

Counselor's Corner: Narrative Therapy

by the Rev. Stephen Lander, LMFT, MA.LP, Westminster Counseling Center

612.332.7743 ext. 235

slander@wpc-mpls.org

www.ewestminster.org/counseling.asp

Our life together in the Church is often spent talking about and telling stories. The stories that we tell are especially important to those who advocate for an understanding of the world through the postmodern lens of Narrative Theology & Narrative Therapy. This way of seeing the world is concerned with who controls the story (or Narrative). The most influential story is usually told from the point of view of the dominant culture. But there are other stories, or "local knowledges" most often told by those who are less privileged.

If we use an example from family life to help us better understand this concept, we would watch for who it is in the family that seems to have the dominant narrative. In other words, whose story, or version of the story, tends to carry the most weight? Usually it is the parents. Any of you who live around adolescents know something about the tension that arises when the dominant narrative of family life is challenged by the emerging identity of a young adult.

The stories we tell about our lives can be very important tools in developing ways for us to talk to one another about the experiences of our faith journeys, and/or the problems we encounter in family life. In her new book, *Speaking of Faith*, the writer, Krista Tippett, talks about a significant point in her life when she was asked to write about the history of the Ecumenical Institute at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville. She says that during the course of the interviews for the project, her life was changed when she learned from the Benedictines about what they called the "first-person" approach to talking about spirituality.

Here is how she puts it, "The first person approach to religious speech is essentially about humanizing doctrine. It disallows abstractions about God, even as it takes account

of the fact that it is hard, and so intimate to speak about this aspect of life directly." Tippett says that talking about God comes about, "not through what we think, but through who we are, through the story of our lives". (pg. 132)

Coming to understand these ideas of Narrative Theology, Tippett says, gave her, "the notion that everyone has relevant observations to make about the nature of God and ultimate things—that the raw material of our lives is the stuff of which we construct our sensibility of meaning and purpose in this life, of how the divine intersects or interacts with our lives, of what it means to be human."

She sums up the influences of Narrative Theology on her work as follows: "There is a profound difference between hearing someone say this is the truth, and hearing someone say, this is my truth. You can disagree with another person's opinions; you can disagree with his doctrines; you can't disagree with his experience."

Likewise, in Pastoral Counseling we are concerned about the stories people tell, and who gets to tell them—in other words, whose story is it, really. We often use the tools of Narrative Therapy to help people develop a bigger picture of the life experiences that surround a given problem. Problems often tend to take on a life of their own and can become a major focus of a person's experience. The telling of one's whole story is a way to expand the discourse and to place problems in a context which includes a broader understanding of the experiences that make up our lives—including our experiences of the Divine!



Stephen Lander

Switzerland & France: Pilgrimage to our Reformed Roots

By Katherine S. Michael, Associate Pastor

A window in the balcony of Westminster features the Reformers of the 16th Century who gave birth to what we as Presbyterians claim as our theological tradition today. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and John Knox, are those whom we regard as the 16th Century founders of Protestantism and our Presbyterian tradition.

As Westminster celebrates its 150th Anniversary, it is appropriate that we touch base with our theological roots with a trip to Switzerland and France to learn about Zwingli in Zurich, Calvin in Geneva, and others who were instrumental in fashioning what we call the Reformed Tradition.

We travel April 28-May 9, 2008, for what will be a beautiful, educational, and inspiring trip into the heart of our theological roots. We will also touch base with local

Reformed congregations and the international church to which we are connected.

Brochures are available on the literature tables at the church. Pick one up and plan to join us on this pilgrimage of

grace. Watch for details about an information meeting on October 7, 11:30AM, Meisel Rm. Contact me with questions, 612.332.3421, or kmichael@wpc-mpls.org.

Movie of the Month

Sunday, Sept. 30, 11:45AM

Meisel Room

Mardi Gras: Made in China

This powerful film follows the 'bead trail' from China to Bourbon Street, informing those who make and wear the Mardi Gras beads of the personal stories on the opposite end of the trail. Don't miss it!