guide participants in discerning God's call for their concrete action. In this activity, they give particular attention to alternative responses to concerns raised in the content and disposition of the everyday stories. In activity 2, the participants decide concrete actions that reflect their intent for things to be different in the future.

Conclusion: Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways does the narrative paradigm have potential usefulness in your care giving context? If it does not, why not? What alternative paradigms have worked and why?

2. What does it mean for you to be called a story guide? How are you typically called? Why? What meaning does the way you are now called have for you? Why?

3. In what ways were the narratives appearing in the presentation reflective of your story? In what ways does your story reflect hope? In what ways have you dealt with narrative content and disposition in your pastoral care giving?