Narrative Pastoral Counseling: A Ministry for the Catholic Parish

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INTRODUCTION

What does narrative and pastoral counseling have in common? After reading this thesis I hope the reader will answer much more than might be expected. Stories have gathered people together for thousands of years. The Gospel stories have been the bedrock of Christian life throughout the history of Christianity. So why join story with pastoral counseling? The simplest answer is that humans are walking breathing narratives. Often times these human stories need to be healed or rewritten in an environment that integrates psychology with theology. Hence the need for a narrative pastoral counseling approach.

Narrative has been gathering steam over the past few years in the respective fields of psychology and theology. A quick review of current journals and recent publications seems to prove the point that the topic of narrative is being examined for its usefulness and power. All the more reason for pastoral counselors to get actively involved in the research and discovery of narrative’s use in counseling.

This narrative momentum has been felt in the family therapy field with heads turning toward the constructivist theory. This theory helps the family to understand the life story they inhabit. With direction from the therapist, the family explores methods of rewriting their family story when it lacks the life-giving qualities it desires.

This same focus on narrative has also provided valuable insight within the areas of spirituality and theology. Individuals and communities are continually seeking a more intimate relationship with God. Christian seekers are eager to find meaningful ways to cultivate their prayer life when the well runs dry. A conscious examination of a
community's narrative can be the solution to bringing new life in the midst of apparent conflicts and division.

Christians throughout history have continually struggled to live out the Gospel story of Jesus. The stories of Jesus have the power to move people beyond the ordinary. Yet at times these stories seem unreachable and beyond our abilities. But Jesus challenged his followers to become fully alive by living out the Gospel message of life. Often times this Gospel message becomes overburdened in the hearts of believers and spirituality becomes confusing and rigid. These moments can steal the spirit of life from the believer, but they can also open opportunities for change. This is the paradox of Christian living, because what seems impossible is possible. These moments can be times to explore the possibilities of forming new life-giving narratives. Pastoral counselors attuned to the narratives of a community can listen for themes of defeat and offer themes of victory.

This thesis is an exploration into the power of narrative for the field of pastoral counseling. My thesis is that narrative pastoral counseling can offer the Catholic pastoral counselor a valuable vantage point while working within a Catholic parish community. I do not consider this narrative approach to parish pastoral counseling as a univocal model or blueprint for successful pastoral counseling. Rather, it is based on the principle of narrative as a critical element to human living. Narrative is so much a part of humanity that individuals have the power to transform it when it no longer brings life. Humans experience life and in the gathering of these experiences create meaning through narrative. Humans go about living by shaping their experiences into stories. These core stories then become the pathways of daily living; they become the lenses we see the world with. Without these core stories our lives would be random, formless, wanderings.

What follows beyond these introductory words are three chapters that build upon each other as they present narrative pastoral counseling. Chapter One, is a
detailed description of narrative. Beginning with real life stories within a Catholic community, I explain how life stories suffering from anger and confusion can limit and close off potential in an individual's quest for the fullness of life. From these stories I detail the unique relationship of narrative with human experience. This section describes how our selfhood is active in utilizing narrative to make meaning from our endless daily experiences.

Continuing from this foundation, I explain how narrative teams up with meaning to organize our experience. This section explores how our meaning-making begins early within child development and continues on through life. Building beyond this meaning-making function, I describe how a story can take root in a life and protect and guide it. This section details how a story can direct a person with a distinct life-theme. This section also describes how story influences individual moral development and how it plays a role in the critical developmental stage of trust and mistrust.

Further on in Chapter One, I present an example of what happens when a life story becomes uprooted. This sections explains how the uprooting can be a blessing in disguise. These moments can bring transformation or conversion.

Finally, at the end of Chapter One I offer two perspectives useful for the pastoral counselor when working with people in a parish context. I offer narrative therapy and narrative theology as theories to utilize in the process of narrative pastoral counseling.

In Chapter Two I focus on the dynamics of individual narrative when it is joined together with a communal narrative. In particular, I focus my examination of narrative on the current Catholic communal narrative. I begin by describing the dynamics of a communal narrative as it strives to live out the message of Jesus. Within this narrative I explain how the community has to struggle in two dimensions. First, the community must be true to its own story, and second it must strive to be true to the Gospel story. Needless to say this two fold task is not easy to live out.
From the dynamics of a communal narrative I describe how I perceive the contemporary Catholic communal narrative. I attempt to show how the current situation in the church is causing certain communal narratives to limit life, rather than provide possibilities for new life.

I conclude this second chapter by offering four communal narratives that I believe can offer individual members within the Church options for growth in faith and freedom.

In the final chapter I present the ministry of pastoral counseling as a unique ministry for the contemporary Catholic parish community. I begin by detailing the distinctive characteristics of pastoral counseling as it has evolved over the past few decades. From this description I explain how pastoral counseling has become a specialized form of ministry for the Catholic community. With the advent of Vatican II and the expansion of the ministry of pastoral care I describe the growth of pastoral counseling.

Finally, I present parish pastoral counseling as a valuable ministerial role for the future of the church. I outline how the parish must be viewed as a system of related parts. For the parish of the future to be complete it must have a pastoral counselor to attend to the needs of the community. Utilizing the ministry of pastoral counseling the fullness of the parish community will experience the fullness of what pastoral care means. Most importantly, the pastoral counselor can listen to the story of the community and assist the community in cultivating a richer life-giving narrative that is faithful to the life of Christ.

I offer this approach as an important part of the ongoing development of the ministry of pastoral counseling in the Catholic Church. As the Church approaches the beginning of a new century pastoral counselors will provide a much needed ministry for the parish community.
CHAPTER I

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE

It seems as if wherever people go they are faced with a story. No matter who we are or what we do, we encounter story consistently in daily life. As a matter of fact it is safe to argue that humans are a story, a living story walking the earth waiting to be told, retold, and maybe even rewritten to fit a particular time and place. Story and narrative is what I will be exploring in this first chapter. First I will begin with real stories, from real lives. These stories will come from people trapped and stuck in dead-end narratives. I will begin in the Catholic parish and illustrate how the power of people’s stories can leave individuals and couples searching for new stories. From these initial introductory stories of the parish, I will explain the power of narrative as it infiltrates all of human experience. In this section, I will detail the power of narrative as it shapes and forms human consciousness. To further argue for the power of narrative, I will also describe how narrative shapes people’s construction of meaning in their lives. Here I will explain how developmentally, the human experiences life in a distinctly narrative fashion. I will also demonstrate how this “meaning-making” person functions day to day in the world.

Story emerges out of human meaning and becomes the vehicle of communicating meaning for the person. For all individuals the story is a mixture of life-giving hope and life-denying sinfulness. The goal of the individual is to discover a personal story that integrates the many forces of freedom and sinfulness. Yet our stories are not simply moving between the extremes of life-giving freedom and life-
denying sinfulness. Our stories are diverse and complex constructions that have
developed throughout our lives. When the story is life-giving it brings hope and
challenges us to grow. When the story is life-denying and lifeless it can trap us and
cause us to search endlessly for freedom. I will describe how a story can take root in
human lives and direct all of action. I will also explain how story has the power to
morally direct and restrict the individual. From this moral stance, I will further
describe how our personal story can be uprooted in our lives and leave us lost and
confused. The uprooting can be devastating and leave us angry and frightened. This
section will explain the power of story when it is rooted or self-defining, and when it is
uprooted or self-distorting.

Narrative is so much a part of humanity that individuals have the power to
transform narrative when it no longer brings life. After establishing the all
encompassing nature of narrative as it is tied to the human, I will offer two
perspectives within the fields of theology and psychology that are helpful to the
pastoral counselor when assisting those seeking a change in their individual narratives.
Although there are many perspectives and theories within theology and psychology, I
have chosen narrative therapy and narrative theology because of their transformative
power to bring a reinterpretation and revision of daily experience. Finally, I will
conclude this first chapter by describing how these two disciplines can be valuable tools
of the trade for a pastoral counselor in the Catholic parish. I believe the parish is the
most powerful place for this ministry to occur because the parish is the place where
individual Christians attempt to live out the story of Christ. The parish gathers the
community together and in the gathering each Christian strives to tell their story and
hear the community’s story. The parish intermingles individual faith stories so that an
integration of communal faith and personal faith can occur.
Resentment was the presenting problem as the couple began to describe why they have chosen to come for counseling. The first piece of the multifaceted puzzle takes form and it is articulated and perceived as resentment. The couple continue to unfold their story and I listen to how each part is shaped and positioned to convey a theme or a meaning. Listen now to their story as it unfolds: "My resentment reached a boiling point on the day we received a call from Rick's father telling us that Rick's mother had taken a turn for the worse. I just felt so insignificant when Rick ordered me to stay with the kids as he ran out the door to the hospital. I wanted to go with him. I wanted to go with him to the hospital. I wanted to support him during this crisis. Instead I was excluded and ordered to stay at home. I wanted to be at my husband's side as he faced the end of his mother's life. I was pushed away and rejected by Rick and that still hurts today. I cannot forgive Rick for what he did to me that day, I resent him for what he chose to do."

What began as resentment suddenly became so much more when told through the experience of a woman wanting to be near her husband. As I listened further, I heard similar stories from Sara, that spoke of other experiences of unforgiving rejection and pain. It wasn't long before a life theme began to emerge and I was experiencing the process of a woman narrating the stories that made up her experience. As she communicated her feelings of resentment and pain, I began to search further for the roots of her resentment. I was beginning to hear a narrative theme filled with pain.

Procrastination was another presenting problem as I listened to why another couple had chosen to seek marriage counseling. This time listen to John: "We have to stop the procrastination, that's all there is to it. She doesn't take care of herself, the doctor has told her to take care of herself but she doesn't want to follow doctor's orders. Last week, I had had enough, so I left, I couldn't take it anymore. Until
something changes, I'm not coming back. We are living apart now and things have cooled down a little. I agreed to try counseling, I figure it is our only chance before divorce."

Again a story with multiple levels of meaning and history comes to the parish counseling office with the couple. In this experience a husband labels his experience of frustration in his marriage as procrastination. He has chosen counseling because when he reflected on his experience he saw no way out. For some reason, probably wrapped up around his failure to find alternatives, he chose to embody his experience in a narrative form that he would title: "procrastination". For his wife, a contrasting story would emerge from her personal experience of their marriage. She would not chose procrastination as the theme of her story. She would rather label her experiences within their marriage as disrespect. If she gathered up her daily experiences of marriage in a comprehensive narrative theme it would represent the sadness she was feeling.

Disruption was yet another presenting problem as a twelve year old boy sat with his mother during the first session of counseling. His mother would begin, "We are here because Jim has been acting up in the classroom. His teachers say he is disruptive in class and this causes problems for the teacher and the other students. He throws paper at other kids and talks out of turn during math class." I ask Jim what he thinks about all this, he replies with disinterest. "I just like to get the teacher's attention. I'm bored in class and so I do things that will make school more interesting."

In this gathering of experiences of classroom chaos and early adolescent behavior the theme of disruption has been enshrined as the problem. The problem is clearly defined as disruption by Jim in the classroom, but the reason for the disruption is something completely different. Lurking behind the disruption of Jim's classroom behavior is the anger and sadness of his father's unavailability. The constant drinking sessions of a father out of control have been labeled by Jim's teacher in the narrative.
theme of misconduct. Through the interpretation of facts surrounding Jim's behavior in the classroom, a story of disruption and misconduct is introduced as the problem. In this case the story is interpreted by Jim's teacher, but if Jim were to interpret the story he would use sadness, loss, and anger as the theme. It is the work of a pastoral counselor and Jim to settle on an interpretation to the story before any progress or change can occur. Ultimately, Jim has to name his own narrative theme surrounding his behavior. Jim has to communicate, maybe not in words, his sadness concerning the loss his father, his family, and his home to alcoholism.

Resentment, procrastination, disruption, these are three labels placed on lives to describe a struggle. These are three interpretations of experiences that are causing pain and confusion for an adolescent and two couples. These three separate situations are each unique to very specific life circumstances and experiences. These five people are attempting to understand what all humans try to understand in their daily lives, they are seeking understanding of their experiences. They are interpreting their experiences so that they can meaningfully express who they are. They are interpreting their lives through a story. Think for a moment about the gathering of experiences and meaningful moments that make up the telling of a life story. How does the human person choose from all the experiences of life an underlying theme or a personal unique quality of the self? Think for a moment about meeting someone for the first time, as they ask the question, "Tell me who you are?" What we choose to include and exclude tells us so much about who we are and where we are going. The question itself gives an individual the opportunity to tell another a very intimate story, a very unique narrative.

These are three distinct stories that have come forth from one Catholic parish community. The community itself has a story of its own, that enables all its members to be identified as a part of the community. For this particular community the members share a belief in one God, who took human form and chose to live among
us. This community is united under the faith that this God came to bring the fullness of life. This gift of life was given totally out of love. This community believes that all who come to the water of God's love will be quenched by its gifts of faith, hope, and love. The members of this community profess this faith and strive to live according to the Gospel story.

This community is a parish community of the Roman Catholic Church in the year 1995. The community, in a physical sense, is a geographical area on a map, with boundaries and dividing lines of membership. Yet this community aside from its physical properties is a collection of stories gathering together seeking a greater good. It is a collection of life narratives rooted in a faith that longs to bring grace and freedom to all the world. It is a community that struggles with living and seeks healing when pain is great. In essence, the community is a tiny microcosm of the larger Catholic Church moving into the future.

**Narrative And Human Experience**

My initial experience of illness was a series of disconnected shocks, and my first instinct was to try to bring it under control by turning it into a narrative. Always in emergencies we invent narratives. We describe what is happening, as if to confine the catastrophe. When people heard that I was ill, they inundated me with stories of their own illnesses, as well as the cases of friends. Storytelling seems to be a natural reaction to illness. People bleed stories, and I've become a blood bank of them. . . . The patient has to start by treating his illness not as a disaster, an occasion for depression or panic, but as a narrative, a story. Stories are antibodies against illness and pain. When various doctors shoved scopes up my urethral canal, I found that it helped a lot when they gave me a narrative of what they were doing. Their talking translated or humanized the procedure. It prepared, strengthened, and somehow
consoled me. Anything is better than an awful silent suffering. (Broyard, 1992, p.19-20)

These are the words of a man faced with the imminent end of his life due to cancer. In the midst of the pain and suffering he turned to narrative to transform his pain and to console his heart. Something within his heart and head, even during the last days of his life gravitated toward narrative. As he states, “stories were antibodies,” fighting the cancer that ate away his insides. A number of reactions and choices were at hand for Broyard. As he explained his experience, narrative seemed to emerge as a soothing consolation. Something within his thoughts or perhaps past experience directed him in the midst of pain toward story.

We all know of people who have been capable of transforming their experiences into a neat and tidy story. Think of the young child who arrives home after her first day away from mommy and daddy. As the young girl sits up in her chair she begins to tell all about what she has experienced at her first day of pre-school. Although her experiences don’t always make perfect sense, it is clear that she has joined experiences together to form a framework of her day. These experiences stood out for her as important and noteworthy. She experienced something of significant value to her in the day’s experiences at school. This young child moves from a random rambling of the day’s experiences to a narrative framework that carries meaning and understanding. The meaning might be fuzzy and blurry, but still it is gathered like apples in a basket to be referenced at some later point in her future.

What has been described above in the young child’s experience is exciting and yet ordinary. Exciting because this human ability to gather experiences into stories is a universal quality shared by everyone. Ordinary because we often simply take it for granted, like the air in the atmosphere. Yet narrative seems to sneak up on us at different times in our lives. As we have seen above, it has provided hope for a dying man suffering from cancer. It has also popped up in the mind of a child after a day at
school away from home. Narrative seems to be similar to the presence of God. God is always present to us, our difficult task is asking ourselves if we are truly present to God.

Before we dig deeper into what this narrative power can provide for pastoral counselors in the Catholic parish, it will serve us well to investigate fully this concept of narrative and how it affects the human person. First of all it is important to lay out the differences of meaning in the words narrative and story. Narrative simply stated, is the account of a series of events. As humans move about in the world they encounter events that usually have a beginning, a middle, and an end. A narrative is an account of those experiences. In reference to the couple mentioned earlier, a clear string of events took the form of a narrative. The series of events for their marriage was being labeled as resentment. So what seems so unusual about labeling our experience as narrative?

Twenty four years ago a religious philosopher, Steven Crites wrote an essay titled: "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in his informative article he states that, our individual consciousness has a form all its own. He states that if our consciousness was blank and formless we would fail to live from day to day comprehending our individual reality. All of our experiences would be random and meaningless. But Crites argues that our consciousness is not a formless mass similar to leaves decaying on the forest floor. Rather, our consciousness is molded and shaped by the endless experiences of our lives. He states that human experience is in a rudimentary way narrative. That who we are as humans is inextricably linked to the concept of narrative. Our consciousness is active and busy day in and day out putting our experiences into narrative. Knowing and believing that this characteristic of humanity is a reality, suddenly opens up endless possibilities for all peoples to exchange and transform their unique experiences. To put it simply, the humanistic universal narrative quality of experience gives all of humanity license to tell a story. (Crites, 1971)
So if the meaning of narrative is the account of a series of events, then story naturally is a connected narrative of important events. A story is an account of an event that has been experienced by a person. Stories can be fictional or they can be non-fictional. Stories can be "made-up" or they can teach about real life. As described above, a man dying of cancer was flooded with stories from others who had similar experiences with illness. People tell others stories as Broyard stated when emergencies break out. Think of the tenants of a burning building; or the victims of a bombing; or the buzz of stories after an inspirational speech. Whenever a crowd of people gather, whether it is an emergency or a celebration the presence and transformative power of story will also be experienced. All of these experiences of story show us that we don’t have to go very far to hear stories transforming human lives.

As individuals have understood the power of story in the midst of emergencies, they have also experienced the beginnings of the power of story in a child. Every adult has enjoyed the experience of watching children as they sit riveted to their chairs when a story is being read to them. The child follows the form of the narrative and is captivated by the adventure and excitement of the events. This experience of observing children listening to a story is evidence enough for the narrative quality of human experience. The fascinating fact of this point is that the thirst for story does not end at childhood, but continues throughout our lives during all phases of human development. If this seems difficult to believe enter into the world of the elderly and listen to the richness of stories they tell of their lives. Not only do the elderly tell stories to recall, but they also recount their stories to hold their self-understanding together. They tell stories so that their personal identities might remain strong, when their physical bodies are failing (Randall, 1986). Story is a universal characteristic of humanity touching all people from childhood all the way to old age. Story is a sort of birthright of the human person.
Humans experience life as narrative. A story puts together experiences so that a comprehensive understanding might guide life. This exercise of the mind called narrative is exciting and holds great opportunities for all who discover its riches. Yet the richness of narrative can be elusive and ordinary. Is the human capable of being aware of its power? How does meaning enter into the narrative quality of human experience?

**Narrative And Meaning: What The Story Reveals**

Stories not only transmit information; they focus, concentrate and direct affective energy; they shape convictions which underlie action as well as the choices and decisions that make us who we are. Reality is complex for we live in many interwoven stories. With hindsight and reflection it is sometimes possible to untangle dominant forces among the stories that lead in our lives. (King, 1982, p.18)

Stories are not simple, in fact, they are complex and loaded with a multitude of meaning, emotion, and rationality. As has been stated above, we all share in the narrative birthright of experience, but after that initial universality we begin to see our stories sprouting out in all directions like feathers on the back of a peacock. The way our stories sprout and grow is unique to who we are and where we live as individuals. We construct our stories under the influence of many factors. Each narrative is culturally, morally, politically, and socially bound. No two people have the same story. Probably the only element we can claim as universal to all human beings is that we all experience life “narratively,” and that we all symbolically construct meaning in the form of stories. Beyond this base similarity a richness of diversity exists that can only be described as multi-layered and elaborate.

An illustration of the complexity of story can be experienced if one returns to the beginning of this chapter when I began to describe the presence of stories emerging
out of the community. Each story had a presenting problem with layers of meaning underlying the initial articulation. The presenting problem could be compared to the introduction of a story about to be told. As the story unfolds the meanings spring forth. When pastoral counselors listen closely they hear the beginnings of an engineering process or the construction of a personal life theme.

To look more closely at meaning and how it functions in our experience it is helpful to observe it from a developmental perspective. Robert Kegan, a Harvard educator and Developmental Psychologist, (Kegan, 1982) explains meaning when he discusses the person as a “progressive motion engaged in giving itself a new form.” He bases his developmental perspective in two major “ideas”. One, that human beings constitute or construct reality (constructivism); and two, “that organic systems evolve through eras according to regular principles of stability and change” (developmentalism). Starting from these two principles, Kegan asserts that human beings construct their reality, rather than having reality happen to them. He illustrates this principle by focusing on the realm of human perception. Every human being at some point in their lives realize that various people can see the same thing in different ways. Just about everyone can identify this when they walk through the doors of their local modern art museum. One look at a Mark Rothko painting can evoke multiple answers to the question, “What do you see?” Many answers will follow and it will become clear that all people with different perceptions will respond uniquely. Yet, Kegan wants to call attention to another question of human perception, and that is, “I wonder whether people see the same thing in different ways or whether they see different things different ways?” All of these questions lead to the conclusion that we as humans are constantly involved in the process of “meaning-making.” The human being organizes constantly through experience, feeling, thought, and perception and places all in a meaning-making context. All of our experiences are null and void without an underlying concept. We are constantly going about our daily affairs through a complex
process of meaning-making. “And the most fundamental thing we do with what happens to us is organize it. We literally make sense. Human being is the composing of meaning, including, of course, the occasional inability to compose meaning, which we often experience as the loss of our own composure.”

As Kegan states above, when we go through the process of meaning-making we “organize what happens to us,” this is a very active human quality. Without organizing our experience, our thinking process would ooze around like lava from an erupting volcano. The lava does not organize the flow it simply moves where it desires. Yet humans are not volcanoes, they are individuals attempting to organize experiences, and one way of organizing them is through individual narratives and stories. My purpose in this chapter is to explore how narrative and story is utilized by the human to function as meaning-making. I am trying to answer the question, “Why does the human being choose story to organize experience?” Perhaps the story holds the human being together, similar to the man at the beginning of the chapter who was dying of cancer. Perhaps when new experiences don’t fit the way the person has organized meaning, a new meaning has to be created. Perhaps a new story has to be created.

To further develop an understanding of meaning-making and how it functions in the human, it would be fruitful to explore new developments in the field of family therapy. Constructivism is a relatively new theory within the field that carries the greatest promise for my narrative purposes. I believe in this theory as a useful tool in helping others to rewrite narratives that are failing to bring life. Although I subscribe to this theory, I do not believe it can solve every situation.

Constructivism is based on the premise “that reality does not exist as a “world out there” but, instead, is a mental construction of the observer.” (Nichols & Schwartz, 1991) What this means for constructivist’s therapists is that when a family enters the counseling room the focus should rest on what the family has identified as
the particular set of assumptions about other people, experiences, and problems. The focus should not be on the interactive patterns of the family, but rather what assumptions or meanings the family has chosen to attach to their problems. This focus on meaning is a clear shift in the family therapy field from an objectivity of family functioning and techniques. The field shifted when some began to challenge the philosophical roots of family therapy. Some believed that a pragmatic, technique approach left many families simply adjusting behavior but not questioning preconceptions of a family. Constructivism was a shift away from viewing families as machines to viewing them as "meaning-makers." Obviously this shift in the field brought a totally unique focus to family therapy. Suddenly the therapist was concerned with the family's actions of observing. Perhaps, for example, the family would enter a museum of modern art and would be asked by the therapist to articulate what they were observing. The therapist would then ask what thoughts or preconceptions were operating for the individuals in the family as they observed the artwork. If the therapist simply assumed that the preconceptions of the family were immaterial then obviously the focus of therapy would remain in the realm of techniques and pattern changes.

This shift has created tremendous waves in the family therapy field, but it has also developed an interest in the theories of meaning and belief systems. Now the focus of therapy can search and examine the perspective or world view of the family. This has incredible implications for pastoral counseling in the Catholic parish. Now, the pastoral counselor can no longer simply listen to the world view of a family or a couple. This change in focus can also spark the telling of the theology of the family. Instead of simply focusing on fractured spiritualities and what techniques could be used to repair a family's prayer life, the pastoral counselor can ask the family to describe how they construct meaning around their spirituality. If the family's preconceptions of spirituality are old lifeless dusty prayer books and pious practices then obviously new meanings could be introduced to the family. This intervention into the family's
spirituality is a prime example of the intimate connection of a family's spirituality with their psychology. This is also the area where pastoral counselors are not only questioners of meaning, but also prophets, offering disturbing words of new life. If a pastoral counselor can offer alternative meanings to family spirituality and psychology then authentic pastoral counseling is occurring.

So where does all this talk of constructivism leave us when we speak of narrative? We can find the answer if we once again return to meaning-making and the person. The individual as mentioned above is bound culturally, politically, socially, and relationally. Within any particular culture or family, certain interpretive devices or images are utilized to convey meaning. In other words, as the human experiences life, culture and family communicate certain customs and beliefs. These beliefs are often imparted through the use of narratives and stories. Think for a moment about the meaning attached to the earth for the Native American. The customs of the Native American peoples has always held that the person is intimately connected to the earth. In a certain sense, the Native American sees the self and earth as one, joined through creation. The world is experienced as whole and sacred. A distinct meaning is conveyed by the culture of the Native American people. This culture carries meaning for the individual members. In this culture meaning-making is distinct and specific for the Native American.

Yet human beings do not blindly accept and receive meanings from the culture. The individual goes through a process of interpretations so that the meanings fit our unique experience. The individual and the culture perform a dance of meaning and the new meaning form is created in the unique individual. This is the beauty of individual experience and meaning, each human being holds a distinct narrative. This is the universal capacity of the human to make meaning and tell the story. This is the beauty of meaning, but there is also a danger and this is where constructivism focuses its therapeutic energies. Constructivism examines patterns of thinking by examining
cognitive processes in human thinking. This theory explores thoughts and behaviors, but doesn't focus on the unconscious or psychodynamic forces of selfhood. "Once learned these behavior patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths (Hall, 1981, p.42). Thus, we frequently mistake what is in fact cultural for something innate and immutable. We only come to realize our mistake when we become immersed in another culture or when someone or some event calls our meaning into question." (Saleebey, 1994, p. 352)

When meaning takes hold in our lives, it has the power to direct us. Suddenly our meanings inform our behavior and we act the way we do because we believe it will benefit us. Over time our choices are all governed by a distinct system of internal meaning. But what occurs when our meaning no longer adequately reflects our understanding? What happens when our meaning becomes second nature and we simply take action without thinking? Over time we begin to realize that our meaning is not serving us and we look for change. We have to deconstruct our meaning and our choices and our behaviors. Meaning becomes confusing and frustrating and questions flood our daily experience.

Over time individuals begin to hear themselves reciting a consistent story. Stories are the vehicles used by people, groups, and cultures to live. The theory of constructivism asserts that if this story is not working or if it is causing pain then a new story has to be constructed. Reframing life experience is one of the tools used by the pastoral counselor in helping the individual or family transform meaning so that life can become liberating. Story and its power contains the key to change when meaning-making is no longer serving the individual. But what makes story such a powerful force for the person? I will now take a look at how a story takes root and grows from experience and meaning. What follows is a description of how story takes root in human life and carries individuals through the multitude of experiences.
How The Story Takes Root

There is much speculation about why storytelling has such a permanent place in the human condition. The obvious reasons may be the most profound. Stories are both fascinating and fun. To experience a “good” story is to be pulled out of ourselves, transposed into the world of the story, undergo its trials and thrills, and be returned to our own reality with renewed appreciation. This ability to totally participate, this “ease of flight” into the world of the story is often associated with childhood. . . . Deeper reasons for the persistence of storytelling have been suggested. Narrative, it is claimed, is the linguistic form which is most appropriate to two of the fundamental components of the human condition - time and freedom. Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end and so capture the temporal dimension of human existence. They are also concerned about people in the midst of the temporal crunch, fashioning futures out of pasts in the present that demands decisions. It has been argued that all stories which are quintessentially human revolve around freedom and destiny and the dynamic relationship between choice and consequence. Since this interrelated pattern of time and freedom is an inescapable component of human existence, the storytelling process which reflects it is a permanent part of human culture. (Shea, 1982, p. 23-24)

Time and freedom, are two fundamental components of the human condition. As a human life is conceived it initiates the process of storytelling. The new creation is a new story with storytelling qualities. In a similar fashion, the new life enters into a story already underway. The story already occurring is as diverse as the experiences that cover the world. A child enters the culture of Africa and is nurtured in the cultural heritage of age old traditions. Another new life begins in Arizona, where a Native
American baby is praised and honored by the elders of the community. The two children enter a story inside another story. One child is Native American, yet born in a country where a tragic story has claimed the lives of many people. The Native American baby is a new story about to begin. In that story the child will be faced with the family’s story, the culture’s story, the land’s story, and the people’s future story. In a very graphic way, the Native American child is confronted with stories of the past in the moment of the present. For the African child the story will be unique to the country and customs of the particular African tribal group. Meanings and stories will be told of the child to the elders in the village and the child will be named according to strict village practices and traditions. The traditions and cultural practices will be embedded within the stories of the African country. As the child grows it will fashion the future with a distinct individual story. Past, present and future will converge and the child will tell a new story.

New life is a profound illustration of stories developing in time and freedom. The mind of the child is shaped by the stories of the culture and the family. As a father reads to his son a bedtime story, the young boy’s imagination comes alive through the telling of the drama. The boy experiences his thoughts expanding as his world explodes. The boy can walk with the characters inside the story as they search for a hidden treasure or a clue to a mystery. The story is a journey or moment of discovery that reveals more than meets the young boy’s eye. As the story concludes and the boy drifts off to sleep he may dream of other places or other stories. The boy may find himself lingering in his power of imagination and wonder. The boy may even realize that he himself has a story that will be lived out. As the boy walks to school the following day he begins to understand that his experiences of living are revealing a story. He comprehends that these experiences can be described and he knows this because soon after school he details to his parents the events of his day at school. He descriptively details the day’s events in a narrative. After a year or two the family has
developed a unique family ritual, they tell the story of their day. They recreate for each other what experiences impacted their lives through the day. Over time the family gathers for a reunion and the picnic tables and benches are filled with stories. Time has transported this family into the future and they are freely sharing the fruits of the passing of time in the form of story. This is the experience of one family, yet this is the experience of all families. All families experience story and live their stories. Some stories are inspiring and some are painful, but all are stories.

If a story is to truly take root in a life it has to stand the test of time, it has to have the durability of time and meaning. When I listen to others tell their story I listen for descriptions that have infiltrated the total existence of the person. I carefully listen to the themes that emerge from the story. I focus on the beginning, middle, and end of the story and listen for a theme.

If one returns to the beginning of the discussion of the stories that have emerged from the parish community, he/she will hear very distinct themes that have led to the construction of the stories. As a pastoral counselor I strive to hear the themes within the stories of couples and families. The themes or the melodies of the stories have played under the day to day existence of the individuals. For the young couple struggling with their marital relationship, a melody of resentment has played day in and day out for them. The melody has taken root in their minds and in their existence. A very simple way to understand this concept of a story taking root is to recall the times we have heard a song early in the morning and can’t get the melody out of our heads throughout the day. As we walk to the bus, or as we drink our morning coffee, or when we sit down in front of our computer, each experience reminds us of the melody. So it is also true in relation to our stories taking root or being constructed, they inform in an all encompassing way our experience and shape our meaning. As stated above, the story becomes the instrument we use to play the melody.
Jean Darby Clift (1992) the current president of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, writes about this concept of stories taking root when she discusses core images of the self. She describes core images as "stories or dramas that reveal to us the way in which we are living our lives and our view of the world. They refer to stories that reveal patterns of what it means to be human." Once we realize and understand these stories we are guided by, we can understand how they control and direct our lives. For the young couple faced with problems too great to comprehend, it may take time to see the meanings and patterns that have directed their story in a particular way. It may take time for them to individually understand the consequences of their choices. The personal meanings the couple has associated with resentment and fear might reveal a greater meaning that could break open their marital experience and cause the roots of their stories to be transplanted to new ground.

Clift further states that childhood fictional stories can often be clues for us as we search for our individual core images. Childhood stories and fables carry a great deal of meaning and coherence for all our lives, while also illuminating patterns of behavior that direct how we make choices or how we acquire knowledge. Most often these early stories form our belief systems and decision-making abilities. It is interesting when adults are asked to describe what childhood story carried the most meaning for them, very often the story fits the individual person's life-theme. This is an excellent example of story carrying human experience through time.

Moral Development and Story

Another revealing exploration around the concept of stories taking hold of us can best be described by examining the dynamics of individual moral development. Most humans seem to enter into existence with an innate ability to ask the question, "What should I do?" In other words, most humans strive to discern what is right and what is wrong. If we stop for a moment and ask ourselves how do individuals proceed
in a process of making moral choices we usually will hear a story told by a person. From this basis in story, it seems that humans communicate important events and significant moral issues in narrative form.

We develop morally as people not through abstract concepts or moral principles, but rather through narrative thought that presents real people living real lives of struggle and hope. Paul Vitz (1990) a professor of psychology argues for this approach to moral development by illustrating how narrative thought is qualitatively different from abstract propositional or scientific thinking. He begins by critiquing Kohlberg’s cognitive development model. "Kohlberg’s model assumes that the moral life is primarily the result of the development of specific, often abstract moral principles that are capable of being expressed in verbal form." Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development assumes that a human person passes through six stages of cognitive reasoning by growing in rational competence. The individual goes through a rational exercise that seeks higher cognitive reasoning. The process is a sort of weeding and pruning of growth. When individual reasoning is confronted with a conflict the rational being experiences a disequilibrium of stages. One way to move beyond the conflict is an increase in moral reasoning. If the individual is unable to move further ahead a stagnation occurs. "Each stage embodies a qualitatively different kind of moral reasoning and represents a form of thinking about morality independent of any moral content."

I agree with Vitz that this process of moral reasoning is not conducive to a narrative approach to moral growth. If most of an individual’s development happens through a process of rationality and emotionality, this strictly rational approach will not function well in developing human persons. Moral growth is more than simply running through a rational exercise. The heart of the individual must play as strong a part in the development of individual morality. If it doesn’t the integration of emotions and thinking becomes fractured and abused. This dynamic of fully integrating emotion with
rationality has been at the heart of the discussion between men and women as they
discern their communition with each other.

After reviewing Kohlberg's stages it is apparent that this abstract cognitive
approach to morality is almost diametrically opposed to a narrative model of moral
development. Vitz proposes an alternative to the cognitive approach to morality by
stressing the importance of narrative thought. Vitz chooses four different authors who
specialize in narrative thought to illustrate his argument.

Jerome Bruner, a psychologist who specializes in narrative psychology, shows
how thought can be characterized by two qualitatively different modes. One is
propositional thinking and the other is narrative thinking. Propositional thinking
consists of "logical argumentation aimed at convincing one of some abstract, context­
independent truth; it is logico-scientific and paradigmatic: that is, this mode of thought
aims at theoretical, formal interpretation, a general abstract paradigm for gaining
understanding. By contrast, narrative thought presents concrete human and
interpersonal situations in order to demonstrate their particular validity. It is a
description of reality, and it is a way of seeing that aims at verisimilitude. The story
mode requires imagination, an understanding of human intention, and an appreciation
of the particulars of time and place." (Vitz, 1990, p. 710)

From this first illustration by Bruner, it seems clear that we strive in morality
to find individual direction by our particular situations. Yet if we base our choices on a
purely rational set of beliefs to discern an answer we will come up disappointed and
trapped. In the other extreme of our moral decision-making we might place all our
choices in our unique situation and end up in complete relativism. If we ended up in
this position our hands would be tied and we would call all decisions moments of
guessing. So where might insight be found in this apparent confusion? Most likely, the
answer can be approached much more humanly if we keep in mind the context of our
situations. This is the transformative power of narrative thought. The specifics of the
people involved, where these people live, and what their intentions are. All of these factors of character, plot, and setting, are essential to the narrative. People live and make decisions around other people. People also share their reasons and actions so that others will understand who they are as individuals. When people tell others about their intentions and goals they are telling a narrative, they are describing the core images of their lives. These images are not abstract principles, but rather stories with deep roots. These stories are qualitatively different from logical conclusions based in rationality. This led Bruner to affirm that a child's moral development is interpersonal, emotional, and imagistic. This placed Kohlberg's model of mental growth in a distant impersonal and abstract place. Narrative thought affirms the particular situation of individual lives and when honored by the pastoral counselor will free the couple to grow beyond their fear and pain. This perspective will enhance connection as opposed to a rational checklist which will only keep couples stuck in their defenses.

Vitz in a desire to strengthen his argument chose to further explore narrative through the work of Theodore Sarbin. Sarbin is a social psychologist, who argues for the relevance of story or narrative as a metaphor for understanding human conduct. Sarbin proposed that a person's life could be interpreted as a story. "The story or narrative model allows psychology to make contact with the historical context of individuals and with the insights into human social behavior found in stories, drama, literature, and history... emphasis was placed on narrative as an organizing principle for human action." (Vitz, 1990, p. 711)

Once again we see the roots of story affecting human action and conduct. The story takes root and guides the forces of human social behavior. One very powerful example of this is the scriptural literature known as the parable. In the parable the informal instruction is guiding the message. The parables are "destabilizing, disorienting inversions of expectations and conventional standards. . . A parable is, in this analysis, an assault on the accepted conventions, including the social, economic, and
mythic structures that people build for their own comfort and security" (McFague, 1987). When the structures people build their security on is based in a faulty story then the roots of the story must change. Parables have the ability to shake the roots of meaning so that new stories can begin to grow.

Another aspect of Vitz's work focuses on the work of Endel Tulving. Tulving is a psychologist who has studied the differences in human memory. He believes that there are two distinct forms of memory. Semantic memory, which is connected to the knowledge of the world and is independent of the person's identity, and episodic memory, which focuses on the "recording and subsequent retrieval of memories of personal happenings and doings." The qualitative differences in these distinct forms of memory seem to focus on semantic being conceptual and episodic being narrative and organized in time. The semantic is centered on the universe and consists of facts and concepts. These memory contents are focused around what one knows. Episodic refers to the self and revolve around events and episodes. The content of episodic memory focuses on something that is remembered. Each of these distinctions serves the belief that narrative affects our memory. We organize our memories in concepts and in events.

All of these examples point to the power of narrative's impact in moral development. Our internal self-constructions concerning morality seem to all carry a narrative focus. When we image moral dilemmas we think about little stories or certain scenarios that have brought meaning to our moral reasoning. We use these narratives to ground our existence and deepen our roots. We invite others into our world and we do this through narrative and story. Through that invitation the mixing of imaginations can change moral perspectives. Moral sensibilities can be modified and narratives can be challenged deep within the human's heart (O'Connell, 1991). These are turning points for many people struggling with a new narrative. These are the moments of "core images" shifting and uprooting.
Narrative's Role In The Stage Of Trust And Mistrust

Up to this point in my argument for the presence of story taking root I have discussed three distinct areas: childhood, core images, and moral development. Each of these areas have shown how powerful story can be in forming who we are and what we do and how we perceive the world. Yet these three issues do not give us the full picture of story's powerful roots. A consistent theme that has been emphasized is that narrative provides the human being with a foundation. It is from the roots of the story that the individual lives and develops. There is a certain need for narrative because of its soothing quality. For the young child, listening to the same story over and over provides a certain regularity and dependability to early life. The child desires this "favorite regular story" because it is predictable and soothing. The child doesn't desire the story because it is relaxing, but rather because the child understands the way the story informs. In the early stages of life a child struggles with trusting its environment and the people in it. The child grabs onto the story, but the story will have to change as the child develops. A great deal of predictability and dependability need to go into early child development. But a great deal of fluidity and flexibility must also be developing in the thoughts of the child. Bedtime stories give a child the capacity to imagine its world.

Over time these stories form a "core image" which was discussed previously. The story or narrative that begins to be formed by the child serves as a guide to moral living. If the story changes children will sometimes cry and wonders why it didn't turn out the way they thought it would. For a young child this experience can be extremely traumatic, because the predictable has become unpredictable. It is in this moment that the child is faced with the rudimentary psychological experience of trust and mistrust. From this stage of development the child begins the life long process of risking, hoping, believing, and facing challenge. If this trust develops well the child will connect trust in the past with faith about the future. In other words the child as an adult will have a
greater aptitude to hearing a new story when the old story no longer brings freedom or growth. Once faith in the future becomes established for the child, the “favorite regular story” no longer contains the power it was once given by the child. The transformation occurs when the child realizes that a new story can establish an even deeper foundation or trust. Now the child’s level of trust is fluid and flexible and able to endure the uncertainty of the future.

Considering all the factors that engage the child in a trusting tug of war, it seems apparent that changing the old story to a new one is not a simple process. Change in any area of life brings suffering and pain. Predictability often can be soothing, but it can also leave us in a place of total withdrawal toward living a fully human life. Every human is called to fullness of life, but the catch to this fullness is that it carries suffering and ambiguity. This segment of the human condition has numerous examples to illustrate the power of change. One very graphic and real passage comes from the recent Broadway show titled, *Angels in America*. In the play a character asks another the question, “How do people change?” The question is asked in the context of the world facing the AIDS crisis. The author of the play has obviously experienced the violence of the deadly disease and fills his characters with passionate feeling for what the disease has done. The author struggles with the meaning of the disease and wonders about the role of God. The character responds, “Well it has something to do with God so it’s not very nice. God splits the skin with a jagged thumbnail from throat to belly and then plunges a huge filthy hand in, he grabs hold of your bloody tubes and they slip to evade his grasp but he squeezes hard, he insists, he pulls and pulls till all your innards are yanked out and the pain! We can’t even talk about that. And then he stuffs them back, dirty, tangled and torn. It’s up to you to do the stitching. . . . Then you get up. And walk around. . . Just mangled guts pretending. . . That’s how people change” (Kushner, 1992). This description of change comes from Kushner’s reflection on the change that has been felt by those suffering from AIDS. He describes how our very insides are torn and
tangled. Change is not easy and we realize that it is never easy. It is never something we can prepare to experience. When it comes, and it always does, it carries a force so great that it has the power to insist that we live a new way.

Change as we have seen above can have profound effects on our personal narratives. We can say with certainty that change is inevitable to the human condition. We all change, some for the better and some for the worse. Yet change carries a price that is difficult to pay. All of these experiences have an impact on our personal narratives or our "core images." As we move through life our ground is often shaken so that change can bring new growth. In a way our roots at times have to be pulled up out of the ground and planted in new soil where we can truly flourish and trust. In essence, our stories have to change if they no longer bring life. We must rewrite the story. In this next section I will explore what occurs when individual narratives are uprooted and become travelers searching for new ground.

**When The Story Becomes Uprooted**

Returning again to the original stories that began this exploration into narrative it is important to recall the couple that sought marriage counseling because of procrastination. As the couple entered the office at the parish pastoral counseling office one element of their relationship was clear. The tension in their relationship was pulling them apart. They labelled their experiences as hopeless and frustrating, and they were seeing little or no alternatives to changing their marriage. They were stuck in an old story that failed to make sense for them. They were confused and perplexed by their inability to adjust to their frustrations. Plain and simple they could not move out of their personal narratives of what they perceived their marriage to be. Their story had become uprooted and they were desperate to find new ground or any ground so that their story could find a stable place.
What these two people experience is similar to what all people experience when faced with the facts of a story not bringing fullness of life. Sam Keen, author and psychologist names these moments as opportunities to reinvent.

Personal myths become constricting and boring unless they’re examined and revised from time to time. We need to reinvent ourselves continually, weaving, new themes into our life narratives, remembering our past, revising our future, reauthorizing the myth by which we live. (Keen, 1988, p. 43)

A new creation must emerge out of the old story that no longer calls us to life. This new creation must be fashioned and shaped uniquely and individually. We must come to our new personal narratives by intimately coming into contact with our humanity. We must be able to fully understand our experience so that we can interpret our world authentically. Coming to this point is not easy and it often causes great pain and struggle, but without this struggle our personal stories will never take root. We will remain wanderers in the desert carrying our old lifeless narratives longing for water and a new narrative.

Moments of struggle can be painful experiences of loneliness and sadness. These are the dark nights of the soul for many seeking transformation. Spence (1982) when describing the psychoanalytic process speaks about these times as important to change or the breaking through of a new narrative. “Psychoanalysis is not really the archeological search for the historical or scientific truths of the patient’s past. Instead, successful psychoanalysis in actual practice involves the active construction of a story about the patient’s past that allows him or her to make narrative sense out of life.” If the patient can enter into the process of constructing the past story, then they can move beyond it to a new narrative. Some understanding of why the old narrative doesn’t bring life has to be comprehended by the person before they can create a new narrative.
One way to explain this moment of uprooting is by examining what happens to the individual when one is faced with a new experience that doesn't fit into their particular personal narrative. Think for a moment about an experience that triggered a radical shift in the day to day events of your life. Perhaps a death of a close friend, or the divorce of a parent. Suddenly everything that was held together by a narrative of living no longer was able to withstand this pressure. The story of your life began to unravel before your eyes. Every segment of your existence was transformed. In a moment of panic you attempt to hold your narrative together, but it fails you over and over again. Soon you deny that this experience is really happening. You decide to live on under the impression that the crisis is temporary. Then one day you wake up, look in the mirror, and realize that you are kidding yourself. Not only kidding yourself, you are cheating yourself and others out of life. Furthermore, you are denying your very self, and you are denying God because your self is a gift from God. Some conversion is called for by the individual. The new experiences just don't fit our personal narratives and we know we have to do something.

This is the moment of truth, or the moment when Keen's reinventing process has to begin. These are the liminal experiences or threshold moments when the lowest amount necessary to produce an effect becomes available. These are the critical mass moments when the beginnings of a transformed narrative begins to take shape. When these moments occur they are like comets shooting through space with lighting speed. One wrong turn and the entire experience could be missed. The crisis that presents itself to the person sends a jolt into personal understanding and the story doesn't adequately give meaning to the particular experience, which seems to be perplexingly threatening (Ganzevoort, 1993). If the person catches the moment of perplexing understanding and feels the incongruity, then a new narrative will eventually emerge.
When the human responds to the threshold moment with new meaning and interpretations many possible stories could result.

On some occasions, this may have the consequence of a complete alteration of the story-line, as is the case of conversational changes (Doran, 1981; Loder, 1981). In other cases, the new interpretations give shape to a second story-line, a double plot. When this is the case, there is a high risk for new crises when threatening events occur in the future, because an integrated frame of interpretation is absent, and conflicting alternatives of meaning emerge. (Ganzevoort, 1993, p. 280)

Now if we return back to the couple again at the beginning of this section we can understand how their personal narrative entered into a period of unexplainable experiences. They were faced with situations that didn’t fit their narratives. They had many thoughts, but little understanding surrounding the interpretation of their marital difficulties. Their new interpretations were articulated to me as procrastination. This was the only interpretation they could somehow fit into their narrative of marriage. They were floundering in a sea of uncertainty and anger. They had become frustrated by their inability to place this particular situation into their narrative. Not only was this causing them to wonder about their marriage, but it was also raising questions around their faith and around their personal identities. In a very profound way these unusual experiences were not only transforming their personal narratives, but they were also impacting their social and religious narratives.

How many other individuals and couples come face to face with the limits of their personal stories. This couple in particular decided to seek out a pastoral counselor who was affiliated with their Catholic parish. They had a belief that what they were experiencing in their marriage as uprooting their personal stories was also having an affect on their Christian faith. Their personal narratives and their religious narratives were being uprooted simultaneously. This obviously brought a shock to
their individual lives. As a pastoral counselor faced with this particular case a very definitive response was being requested by this couple. Fortunately, a pastoral counselor was cognizant of their situation and through a process of “reinventing” of the old narrative a new narrative could be creatively discovered and created. In this particular situation psychology and theology could be approached in an integrative manner so that the couple could be assisted in authoring a new narrative.

The process of establishing a new narrative and leaving the old story behind is a difficult process. It is a combination of many forces coming together to bring about transformation, or a re-writing of the story. A pastoral counselor is presented with a unique opportunity to assist individuals in bringing a new narrative to life. There are numerous therapies and approaches that can be used by the pastoral counselor to make this process happen. Two very unique perspectives are available to the pastoral counselor as he assists the client in a process of narrative change. Those two perspectives within the fields of psychology and theology are narrative therapy and narrative theology. Both of these approaches honor and value the place of narrative in the human condition. Before I conclude this first chapter and move onto the subject of the current narrative of the Catholic Church, I will give a brief description of narrative therapy and narrative theology.

What Is Narrative Therapy?

... we make the general assumption that persons experience problems, for which they frequently seek therapy, when the narratives in which they are “storying” their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience “storied” by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and that, in these circumstances there will be significant aspects of their lived experience that contradict these dominant narratives. What are the
implications of these assumptions for that activity we call therapy? If we accept the assumptions made above as reasonable, then we could also assume that, when persons seek therapy, an acceptable outcome would be the identification or generation of alternative stories that enable them to perform new meanings, bringing with them desired possibilities - new meanings that persons will experience as more helpful, satisfying, and open-ended. (White & Epston, 1990, 14-15)

These words come from the Australian psychotherapist, Michael White. Within these words there is a distinct message of hope and new possibilities. Rather than focusing on the actions that occur in the lives of people, White takes a step back and focuses on the meaning attached to the actions or assumptions. This shift of focus has numerous possibilities for families or individuals stuck in dead-end narratives. As White notes above, “when persons seek therapy, an acceptable outcome would be the identification or generation of alternative stories.” What narrative therapy attempts to do is empower people with new life-giving narratives.

Narrative therapy has been labeled in some writings as, “the third-wave” of psychotherapy. The first, beginning with Freud, focused on pathology and psychodynamic theories. The second wave consisted of the problem-focused therapies with less emphasis on pathology and the past and more focus on cognitive, behavioral therapies. Much of the focus was on the here-and-now instead of hidden meanings. The “third-wave” changed the focus when it concentrated on personal identity as a fluid social construct. Suddenly, the focus was not so much on the world outside of the self, but rather the world constructed by the self within. There was a distinct shift from the action or the behavior to the meaning or narrative of the therapeutic process. Narrative has shown the greatest force because of the universal quality of humans telling the story. Narrative therapy has done for the family therapy field what it has done for individual clients; provide possibilities for new narratives.
The grace of narrative therapy is the belief that, “the person is never the problem; the problem is the problem.” This central tenet of narrative therapy I believe carries the greatest affinity to pastoral counseling. In this central belief of narrative therapy the client is honored with dignity and respect. The narrative approach could even be understood as a creation-centered therapy. In this perspective the client is seen as total gift, created by God out of love. The focus of therapy is accompanying the client in changing the story so that the essential core person may flourish rather than be confined to a life-denying narrative. The technique of externalization of the problem allows the narrative therapist room to focus on a part of the person, rather than the whole person. In this central technique of the therapy, the client does not remain helpless and attached to the identity of the problem, which is also often understood by the client as an essential core of their identity. This movement away from labels and toward accountability for choices automatically creates possibilities for re-authoring a personal narrative. This no longer leaves the client with a helpless situation, but a concrete alternative. No longer do people have to describe themselves as a depressed person, but rather as a person who experienced a part of themselves as depressed (O'Hanlon, 1994).

So if the process of narrative therapy is to be successful, the therapist must be skilled in the technique of externalization. Yet externalization is not that easy to put into practice. At first glance the therapist might think it is simply a linguistic twist of words that separates the problem from the personal identity. The difficulty is how this separation is accomplished. Here is where the skill of the therapist is paramount to change. Essentially, the therapist must communicate in an empathic way through a sequence of questions so that a method of freeing the person from the problem can occur. The therapist attempts to produce a freeing from old narratives so that new narratives look appealing. This change in the perspective of the client produces new life-giving narratives. The client realizes that there are alternatives to the present
situation they find themselves in. There is a very thin line between change and stagnation, the language of the therapist is often the key link in the change of the narrative.

Carl Tomm, a professor of psychiatry focuses this process of narrative therapy when he speaks about internalizing personal agency.

The main thing I would like to draw your attention to here is that these questions embed the notion that the patient does have choices, and that the patient is an active agent in the course of their own lives. . . a greater sense of personal agency may be achieved and the therapeutic conversation becomes a process of personal empowerment for the patient. (Tomm, 1989, p. 56)

The structure of the narrative approach can be described in the following way. First, the client and the therapist come up with an acceptable name for the problem. Take for example the case I presented at the beginning of this chapter concerning the disruptive young boy who comes for counseling. The boy has been labeled as disruptive by the school and by his parents. The narrative therapist would move away from labeling the boy as disruptive and focus more on the name of the problem as disruption. Second, the narrative therapist would personify the problem (disruption). The discussion would now focus not on the boy, but on disruption as another person. The therapist would start discussing disruption through the use of images and metaphors. This slowly moves the boy out of the limelight and places disruption as "exhibit A". This course of examination then evokes in the person the possibilities for change. Now that the boy is removed from disruption, he no longer feels attacked or on the defensive. He is no longer the problem, rather disruption is the problem. Now the defensive energy that was used by the boy can be used elsewhere to fight against the problem.

Thirdly, the therapist finds out how the problem has forced certain actions in the boy. An exploration of what the effects of the problem have had on the person and
other people is then explored. This focus honors the person and empathizes with the elements of limiting life experience. The more questions are part of the process the more the problem becomes externalized. The language used at this point is always highlighting individual choice. Accountability is the theme behind the exploration.

Blame is never the focus of the process. “If the problem invites rather than forces, one can turn down the invitation. If the problem is trying to recruit you, you can refuse to join.” This is the moment of empowerment over the problem. Fourth, the therapist searches with the client for times when the problem has not dominated. What are the exceptions to the rule surrounding the problem, becomes the question. This fourth stage shows that alternatives are possible and that the problem is not all powerful. In the fifth stage the therapist finds historical evidence to give credit to the new view of the person. The past is a powerful tool to illustrate to the client that defeat of the problem has occurred in the past. This is the narrative core of the treatment where the stories of success from the past are used as evidence to illustrate the competence of the client. This jewel of the past is then held up as proof of a distinct life-giving narrative. The therapist highlights this past success as evidence leading to change and a valid alternative. Sixth, the client and therapist explore the future and how this new found strength will serve them in resisting future problems.

Finally, the therapist and client bring this new story beyond the therapy session and into the social context. Narrative therapists utilize written letters as vehicles for accomplishing social validation. Are there people who could testify to the shift in your story? Those who knew you before you escaped the power of disruptive behavior? These people could remind you of the accomplishments you’ve made. This gradual process of narrative change then takes new roots and the narrative grows beyond the therapy session. These are the moments of conversion and transformation of the story.
This process is obviously not easy and change is not a simple seven step procedure. This perspective is not the answer to everyone's disorders and pains. It is a theory that could be effective when working with couples and families in a pastoral counseling office. At the root of this therapy is a belief that people are not their problems. Problems are unique in each case and each problem constructs around definite social and personal meanings. White and Epston believe that these meanings can be altered to create new narratives that bring life. They have faith in the power of possibility and alternatives for changing lives.

I believe in narrative therapy's unique perspective because it is committed to the belief in people's possibilities for change. The core of the therapy is in the conversations, words, language, stories, and meanings of the therapist and client. In a certain way it is an honoring of stories and meaning. The goal of this therapy attempts to bring life back to the place where it belongs. Life must reside within the person so that the individual can create love outside of themselves. If that love is damaged or defeated then it will not bring forth life. This therapy respects the value of the loving, life-giving person. The goal of narrative therapy is to bring hope back into the heart of the person's life-story.

I conclude this discussion of narrative therapy by quoting Wylie who described White's contributions as similar to the art of gardening:

...doing therapy, like planting and tending a garden, is a matter of methodical attention, small steps and hard labor- digging, spading, pruning, watering, mulching. Good gardeners are both practical and visionary. They don't expect to turn the desert into a Garden of Eden, at least overnight, but they are optimistic enough to believe that with time and effort, and the blessings of rain and sun and decent soil, they can collaborate with nature to transform even quite desolate spots into little oases. (Wylie, 1994, p. 48)
What Is Narrative Theology?

Back in the mid 1970's a storm of research and writings flooded the theological journals and bookshelves around the topic of story and narrative in theology. From this research certain authors became familiar names under the title: narrative theology. Shea, McFague, Gerkin, Cone, Crites, Crossan, Ricoeur, Hauerwas, were just a few of the many theologians that were exploring the power of narrative in connection with theology. What these authors were researching and writing about were the exciting possibilities of utilizing narrative in theological exploration. These authors were attempting to question and debate a number of areas universally accepted by the theological world. First, they sought to challenge the traditional view that religious truths were best expressed in propositional form. Second, it sided with the belief that religion can never be a personal quest; and third, it stated its belief that this form of theology would be much more accessible to the whole church, especially the laity.


Narrative theologies are exercises in understanding, assessing, and proclaiming a religious tradition which takes stories as conceptually and practically prior to doctrinal formulations or theological systematization, for these could not make sense without a narrative context. Thus to understand the life and faith of the communities in the biblical traditions, one must retrieve the myths, legends, fairy tales, . . . which constitute these ongoing sagas. To assess new ways of life and faith, one must evaluate practices and proposals for their appropriateness for carrying on the sagas in a new context. To proclaim Christianity is to retell, ritually reenact, and live stories of faithful discipleship to Jesus. Christian traditions differ among themselves as the range of stories differ. (The New Dictionary of Theology, 1987, p. 702)
Narrative theology is a bold departure from traditional theological approaches that see the theological doctrines as primary. Narrative theology is asserting that if we are to truly live our faith we must begin with the stories that formed our faith. These narrative theologians were passionately appealing to the hearts of the church members rather than to the rational, abstract concepts that play a part in the believer. These theologians were also arguing for the fundamental narrative that also informs the basic quality of human experience. In other words, they were appealing to the belief that a basic narrative structure is an "appropriate form for expressing an historically-rooted faith such as Christianity. Narrative permits us to understand 'truth' in existential rather than absolute terms" (NCE, 1987). Truth or the foundation of faith could be experienced rather than acquired from an outside absolute. A narrative structure around our faith could suddenly touch us where we live. Our stories could relive the call of discipleship. This approach changes the way we live out our faith because we begin to experience our imaginations and senses informing our faith. This opens up our stories to the communal story and we together journey toward wholeness as a people and a community. The narrative of the community then becomes the moment to remember and to celebrate. The historical community lives the ongoing narrative and hence, the Church continues to live out the faith and belief of Jesus' life and ministry.

The Church then retells the story in the parish through liturgy and catechetics so that others might enter into the community story. At the parish which is the grassroots location of the Church, the community grows together as the people of God. The liturgy then becomes a moment when the community sustains and develops its Christian identity. If the members truly grow from their own story then they will hopefully join their story with the community so that the community story becomes united and rooted in Christian salvation.
The Church’s story takes on an added dimension when the context of the story is told in the lives of faithful followers. The personal life histories of the followers become living spiritualities of communicating faith in action. This has found particular strength in the Liberation theologies of Third-world countries. Stories of oppression and how faithful people survived their situations are graphic examples of narratives struggling to unite with the whole faith community. These stories are always channels of grace and true faithfulness.

Most importantly, narrative theology strives to assist others when their experiences of daily life fail to make sense. Narrative theology offers an alternative to people who believe that their stories don’t fit their faith and their Church. Today’s Church leaders must assist members as they struggle to reinterpret the experiences of daily life as it relates to the Church’s collective story of salvation. Narrative theologians are offering a theology that will bring daily experience into the Christian communal narrative without being accused of relativism.

Yet the difficulties and limitations of narrative theology cannot go unnoticed. There clearly could be a tendency on the part of community members to relativize their faith so that all daily experiences fit the story of the community. There must be a clear distinction of stories so that community members don’t fall into the trap of calling all stories valid. Obviously, there are stories that have a tendency to block us rather than free us. All Christians need a discerning mind and heart to understand the full power of our stories. One of narrative theology’s most important contributions to the Christian community is to assist its members as they discern their individual stories. An effective narrative theologian will guide the stories of the individual members so that they will enhance the faith of the community.

Although this tendency toward a relativism of all stories is a valid one in narrative theology, there is also the tendency to fall into the jaws of fideism. This leaves the believer in a position that all Christian assertions are matters of blind belief
and cannot be known or demonstrated to be true. This tendency forces the believer to simply accept rather than confront the problems of truth that are created through numerous narrative traditions. This tendency has left many wondering about the complexities of multiple social and cultural conditions. These complexities are difficult to understand and incorporate into faith. Narrative theologians strive to keep these complexities open so that the individual can confront the multiple narratives with a spirit of openness and grace. These complexities of faith are experienced as moments of new beginning or experiences of hope in the midst of uncertainty. This is the power of narrative theology, but its power does not come without the cautions of relativism and fideism.

Sallie McFague (1975) a Christian theologian indicates that “for the Christian, the story of Jesus is the story par excellence.” It is the story of human struggle moving toward belief, but also it is the unification of heaven and earth. It is God among us in human form struggling, yet it is also the transcendent God walking among us. This human drama, is the God drama of life and death. The story is placed before us to illustrate that God is always with us. This has great implications for all believers telling their stories of coming to belief. The individual stories of the community are the stories of Jesus’ struggle to come to terms with his own humanity. As the Church carries out the mission of Jesus it constructs stories of faith such as the creeds. “From the novelist as well as from the stories of scripture the theologian should take courage to concentrate on the experience of coming to belief, not on the “beliefs” themselves. The latter job, the systematic one, is necessary always, but the more crucial task for our time—the task that will help people to hear the word of God—is the more difficult one of locating, testing, and understanding those stories-artistic, personal, social, and political—which carry experiences of coming to belief.” Every Catholic parish will struggle with the telling of the story. Narrative theology provides the backdrop for individual stories to become united with community stories. For Christians this task is
done over time within the community. Many have left the community because their story no longer makes sense to their individual faith story.

The pastoral counselor plays a unique role in this process of discovery and mature faith development. The counselor can provide the client with a sense of understanding, but also a challenge to reinvent the story if it does not bring life to the specific life story or the specific parish community story. The pastoral counselor is a member of the community that listens to the story, but also provides a ground for the story to grow and develop. The counseling moment becomes a moment of reconciliation and a moment of evangelization. When the stories converge together all involved benefit and become more fully alive. Counselor, client, community, and narrative converge to reap abundant life.

Narrative theology offers this richness to the community and to the individual it is the task of all involved to bring the story alive. Today this form of theology is of vital importance to the Church, but more importantly to its members who struggle to find a life-giving narrative. The good news is that the life-giving narrative is already present, the role of everyone involved is to make the story come alive. In particular, the Catholic parish with a pastoral counselor is in a unique position to listen to the ambiguity of the story and assist the teller in transforming a new life-giving story. This then would be the impetus to moving the individual story back into the community story. The aftermath of these transformed stories is a stronger community of faith living out the Christian story.

**Summary**

This chapter set out from the very beginning to argue one point, that narrative and story is essential to human experience. The exploration has moved full circle, beginning with the real stories of the community all the way to how these stories reveal more than we might expect. It now seems clear that if individuals are not aware
of the stories that make up their lives they will continue to flounder in a senseless narrative. That same groping in the dark can take hold of an entire parish community, causing the community to wonder where it is going. Our stories reveal so much, probably more than we can imagine. How we live, what we eat, who we choose as friends, and how we struggle to live well and believe well are contained in the stories we live. When a story takes root in our daily experience we recognize the story as an expression of who we are. Over time this story can flourish and bring life, or it can meander and die. The pastoral counselor in the Catholic parish community brings a unique dimension to the story when it is suffering or floundering. The pastoral counselor listens to the individual story through the lenses of a Christ. The pastoral counselor utilizes the tools of narrative therapy and a narrative theology. In a dynamic counseling experience, the individual, couple, family, or group, along with the counselor has the opportunity to listen and transform the story. It is a moment when individual stories of the community can be united with the universal story of the faith community to flush out fear and enliven through grace. It is a unique moment, a spiritual moment, a holy moment. Yet most of all it is a narrative moment of transformed stories.
CHAPTER II

COMMUNAL NARRATIVES:
ASSESSING THE PRESENT CATHOLIC COMMunal NARRATIVE

In this chapter I have decided to focus more intimately on the present Catholic communal narrative. Now that a substantial foundation has been laid concerning the importance of narrative in individual human experience, it is crucial to link this distinctive narrative quality to the communal level. Every community has a common story that guides their living and faith. For the Catholic community, the Jesus story is the foundational story that directs and informs the church. When the community gathers together they share in the common story by remembering and celebrating its hopes and beliefs. In the midst of the communal gathering the members recall the story through prayer and thanksgiving. The community also gathers to live out the faith by reenacting the story in their daily lives. Each member lives the gospel so that the communal story will become fully alive. The power and life of the communal story becomes enacted when the individual members truly live the story of Jesus.

Fitting together the individual stories of the community with the communal story is not an easy task. As was discovered in the previous chapter, our personal experience and the meaning we construct from it has a precarious character. Every individual is in a process of developmentally adjusting and refocusing meaning to fit reality. Our narratives are not static and so our experience of the world is constantly changing. Humans go through periods of stability and change and each period beings
with it new meaning and purpose. This same diversity can also be attributed to the community. The community is not locked in time and space like a frozen iceberg. The community is dynamic and ever changing. It is also continually going through a process of growth and development. Many different members of the community can gather together and all provide valid interpretations of what they perceive to be the communal narrative of the church. The goal of the community is to gather these stories together so that the community can grow together in faith and hope. Yet, underlying this goal is the reality that the communal story and the individual story will always live in a tension. This tension represents the spirit of God moving all of creation forward. This tension is the individual, communal, and global narrative coming alive guided by the spirit.

The Dynamics of a Communal Narrative

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and the many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts. 2, 42-47)

From this passage in the Acts of Apostles we read the beginnings of the Christian community. In the passage, themes of fellowship, sharing of a meal, prayer, and gathering together in the temple all make up the ideal community. The community is joined together around a common table of fellowship and faith. In these words Luke,
who is believed to be the author of The Acts of the Apostles, asserts that the community is a Spirit guided community. Luke's words tell the story of a community guided by the spirit of God. This theme of the community being guided by the spirit of God, becomes the force behind the building up of the Kingdom of God here on earth. The church becomes the place where the spirit of God comes alive. Through its members the church carries on the message of salvation that was lived in the person of Jesus Christ. It is exciting to reflect on the determination and conviction the early community possessed as it grew from the resurrection. The zeal in the hearts of the early apostles must have been a blazing fire of love. It must have been a spirit filled atmosphere as the early community shared their stories of faith with each other. The early Christian community was a diverse mixture of hope and fear. Both women and men of the early community wondered what would become of the new community. The narrative was alive and well, but it also searched for a direction that would be guided by the spirit.

Before returning to the present day communal narrative in the Catholic church it is important to discuss the dynamics of the individual narrative joining with the communal narrative. In other words what are the ingredients involved in the transmission of an individual narrative becoming incorporated into a communal context? Of course the communal narrative often builds its identity from the members gathered together, but what about new members entering the communal narrative?

Obviously, for the early Christian community an immediate gathering of the community meant celebrating the belief in the resurrection. The early members celebrated and praised the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They themselves were witnesses to the ministry and life of Christ dwelling among them.

What are the dynamics of a community gathering together today under a unified narrative? As I reported in the first chapter, individuals bring a rich experience to
formulate a unique narrative. How can these complex individual narratives be joined within a communal narrative?

Navone and Cooper in their informative book, *Tellers of the Word*, map out a theology of story to guide the believer through the life of Jesus. They base their work on the premise that,

humankind is for God, that religion is intrinsic to authentic humanism, and that in theology the theocentric and the anthropocentric coincide; so it is that all theological statements are to be matched by statements of their meanings in human terms. Theology of story employs the category of story to bring to life theological truth through contemporary apprehension of personal and social reality in all its concreteness. It aims to provide us with a wealth of new insights into what it means to be human. (Navone & Cooper, 1981, p.xvi)

From this basis they present nine moments in the theology of story. The first three moments "delineate the phenomenology of storytelling;" they discuss the characteristic of storytelling as a mode in which human beings live in the world. They include how human beings tell stories and what stories intend by the teller. For the Christian, meaning within the story utilizes Jesus as the subject of the story. The next six moments consider the universal story of God as it is revealed through the human story. Included as one of these moments is the subject of the Jesus story as foundational for the story of the community, the Church. This moment considers the joining of the individual narrative with the communal narrative. What follows are the elements that transmit the individual narrative into the communal narrative.

A common occurrence in today's Catholic Church is the closing of schools because of the lack of funds to support its purpose of providing adequate education. It is a difficult experience for the teachers and the students, but it is also a blow to the community. The school is identified as a locus of support and strength in the midst of a neighborhood that might be considered dangerous and unsafe. It is also not uncommon
to experience the students and teachers joining together after a school has closed to share their stories of loss and sadness. An instant bond seems to establish itself around a common story of the school’s members. This common bond is universal to all persons as they communicate to each other through the stories they tell. Each story tells of the hardships of finding a new school to attend. The members are joined together by a distinct identity. They are a community of people who have been built up around the story of Catholic education. The story they share after the school closes is the creation of a different community. Each individual narrative is joined in a common experience of loss. A community is changed and a new identity is sought.

Although they are joined by the common story of losing their school, they are also individually telling how their lives will be affected. This uniqueness of the individual story in the midst of the common story is characteristic of all communities. It is what gives communities such a rich resource to draw from.

Taking a closer look at community a certain presumption is contained in the previous example of a communal narrative. The presumption is that each member has shared a common understanding of the meaning of the communal story. If different understandings were attached to the common story of the school there would have been no consensus on the meaning of the school’s closing. If the communal narrative was not shared by all of the school members then no one would have been able to gather together to share the stories of loss.

Another way of saying this is that if there is a radical disagreement about the true meaning of the foundational story, then there cannot be a communal narrative. The community must first believe and agree upon the foundational story before they can move forward as a community. There can be many theologies, but there still must be one common story. Failure to agree on the common story is the beginning of the end for a struggling community. “The power of stories to shape the identity of communities is seen in the emotional violence that greets those who challenge the
community's common interpretation of its foundational story" (Navone & Cooper, 1981).

Another aspect of the communal narrative taking shape is the dynamic of the community's life story being recalled and celebrated. The members of a community participate in the communal narrative by remembering its meaning and value. The community of men and women in the Acts of the Apostles participate in the newly formed community by breaking bread together. This ritual has value for the communal narrative because it conveys the meaning the community is based on. Jesus broke bread and gave of himself so that others might have life. The community relives and remembers its story so that it can live on into the future. If the community forgets the story of Jesus they will no longer be able to participate in the story. The story will lose all meaning and die.

The traditions of the early disciples over time become the story of the community's life. The traditions of a community's life story communicate a certain spirit that enables the community to grow and develop. The traditions don't necessarily force the community into a static position, but rather ground the community in a life-giving story. The tradition of the community links people together under a common identity so that they can move into the future with conviction. Tradition has a unique function in a communal narrative because it must remain open to what has occurred in the past and what will present itself in the future. It must live in the dynamic tension of change maintaining the communal story. A perfect example of this dynamic tension in today's church is the struggle of women and men to work together rather than working against each other.

"Authentic storytelling is the creation of a community of love" (Navone & Cooper, 1981). Community is the fruit of love. As the members of the community share their individual story they do so knowing that all members are joined together in a bond of love. If the individual stories we tell are not truly who we are or what we
believe then the community will suffer. A spirit of love must be the function of our communication otherwise we will break down the community. This authenticity is not easy to practice, it requires an awareness of our true narratives. If our stories are not bringing life to ourselves, then they will not bring life to the communities we participate in.

Another dynamic at work in the fusion of the individual narrative with the community is that the individuals can only thrive in the communal narrative if they allow themselves to be governed by it. Once members of the community have chosen to commit themselves to the communal narrative they will begin to benefit from the communal story. For Christians to commit to the communal narrative is to open their hearts to the potential of conversion. This commitment demands more than a visible or physical presence at communal celebrations. We must truly come to the communal narrative with a belief that the story can transform our lives. Of course we often don't plan for conversion, but we can turn our heart closer to God by listening with our hearts. Perhaps grace and surprise will come to our communities when our hearts are open. To enter into the community with this disposition is to leave room for the potential of our stories becoming more fully alive. Once again, a tenuous balance of faith, hope, and love is required around our own story and the community's story. We could easily become sucked into all of the community story and fail to realize the potential of our own personal agency. The goal is to remain open to change so that we can be transformed into a new creation. When we approach the communal narrative in this manner we build up the Kingdom of God.

Yet another element of community is that there is a limit to the individual members' interpretation of the communal narrative. We can become so attracted to a part of the communal story that sometimes we can destroy its meaning and lose the potency of the broader communal story. This could have happened if the early apostles decided it was important to leave out certain parts of Jesus' story because they were
too demanding. This twist on the narrative could divide the community so much that all of the community could fall apart. This is not to say that there are not differences in interpretations, but if the true meaning of the communal narrative is being betrayed, then the community will have to struggle to find the true meaning. This is happening presently in the Catholic Church around the issues of ordained ministry. There have been many voices in the church calling for a new interpretation of the “true meaning.” These issues of interpretation are moments when the community struggles with their common story. Every community struggles with this tension and strives to seek the “true” meaning of the story.

“Our experience of the Jesus story is conditioned by our experience of our own world” (Navone & Cooper, 1981). As members of a communal narrative we are drawn to the Jesus story through our individual life stories. Only when we open ourselves to the question of our existence can we open ourselves to the questions of Jesus and the Good News. If the story of Jesus impacts our stories then we can join with the community to put it to the test. If our experience is not conditioned by the Jesus story then we will have no use for the communal story of salvation.

Naturally, our understanding of the Jesus story will be conditioned by our participation in the community story. In hearing the story we are moved to act on it according to how attentively we listen to our stories and the communal story. If we are not aware of our story then we will obviously flounder in the communal story. “Discernment of the true meaning of the Good News, the judgment phase of our cognitional process, is greatly facilitated when it is done in a community striving to find life through the Gospel” (Navone & Cooper, 1981). When the community is truly living the gospel the individual story can be reformed and supported. The dynamic of the community story enhances the individual narrative in a moment of grace.

Finally, the tradition of the Church is the life story of Christians. The communal story itself communicates the message of Jesus and thus each individual story, in the
gathered story of the Christian community. Tradition involves the telling of the story through generations so that the story may live on into the future. Each link in the communication of the story builds upon the tradition and creates a spirit of love and grace. The story of Jesus binds history together in the communal narrative. All those who may be separated by time, or culture, or location are joined together under one story of faith. "The story of the Church is the story of the success and failure of its mission to bring about the explicit communion of all women and men in the embrace of God's universal love" (Navone & Cooper, 1981).

From these reflections on the dynamics of communal narratives it is clear that there are multiple layers of understanding and meaning at work. For the individual narrative to fully incorporate into the community it must follow the guidelines I have outlined. The tension of each guideline directs the individual narrative in so many mysterious ways. The spirit of God is truly at work in the formation of community. This spirit is evident when we consider the complex dynamics of interpretation of traditions and principles. The Acts of the Apostles is a vibrant and crucial example of community guided by the spirit of God.

Charles Gerkin a pastoral theologian has written extensively on the subject of narrative and the hermeneutical perspective of practical theological thinking. He writes about how the individual self out of its experience must consider the areas of interpretation of faith and culture when it is forming a narrative. This process is a delicate balance of a unique social situation combined with tending, maintaining, and reinterpreting the story. Gerkin calls this process the "life of the soul." He also goes a step further when he speaks about the communal narrative.

It is important to acknowledge that one of the presuppositions contained in this narrative, hermeneutical perspective on the way communities form their narratives and maintain their traditions is that the ongoing, intergenerational life of any community is sustained over time by means of a
dialectical interaction between events and human construction of interpretations of those events. The story of any community thus always involves a peculiar mixture of historical facts (events that occurred in their actuality) and imaginative fictions (human attachments of meaning to the events). Stories give accounts of events, but they are accounts of events that express the meaning of those events within the ongoing life of an individual or a community. . . Events in time and human interpretations of events interact in multifarious and subtle ways to shape and channel individual and corporate life in certain directions not fully under the control of the individual or the community.

(Gerkin, 1991, p. 59-60)

The implication of this narrative dynamic is never a simple process of living out the tradition of the community. The message of this approach is that each event or experience of the individual or the community will have unique dynamics at work. Here it can again be stated that the spirit is truly at work in the community, directing the community as it lives out its narrative. An excellent example of a community living out the meaning of an event can be understood through this additional quote from Gerkin.

The people of the Hebrew Bible, for example, had their consciousness of themselves forcefully shaped by the events of the Exodus. Those events made them the people of the Exodus in ways they have never escaped or forgotten. But they became a people likewise shaped by the meaning-filled stories they attached to those events. Events and narrative meaning interacted to give a people a history and a communal consciousness of who they were. Any effort to separate out the power of the Exodus events from the storied meanings linked to those events would encounter, say Ricoeur, an impassable barrier. (Gerkin, 1991, p. 60)
The primal images and meanings attached to the Exodus have been the bedrock of historical meaning for the Hebrew people. The event shaped their identities as a chosen people set apart. Other peoples also have had their lives shaped by events. For the Christian, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the life story of the Christian community. How the community interprets those events determines how the community lives and grows. The Christian community has been guided by the traditions of the early Christians. Each age has interpreted the Christian story in a unique way. It is now time to answer the question of how the Catholic Church is currently interpreting the Christ event. How has the Catholic Church shaped their consciousness according to the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? What meaning-filled stories have they attached to the event? Is the present communal consciousness of the Catholic Church life-giving? How have the individual narratives of each member of the Catholic Church brought life to the communal narrative? Has the individual narratives floundered in the community searching for a life-giving narrative that will bring life? All of these questions seem to stem from the basic question: is the Catholic Christian community living out of a life-giving narrative?

**The Contemporary Catholic Communal Narrative**

A conviction that the church can be the church of the faithful would require a profound conversion on the part of the parish, not only of its pastoral staff but of the parishioners in the pews, who are no longer merely “the audience” who sit politely while the priest and deacons and music ministers do their thing. Sunday Mass would no longer be “just” a liturgical sacrifice, or “just” an insightful homily. It would be a clarion call for the worshipping community to become also a serving community. “I come not to be served, but to serve.” (O’Malley, 1993, p. 10)
This forceful reminder to the Catholic community from a theology teacher in a recent Catholic periodical sends a distinct message to all who are part of the "church of the faithful." Contained in the message is the understanding that the contemporary Catholic community is falling short of the Gospel message to serve. Implicit in this reminder is the belief that the community is struggling to actively live out the communal narrative of Jesus' living model of service.

Any active and relatively informed practicing believer would be fast asleep to not hear and see that there is a confusion around the communal narrative in the Catholic Church. A sampling of just a few of these communal narratives can be convincingly understood in this quote from Avery Dulles on the current situation in the Catholic Church.

Priestly and religious vocations have notably declined, even if, as some believe, the decline has bottomed out. A high percentage of "under forty" Catholics no longer regard themselves as members of the Church. Many Catholics who enter mixed marriages drift away from their former religion. Among Catholics who persevere, a large number reject official teaching of the Church on issues such as divorce, contraception, and, to some extent, abortion. Dogmas such as papal infallibility are widely misunderstood and disbelieved. Even among orthodox Catholics, increasing numbers are in canonically irregular situations, such as remarriage after divorce. With the decline of the Catholic school system, and with the increasing influence of mass communications, the Church finds it increasingly difficult to transmit its doctrine and values to its younger members. . . For some reason the Catholic Church seems unable to capitalize on the yearning for religious commitment and spiritual experience felt by so many of our contemporaries. . . Catholicism has an incomparable intellectual, cultural, mystical, and spiritual heritage. Why then does it appear so stagnant, so lacking in self-confidence, enthusiasm, and
purpose? What can be done to mobilize the religious potential in its tradition?
(Dulles, 1982, pgs. 2-3)

What is it about the Catholic Church in 1995 that has caused such division around the understanding of its communal narrative? In working with a family, the pastoral counselor would listen for the particular set of assumptions the family attaches to their problems. The counselor would listen to the meanings and core images attached to their family story. The same insight can be obtained by the pastoral counselor when listening to the meanings attached to what the story of the community is speaking. What are the constructions and images of the Church that do not bring life to the community? Where are the areas within the community that the communal narrative conflicts with its members? These are not easy answers to obtain, but at least the pastoral counselor has a place to begin. The narrative of the community will reveal interpretations and meanings that can lead to healing within the community. Can the pastoral counselor listen to the assumptions that the community has attached to their problems? If the pastoral counselor can be this agent of transformation for the community then the community can begin the mission of Jesus which is to serve.

In this section I cannot do justice to the multiple issues facing the contemporary Catholic communal narrative, but I will address certain parts of the narrative that I believe are not life-giving. To begin, the issue of ministerial roles in the church has been limiting members of the community rather than uniting them. There is currently a wide gulf between who serves the community and who doesn't. Intermingled in this debate is the belief that Christ chose only men as apostles, therefore men are the successors in the ordained ministry. From this argument the further argument is made that only men can properly represent Christ at the altar, acting in persona Christi. These pronouncements obviously leave women frustrated and angry. These statements widen the gulf of egalitarian roles currently improving in other realms of the Church's development of ministerial roles. These statements cause pain and division and
ultimately place women on the margins of the community. Thus the narrative lacks life and the hurting members of the community consider new options in reinventing the narrative.

Over time this question of who will serve the community becomes more acute as priestly vocations decline. These changes then ask a further question, what ministerial roles will change and how will the community be directed? With ordained ministry restricted to men and vocations on the decline how will the Church meet the needs of the community?

Theologian Patricia O'Connell Killen states that three factors have placed the Catholic Church in a new and unique position. First, the Catholic Church has moved out of a self-contained enclave. The American Catholic Church moved from a collection of European immigrants with native speaking parishes to a group mixed together into an American culture with distinct values and practices. Suddenly Catholics were not contained by, but part of the American Dream. Secondly, Vatican II opened up the Catholic Church and widened its perspective.

The major gift of the Council to lay Catholics was a call to be adults in faith and to act that way . . . The Council introduced the image of the Church as the People of God, an image which contained seeds of an egalitarianism among clergy, laity, and vowed religious unimagined a decade earlier. (O'Connell Killen, 1993, pgs. 16-17)

Thirdly, the culture shifted during the 1960's and 1970's and caused a radical questioning of authority and institutions. This obviously caused members of the Catholic Church to take their religious beliefs elsewhere. Religion became a radical individual quest.

These changes have shocked the system so extensively that traditions had to be reexamined and restructured. The foundation of the Church was so shaken that the foundations had to be unearthed to discover cracks and strains. Killen believes that
these elements of change so severely challenged the Church that they left the members of the Church with two challenges. One, how can the Catholic heritage be appropriated without falling into anachronism or reductionism. And secondly, how can Catholics live an authentic ecclesial community. Both of these challenges call for a transformation of the communal narratives. How can the community live a life-giving tradition and heritage through its stories and faith? One solution will have to address this issue of ministerial leadership. How can the communal narrative be true to the life of Jesus and still function in a spirit of equality and freedom?

A second communal narrative that I see as death-dealing is the ever-present division between the Pre-Vatican II Church and the Post-Vatican II Church. Eugene Kennedy calls this division “Tomorrow’s Catholics and Yesterday’s Church.” The calling of Vatican II and the enforcing of its teachings has sent a ripple effect throughout the entire Church. Its force has been felt as strongly as the gusty winds of a hurricane. In its aftermath it has left a Church divided and confused. In the confusion and clutter there is also anger and sadness surrounding the loss of long held traditions. Although Vatican II is close to 30 years in the past it still has brought divisions and pain that long for healing. This is the dynamic tension that I referred to when I explained the tension of the individual narrative combining with the communal narrative. As I mentioned above, the tension is painful and demands a period of grieving.

The communal narrative of two churches contained in one is ever present as a source of division for many members. Predominantly, the loss centers around the pain of losing faith practices that were integral to the Church. Members of the Pre-Vatican II church were one with their Church and identified who they were as uniquely Catholic. With the advent of change and transformation these members lost an integral part of their faith. Through a lack of integration with the present Church, these members have struggled with the change of long held traditions and practices. A communal narrative of division has existed in the community since the calling of
Vatican II. Ultimately, this narrative has brought more confusion than life. The only way to transform this narrative is through an honoring of the loss of faith practices and traditions. Without this honoring of grief, the communal narrative will continually inflict division on its members. The process is long, but in the end it is the difference between moving into the future with freedom or remaining in the past as a prisoner. Hopefully this dynamic transitional tension will bring a life-giving narrative to the community.

Another communal narrative that I see as not life-giving is that Catholics are not able to interpret their day to day experience as moments of revelation. Catholics do not use theology and religious language to articulate their experience. Rather than communicating why and how they have come to believe, Catholics are stunted in their ability to explain their personal spirituality. As an unspoken communal narrative remains dormant over time a community loses an integral part of its identity. This characteristic lack of coherent expression in the contemporary Catholic narrative is slowly deteriorating the spirit of God. Patricia O'Connell Killen once again is on target when she expresses this stress on the communal narrative.

The stakes in our current situation of widespread adult lay theological illiteracy are very high. Without conscious and critical theological reflection by lay adults, the church's faithfulness to the gospel and its authentic witness to that gospel in the world diminishes. Why? Because our capacity to comprehend and faithfully live the Christian faith correlates directly with our capacity to recognize, describe, and discover the revelatory quality of our human experience. Our capacity to live rich, authentic, human lives depends on our capacity to befriend and enter deeply and openly into our Christian heritage. Without developing the practice of theological reflection, lay Catholics cannot carry a vital tradition into the year 2000 because they will not be able to employ hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval in living their faith. They will enter the
twenty-first century as anachronistic, reductionistic, or disaffiliated Catholics. (O'Connell Killen, 1993, pgs. 22-23)

If this communal narrative of theological illiteracy continues the price will be deep and expansive. Many Catholics voice loud and clear what they do not want in "their" religion and spirituality. This is clear when Catholics disagree with Evangelical Christians as they preach a Gospel that doesn't sound true to their experience. But what Catholics don't like is not enough. Catholics must have a well informed faith that challenges and affirms the gift of life. Catholics are not stating what is good about their faith. As O'Malley stated at the beginning of this section, "the parishioners are no longer merely 'the audience' who sit politely while the priest and deacons and music ministers do their thing." The faithful live out the call to discipleship by truly living the Gospel message of fullness of life. This fullness can only come alive when the communal narrative is a well informed theological reflection. Catholics have to start telling their stories of faith with a strong conviction and belief that stirs the flames of faith.

Each of these preceding communal narratives in some manner limit the life of the community. When these communal narratives take on a force and a power they have the capacity to break down the traditions and practices of a community. It is ironic that a community that has experienced so much change from within and without can carry on through pain and transformation. Yet this is the strength of the Church's faith. The ministry of Jesus was one that challenged, encouraged, celebrated, forgave, and beckoned all who were followers to embrace the mission. Our understanding of the story of Jesus is conditioned by our investment in the Christian community. If that Christian community does not embrace a communal narrative that is life-giving then the community will suffer and eventually die. These narratives of ministrical leadership and theological illiteracy that the community is currently embracing are not life-giving and the effects of the denial of life are being manifested in the community.
To move from these stressors on the community, I would follow a narrative therapy for the present Catholic communal narrative. My first task would be to come up with an acceptable name for the communal narrative that is not bringing life. I have done this in identifying some of the narratives I believe cause the greatest limitations to the community. These are, the ambiguity of ministerial leadership; the division of two traditions in one church; and finally, the theological illiteracy of the Catholic people. Each of these communal aspects of the Catholic Church have developed over time causing the community to stagnate in a dynamic of fear of the future. These narratives have also developed because of the cultural changes that have been experienced by the American experience. These narratives become powerful when the community functions under the meaning it has attached to the narrative. Each of these narratives has limited and encapsulated the community, rather than setting the community free. A sure sign of a death-dealing communal narrative is its characteristic style of closing off possibilities to future growth.

Is the communal narrative destined for destruction or is there a way out? Is the narrative of division forever holding the community hostage? I believe that these death-dealing communal narratives cannot hold the community forever. A boiling point will occur where the community utilizes it’s strengths so that transformation will bring a new creation. This transformation is created out of the spirit of God in community. When community members begin to realize that truly living the Gospel means giving themselves away, new life will emerge from the community. This new life will then take hold in the narrative of the community and the power of God will spread like fire through the lives of all its members. In this life-giving community a new sense of vision to the mission will accompany every believer. No one in the community will be left untouched by the potential for grace and conversion. All things will be made new.

What follows in this next section is a gathering of life-giving communal narratives currently existing within the community. I propose these communal
narratives as having the potential to bring new life to a struggling community. Each of these narratives are an expression and mediation of the presence of Jesus in the community's story. The struggle for the community is grabbing hold of the narratives and choosing to be directed by them.

Four Life-Giving Communal Narratives

Avery Dulles is a Catholic theologian who has spent a great deal of his life attempting to explain and understand the reality of the Church in the world today. He is famous for his work of imaging models for the Catholic Church. Dulles believes that there are distinct models through which the Church's character can be understood. These models are the Institution, Mystical, Communion, Sacrament, Herald, and Servant. Each of the models when incorporated into the image of the one Church can assist the faithful member of the church to grow in faith and practice.

What I am proposing in this section is similar to Dulles' approach. I believe that certain distinct narratives in the Catholic Church can help individual members to grow in faith and freedom. In the previous chapter, I have explained how narrative has the power to alter meanings so much that it can bring about a new vision for the storyteller. When story no longer brings life for the believer, a new story must be rewritten. I propose that currently there are competing narratives at work in the church. Some of these narratives fail to foster growth and contain a distinct death-dealing quality to them. I have identified these as ambiguous ministerial roles; two traditions in one church; and an illiterate theological membership. Each of these narratives operate in the community and are passed down to other members through time. But I assert that these narratives are not the only ones operating in the community.

The four life-giving narratives or values I propose are: human life as total gift; prayer as moment of union and transcendence; service as missionary journey; and
authentic love as kingdom building. Each of these communal narratives currently operate within the Catholic communal life, but each of these narratives are not fully established or articulated. The theme of these narratives are distinctively grounded in a life-giving, nourishing spirit. Once they have become an integral part of the community they spread throughout the community to nourish its members with freedom and grace. Before I propose these four narratives, I believe it is fruitful to hear from Dulles on his vision of discipleship and mission in the context of communal transformation.

As the community of disciples, the Church must carry on, with appropriate adaptations, the forms of mission enjoined by Jesus upon his original followers. Besides proclaiming the good news, the Church must replicate the works of Jesus. Just as he healed illnesses and cast out demons, the Church must combat poverty and disease, show compassion for the sick and the dying, and give assistance to those in need. Our contemporary world Church, in its corporate discipleship, must take account of the needs and opportunities of the day. With its hundreds of millions of members, it has social responsibilities far exceeding those of the “little flock” of which we read in the New Testament. (Dulles, 1987, p. 221)

Dulles calls on all the Church to live the mission of Jesus and commence in bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth. The community can only carry out the mission of the Church if it is guided by life-giving narratives. These four proposed communal narratives are pathways toward enlivening the community to truly live the message of the Gospels.

Human Life as Total Gift

Human creation is called into being by God. This call by God is done totally out of love without a price. God delights in this expression of bringing forth life so much that God enjoys the act of giving. Therefore grace is not something we earn but rather
something offered to us as Christians. Believing this aspect of what it means to receive life then fashions how we go about living in the world. If all is gift then we are truly given a bounty so great we can never be fully nourished.

This perspective of life as total gift has deep implications for the community but also the Church. This narrative of faith when fully comprehended in the community causes the community to share the gift of life with each other. Each member recognizes their own life as a gift. This perspective helps the individual members of the community to believe that fullness of life comes from giving their gifts away. This giving enables the members to not focus on who is the greatest among the community, but rather who could be helped. Life becomes fuller when the community gives parts of themselves away.

If Church and community are then understood as gift the stance of the community turns away from what it deserves to what it can offer. In this narrative the purpose is not a balancing of scales, or an equal payment for equal work. God does not measure God's love for us. Each moment of love is another free expression of God's graciousness. The implications for our relationships within the community suddenly are transformed from what our rights are to how we can extend a right to another. The moment of giving our love away is a moment to express the grace we were blessed with from our birth.

When the community is aware of this giftedness a transformation occurs in the members of the Church. The Church is not something we create for ourselves, but rather something that is given to us as a sign of God's love in us and in our world. We may search for all the reasons why God loves us and never come up with an answer. The reason why there is no answer is because God does not have to have a reason. God has freely chosen us as Church to bring the Good News beyond the bounds of our wildest imaginations. God has freely chosen to give himself away and so came to human life in the form of a Savior. Now God has chosen us to give ourselves away
totally out of love and so we have the Church as the manifestation of God’s love. We struggle as Church, guided by the Spirit for each other, but God continually blesses us with his love. It is the task of our lives to live out this love through community.

What does this mean for the community today? This narrative exists in our Church, but in silent and quiet whispers. The challenge of the Church is to raise the narrative of gift beyond the community so that all may truly embrace this giftedness. I hear the narrative of gift in parishes that live the Gospel by moving beyond the boundaries of the geographic lines of service. It is done in the communities that are so focused on their mission that they forget what their service is truly providing. There is a selflessness to their calling that they create in the midst of collaboration.

As Americans we have a tendency to take what we have for granted. It seems that so much is possible to obtain that we begin to think we deserve what is available. This has dramatically become clear to me when I converse with friends from other cultures. There is a simplicity of heart in these people of Africa and Asia. There is also an enduring quality of respect and love that they communicate when they talk about what they hold as their possession. There is no element of deserving what they have, but rather a gratefulness for the gift. It is even wrong to call their gifts possessions, because the root of their “things” are understood as total gift. These friends remind me that creation and God do not become available to me through a special blockbuster price mark down. This would be the “American” consumer way. When I find myself thinking this way I ask myself, have I taken all the gifts I have received for granted? If I have I step back and say thank you. Robert Wicks always seems to remind me of this giftedness of life through his reflections. His message to the Church and to the community reinforces the point that this communal narrative must be spoken in a louder voice.

The list of our lacks and losses is endless. The problem: we have lost perspective; we have lost the reality that all is gift. While we focus on the
injustice in our lives, we fail to open our hearts and accept the love and many, many gifts that sit undusted, unappreciated, and unused right at our sides... or right in our families, places of work, congregations, and parishes.

Sometimes it takes a death, a loss, a crisis, or a traumatic awakening to blow the dust away. But it needn't take such an event. We can do it slowly each day, because the dust of taking things and people for granted naturally builds up each day. The question is: Will we take out time each morning, each day, each evening to look... to look anew, so that all that is gift is embraced instead of being given away through neglect and lack of appreciation? Possibly this is the question to reflect on every new year as our resolutions are shaped and placed in our hearts. (Wicks, 1987, pgs. 36-37)

What will it take for the Catholic community to fully live this reality that all is gift? The reality is present in the contemporary communal narrative of the Church, but is the narrative spoken enough so that all can hear? This narrative needs to be spoken each day within our communities so that nothing is taken for granted. The community has been given a gift, can it embrace this gift through appreciation? I believe the community needs to move more fully toward this narrative if it wants to move into the future. Each member of the community must voice their experience so that the community can come alive in faith.

Prayer as Moment of Union and Transcendence

The second silent but present communal narrative in the Church today is the pathway to the Spirit of God, or the spirituality of the people. As I stated above under the subject of narratives that don't bring life, I included the illiteracy of theological reflection among the community members. How do the community members pray and communicate the revelation of God? A large majority of the community lacks the skills of communicating an adult, individuated faith. The result of this is an inability to
truly enter into the mystery of God's love for us. If the individual community members fail in this experience then they are doomed to fail as a community as a whole. It seems that the parish community is usually competent in communicating the tradition and moral life of the church, but how well is it able to equip its members with the tools to enter into the moments of direct experience of God?

The way the community prays together is important and vital to the life of the community. I recall a moment that was especially prayerful to me during an Easter Vigil. The Easter Vigil is usually the time when the Catholic Church baptizes new members into the faith community. It is a unique moment for the community, because it signifies the beginning of new life for the entire community. The community is made new by the addition of new members. The community is changed by new lives entering into the journey. It is sort of a stopping off point for the community as they continue on the journey of faith. I was particularly invigorated by this Vigil one year when I met a new member of the community the day after the Vigil. I was walking into the church when I recognized the new member greeting people at the door. As I approached him I observed a change on his face and in his embrace. Something had changed in his demeanor. As he continued to greet community members entering the church on Easter Sunday, I stopped and reflected on his journey. Here is a man who was searching desperately for a home and he has truly found it in the community of the people gathered. He said to me, "finally I can partake of the bread and wine offered at the table." He had found a home and had been able to express what this home meant to him. He was expressing the nourishment he was receiving. I'll never forget the look on his face that day, it was a recognition of the Spirit of God at work in his life.

This was a particularly poignant moment for my own spirituality because I recognized in this new member of the community the zest and zeal of conversion. He was making new the message of the Gospels by greeting the members of the church community. By his very missionary presence he was communicating the presence of
God to me. He may not have been aware of it but he was spreading the message of new life through his greeting of the community.

There is definitely no lack of spiritualities in the Catholic community today. One exploration into a local religious bookstore will reveal a plethora of prayer styles and preferences among the community members. In the community today there are numerous styles such as devotional, contemplative, social justice, self-help, liturgical, and biblical. What makes this narrative silent is that these styles are not honored by the Church in an integrative manner. Instead of focusing on a devotional prayer group and respecting its right to gather, the Church fears these groups will divide the community. The Charismatic Movement, Cursillo, and Marian groups all express their spirituality through these prayerful styles. These groups contribute to a life-giving narrative when they bring their gifts into the gathered community. It has been difficult to bring these groups together and this has caused unwarranted divisions. The same can be said for the social justice ministries within the community. Some in the community feel called to a prophetic role as a member of the community. This is a valid response on the part of the individual believer because this expression of their faith is authentic. Yet when these members gather with the community they find it difficult to embrace the community's faith expression. A tension exists in this expression of spiritualities, but the good news is that the community is tapped into their expressions of faith. Each style is valid and the community is made up of many who seek to quench their spiritual thirsts.

In a recent article in *Chicago Studies*, Matthias Neuman calls for another spirituality to undergird all the other spiritualities mentioned above. This spirituality is an intellectual spirituality. This spirituality is seeking to erase the illiteracy that currently exists in the community.

An intellectual spirituality would embrace and practice several basic principles. 1) It would acknowledge an authentic experience of God within the
critical use of the mind to grapple with the adequacy of religious formations. In struggling to get to the outer-most limits of explanation, a real touching of divine transcendence and Mystery can occur in this quest for truth. 2) It would identify a genuine religious asceticism within the mental rigor and honesty needed to pursue religious understanding. True asceticism is not limited to the body and its senses. To honestly confront and humbly stand before criticisms of cherished beliefs can be as painful as any corporal mortification. 3) It would emphasize real prayer in the attentiveness to and bonding with God as Truth. In an intellectual spirituality the hard search for religious understanding and expression can create an opening for the presence of Truthful Mystery. 4) It would encourage virtues of both creativity and humility in acknowledging the limits of thinking before Mystery. As valuable as reason is, it still ends in an abyss which cannot be explained. There is virtue in the strength to continue on when obvious limitations restrict the hard thinking of this spirituality. (Neuman, 1994, p. 257)

This type of spirituality seems like a high expectation for the Catholic community, but it is one that will move the community beyond some of its silent presence. This spirituality also tends to swing a little too far from a heart-centered spirituality, but it does offer a spirituality that is grounded in a critical faith. If this life-giving narrative of prayer is to inform the community it must wake from its sleep and begin to shape and form the community in day to day living. This would truly be a pathway to God. It is up to the members of the community to speak this narrative of prayerfulness passionately but also competently.

Service as Missionary Journey

A third life-giving narrative informing the contemporary Catholic community is the narrative of service as the mission journey of the faithful. A great deal of debate and
conversation has focused around the issue of individual calling and vocation in the Catholic community today. This has come to the forefront with the impending questions of who will lead the Church in the future. Ordained ministers are not as large in numbers and the trend is showing a deeper cut before a final bottoming out. The current ministerial discussion has focused on the declaration in the scriptures that states that all are called into service by license of baptism. When we enter into the community through the sacrament of baptism there is an implicit call to serve as a member of the priesthood of all believers. But how are Catholics responding to the call of service? If members of the Church are not clear about the implications of their calling then how will they live out this calling? Once again, it is my impression that this calling or vocation is present in the Church, but lacks the needed volume so that it can be heard. This is a life-giving narrative because it enables the community to be led by members who have responded to the word of God. But what about other members who hear this calling but lack the clarity of understanding in responding to it? Is the Church failing to inform its members around the issues of answering the call?

Over the past year I have worked as a pastoral counselor in a community that is heavily populated with public service employees. It doesn't take long to realize that these professional service careers cause a great deal of stress in the family system and in the community. It has not been uncommon to hear stories of pain around alcoholism, lack of intimacy in marriage, and depleted faith. It is ironic that these people serve others but cannot attend to their own needs of health and well-being. But that is beside the point that I am trying to make. My point is that there are many in the community who feel called to service, but cannot connect this ideal of service with their faith. They lack the tools to respond to the Gospel call of nourishing their faith through their work. Often times these members of community will only connect vocation with priesthood or religious life. The community is falling short of equating their call to service to service in the Christian community. The narrative of service to
the Church is nascent and cloudy and lacking integration. What can the Church do to wake this wealth of experience and potential? Does responsibility rest in the hands of the current ordained leadership?

A powerful expression of calling and vocation is spoken by David Power in his reflections on lay ministries. But more powerful is the conclusions of his reflection on lay ministry and how it will expand.

The most remarkable thing about the development of ministries in today's churches is the manner of their relation to church renewal. One might be tempted to say that where there are enough ministries and good ministers, the renewal of the church will follow. It is in this sense that prayers are offered for vocations to the religious life or presbyterate. Today, however, what is happening is of reverse order: where there is a renewal of community life, then a variety of ministries spring up. A vital grass-roots renewal is in many places giving rise to more abundant and varied services. (Power, 1980, p. 113)

This concept of mission and ministry is suddenly turned on its head. Ministries emerge out of a renewal, and this renewal is occurring in the contemporary Catholic Church at record setting pace. This has far reaching implications for the converging of members understanding of mission and the Churches need for the future. Suddenly the question isn't how will the Church and community solve the needs of the community through service, but rather when will they serve. The answer of course comes from the community itself. Renewal is forcing service to happen from the community spirit. New ministries of service are emerging out of the community in dynamic ways. Ministries are "springing up" when community comes together to realize that a need exists. I firmly believe this will have a dramatic impact on the ministry of pastoral counseling at the community level. As more and more communities begin the renewal of their mission they will recognize the need for healthy members. In the next chapter
I will explain how the ministry of pastoral counseling is one ministry that is rising more and more out of these renewed communities.

As members of the community continue to experience renewal and new life, new understandings of carrying the mission of Christ will come to the attention of the community. A spirit of compassion for those in need will enable certain members of the community to serve without cost or retribution. Those called to serve will respond out of love and begin to see those needing comfort for the first time. These members will have moved out of themselves to truly understand the needs of others. They will begin to live as Jesus lived, by loving those in need and putting faith into action. Once the community begins to embody the compassion of God's grace the members of the community will become infected with the desire to serve others. Over time the entire community will truly experience the love of God by recognizing the call to service as the call of God. Then this silent narrative that sleeps in the communal Christian unconscious will be made conscious through the service of all its members to each other.

Authentic Love as Kingdom Building

St. Irenaeus once said “The glory of God is humanity fully alive”. At first glance this might provoke a reader from the 21st century to compare St. Irenaeus to Abraham Maslow. The reader might reach the conclusion that what is being promoted is really self actualization. Yet a closer reading of the words of St. Irenaeus reveals a deeper and fuller expression of spirituality and human personhood.

St. Irenaeus had more in mind than self-actualization and the implications of his quote goes far beyond individual personhood. This final life-giving narrative is also a sleepy presence in the contemporary Catholic Church. To become fully alive means to respond to the promptings in our hearts that lead us to act honestly in connection with what we believe. This dynamic of authenticity often comes up when members of the
community are in the midst of a difficult situation. Often a member of the community will struggle with the question, what should I do? This question forces the individual to reflect on who they are and what they believe is valuable to them. Even though the particulars of the situation might be complicated, the individual has to act according to their true self. The more the individual is aware of their true self, the more authentic they will be in the actions they perform. To be genuine or real assumes that the individual has knowledge of who their real self is. The Christian life calls for authenticity in living and faith. This means responding to the needs of the community when they call for assistance. Authenticity calls for a discerning heart that is aware of what the needs of the community are speaking. This discernment is not easy, but it is a part of every decision making process.

To become fully alive means to discern the promptings of the heart and respond with compassion and love. If we deny our personal agency and ignore what we are called to, we will deny our very selfhood. God’s creative love is active in the hearts and bodies of all Christians, but if this creative spark remains dormant then God will not rejoice. God’s creative love seems to also be an elusive force when a community is struggling with change and fear. Yet this creative love is deep in the narrative of the community spirit and it is alive and forceful in the communal heart.

Dolores Leckey who has ministered as the leader for the Secretariat for the Laity over the past few years has these reflections on the work of relationship in community.

The focus of community is the same focus that Jesus had, namely relationship, that “space between” where human beings are able to become themselves as known to each other. Such exchanges between people occur in an environment of compassion which is the antithesis of dominance, competition, or manipulation. Again, marriage is an example of the kind of ongoing encounter I'm talking about. Something powerful happens between
spouses. Creativity is released; personalities are transformed under the influence of each other; something new emerges from the energy shared between wife and husband. . . As marriage is a community of equals, so must be the local church, if it is to be a community of friends. This appreciation of equality before God presumes coming to know one another deeply. (Leckey, 1987, pgs. 106-107)

We come to know ourselves through the other. As a community this life-giving narrative promotes the well-being of the community by expressing who we are authentically. When we do this we live out the Gospel. The community becomes more fully alive in the midst of living out this compassion. As mentioned in the previous narrative, as the community renews itself it expends itself. This has been experienced in the building of membership beyond its bounds. New communities are formed from this practice of authentic love. In the end this authentic loves is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. A manifestation of this Kingdom is authentic love in action. In concrete expressions this is the community gathered together expressing its creative love. This narrative cannot be put under a basket, it can only be a light shining beyond the darkness. This community spirit is the shape of things to come in the Catholic community.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter has been an exercise in connecting narratives beyond the individual experience to the communal. Although American culture is often an exercise in expressing individuality, the contemporary American Catholic Church strives to gather narratives together. This is not always an easy task for the Church or for its members. I have explained how this exercise is often a dynamic process that produces more victims than survivors. Yet, the Church itself is currently in the grips of massive change. These changes obviously affect the narratives of individuals and communities. These
changes have brought transformations and resistance. The future shape of these narratives remain to be determined. Time will be the greatest predictor of the future shape of the Church.

In the midst of this integration of individual and communal narratives certain narratives carry forces while others lie dormant. I have presented narratives that I envision have left the Church struggling to find life. These narratives have a death-dealing quality about them that limit the potential of the community. I have also presented four narratives that I perceive to be bringing life. These life-giving narratives have been present and active in the Church, but they have been silent and nascent. The contemporary Catholic Church is just beginning to experience the power of these narratives. As the Church continues to experience a renewal it will shake off these death-dealing narratives and embrace the fullness of the life-giving narratives.

After explaining the power of narrative in the life of the individual and the community, my final task in chapter three is to explain the unique opportunity for the ministry of pastoral counseling to contribute to the life of the local Catholic parish. This ministry has the unique opportunity of listening to and guiding the narratives of members of the community and offering life-giving narratives over ones that fail to bring forth life. The community longs for a theological literacy along with a wholistic mental life. I firmly believe the ministry of pastoral counseling provides this moment of grace. If the Church embraces this ministry, then the Church will experience the community more fully alive.
CHAPTER III

PASTORAL COUNSELING: A UNIQUE MINISTRY FOR THE CATHOLIC PARISH COMMUNITY

At present there are over forty pastoral counseling or pastoral counseling related master's degree programs, over twenty-five of which started in the 1980's. Of the more than two thousand students enrolled in them, approximately 50 percent are women (Catholic programs report over 65 percent of the students being women); over 70 percent are laypersons; and almost 10 percent are from areas outside the United States. (Wicks, 1994, p. 84)

These statistics on the current size of the pastoral counseling movement sound impressive and encouraging when the reader considers the scope of this growing field. At first glance the numbers could even be thought of as a necessary response to the growing need within American society for a holistic and integrated approach to psychology and religion. What a wonderful opportunity to bring together psychological issues with a developmental approach to spiritual maturity. Pastoral counseling seems to be offering a distinct ministry that accompanies individuals, couples, and families on the road to a fullness of relationship with self, world, and God. Yet for some reason, the field of pastoral counseling is almost non-existent in certain theological discussions of ministry. Why is there not more of a focus on pastoral counseling in Catholic
ministry discussions when it seems to be growing within the field of university education? More importantly why is it not officially endorsed as a distinct ministry of the Catholic Church?

Although these questions can be applied to other denominations my questions in this chapter will focus on pastoral counseling in the Catholic Church. As stated above there are over forty pastoral counseling Master's degree programs currently operating in the United States and Canada. Of the forty programs, twelve are at Catholic institutions. This doesn't necessarily indicate that all graduates of these programs are Catholic, but it does demonstrate that the Catholic Church has in some way endorsed the field.

It would be revealing to do some rough statistical analysis to come up with figures around the field of pastoral counseling in the Catholic Church. For example, if each of these programs, that were based in Catholic institutions began in the 1980s and if each program graduated twelve Catholic students, that would indicate that there are roughly, 440 to 500 graduates ministering around the world, especially in the United States. Of course these are rough estimates, but they show a growing number that will only continue to increase. As time goes on most pastoral counseling programs will grow and accept more students into their programs. At the current time these numbers seem to be increasing and they seem to be serving a growing need of the faith community.

To extend these estimates further I have often wondered how many of these pastoral counselors minister at the level of the Catholic parish community? I have no hard data to determine what these numbers might be, but in the city of Chicago, which is one of the largest archdioceses in the United States, I can account for only a few pastoral counseling centers affiliated directly with a parish community. Most often these pastoral counseling centers consist of a few counselors offering their services to the parish community. The counselors often hold office space in one of the buildings
attached to the parish. This seems to affirm the point made above that the Catholic Church has shown little interest or investment in the field of parish-based pastoral counseling. To put it frankly, the Church has not utilized the expertise and resources of the pastoral counseling field in the parish setting. Because of the absence of an official endorsement by the Church, Catholic professionals have taken their gifts and services outside of the parish community and into the numerous private and public mental health services.

One area within the church where pastoral counseling has found a home is within Catholic Charities. Catholic Charities was established in 1910 by the Catholic University of America, as a movement to advance the cause of charitable programs. It was also established to coordinate the work of the Catholic community within social service agencies in the United States. Throughout various offices around the country Catholic Charities offers counseling for a wide range of people with a multitude of specific issues. Often times if the resources are not available for Catholics within their parishes they will be referred to the Catholic Charities office.

This move away from the parish community for counseling has set a trend within the pastoral counseling profession that should be moving in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, a number of factors have influenced this movement away from a parish-based ministry. The Catholic Church today is faced with a unique set of circumstances concerning ministry and it has struggled to meet the needs of the community.

In a recent article by the sociologist, Richard Schoenherr on the irreversible decline in the Catholic ordained priesthood he reports on the latest demographic facts. These latest numbers related to the ordained priesthood raise questions about the effectiveness of serving and meeting the needs of the community.

The stark facts are that, while the diocesan priesthood population will have declined by 40 percent between 1966 and 2005, the lay population is
increasing by 65 percent. The laity-to-priest ratio, a fairly accurate measure of supply and demand, will double between 1975 and 2005 from 1,100 to 2,200 Catholics per active priest. Furthermore, this is a conservative estimate because it does not account for the growing Hispanic-American population, which is increasing five times faster than the general population. At the same time, recruitment and retention will remain chronic problems and the number of retirements and deaths will soar. (Schoenherr, 1995, p. 12)

These numbers do not lie, in fact they paint a picture of a rapidly changing church. These changes will obviously bring about various ministerial adjustments. The Catholic Church is struggling to be a church without ordained priests. They are also learning how to minister to communities when ordained ministers are not available. One adjustment is the creation of pastoral coordinators where an ordained priest is not available. This ministry has developed because more and more parishes cannot be staffed full-time by an ordained minister. The ministry was created because the church was backed against the wall with few alternatives. Yet this emerging ministry has grown out of a new understanding of alternative pastoral leadership. This ministry has embraced the gifts of the community by supporting the ministerial gifts of the members of the community. This new ministry is establishing a new approach that doesn’t put a band-aid on the priest shortage, but rather embraces a new ministry. If this approach is utilized in other emerging ministries it will send a clear message to the members of the church that their services are valued and desired.

On a more practical level, at the local parish, specific life questions along with faith questions will not go away. Just because the minister’s role is changing doesn’t mean that the community’s needs will change. In fact the community’s needs will probably continue to grow more diverse and complicated. As the world changes the Church will also change. The community will continue to struggle with marital problems and family conflicts. Community members will seek guidance in the areas of
faith and decision-making. The community will continue to voice these issues as they live and grow in the community.

In this chapter I do not wish to argue for the ministry of pastoral counseling to replace the changing face of ordained priesthood. Neither do I see pastoral counseling as synonymous with the Catholic priesthood. I would argue for the ministry of pastoral counseling even if the Church wasn't in a vocation crisis. My position in this chapter stems from the belief that the ministry of pastoral counseling is a distinct vocation of the Catholic Church. What makes this ministry even more poignant is that the present Catholic situation has carved out a natural space in the Church for pastoral counselors to minister. The alignment of changing ministerial roles along with the changes in modern American society has created the need for pastoral counseling. There is a great thirst in America today for a psycho-spiritual integration of matters of the self with matters of the spirit. More and more people within the Catholic community are struggling with the questions of personality development and faith development. Often times these two realms are thought of as separate compartments rather than as distinct parts of a whole. Pastoral counselors in their work seek to assist individuals within the community to experience their faith life as part of their psychological life.

The Distinct Characteristics of Pastoral Counseling

Thomas Hart (1994) a theologian and psychotherapist, in his recent book is asked the question: "What is the difference between spiritual direction, pastoral counseling and psychotherapy?" His answer characterizes the current dilemma of attempting to define the distinctiveness of pastoral counseling.

Let me begin my answer on a personal note. As a Jesuit priest, I was "spiritual director" to many people. During those years I also worked in parishes, schools, and retreat houses as a "pastoral counselor." These last fifteen years, I have been a "psychotherapist." But I think I have always done
pretty much the same thing: I have listened to people with care, and given them my honest responses. It was their lives people have brought me, however they saw my role. They brought whatever most concerned them. And my responses have always come out of an ever growing fund of personal experience, faith convictions, and psychological knowledge. So for me, there has been no major difference among these three practices. . . People seek out a pastoral counselor (most often, the priest or minister in their church) when some problem is bothering them, and they want help with it from someone who shares their faith. . . They do not think of the pastoral counselor as deeply trained in psychology, but they presume he or she has some psychological training and considerable life and counseling experience, and so is a wise and good advisor. (Hart, 1994, pgs. 143-144; 146)

Although Hart speaks out of his personal experience and his perceptions of pastoral counseling he doesn’t necessarily identify the distinctiveness of pastoral counseling. For Hart there seems to be no major difference between spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, or psychotherapy. I find Hart’s conclusions disappointing in that he fails to highlight the important distinctions that I believe exist. I do not disagree that each of the three practices tend to overlap, but I do believe that their distinctiveness is vital and needs to be stated. When the distinctiveness is not stated it continues to send a message of ambiguity to potential community members who might seek out pastoral counseling. In particular, the Catholic Church and its members will continue to remain perplexed by the value of pastoral counseling as a ministry until a more cogent communication of the practice is communicated.

F. Clark Power, a researcher in the field of education and faith development in an informative article on the distinctiveness of pastoral counseling states that two issues have to be addressed before pastoral counselors can achieve a distinct identity.
First, pastoral counselors must clarify the relationship between the humanistic values that underlie secular models of counseling and psychotherapy and their theological convictions. Second, pastoral counselors must define their field in such a way that its religiously based distinctiveness is maintained within the broad disciplinary framework of empirical psychology. (Power, 1990, pgs. 75-76)

Power asserts that pastoral counselors must define what distinguishes their practice from secular therapy. He uses the example of Clinebell's (1984) definition of pastoral counseling in, Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling to illustrate the lack of distinctiveness. "Pastoral counseling is a reparative expression of pastoral care, seeking to bring healing to those who are suffering from crisis induced dysfunction and brokenness." The definition combines the work of psychology and theology, but there is nothing to distinguish it from secular counseling. Power argues that the distinctiveness of the "pastoral counselor must be based on what the counselor actually does and not on the counselor's training, role, or even consciousness."

I agree with Power that the pastoral counselor must be identified by what he does and not how he has been trained. Pastoral counselors help people with problems related to intimacy, but they also assist people in discussing issues around meaning and religious beliefs. Pastoral counselors assist people in bridging the confusion they experience when they are faced with difficult issues in their lives that are linked to their faith.

I have often communicated to friends and family that I am training to be a pastoral counselor. They quickly reply by asking how pastoral counseling is different from secular counseling? I reply by stating that a pastoral counselor attends to the psychological issues of a person's life, but also the theological questions that often confuse or prohibit growth. The pastoral counselor is unique in that he or she seeks to facilitate psychological health and spiritual maturity. I understand pastoral counseling
as a specialized form of ministry that has been influenced by certain psychological principles. It is a practice that is growing stronger as psychology and theology continue to dialogue. Especially in the United States, Americans are eager to integrate and articulate what they believe and how they live. Pastoral counselors facilitate the process of assisting people in this process of integration of spirit, mind, and body.

Pastoral counselors listen to the symbols of religious language and assist others in clarifying the concepts of forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, fear, grace, and love. Many times people will seek out a pastoral counselor because they are confused about the limits of sacrifice, or the intensity of grief. What makes pastoral counselors distinct is that they can listen to a life story and hear experiences that speak of spiritual ambiguity and confusion. A pastoral counselor can listen to and experience the faith of a client and assess how that faith has been misused or abused. Ultimately the pastoral counselor meets people at the “limit experiences” of life. The limit experiences are the moments of radical questioning of existence people go through when they seem to exhaust all their resources. These are the times when meaning is shattered and a new reality is sought. These are the moments spoken of in chapter one when an old story or life-narrative has to be rewritten. A new story has to be told by an individual who has reached the limits of trust and faith. Pastoral counselors guide and hold clients in these moments so that a new story can be rewritten. These are difficult moments and joyful moments, but most often they are uncertain times of fear and ambiguity. Pastoral counselors help individuals work through the crises so that hope is possible beyond the pain. In this kind of counseling the distinguishing characteristics of pastoral counselors are evident in the bigger theological questions of salvation and the kingdom of God. Perhaps a loss of a husband or a wife precipitates these limit experiences, these are the moments of God’s grace entering the confusion of individual lives. The pastoral counselor guides and directs individuals by preparing the ground for God to be
experienced and loved. True growth comes when new meanings and new narratives breakthrough old systems and a spring flourishes.

What makes the pastoral counselor distinct is his or her faith and trust in God? The counseling enterprise is not simply a dialogue between client and counselor. The pastoral counseling experience is an experience of spirituality and faith. The counselor and client commit themselves to a process of change that is grounded in faith and love. When it is appropriate to communicate the presence of God in the counseling experience, the pastoral counselor will clearly state that ultimately the counseling experience is a moment where two are gathered in the name of Christ. This communication of counselor to client is a reminder that reconciliation is being sought in a sacramental way. The counseling experience is a holy moment where healing and wholeness are desired.

Prayer is also an element of pastoral counseling that distinguishes it from secular counseling. Prayer can be a moment of conversion and transformation in the counseling relationship when the counselor and client together join together to glorify God. Prayer also establishes a unique pastoral relationship that encourages moments of transcendence. Calling on the love of God through prayer brings the counseling moment into a sacred space. Without prayer I would find pastoral counseling seriously lacking a key ingredient to healing and grace.

All of these issues of loss and pain and salvation are distinctive to the work of pastoral counselors. People within communities are often speaking about these issues, but they do not have the words to describe their experience. Pastoral counselors facilitate the process of articulating faith and redemption by giving people words to explain and feel their experience. Catholics as members of parish communities are longing to speak these words so that together with pastoral counselors they can better answer the question Jesus has asked his disciples. “Who do you say I am?” The primary
focus and issue the pastoral counselor deals with is helping believers to answer this question with heart-centered faith and spiritual maturity.

The Path That Has Led Pastoral Counseling To The Catholic Parish

The Seeds Planted by Vatican II

It is amazing to even consider the possibility of pastoral counseling becoming a part of a parish ministry team when lay ministry is put in a historical perspective. My early memories of lay involvement in ministry always centered around the lector at Sunday mass, or the leader of song. These were ministries that enhanced the celebration of the Eucharist and provided opportunities for the laity to utilize their gifts for the community. Lay involvement before Vatican II was underutilized and many times ignored by the leaders of the church. Most lay groups functioned outside of the worshipping practices of the community. Almost all of the lay groups functioned as adjunct groups, such as the Holy Name Society, or the Altar and Rosary Society. These groups gathered not so much to voice their ministerial needs but to support the parish financially and socially. These societies were gender divided and rarely gathered together. They were groups who gathered but almost never spoke about alternative worship styles. If they did gather for these purposes they sometimes would have been seen as a threat to the parish community.

The advent and aftermath of Vatican II has brought a new reality to the Church’s understanding of ministry and lay involvement. There was a distinctive move away from a negative position of opposition to a positive communication of interest. Suddenly the message to the people of God was that each community member has a sacramental identity rooted in baptism. By virtue of baptism every Catholic has a right to minister in the Church. This began to send a message to the people that they were no longer seen as a threat to the Church. In a sense, the 2nd Vatican council ended the power
struggle of control and fear by conveying a message of sacramental identity. The Church was beginning to identify and affirm the value of the community.

Vatican II also affirmed the laity’s "relative autonomy" from the hierarchy. Robert Kinast, a pastoral theologian describes this change in his essay on the worthiness of lay ministry. He details where these statements by Vatican II are located in the documents.

This was stated in the Constitution on the Church, 33:

The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the church. Through baptism and confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.

The same position is restated in the decree on the Lay Apostolate, 3. There are two important points here. The basis of the laity's role is sacramental, not juridical, and it is the Lord who appoints them, not the hierarchy as was the case in Catholic Action.

This establishes the relative autonomy of the laity. Their role is not limited to formal invitation or appointments from the clergy, but neither is it left entirely to their own discernment and discretion. Both the sacramental life and the apostolate are inherent features of the communal life of faith, which is presided over by the clergy. (Kinast, 1993, p. 289)

These statements from the documents of Vatican II radically change the perspective of the Church on the meaning of lay ministry. The laity are suddenly appointed "by the Lord" rather than by the hierarchical powers in Rome. This sends the message that the laity are not absolutely bound by the hierarchy. Of course this autonomy is a new freedom, but it is not a limitless process of anything goes.

A third difference that resulted from Vatican II was to affirm the role of the laity not only in the Church but also in the world. The 2nd Vatican council sent a clear message to the laity that they have a vocation to building up the Church. This message
was to inform the people of God that by right of their baptismal calling they were mandated to serve the Church.

The laity have responded to this calling by serving in the church as ministers of the word and ministers of song. These ministries have brought a vibrancy to the celebration of the Eucharist that has nourished many. Other ministries have spread to the work of religious education and evangelization. The laity took on new responsibilities to educate members of the community in the ways of faith and service. Other ministries have also emerged from the areas of ecumenism, social justice, youth ministry, and liturgical celebration. Each of these ministries have brought a fullness of life to the parish that has enhanced the community with many gifts. As these gifts have grown and developed they have sparked others in the community to follow the Gospel message of “coming to serve, and not be served.” The community of believers is responding to their sacramental call by putting their gifts to work in the community. The community has been the better for this growth, because it has harvested the fruits of these new ministries. Out of these ministries the Church has grown and the message of the Gospel has come into the homes of all those seeking new life.

The Ministry of Pastoral Care

Another ministry that brought about new opportunities for the Church was the ministry of pastoral care. The foundations of pastoral care flow out of the needs of the community as they live out the Gospel. In the process of striving to live out the Gospel members of the community will seek out God in the midst of their lives. The real life experiences of the members of the Church will often become moments of confusion and fear. Some of these moments such as the death of a spouse or the unexpected illness of a community member raise questions for the members of the community. The ministry of pastoral care seeks to serve these community members who struggle with the difficulties and mysteries of living.
In the ministry of pastoral care the caregiver bases his or her ministry on the meaning and implications of experience according to the Gospel. In a way the minister of pastoral care deals with God's intentions as they challenge the individual believer's intentions. These moments of crisis and pain are often moments of conversion. Often times members of the community will be tempted to blame God or blame themselves. It is the task of the pastoral caregivers in the midst of the community's confusion to communicate the intention of God. This is not an easy task and often the intentions of God are mysterious and not easily understood.

The tensions that exist in pastoral care are difficult to monitor because of the tendency of the believer to encapsulate God's actions into a clearly defined description. Pastoral care is not static or limited to certain possibilities, and it is not based on a professional psychological model of development. The basis of pastoral care is grounded in the belief that all of the community are striving to live out the baptismal commitment of faith. The ministry of pastoral care helps us to live out our commitment in the church according to our particular life experiences. It helps us seek salvation by living according to the Gospel message of life. At times in the process of living, the Christian seeks forgiveness because of the reality of sin. Pastoral caregivers facilitate a process of helping members of the community to see their finiteness and limitedness as human believers. This recognition of sin enables the community members to seek forgiveness. Pastoral caregivers also have the responsibility of inviting believers into the mission and ministry of building up the kingdom of God. The faith of Christians is not an individualistic experience, but rather an experience of relationship and koinōnia.

Living out this ministry is not an easy task for the members of the community that respond to its calling. Yet all Christians are called to this ministry of care. Regis Duffy, a Roman Catholic pastoral theologian has attempted to establish a theological model of Roman Catholic pastoral care according to the catechumenate. He uses the
catechumenate because of its long history of providing a formation process into the Church for new members. Along with his beliefs about a theology of pastoral care he states what the practice of pastoral care should truly be grounded in.

I have suggested that pastoral care cannot achieve its real purpose if it does not renew a sense of mission in all whom it touches. Pastoral care allows Christians to hear once more Christ’s challenge: “Rebuild my house.” It enables us who do not see or hear perfectly ourselves to help others see and hear again. Today the need for effective pastoral care is greater than ever because many Christians no longer perceive that challenge to help as an essential dimension of becoming or remaining authentically Christian. Pastoral care retools Christians so that they can participate in this rebuilding with a new sense of purpose and vision. Our concern here is with pastoral care for tomorrow. (Duffy, 1983, p. 85)

Pastoral Counseling As A Form Of Pastoral Care

One of the results of the expansion of pastoral care in the Roman Catholic church has been the emergence of pastoral counseling. Duffy (1983) in his book on pastoral care mentions some of the early names in the development of “Catholic pastoral counseling” as Raymond Hostie (1966), Andre Godin (1965), John R. Cavanagh (1963), and Charles Curran (1969). These were often priests in the Church who were aware of the need for counseling skills and psychological competence when working with people. Some of the titles of these books reveal the focus of their study when ministering through pastoral counseling. “The Pastor as Counselor;” or “Psychological Dynamics in Religious Living,” were written in the attempt to join the resources of theology with psychology.

More contemporary authors such as H. Nouwen are often cited as pastoral caregivers who address the needs of Vatican II with pastoral psychology. Nouwen has
often been a favorite among many of the Catholic community because of his commitment to not only the one seeking healing, but also attending to the actual healer or caregiver. Hence, the popularity of his book, "The Wounded Healer" (1972).

Since the 1980's pastoral counseling programs have grown in the university system. These programs have been training lay and religious members of the church to be pastoral counselors. The pastoral counselor that is trained through the university based program develops personally as a counselor by integrating their individual self-understanding with their faith understanding. Taken together these parts of the pastoral counselor's development can enhance their ability to assist others in this lifelong task of personal integration. The difference between these university based training programs and counselors working within Catholic Charities is that there is a greater emphasis on personal development of the counselor along with faith development. Although the distinctions in counseling are not very different, the method of training pastoral counselors is unique to the university based programs. So if the question was asked how do university trained pastoral counselors work differently than counselors at Catholic Charities? The distinction would lie in the manner in which the university trained counselor integrates who they are as counselors with who they are as people. Another distinction also focuses on the university trained pastoral counselor contributes to the field of research. These university based programs encourage pastoral counselors to contribute to the empirical knowledge of the profession.

When these lay students come to the end of their program of study they often do not have an established office to occupy within the Catholic Church. In other words, no one within the Church officially endorses the pastoral counselor as a ministry of the church. In comparison to the ordained ministries which go through a sacramental ceremony of ordination, the pastoral counselor is left to search for a place in the church. This ordaining of some ministers and not ordaining others has caused
great division in the Church. Especially as new ministries grow out of the needs of the community some official acknowledgment must be part of the minister’s development. I believe some form of endorsement has to be implemented otherwise ministries such as pastoral counseling will continue to exist as a ministry that serves the community as something additional to the “immediate needs” of the Catholic Church.

The lack of any response by the Catholic Church presents the pastoral counselor with a limited range of possibilities if they wish to serve within the Church community. One option for the counselor is to work outside of the Church as part of an agency or under the structure of Catholic social services. Often these services are offered within Catholic Charities. Another option is to establish pastoral counseling within the Catholic parish along side the ministries of director of religious education; youth director; and the newly formed position of pastoral associate. This option enables the pastoral counselor to be a part of the total team ministry. This seems like the natural place for pastoral counseling as a ministry because of the community’s need for the service. It is unclear what this ministry might look like or how it might be utilized when it is part of the parish. In the following section I would like to raise some of the issues that might emerge from this ministry if it existed within a parish framework.

Parish Pastoral Counseling

When I think of the Catholic parish I usually think of a group of people gathered together because of their belief in Jesus Christ. For the Catholic the parish is a microcosm of the Church. Specifically for Catholics, the individual parishes are located within a diocese. The diocese is typically guided by a bishop. Beyond the diocese further guidance is given by Cardinals. Finally, the entire Roman Catholic Church is directed by the Pope. This hierarchical structure of authority has been the history of the Church since its beginnings. Viewed in this way, the parish is a designated geographical area where members of the church gather to worship and seek guidance.
Beyond the geographical understanding of parish is the richer understanding of parish as a gift. The parish is not something Catholics make, but rather as something that we receive from God. We were given the gift of faith through God's loving action of giving away part of his very self. Because God chose to love us we have inherited the kingdom of God. God chose to dwell with us by taking flesh and become one of us in Christ Jesus. The Church is God's gift to us and we continue this gift through the celebration of our love. Through the sacraments which we celebrate we carry on the mission of God's love in the world. We live out the story of God's love for us by serving others within our community. Each parish in their individual way carries on the communal story of Christ. When the Christian narrative is especially vibrant and true to the word of God the community flourishes and grows beyond its bounds. As individual members of the Christian community we strive to live out our individual stories in a way congruent with the Gospel story. At times this is not an easy task for members of the individual parish communities. As I stated in chapter two the individual stories of the community members can fail to be incorporated into the communal story and cause confusion and fear.

Within the parish the Christian narrative gets transmitted through the liturgical and catechetical practices of the church. When the preaching and teaching of the local parish is presented in a narrative form the members of the community begin to connect their individual experience with their faith experience. Furthermore, as the community listens and believes these stories they are strengthen in their faithfulness to the message. The message becomes the grounding for their faith to function actively. As the community grows in their story they solidify their reasoning for doctrine and belief. If the doctrine is causing pain or fear, the community must confront it directly. This direct confrontation is the only way to strengthen their faith and hope. Most importantly the parish is a place where the individual members can tell and revise their personal faith stories. The members of the community need help in establishing the
skills of reinterpreting the experiences of their daily lives. If these stories are not grounded in the Church’s universal story of salvation then the individual members will struggle to find meaning in their story.

Who can be a resource for the development of skills in reinterpreting the experience of daily living? Who can support the teller of the story when it fails to be hopeful or faithful to the members of the community? Who can be trusted enough so that personal faith histories can be transformed and strengthened in faith? The pastoral counselor holds this distinctive role. The pastoral counselor is trained in listening to the story and guiding the parishioner in reinterpreting and sometimes rewriting a personal story so that it connects with the Church’s story.

So the question follows, why do pastoral counseling in the parish? The answer lies in the belief that the personal story and the faith story grows and develops from the parish. The parish is where the community gathers to share the story and continue the story. Through baptism we enter the Church and the entire community. We also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism. We begin our journey in the Church by being given the gift of carrying on the mission of Christ. We become the continuation of Christ through our baptism. Together through each member’s baptism we form the body of Christ. This body of Christ is the presence of God proclaiming the story of Christ’s salvation. The expression of Christ’s story is our interaction together in our communities. The parish is the grass roots expression of the church. So the membership to a parish is not just belonging to a parish, but rather interacting through relationship with other members of the community. The parish becomes the place where we live out the message of the Gospels. From the parish we spread the good news to all those in need of care and compassion. Our ministry grows out of the parish experience. Members of the parish are called upon to share with others the gift they have to give. Pastoral counselors respond to this need by offering their services of
listening and healing. Paul Giblin, a pastoral counselor makes an important distinction when discussing pastoral counseling as a ministry of the church.

Pastoral counseling is not psychotherapy. Even though it shares similar training in psychological theory and practice, pastoral counseling is informed by a gospel vision, is exercised by a representative of religious community, and involves a theological, pastoral method. Finally, pastoral counseling is a specialized subset of pastoral care. The pastoral counselor trained in M.A. or M.S. university-based programs is not prepared to celebrate liturgy, to preach, or to evangelize. However, the pastoral counselor is responsible for embodying and communicating the values and norms of his/her religious community (Gerkin, 1991). Pastoral counseling has its "limits" even as it shares many commonalities with other areas of pastoral ministry and psychological practice. (Giblin, forthcoming, pgs. 8-9)

The pastoral counselor must intentionally carry the gospel vision when he or she functions in the parish. I believe this gospel vision must be narrative in form to reach the individual members of the parish. The pastoral counselor as I stated above must be officially endorsed in some way by the official church, so that they are respected as a representative of the parish community. If this official endorsement or blessing is not observed by the church, the members of the community will not be drawn to the pastoral counselor as a minister. The pastoral counselor must establish him or herself through their own lived experience of the Gospel. The community must see the counselor as an individual who truly lives out the Gospel message. The pastoral counselor must be in relationship with the community so that the community can experience the counselor as living the Gospel message of love of neighbor. The counselor must present and live a message of love.

Also the pastoral counselor has to utilize a pastoral and theological method that is coherent and effective. My personal preference for the parish pastoral counselor
is a narrative pastoral and theological method. As I stated in chapter one, narrative therapy and narrative theology contain valuable tools in ministering to those who flounder or feel lost in their personal faith stories. In stating my preference for narrative, I do not believe that this is the only method. Many other methods are conducive to healing and have proven to be helpful to bringing about change and growth. I choose narrative because I believe it has the capacity to transform hearts because stories transmit power and grace in remarkable ways. Narrative can also be utilized as a brief form of therapy. In the Catholic parish there will probably not be a great deal of need for long-term counseling. Although this is not nonexistent in the parish, the general trend would focus more on short-term counseling.

The Parish as a System

If a pastoral counselor is ministering in a parish I believe a family systems perspective is the most beneficial. The parish is the place where couples, families and singles are engaged in relationships. Often members of the parish such as married couples are drawn to the community because marriage is supported and honored. This focus on marriage in the parish enables other couples to find a place to gather together. Other members of the parish are related to each other through family history. Parishes are often places where a family grows together in faith. Mothers and daughters; fathers and sons; brothers and sisters; aunts and uncles; mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws, each of these relationships presents particular issues. Every relationship has a unique dynamic within the family, but also within the faith community.

The family systems perspective looks at all of the individuals as interconnected so that when a change occurs with one member the entire group is influenced. The system functions by maintaining a balance or homeostatic cycle. When symptoms arise
in a family it has the effect of maintaining a particular way of functioning. The systems approach recognizes the symptom and determines how it is keeping the family stuck in a certain framework. The task of the pastoral counselor is to help the family to recognize their behavior and change it if they want to. The family must be reminded that when any change is made in the family, the entire family system will be impacted. Each relationship in the family plays a part in the total family system. When the family wants a change in the relationships they each have to take responsibility for the adjustments.

I find this approach well suited for the parish mainly because often the family functions in ways similar to the parish. Thomas Sweetser and Patricia Foster, in their book, Transforming the Parish, speak about the parish as a system.

That is what happens when we begin to view the parish as a system of interconnected individuals, groups, ministries and organizations. Touch one part of it and the whole system is affected. That is what gives us hope that a new way of being parish is just ahead, perhaps is already here. A number of the parts in the system are being changed at this very moment. There are not enough priests to go around so tasks once done by the ordained are shifted to other staff members and parish volunteers. . . The system is being changed from top to bottom.

As this happens, two options lie open to the leadership, they can try to stand firm and keep the status quo. Eventually the changes will happen to them. Or they accept the inevitable and start taking a more active part in the changes that are happening to the parish system. (Sweetser & Foster, 1993, p. 82)

The family systems approach is a distinct method for bringing health to a faulty system. In a parish, family systems functions in different ways with different people and circumstances. As Sweetser and Foster state, the parish system is multidimensional and contains a wide mixture of interconnected links. When a parish is not functioning
well it is the dynamics of interconnecting relationships that needs to be examined. If a pastoral counselor is trained in family systems and is in place in the parish as a minister, the parish will have an alternative to turn to. The pastoral counselor can work with the parish as a counselor for individuals, couples and families. Also the counselor can work with the parish as a whole to address the difficulties of transforming ministries and new forms of worship. As each part of the parish changes the pastoral counselor is available to guide all of the members beyond limitedness of vision to a wider expanded variety of choices. When the pastoral counselor does this work he or she brings the Gospel vision of new life to fruition. In these grace-filled moments the community grows and the spirit of God grows.

The Catholic Parish of the Future

What will the parish of the future look like and who will be the leaders of the parish? Many predict that the parish will continue to be a place where members of the community gather to worship and participate in the sacraments. The difference will be that the presiders of the community will not be ordained priests, but rather members of the community elected to lead the community in prayer and spiritual well-being.

With the change of leadership will also come the change of involvement in the parish. The parish will become an even more vibrant place to gather as a community of believers. More of its members will want to live a more active faith by putting their ministerial talents to use. More community members will realize that the only way to a richer and more fulfilling faith is through connections with other community members.

The parish will also develop its ministerial offerings to the community. These ministerial offerings will include the services of pastoral counseling and lay pastors. Pastoral counselors will be members of the parish ministry team that serve the needs of a wide range of issues. Community members will seek pastoral counselors in times
of need especially around the issues of marital difficulties, divorce, remarriage, grief and loss issues, emotional pain and confusion, and spiritual questions. Pastoral counselors will guide the members of the community as they struggle with their faith to find healing answers to their messy and unpredictable lives.

Lay leaders will guide the parish in prayer and public worship. They will also be a resource for the community when changes in the larger church are called for. They will instruct and preach to the community so that the members are nourished by the word of God. They will call all of the community to a deeper and loving faith life.

The parish will become a different place with a parish staff made up of parish nurses and directors of religious education. The members of the parish staff will operate out of a different financial compensation. Ministry will no longer be seen as something extra for the parish. Lay ministry will be acknowledged and financially supported because it will continue to be valued as an essential part of parish functioning.

As these transformations and transitions occur they will stretch the members of the community to look beyond but not dismiss the history and traditions of the church. This will be the greatest challenge for the church as it makes a change for the future. New narratives will be intertwined with the old enduring truths of the gospel. The joining of these narratives with the tradition will result in new realities for the parish of the future. Vatican II brought change, but the church has not yet felt the full reality of what the council communicated and intended. Once the church moves beyond the surface cosmetics of change it will truly shift to a new life-giving narrative. When this change comes to the parish in the form of new ministers and ministries, the community will truly come alive.

Pastoral counseling will play a distinctive role in these new parish ministries because the members of the community will be renewed and healed by its gifts. There have been glimmers of hope springing from this ministry of life-giving hope and faith.
Pastoral counseling will continue to develop as a ministry because of what pastoral counselors do. They will minister to the members of community by bring the gospel message into the counseling setting. They will assist people in understanding the dynamics of theological and psychological frameworks. They will preach a message of integration as every Christian searches for understanding and meaning. Pastoral counselors will bring the gospel beyond the counseling room so that the faith of all believers will grow beyond the bounds of the community. Pastoral counseling is truly, “a quiet revolution in modern ministry.”

Summary

This chapter has been an exploration of pastoral counseling as a unique ministry in the Catholic Church. For pastoral counseling to establish itself as a ministry it must have very distinct characteristics. Pastoral counselors have to be able to articulate what they do. They have to communicate what makes pastoral counseling what it is. The sooner clarity can be reached the sooner the members of the church will direct their needs toward the pastoral counselor.

The Catholic Church made a drastic turn toward a new form of ministry when Vatican II concluded. The council brought new understanding to the meaning and narrative of ministry. The seeds of Vatican II have planted a rich diversity in the areas of ministry. The ministry of pastoral care widened its outreach to meet the needs of all the members of the community. One of these needs brought about the ministry of pastoral counseling. Pastoral counselors began to minister to members of the community who were seeking guidance in a theological/psychological framework.

This unique ministry has been offered in many places, but one place where it holds the greatest promise is in the parish. The parish seems to be the place where all of the community can benefit from its many offerings of healing. The location of the parish gives the pastoral counselor the opportunity to minister for all the community
as a system. Seeing the parish as a system, the pastoral counselor can work out of a specific method (family systems) and utilize the method for a two-fold purpose. The counselor can work with the individual family system along with the parish system. Both can be seen as systems in action seeking change and transformation.

The future of the church will bring new ministries as the members of the church grow in religious and spiritual maturity. It is an exciting time in the church to play a part in this expansion of ministries. Pastoral counselors will be a part of this expansion of transformation and change. Pastoral counselors will fulfill a unique role in the future of the church. This ministry will help to bring the Gospel message of Good News into the 21st century.
CONCLUSION

In coming to the conclusion of this thesis I find myself reflecting on the future of pastoral counseling in the Catholic Church. My attraction to the pastoral counseling program at Loyola University Chicago was founded on the belief that pastoral counseling will be a much needed ministry for the future of the Catholic church. After completing this thesis and the program, I still firmly believe in the ministry of pastoral counseling. I am convinced that any counseling done within parish walls must be grounded in the Gospel story and healthy psychological principles. Without these two elements pastoral counseling can not be advertised or administered as part of the Catholic community.

All Catholic pastoral counselors face a difficult challenge when they proclaim their desire to minister in the parish community. These areas of ministry are uncharted and relatively unknown to the counselor. Yet a parish without a pastoral counseling ministry is seriously lacking a needed resource for the future. One look at any of the many expanding denominations of today’s religions in America will show that counseling is a priority to the gathered community. Without this ministry in place in the parish the Catholic community will continue to lose large numbers of believers because their needs are not being met by the parish community resources.

I have presented what I believe to be a significant contribution to this uncharted territory. Through the acknowledgment and defense of narrative I have presented a universal aspect of human experience. Everyone can understand and communicate the power of a story. Narrative makes us who we are. More importantly for Christians,
narrative transforms hearts and enlivens souls. A story has the power to change the way we choose to live and the way we believe. When we can develop an integration of our psychology with our spirituality we will reap the gifts of God's grace. This mode of living is difficult and so the more we are connected to its potential the more we will live out the gift of our lives.

I hope this ministry will grow from the grassroots of the church. The parish is the place where this ministry can truly flourish and spark the hearts of the community. Like all new ministries a starting line must be drawn. The first steps of this ministry must come from the parish community. The church carries on the life and mission of Jesus in the way it ministers to the gathering of believers. This ministry of narrative pastoral counseling is yet another manifestation of Christ's love poured out among us. This ministry is for the church and of the church.
REFERENCES


Dennis P. Phillips, was born in the city of Chicago, Illinois on July 16, 1963. He is the tenth of eleven children born and raised by Edward J. Phillips & Elizabeth M. Phillips. He received his undergraduate degree in Geography & Environmental Studies from Northeastern Illinois University in 1985. He later went on to study theology at the Washington Theological Union and the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He will complete his Master of Divinity degree in 1996. Upon completion of the Master of Arts in Pastoral Counseling from Loyola University, he will work in elementary education as an educator and pastoral counselor.
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The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Pastoral Counseling.

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