

Outreach Issue 2020

THE BIBLICAL STORYTELLER

A Network of Biblical Storytellers, Int'l. Publication

Lighting the Fire Again



BIBLICAL STORYTELLING:

At the Wild Goose Festival As Cartoons
With Youth In Pastoral Life At the Festival Gathering

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Pre-Conference Event July 28:

"A Widows Tale" Retreat



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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.

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What Stories Light Your Fire?

One of the things I love most about storytelling and storytellers is hearing stories told with fire and passion. The marvelous part of this is that we're all attracted to and passionate about different stories!

Have you noticed that what we're passionate about influences the stories we choose to tell? I invite you to consider these examples from my own life:

When my son was just a little guy, I wanted the Bible to deeply influence his life so I told him stories I knew he would enjoy and that I hoped would inspire him to be a man of God: David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lions' Den, and the Exodus. It worked. He is.

As a young mother myself, the Luke birth narrative became a passion. I wove Advent and Christmas hymns in and out of the scripture narrative, like twinkle lights on a Christmas tree, and still tell this gorgeous piece for churches during the season. Originally, I wore an "Old Masters' style" biblical costume but after realizing how utterly inauthentic that was, dropped the deep red and blue draping. Thanks to NBSI Festival Gathering workshops that educated me about the lifestyles of biblical persons, it no longer rang true for me.

When my mother was dying of breast cancer, I found myself leaning on Psalm 23 and then learning other Psalms that spoke to my painful journey through confusion and grief to peace and release.

As my father (a Methodist pastor) left this earth I learned and



Donna Marie Todd, Editor

told him the Gospel stories he so loved. As I was telling him the cleansing of the temple he yelled, "Knock their blasted money to the floor! Love of money is ruining the church!" And then he reminded me of the time I'd watched him baptize a poor, uneducated neighbor in the creek after a random visit with the old fellow. That story became my first CD, *Baptism at Second Creek*.

Then at 55 I found myself in a hospital, in a tiny waiting room the size of a supply closet. My husband of 23 years had suffered a massive stroke. I was waiting to see if he would live until dawn. I had cried out to God but it felt like no one was listening. Until a tattooed biker with a Harley Davidson bandanna leaned over and said, "So sis, what's your story?" When I didn't reply, he shared the story of his own brush with death and said, **"God's for real, sis, he's for real! And I don't know what your story is but I'm gonna pray with you right now and no matter what happens, it's gonna be alright."** Before the year was out, I became a widow. And now, I am passionate about the lives and stories of widowed women—their stories from the Bible and their stories today.

Your turn! What stories light your fire?



Biblical Storytelling at the Wild Goose Festival

by Drew Willard, UCC Pastor, FL

When Brian McLaren was keynote speaker for our NBSI Festival Gathering back in 2013, he said he was going to the Wild Goose Festival the next week. I checked it out and decided to go the following year and I thoroughly enjoyed it!

I would describe the Wild Goose Festival as a “Progressive Christian Woodstock.” The first year, I actually had lunch with Brian McLaren and then heard William Barber, Jim Wallis, and Frank Schaefer—the UMC pastor who was initially defrocked for presiding at the marriage of his gay son.

You can apply online to be a “Co-Creator” at Wild Goose, so I applied and was accepted as a speaker! The application was all online. They ask for a bio, a presentation description, and three downloadable videos, which I had made professionally. The storytelling presentation they selected was “Sabbath: A Day in the Life of Je-

sus”, and I was given the River Tent venue where a mike and sound equipment were provided.

My program was based on a script I have refined for ten years, taken from a Greek/English (RSV) interlinear text as a paraphrase of Mark 2:23-5:43. I wove drama and humor into it and even a brief rap song. I used to translate every word

This year, in addition to speaking myself, I heard Diana Butler Bass, Barbara Brown Taylor, William Barber, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Larycia Hawkins—the Wheaton College instructor who was fired for wearing a hijab in solidarity with Muslim women.

I met some exceptional people and had the opportunity to read the

pulse of progressive Christianity. There was a lot of anger, not only among United Methodist clergy about the UMC decision against LGBTQ rights, but in general about how Christianity has been

hijacked by conservatives. As Nadia Bolz-Weber said, “We should not be more loyal to doctrine and Bible verses than we are to people.”

The “wild goose” represents the Holy Spirit in Celtic symbolism. It’s also pretty wild out there in Hot Springs, North Carolina, camping



The Wild Goose Festival:
A Progressive Christian Woodstock

for my scripts, but using an interlinear text allows me to get at root word meanings for Greek words faster, though obviously in a more limited way. I then string the words in English back together like a pearl necklace and polish the story with expressive telling.

or “glamping” (glamorous camping). Speakers are housed in tents. Mine had two cots, a nice mat inside the doorway, a small table, and an LED to hang from the center pole. There was also a fan, but alas no hookup!

Electric shuttle cars took us to main areas but you also end up doing a lot of walking. Let’s just say it pays to know where the decent toilet and shower facilities are.

The Wild Goose had plenty of mud (it rained on and off during the festival), music, awesome speakers, displays, vendor booths, a bookstore, food vendors, and “beer & hymns.” I very much enjoyed being the biblical storyteller for the festival!



There was a strong buzz of anger and a general questioning of the fundamentalist Christian doctrine that has led to the blind advocacy of a corrupt president and administration. But there were also many brilliant, grace-filled people who were just there to meet and talk and share.

Drew Willard is the author of *The Gospel Pilgrimage* and a UCC pastor in Florida.

NEW FOR 2020! A PRE-FESTIVAL EVENT

A Widows Tale Retreat



Fellowship . Stories . Food . Laughter

“If I had to describe this retreat in one word it would be: powerful.”

Jennifer Cox UPMC Hospice Bereavement Coordinator

“It’s excellent. The program is so well-designed.” Donna Null

“Go! It’s so much FUN! Just GO!” Leslie Dunn

An informative, fun, one-day event from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., for women who have lost their spouse, want to find deep healing, and build a new life. \$197 registration fee includes all retreat materials, a catered lunch, take-home workbook, and on-going support. Led by Donna Marie Todd, storyteller, widow, founder of *A Widows Tale*, and Certified Grief Recovery Specialist.®



Tuesday, July 28, 2020 9:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Space is limited. Register online:

<https://www.nbsint.org/a-widows-tale-retreat/>

A Musing on Widowhood in Jesus' Time and Today

by Richard Swanson, PhD
NBSI Seminar Scholar
and
Donna Marie Todd, widow and
editor of *The Biblical Storyteller*



Luke, Chapter 20

45 *While they were listening, when all of the host was, he said to his disciples:*

46 *Beware of the scribes: those who walk in stoles, and love greetings in the markets, and premium seats in the synagogues, and premium places in banquets.*

47 *Beware of those who consume the houses of widows, And, as an excuse, they pray endlessly. Those will receive overflowing judgment.*

Chapter 21

1 *He looked intently; he saw those throwing into the contribution box their gifts. Those who threw were rich.*

2 *He saw some woman, a widow, needy, she threw there 2 lepta.*

3 *He said: Truthfully I am talking to you: This widow, this poor woman, she threw in more than all the rest.*

4 *For they all, out of the overflow to them, they threw into their gifts. She, out of her deficiency, her entire life, all that she had, she threw.*



Q. Is there subtext in this Luke text? Do these same subtexts resonate with widows today?

IN JESUS' TIME

Richard: It is interesting how much this set of scenes (and Luke's whole story) echoes Mary's Magnificat. It would almost sound as if Mary sang that song more than once. It would almost appear that Jesus listened when his mother sang.

And, just incidentally, it might be worth noting that traditional interpretation has guessed that Joseph was much older than Mary, and thus had died earlier in Jesus' life. Traditional interpretation uses this supposition to explain Joseph's absence after the opening scenes in the story.

So, what if traditional interpretation is onto something? What if Joseph has died? That would make Jesus' mother a widow. What if Jesus knows something first-hand about how posers with power eat

up the homes of widows? That would make this little set of scenes even more interesting.

TODAY

Donna Marie: I love that phrase, "posers with power," Richard! Every modern-day widow has met those folks.

Only a few weeks after the death you realize that all the assurances you received at the funeral, "You'll be fine because you're so strong!" had better be true because the wolves are lined up outside your door and you can feel their hot breath on your neck. It seems like you owe all the medical people and government entities at once. Additionally, it feels like everyone but you has forgotten that your spouse died. And because you're grieving when this happens, it's very disturbing. Your whole world is upside down.

Life as a widow is often very difficult financially. Money is always an



issue, unless your husband left you a fortune, which most do not. As a married couple, you don't "plan" on the death of the other except for life insurance. Widowed life ushers in many "unplanned" difficulties after the death.

When your spouse dies, it affects every aspect of your life: financial, legal, social, emotional, sexual, and parental. (This is true even if your children are grown because you're mourning different people. Their lives are not impacted in the same way as yours has been.)

Q. How would Joseph's death have affected Mary, as a woman in ancient times? Were there societal implications and expectations? What are the societal implications and expectations for a widow today?

IN JESUS' TIME

Richard: In both Jewish Scripture and in the New Testament, communities were assessed on the basis of how they treated widows and orphans. These two groups are linked together because both are powerless. Orphans, if not cared for by the community, would beg on the streets.

Widows were in a more difficult position. It is not possible to know what, exactly, was the situation in Nazareth during Jesus' life, but in many places, and in many centuries, widows were not allowed to

own property or engage in commerce. The social situation was complicated: there are biblical characters, women, who clearly do both. But scholars often conclude that it is most likely that such people, and such communities, were the exception, not the rule.

So what became of women, widows, if they could not own property or engage in commerce? If their families supported them, they were fine, though their security was uncertain. If they did not have family support, their situation was much more troubled. They had to earn money any way they could. Begging was certainly an option, but patriarchal societies always provide another option. Patriarchal

is clear: God sees when women are forced into sexually abusive situations.

What does this mean for Mary? In Luke's story, we first meet her as a fearless young woman, perhaps no more than 12 or 13 years old, who looks an angel in the eye without flinching. We hear her sing a song about God turning the world right-side-up. We see her engaged in probing, analytical thought. If she is a widow late in the story, she will surely still be courageous and possessed of the same sharp intelligence. But if she could not own property, she might also have been insecure, at risk, and kept in a risky position so that some man with power could devour her house,

or use her as he chose. If Jesus was old enough to earn a living, he would have earned money for the family and would have secured his mother's position. But if Jesus was still a boy, he would have watched as she navigated the minefield that patriarchal society lays for women.



societies keep women insecure, because patriarchal societies always choose to create prostitutes. That is part of why prophets like Isaiah measure societies by how they treat orphans and widows: it's not just that the treatment of the poor and powerless reveals a great deal about the ethics of a community. Perhaps even more important, Isaiah

If Jesus was still a boy, he might have seen her pushed to the point of desperation. And that raises the possibility that when Jesus looked at the widow putting her last coins into the offering, he saw his mother. Her act, while it may have roots in devotion to the God who alone is God, the act is also desperate. When all that you

continued on page 8

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have in the house is two lepta, you might as well give it away because there is nothing that such a small amount of money would buy anyway.

When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose, to quote Bob Dylan.

TODAY

Donna Marie: It's still a man's world and a couple's world. When you become a widow, you become invisible. It's not that people are mean, it's just that you remind them of an uncomfortable truth: People die. Every day. With alarming regularity.

Widows are a reminder that cancer, accidents, suicide, and war casualties are real. When death comes to you, and it will, you will not be in charge of how or when it happens. You won't even be on the committee! And, we live in a death-phobic society. In the United States this year

700,000 women will be widowed. There are 11 million widows on Facebook. That's a lot of hurt.

When a man loses his wife, he's encouraged to remarry, and often does so quite quickly. Women are given a different set of messages: You were so lucky to have him.

At least you have your son. You'll never find anyone like him. (Which is true, but that's not the point!) Widows are encouraged to disappear from sight. In some countries, women are still persecuted and even killed when their husbands die! There are places where women are actually burned along with the husband's possessions. These areas blame the husband's death on the woman, which is insane.

In our country, we're not burned in that way, but we're still on the outside of most social groups.

We're not invited to hang out with couples any more because we're



not a couple! Often, our girlfriends disappear, too; because we are a reminder of death and no woman wants to think about her spouse dying. We are also still, in this day and time, expected to remain the public mourner of the man. This means there is often little encouragement for a woman to move for-

ward into a new life. Interestingly, when a woman keeps grieving, the man's family and friends don't have to—they're off the hook! I was at a Christmas party four years after my husband's death and my not-yet-divorced sister-in-law was there with her new beau. Everyone accepted that. But when my son said, "I'm glad Mom didn't bring her boyfriend," a hushed silence fell over the whole room and the sister said, "What about Perrin?!" and I quietly replied, "He's dead."

Q. How would his mother's life as a widow have informed Jesus' ministry and life? How does losing a father impact both a mother and a child's life today?

IN JESUS' TIME

Richard: If Jesus grew up in a family that could not count on housing or food, the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6) takes on a sharp edge. He blesses the poor and those who are hungry, perhaps remembering days

when there was no food to be had. He sets that painful reality over against the Reign of God. God's Reign turns the world right-side-up. For comfortable people, the challenge in this image is generally translated (quickly) into a comfortable religious cliché. Jesus does

not speak in clichés, comfortable or otherwise. But for someone who knows poverty and hunger, the promise of a world turned right-side-up touches a nerve. The more I study Luke's story, the more I think that the Jesus in this story knows both poverty and hunger. He seems to have learned his mother's song about a world raised to justice, and to have seen her as she dealt with the vulnerability that goes with being a widow in a patriarchal world.

In all of the gospels, vulnerability is at the heart of the story of the crucified messiah. It does not matter how often we paint pictures of a victorious Christ. The stories through which we encounter God's messiah are stories of a messiah who cannot defend himself against Roman brutality. And it does not matter how vigorously we cook up atonement theories that soften the edge of Jesus' having been tortured to death, the gospels (especially Luke, I think) tell a story of a messiah who learned to cope with risky vulnerability at the feet of his mother, who may very well have learned her lessons because she was a widow.

TODAY

One of the most devastating impacts on a child's life when he or she loses a parent is that what should be happy and celebrated times are clouded by the grief of who isn't there to see it.

When our son graduated from high school, when he became an Eagle Scout, when he got a full academic ride to college, when he turned 21, when he graduated from college, all these events were deeply colored by

the sadness he felt, because his Dad was not there to see it.

As a widow, when you show up for the family Christmas party, football games, scout award nights, or church youth group potlucks, you're the odd one out. Everybody else has "their people." You just have you and it feels so lonely.

Solo parenting is a life adventure unto itself! For instance, there are things that men talk with boys about that boys don't want to talk with their Mom about. (Sex, for instance.) The same thing goes for girls. They don't want to talk about menstrual cycles and getting the cramps with their Dad! That's just wrong, and we all know it. So there are those moments of exquisite discomfort when you have to have those conversations. You have to, because there are things your child or youth needs to know and you're the one left to tell them.

Also, it's harder to enforce "the rules" in a household without the male father figure. Like dogs, kids can smell fear, and they take advantage of it whenever they can!

Moving forward as a widowed woman takes guts, bravery, and determination. But it's worth it because a widow has two choices: 1. create a new life for herself (a life she loves living) or 2. be the second victim of her spouse's death.

I often joke at A Widows Tale retreats that widows should lead couples' retreats because we are holders of a great and beautiful God-truth: In the end, love is all there is. When the horror and sadness of death fades, love is what remains.

Your Gift
will let
biblical
storytelling
continue
to shine the
light of God
to future
generations.

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include the
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in your will or
estate planning.

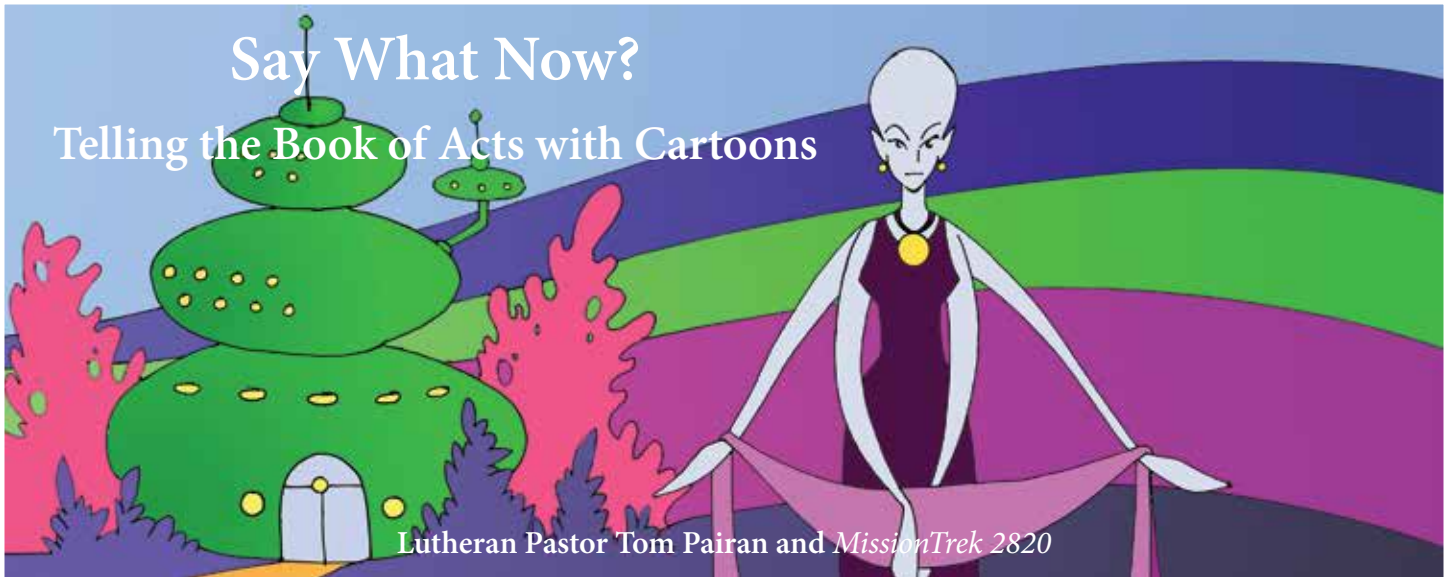
Thank You!

Photo by Quano Al on Unsplash



Say What Now?

Telling the Book of Acts with Cartoons



Lutheran Pastor Tom Pairan and *MissionTrek 2820*

Like a lot of us, I grew up watching super-hero cartoons on Saturday morning television. That eventually led to reading comic books. And that eventually led to writing

and drawing comics. As a teenager, I drew a series of comics about my family, a series of super-hero parody comics, and a series about a zombie crab.

Though I grew up in the church, I did not begin reading the Bible regularly until I was in college. One of my first classes was “The Art of Biblical Narrative,” which focused



on the stories of the Bible. As an art major, I was able to include an independent study in my schedule. That's when I chose to draw my first comic strip adaptation of a biblical story: Jesus and the man possessed by a "legion" of demons.

These days I'm working on *Mission Trek 2820*. Most of the characters

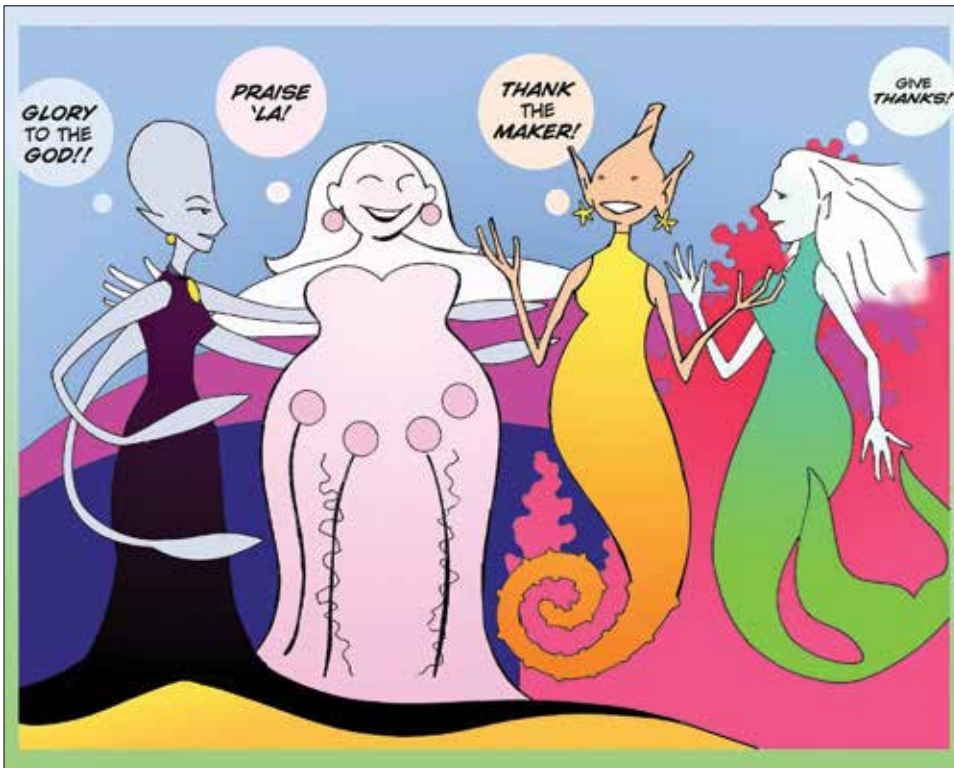
year 2820. It tells the futuristic adventures of a "space missionary" and his crew. Some of the outer space settings mesh well with the story of Acts. For example, having a group called the "Areopagus" works just as well on Mars (named after the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Ares) as it does in Athens, Greece.

Facebook, or other means. Readers of this article can be the first to access my new website for the project: missiontrek2820.weebly.com. As new episodes are completed, they will be posted online.

For those who are not of the Christian faith, I hope my comics will include a message of the grace of God given in Jesus Christ to the world.

For those who are familiar with the stories of Acts, my hope is that the spin I put on the story will excite and inspire the readers and help them hear anew the amazing adventures of the Apostle Paul as he shares the good news.

It's my way of encouraging everyone to learn and tell biblical stories!



have a New Testament inspiration. Captain Pol Apostolos is, of course, based on the Apostle Paul. The premise and visuals for the comic draw heavily on the *Star Trek* television series. Readers may also notice nods to Walt Disney theme park concepts and animated features, Greek mythology, and television shows ranging from *The Simpsons* to *The View*.

MissionTrek 2820 is a retelling of the Acts of the Apostles set in the

Other settings, like the underwater world of the Lydea character, necessitate creative storytelling. (How does one baptize a person who lives underwater?) Much of the dialog has a familiar ring, however. Many of the characters speak lines lifted from Paul's speeches in Acts, or the Pauline Epistles, or the Pastoral Letters.

Keeping with the futuristic theme, I distribute *MissionTrek 2820* digitally, whether through PowerPoint,

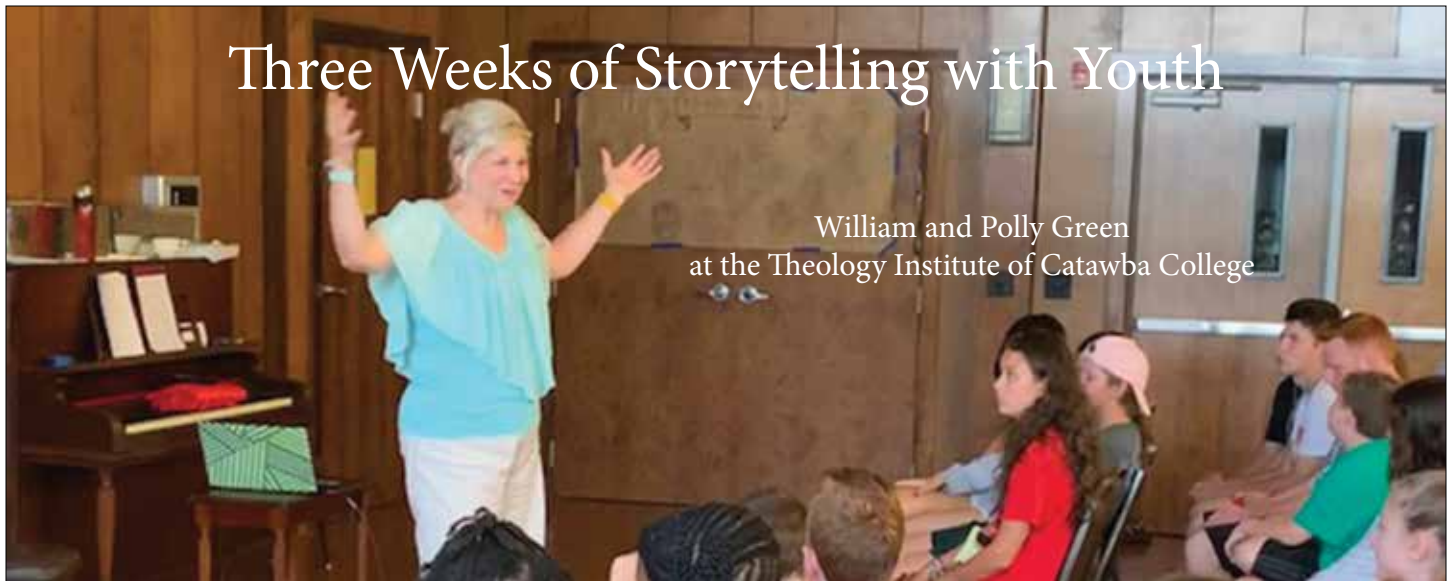
Tom Pairan is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, currently serving a congregation in Chillicothe, Ohio. He is husband to Anne and father to son Jon and triplets Nick, Noelle, and Abbie.



In his spare time, he illustrates projects on a freelance and "just for fun" basis, including "*MissionTrek 2820*," a futuristic, comic book retelling of the Acts of the Apostles.

View *MissionTrek 2820* online at <http://missiontrek2820.weebly.com>

Three Weeks of Storytelling with Youth



William and Polly Green
at the Theology Institute of Catawba College

The Theology Institute at Catawba College was made possible through a Lilly Foundation grant (\$600,000), which encourages youth to do theological reflection and to explore contemporary moral issues. A key component of the Theology Institute is to help persons discover their call vocationally

“Discover” is a part of the program of the Theology Institute. Through a series of week-long camps, middle and high school youth are encouraged to discover God in new ways, to discover who they are as children of God, to discover how to live out their faith, and to discover what they are called to do vocationally. The Institute reaches formative youth before college to encourage them to do theological reflection and to explore moral issues. The 2019 Institute was held at the Black Lake Retreat Center in Asheboro, North Carolina.

Each year there is a different theme.

The theme for the three-week 2019 summer program was “STORY.”

After 41 years of pastoral ministry, I began looking for ways to share biblical storytelling in my retire-



ment. I contacted my alma mater, Catawba College, and Chaplain Ken Clapp put me in touch with

Shannon Axtel-Martin, the Director of the Theology Institute at Catawba College. Shannon invited me to come to campus and to do some biblical storytelling for faculty, students, and guests of the college. Afterwards, she invited Polly and me to do a storytelling workshop for the “Discover” series of summer youth camps sponsored by the college.

The ages of the youth are from 11-18. There is no cost for youth to attend Discover, which is completely funded through the Lilly Foundation grant.

Catawba College has a rich heritage with the Disciples of Christ Church. The Disciples of Christ Church in North Carolina and the college send out publicity for the Discover program and information on how you can apply. Each youth must have a mentor to apply for the camp. (If a

youth does not have a mentor, one can be provided by the college.)

An emphasis is placed on racial and denominational diversity. Youth from all denominations or no faith background at all are welcome. Various economic backgrounds are also represented. The college makes a special effort to spark an interest for higher education, and especially for pursuing a college degree, during the program.



creative with their gestures. We recorded several of the performances. We also invited them to share the journaling they had done during the week.

At the end of our workshop we gave a blessing over each youth, saying, “You are beloved, made in the image of God; live your story!”

The youth’s re-

sponses to our workshop were enlightening:

The counselors for the Discover camp were college students at Catawba, chosen for their gifts and experiences working with youth.

My gifted wife Polly and I introduced youth to the art of biblical storytelling and what it means to learn and tell biblical stories by heart. We used the MULL method of learning by heart. I told the Creation story, Genesis 1-2:4a. Polly and I guided the youth to learn Day One of the creation story. Here’s how we did that:

They learned to tell it by working in small groups, repeating it back and forth to one another.

By keeping a journal, the youth were able to process personal reflections on the story of creation and find their own link to the story.

We also asked them to look up at the sky at night and then read Psalm 8 and record their experi-

ence. They were encouraged to start each day by saying Day One of the creation story.

For theological reflection, we focused on “What does it mean to be made in the image of God?” We gave them three questions to discuss: 1) How does understanding what it means to be made in the image of God change the way you see yourself? 2) How does understanding what it means to be made in the image of God change how you see others who are different from you? 3) How does understanding what it means to be made in the image of God change the way you perceive the rest of creation?

Polly shared her art work centered around creation and how she uses art to learn and tell biblical stories. The youth were given the opportunity to do art with mixed media as they reflected on their experience of God during their time at camp.

The youth were given an opportunity to perform Day One of the creation story. Many chose to tell it together as a group. They were very

“We never knew you could do this with the stories in the Bible.”

“This was fun!”

“It really made the story come alive!”

“Can you do this as a career?”

“I want to do more of this!”

“I’m going to tell my pastor about this!”

Polly and I shared with them about the Network of Biblical Storytellers International and encouraged them to continue to learn and tell biblical stories by heart.

One of the counselors, a recent graduate of Catawba, is going to Wake Forest Divinity School in the fall, and he asked me to be his mentor and to help him become a biblical storyteller.

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Several of the youth talked with me about the ministry and what it is like. Several of the youth talked with Polly about art and how they could continue to use it learning biblical stories.

It was a most rewarding experience to be around these young people, so eager to learn, curious, fun loving, and so open about sharing their lives and experiences with us. We were honored to feel so appreciated and needed by the youth. On many occasions, they sought us out to share their personal stories and experiences. We felt like we were on Holy ground when they confided some of their deepest needs, questions, problems, and longings for purpose and meaning to us.

Rev. Dr. William Green is a retired UM pastor and graduate of Catawba College. He holds an M.Div. from Duke Divinity School and a D.Min. from Emory University. Now Director of Ministry Development with Disciple Bible Outreach Ministries, a nationwide prison ministry, he is pursuing opportunities for biblical storytelling.

Polly Jo Green is a mixed media artist (pollyjogreen.com) and the founder of "Heart's Desire Art Journey" retreats. She has a BA in Psychology from West Virginia University and has been a marketing professional in the architectural, engineering, and construction industry.

They are longtime members of NBSI.



"Given this approach uses gestures, is more expressive, and is more active in nature as opposed to simply reading scripture, it helps students think more about the meaning of the scripture they are trying to cover. It also lends itself quite nicely to persons of that age-range given their difficulty concentrating."

*Johnathon Boles,
Assistant Director, Lily Center for
Vocation and Values*

*Reflections from
Shannon Axtel-Martin,
Director of the Theology Institute at Catawba College*

From my first exposure to biblical storytelling with Rev. Dr. Green, the first word I think of is "captivated." Not only was I captivated and thrilled to learn about the depth and meaning biblical storytelling could add to our Discover program this summer, but I got to witness our students (middle, high school, and college age!) repeatedly be captivated by hearing the Gospel in a new way.

In planning any session with our young people, it is always in the back of my mind that I don't know for sure how they will respond. It turns out this is not something I needed to be concerned about with biblical storytelling. I witnessed our students take up the challenge of learning a passage by heart, work together to practice, get out of their comfort zones learning gestures, and channel their creativity into learning and telling biblical stories. It was a wonder to see.

One of our missions with Discover is to "explore sacred scriptures and theological traditions in-depth." This was such a powerful way to go way back to the tradition of scripture as a story that was told rather than read, and engage on a deeper level in a different way than we had done before. My hope is that many of our youth will continue to learn biblical stories by heart and even share biblical storytelling with their home congregations.

The Academy for Biblical Storytelling

An NBSI Certification Program with Dr. Tracy Radosevic

The purpose of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, International (NBSI) Academy for Biblical Storytelling (ABS) is to provide a process of support and training in both the performance and teaching of biblical stories that encourages individual styles as well as an appreciation for the stories in the form they've been "traditioned" to us. In helping students to achieve a significant degree of skill and experience in these two areas, the ultimate goal is to send qualified participants out into the world to function as certified biblical storytellers and, consequently, commended resource persons able to offer services on behalf of the NBSI in a way that aids the Network in fulfilling its mission: to encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories.

The Academy is overseen by a dean, Dr. Tracy Radosevic and also utilizes the unique talents of a team of mentors from within the NBSI community—those who have undertaken advanced degrees, evidenced a depth of knowledge from training and independent study, demonstrated significant experience in teaching and leading workshops, distinguished themselves as performers, and shown themselves to have attained a level of spiritual awareness through the discipline of biblical storytelling.

The word "Academy" was chosen intentionally; this program is rather rigorous, requiring the reading of a variety of books, the writing of several papers, and a multitude of

recorded performances (including one 60-minute concert and one 90-minute workshop). ABS is a "school without walls," meaning that the majority of the work is done from home with most assignments and subsequent feedback sent via email and online instruction and meetings hosted through a



"As far as I know, this is the only program of its kind out there: a quality educational experience providing a thorough grounding in the art of telling scripture by heart. No need to uproot and move elsewhere. A great bargain compared to the usual cost of higher-level education courses. ABS is the way."

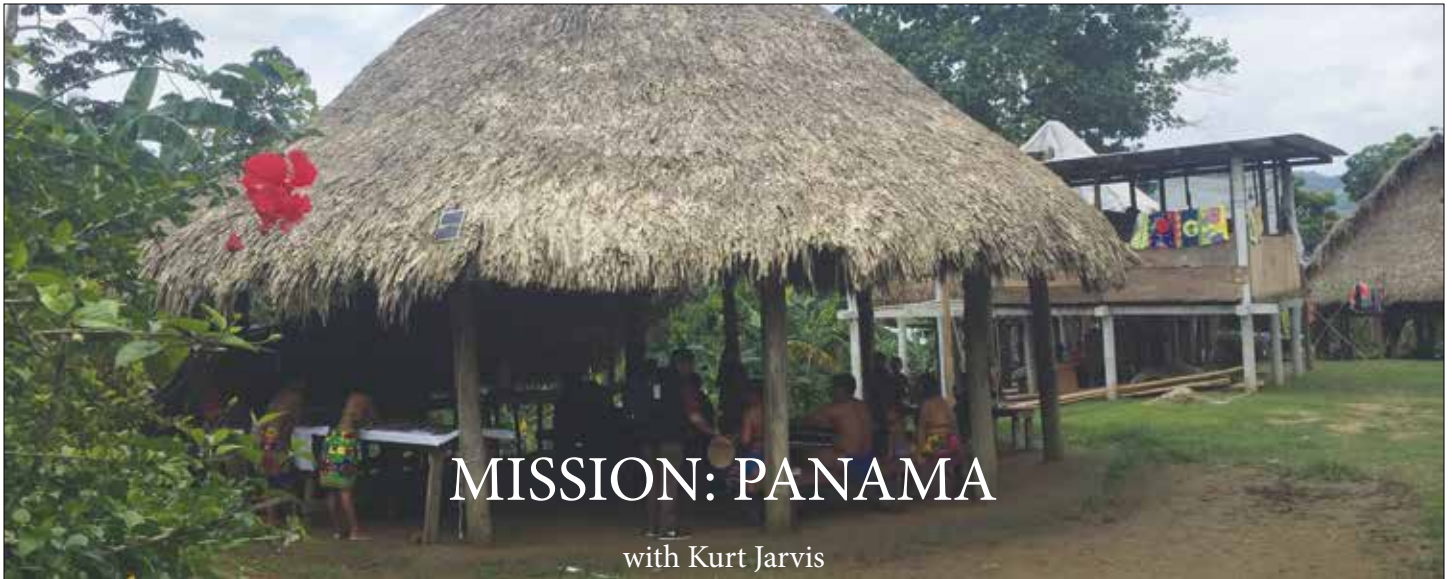
Mei-Lin Po (NBSI BSC 2009)

teleconferencing service like Zoom. Two face-to-face meetings are also required: the summer Festival Gathering of NBSI (as well as the immediate 3 days afterwards), and a late-fall, two-night meeting, the location of which is determined by the geographic location of that year's students. The Academy's structure and M.O. work best with students who are self-motivated, disciplined, committed and open to constructive criticism.

The Academy offers two levels of certification: a one-year (January to December of even-numbered years) program culminating with the granting of a Biblical Storytelling Certificate (BSC), and an optional second-year program (January to December of odd-numbered years) concluding with a Master of Biblical Storytelling Certificate (MBSC). This opportunity is by invitation and may be extended to BSC graduates after they've had a few years to get more experience and build up their repertoires.

Candidates in each program commit, among other things, to a process of reading, course work, coaching, reflection, repertoire development, and pedagogy training.

The Basic Certification program is held during even years (2020 is a BSC year). Applications close in November of the odd year before the program. For more information on requirements and equipment needed for this virtual classroom program, visit www.nbsint.org/academy-for-biblical-storytelling/.



MISSION: PANAMA

with Kurt Jarvis

Several years ago, through a ministry colleague, I was invited to do some biblical storytelling training in Panama with a missionary couple, Bonita and Gino Sanchez, who had founded an annual church ministry conference.

The missionaries were so intrigued with biblical storytelling that they have since had me return now on six projects. The couple has organized several youth camps, VBS programs and ministry conferences where I and other colleagues have led and taught in these programs. Through the Sanchezs' we have been invited to conduct storytelling workshops in Guatemala in 2020 and return to Panama for a ministry conference in 2021.

This year our workshops were at a ministry conference where over the period of two days we trained over 75 teachers,

pastors and other workers in the biblical storytelling methods.

The training impact has the potential to reach nearly 4,000 children and youth as well as hundreds of adults across Panama where the

storytelling techniques will also be used.

Chronological Bible storytelling was the emphasis of the various workshops, but creative and interactive telling methods were the

hands-on workshop activities. These telling techniques included: freeze frame drama, pantomime, audience repeated phrases, narrative telling in a line, story drama scenes, and numerous other techniques that I teach.

This was primarily a Spanish language conference, so an excellent experienced translator was involved. After more than 40 international training and telling experiences we have learned how to use translators effectively and not overwhelm them!

Following story pre-



sentations we often have an open session that connects the story principles to current life settings. Delving into the story's cultural backgrounds and placing them alongside the people's cultural backgrounds and implications enriches the telling and workshop experience.

Anyone contemplating an international mission trip would be wise to consider the risks involved. The first and biggest danger in international missions is not using common sense. The second is going without having some knowledge of the culture. And third is going without an indigenous connection *inside* the country where you are going. There are some countries I

would not travel to. That said, international experiences are some of the most rewarding you can have. An international mission expands one's global knowledge of people and cultures. And know this: The Bible Story itself can pierce any heart at any age level anywhere in the world. There is no other power as effective as God's Word and its stories to reveal truth and change lives for eternity.

A former member of the NBSI Board of Directors, Kurt Jarvis and his wife, Judy, have been involved in Bible teaching ministry and missions for over 60 years and they continue in international biblical storytelling and teaching. Kurt has conducted Bible storytelling programs and training in over 45 countries.



Healing a United Methodist Congregation through Biblical Storytelling²¹



by Rev. Diane McGehee

In 2019, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church (UMC) voted to support the ongoing exclusion of LGBTQAI+ persons from full participation in the life of the church. Pursuant to that vote, the United Methodist Church reaffirmed its earlier discriminatory practices of labeling LGBTQAI+ persons as “incompatible” with Christian teaching, denying same gender persons the right to get married in UMC buildings or have UM clergy officiate at their weddings, and refusing ordination to gifted, Spirit-anointed LGBTQAI+ persons. It also voted to punish and push out of the church anyone who disagrees with the discriminatory theology of exclusion that supported the vote.

I am the senior pastor of Bering Memorial UMC, one of only two reconciling congregations in the Texas Annual Conference. To say that I and my congregation, the majority of whom are LGBTQAI+ and life-long Methodist Christians, were devastated by the recent actions of the General Conference does not even begin to describe the pain and anger we felt and continue to feel now.

How does a pastor help not only

her congregation but also members of the LGBTQAI+ community, family and allies, and reconciling folks in other United Methodist congregations heal and claim their identity as beloved children of God and to find healing in a context of harm, rejection, and exclusion? By telling the Gospel story! It is in the story of God’s redemptive work in the world that the possibility of life and that more abundant emerges. It is in the telling, hearing, digesting, and internalizing of that life-giving, life-affirming, life-celebrating story that a yet unimagined future can begin to emerge: A future of new community formed through deliverance; formed during ongoing oppression; emerging out of devastating loss and impossibility.

Faced with an uncertain future in the aftermath of General Conference, the members of Bering Memorial have started telling each other the following three biblical stories of Exodus, Exile and Em-maus as we seek to heal and discern a way forward.

EXODUS (Exodus 12:31-42)

“Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said. 32 Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring

a blessing on me too!”

The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for they said, “We shall all be dead.” 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. 35 The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so, they plundered the Egyptians.

37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38 A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. 39 They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

40 The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. 41 At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. 42 That was for the LORD a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations.”

EXILE (Jeremiah 29:4-14)

Thus, says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. 8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners

who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, [a] 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the LORD.

10 For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

EMMAUS (Luke 24:13-35)

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28 As they came near the village to which they

were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So, he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

All three stories point to a possible future with hope: futures written together by God and God's people during painful and confusing circumstances. All three stories



Photo by Heather Mount on Unsplash

remind us that God is at work in our midst bringing resurrection in whatever circumstance we find ourselves: needing to exit for a new home; digging deep to find our lives even in the midst of exile; or finding an unimaginable possibility emerge before our very eyes out of gut-wrenching heartache and loss.

At Bering we are sitting with these stories in our individual devotional times; learning them and telling them to each other as prayer partners and in small groups; journaling what we are hearing; and shar-

ing with one another and with God the heartache, hurt, anger, confusion, hope, or whatever arises each time we listen to or tell the stories again. We are letting the stories narrate us even as we narrate them. We are expecting our story to become interwoven with one or more of these stories to create God's new story for us in this moment.

Which story will be the story of the United Methodist Church? Will the denomination fracture? Will a new Methodism or something totally new emerge? We don't yet know. And we are coming to a place where that is okay. The stories give us a place to reside while we wait on God's direction. They give us a foundation on which to plant our feet, as well as a laboratory in which to explore new possibilities. The stories remind us that whatever happens, God has never abandoned God's people and will not start doing so now! God's story is still being created and we get to be a part of its creation and telling!

Rev. Diane McGehee, M. Div., J.D. is Senior Pastor of Bering Memorial UMC where ALL are welcome and celebrated, no exceptions. She is an advocate for social justice for all who need to know they are loved by God and of infinite worth just as they are. Diane graduated from Harvard Law School and the Perkins School of Theology. She founded and directs the non-profit Together in Hope which works with children and families living in poverty in the Philippines and in Ethiopia.



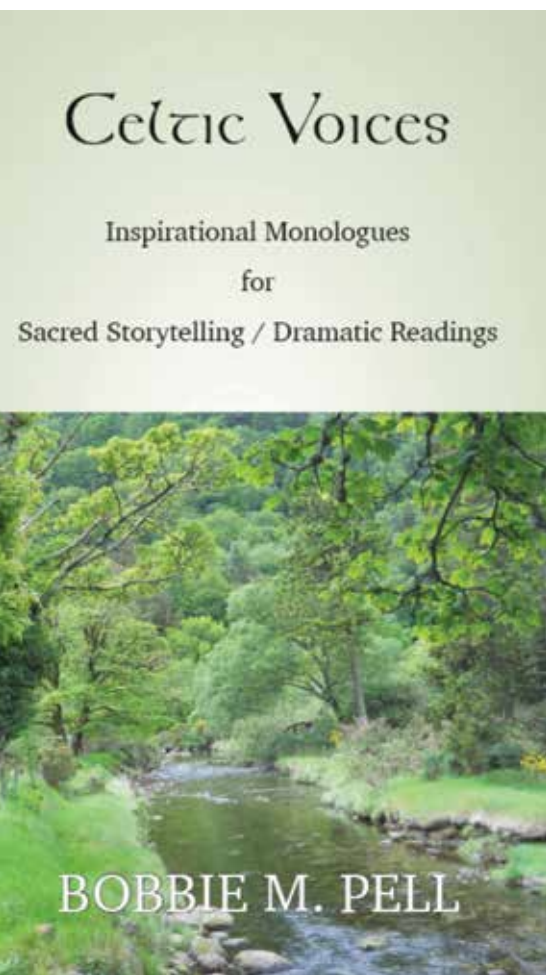
NBSI Author Spotlight

NBSI Member Bobbie Pell and *Celtic Voices*

As a storyteller, I hold a lifelong fascination with the values, magic, and wonders of folk and faerie tales. Imagine my surprise to locate a spiritual framework already in place around such episodes found in the lives of the Celtic saints! Having visited many of the monastic sites where these amazing Christian leaders lived and worked, I was profoundly impressed by their faithfulness, diligence, and humility. During my research, strong personal ties arose between me and these men/women of the past. I realized the potential of reaching others, inspired by the stories of these faithful people, whose spiritual lives were enriched as they made their own heart connections.

From a historical perspective, the growth of the early Celtic Church ranged between 5th-12th centuries (“The Golden Age”). Ironically, this system of faith paralleled the period known as “The Dark Ages” in the following regions of Europe: England, Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, Wales, and Isle of Man. Monastic life encouraged friendship between the early saints, valued artistic expression (Illuminated Book Arts, poetry, use of the imagination), and learned Divine teachings inspired by stories and dreams. Possible roots in Christianity came from either the Apostles Paul and Peter (in their

travels) or Joseph of Arimathea, believed to have visited Glastonbury. As the flower of Christianity bloomed, monastic sites dotted hillsides and remote villages, bringing the love of Christ to pagan followers. Their acceptance of the scriptures and the doctrines of faith allowed believers to embrace



these new practices while honoring their previous ones, believing the True God was All-Encompassing, vast enough to hold all. I began this journey with Mary Magdalene (my “Biblical Bonus” section”) for a sacred feminine service at my local Episcopal Church. When I

considered my earlier interest in the lives of Celtic Saints and considered writing this book, my priest encouraged me to use the liturgical Anglican calendar for possible options. I chose the number 7 as a holy number blending the “4” natural elements [earth, air, water, and fire] with “3” representing the Trinity as well as mind/body/spirit. I wanted a variety of experiences, genders, and characteristics for a unified presentation.

The purpose of this book is to open the pathway for professional storytellers, performers, lay worship leaders, and ministers/parish priests to share the stories of these Celtic spiritual leaders of the past. The monologues have biographical information, legends, amazing miracles, wondrous encounters, and angelic support. Each monologue runs about 15-20 minutes. They may be performed (without notes) or shared as Dramatic Readings (with notes) for worship, special events, and festivals.

For over 30 years, Bobbie Pell has shared her love of story with audiences of all ages through written works, storytelling performances, and workshops. Her specialty area, Celtic folklore and traditions, now expands from faerie lore into the realms of Celtic spirituality. Bobbie’s books are available from her website: bobbiepell.com/store.html

SIMONE ROLLINGS

Vice President

I am a native Marylander and the oldest child of my parents. I'm a sister and the proud aunt of a pre-teen nephew. Love to travel! One of my travel goals is to visit 50 states by the age of 50. Time is ticking...I have 16 more states to visit and less than three years to go.

My B.A. is in Art History and I have a Masters of Business Administration. I've worked in public service for 21 years, government acquisition and contracting 14 years, and talent management 13 years. Prior to that, I worked in the private sector, including my family's business since the age of nine (smile).

On December 31, 2010, God called me to storytelling and I surrendered my vision and plans to God and asked for His direction. God answered my prayers and told me to focus on storytelling.

Realizing I needed to connect with a storytelling community, I learned about Network of Biblical Storytellers, International as a result of an internet search. With faith, I attended the 2011 Festival Gathering and returned home energized and encouraged. After sharing my experience with my pastor, she asked me to tell the scriptures on the first

Sunday in Advent. Her receptiveness held me accountable to what God had directed me to do. From that point forward, I've attended subsequent Festival Gatherings and received invaluable experiences and information for a fruitful storytelling journey.

Learning and sharing biblical stories strengthened my faith and I pray that God uses me to encourage and strengthen the faith jour-

ney of others by teaching them the discipline of learning and telling biblical stories. Biblical storytelling takes listeners on a journey and connects the listener's heart, soul, and mind. It has the power to be transformational for both the teller and listener. Through my work with NBSI, I've learned that biblical storytelling can be an instrument of reconcilia-

tion, restoration, healing, community-building, peace, encouragement, joy, and comfort. I've also found that the effectiveness of biblical storytelling depends upon my preparation, which includes prayer and study of the biblical scriptures. This has become an important part of my own spiritual formation. NBSI has been an invaluable resource for my biblical storytelling. I leave the Festival each year energized to strengthen the faith journey of others through biblical storytelling..

I would like to see NBSI demonstrate how to integrate the telling of biblical stories in Bible study or small groups, which would further develop and grow followers of Christ. I think we can broaden our reach by collaborating with other ministries and uncon-

ventional partners to increase the awareness of biblical storytelling in both traditional and nontraditional venues.

I hope we will employ innovative strategies to introduce biblical storytelling to a wider range of individuals (regardless of age or geographic location) through online learning experiences while maintaining connection with the traditional NBSI community.



Simone lighting up the Festival Gathering with her laughter.



Remembering the 2019 International Fe



Smiling Faces at Registration!



Sharing Stories Together



Keynote Presenter D





Festival Gathering of Biblical Storytelling



Dr. Kathy Maxwell



Fellowship and Laughter



And More Stories and More Stories!



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Tell Biblical Stories
and Meet Biblical Storytellers
from Around the Country
and the World!

2020 Festival Gathering
of Biblical Storytelling

July 29 - August 1, 2020 in Dayton, Ohio
Register online at www.nbsint.org

Pre-Conference Event July 28:
"A Widows Tale" Retreat

BenWhite@Unsplash.com

