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# Fostering Healing through Reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ

Randall K. Carr

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## ABSTRACT

This project is an exercise in addressing anxiety as a result of unresolved conflict in the Abernathy Church of Christ. In 2009 emotions escalated to a climactic point, leading a group of participants to separate from the Abernathy Church of Christ. The events surrounding this episode have played an influential role in shaping the narrative of the Abernathy Church of Christ. This project seeks to identify areas of residual pain in the existing narrative and move the congregation into a narrative of hope for the future of the Abernathy Church of Christ. The central theme is reconciliation and results from blending God's metanarrative with the narrative of the congregation.

To accomplish the objective, this project invited engagement from key leaders in the Abernathy Church of Christ to participate in writing the congregation's next chapter. The invitation to craft the future narrative was narrowed to the current leadership in the Abernathy Church of Christ and provided diversity from unique vantage points concerning recent conflicts in the ACC narrative. The methodology this project incorporates is an ethnographic examination to understand the existing narrative of the Abernathy Church of Christ. Following this examination participants moved the existing narrative toward a future narrative of hope. The crafted chapter from the story-writing group developed a future narrative and identified key elements for incorporating innovative ministry techniques to share God's metanarrative in the surrounding community.

As the story-writing group shifted attention away from the existing narrative of the Abernathy Church of Christ, a future narrative was discovered revolving around the theme of reconciliation. Reconciliation from God's metanarrative and the narrative of the congregation positions the Abernathy Church of Christ to impact the surrounding community. In addition, the shift toward reconciliation also relinquishes anxiety fueled by unresolved conflict. As God's metanarrative blends with the Abernathy Church of Christ narrative, revealing reconciliation's presence, the congregation's future chapter seeks to be active in the surrounding community to proclaim God's story.

Fostering Healing through Reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Randall K. Carr

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

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Dean of the Graduate School

Date

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Thesis Committee

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Dr. Jeff Childers, Chair

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Dr. Dale Bertram

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Dr. David Wray

To Tamber, Brayden, Rylan, and Brynn  
who show me every day  
the love of God  
and the beauty of  
narrative

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Finally, I give glory to God, the one whose story brings meaning to life and reconciliation for all creation. To God be glory, power, and majesty forever and ever.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This project addressed an identified need for a ministry intervention fostering healing through reconciliation in the leadership of the Abernathy Church of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the project was to assist the ACC leadership in resolving conflict that has plagued the congregation for almost two decades. Chapter 1 introduces the project by describing the ACC context. The introduction will include a telling of the ACC narrative from the past two decades leading up to the climactic point of tension and the remaining attitude following this struggle. This chapter will also clarify the problem and purpose statements, as well as identify assumptions, delimitations, and limitations, and provide definitions. Chapter 2 explains the theological foundation on which this project is constructed. The theological foundation for this project was based on Paul Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis, themselves based on Aristotle's *Poetics* and Augustine's *Confessions*. In particular this section will focus on the manner in which these phases inform a reading of the narrative structure in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. Chapter 3 lays out the intervention methodology for guiding the ACC leadership toward healing through reconciliation. This chapter includes the intervention's format, description of the participant group, narrative interview questions, project seminars, evaluation methodology, and techniques for collecting research data. Chapter 4 summarizes research data collected throughout this project, laying out key findings from three vantage points

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<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter referred to as ACC.



to discern the effectiveness of this project. Chapter 5 will substantiate the project's validity as well as present lessons learned and remaining questions, and offer suggestions for replicating this methodology in different contexts.

#### Title of Project

The title for this project is “Fostering Healing through Reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ.” The presence of unresolved conflict in the ACC narrative<sup>2</sup> has perpetuated an attitude of anxiety from the existing leaders, mostly directed at former members. This project sought to identify the residual hostility and move the congregation toward emotional healing of lasting pain from recent conflicts. Through reconciliation ACC's narrative of pain shifted toward a narrative characterized by hope found solely in manifesting God's metanarrative.

#### Description of Ministry Context

ACC has often been described as a family in which participants<sup>3</sup> are committed to the well-being of other participants and sharing the story of Jesus as Christ. It is not uncommon to hear the expression “church family” as a mark of distinction applied to ACC. The notion that ACC functions similar to a family is appropriate. Numerically, ACC was a relatively small congregation with approximately sixty participants.<sup>4</sup> ACC

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<sup>2</sup> The ACC narrative is communicated through stories participants tell and the actions in which the congregation participates. Since the ACC inception participants have recounted the historical events through stories to communicate how the church has been formed through the years of its existence. These stories are told around the water fountain before and after the worship service. The ACC narrative is also recorded in the annals of the church's history. Even still, the narrative is communicated in the traditions passed down to future generations. The ACC narrative is filled with scenes, moments, and events that have contributed to the image the ACC bears in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> “Participants” is used throughout this project to refer to members of the Abernathy Church of Christ. Participant carries a connotation the ACC leadership hopes to create within the ACC narrative. This connotation suggests members actively engage in the ACC ministry efforts. While active involvement is not realized from ACC as a whole, the congregation leaders dream of witnesses growing participation among the current members.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 79, characterizes small congregations as “Churches with an average

consisted almost exclusively of white, middle-class families that have lived most of their lives in or around Abernathy, Texas. Demographically, ACC is primarily separated into two generations. One group is made up of older members with a base age of sixty years. The other group consisted of young families ranging in ages forty years and younger. Visibly absent from ACC was the group between the ages of forty and sixty. The level of intergenerational involvement among the lives of participants has promoted the family motif through relationships between the existing groups. The smaller participation base encouraged a family atmosphere by offering individuals ample opportunities to be involved in the lives of other participants.

### The Birth of a Congregation

In the summer of 1922 five families came together in a local schoolhouse to participate in a “gospel meeting.”<sup>5</sup> At this time Abernathy did not have a Church of Christ and people committed to this tradition were left to travel to neighboring communities for worship opportunities. The gospel meeting held in 1922 was the inaugural meeting of ACC. For the next eighty-seven years the congregation witnessed a steady numerical increase followed by a peak and subsequent decline. Members recount some years with an attendance of more than three hundred. In addition, the congregation also witnessed an abundance of participation from members in church-related activities.

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worship attendance of between 10 and 150 members.” Galindo narrows the scope of small congregations into two smaller categories. The ACC sits on the line between the family-size congregation (3 to 50 members) and the shepherding-size congregation (50 to 150 members). Based on Galindo’s characteristics, ACC appears to better fit into the family-size congregation. These characteristics include 1) intimate relationships, 2) presence of extended family units, 3) commitment to doctrine, theology, or teachings, and 4) widespread presence of silent leaders. For more on congregation size and characteristics, see Galindo, 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> “Gospel meeting” refers to a period of heightened evangelistic efforts to draw participation into a specific congregation. To conduct a gospel meeting, churches would invite a speaker to preach a series of lessons on a predetermined topic. The hosting congregation would advertise the forthcoming event and invite people to attend these services.

One individual recalls the vibrancy of ACC, saying “If we didn’t have 250 in Bible class, we felt like we didn’t have anyone.” Another couple pointed out growth and participation did not last. Participation in ACC began to drop in the mid-1990s. At this time ACC began to experience a decline in numerical participation as well as involvement in ministries conducted at the building. While various speculations have been offered to explain the reasons behind the decreasing participation, ACC remains a congregation serving the community of Abernathy and seeking to create a worshipful atmosphere.

#### 1997: Shift in Power

In 1997 a pivotal shift in the ACC leadership took place. At this time six men with longstanding tenures in leadership and attendance served as elders in ACC. Together this group decided to resign as elders in order to allow younger men to assume this role. The notion was expressed that younger men would be able to bring innovative ideas for ministry to ACC. In addition, younger men would have the increased energy to minister effectively and offer a more appealing visible presence in the surrounding community.<sup>6</sup> As a result of this decision, ACC selected two men to assume the role of elder at the resignation of the older elders. These men were highly respected within ACC and also actively participated in a number of community events through the Abernathy school system.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The rationale behind this decision echoes a similar move in the late 1960s. At this time the elders in the ACC decided to step down and bring younger men into the leadership role. Six men were selected to assume the role of elder in ACC. Some of these men were elders that stepped down in the mid-1990s to allow younger men to assume the elder role.

<sup>7</sup> Each selected man had children in the Abernathy school system. The ages for these children ranged from kindergarten through high school. The community of Abernathy revolves around the school system. The elders’ decision to select men with children attending Abernathy’s school system provided a natural means for making ACC visible in the community.

## 2001: Exercise of Control

Four years after the transition of leaders, the preaching minister<sup>8</sup> of ACC accepted a different ministry role and moved from the Abernathy community. As the elders began searching for a new minister, the group identified the expectations they believed the next minister should meet. They were looking for an individual to be in the surrounding community.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the elders were interested in hiring a younger minister with a family and a repertoire of innovative ministry ideas. While the current elders were developing expectations for the next minister, a group composed of former elders and older members were meeting together to discuss expectations of the next minister. These participants believed the next minister should be an individual committed to teaching nothing but the Bible. This group of former leaders and older members was united<sup>10</sup> around their shared feelings of dissatisfaction about the direction of ACC. The primary critique was that ACC had moved away from teaching the Bible.<sup>11</sup> The expectation of this group was to find a minister who would rehabilitate the congregation's scriptural teachings. The current elders did not share similar expectations concerning the minister's

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<sup>8</sup> David Bennett had served as the pulpit minister for much of the 1990s. He transitioned out of the pulpit minister's position in 1999 to accept a ministry position in a different location. Steve Gauntt was the next minister and served ACC from 2000 to 2010. Brandon Denton was the next minister from 2012-2013. After Brandon transitioned in 2013, I stepped into the preaching position and have been in ACC from May 2013 to the present.

<sup>9</sup> The elders looked for a minister willing to commit to the Abernathy community. One minister candidate recalled this expectation was heavily emphasized during the interview times with the ACC leaders. In addition, various ACC participants stressed community involvement as a requisite for the next minister. Some individuals used the minister's presence in the community as a gauge to determine the minister's effectiveness.

<sup>10</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 10, notes, "Anxiety is also contagious. It connects people. Let one or two people unleash their anxiety, and it won't be long before it has a ripple effect on the congregation." ACC witnessed this ripple effect in the search for the next minister. The dissatisfaction of a relatively small number in ACC began to persuade others to share similar frustrations.

<sup>11</sup> The ACC leaders were accused of moving ACC away from biblical teachings through the introduction of recent books. One individual summarized this saying, "We began to see movement . . . at the end of David's time in Abernathy away from what the Bible taught toward the writings of men."

primary task. Differences of preference concerning the minister's role separated the current leaders and former leaders. This separation increased as former leaders came to believe the current leaders had ignored the group's expectations for the next minister.

After some time the role of preaching minister was offered to a young man who accepted it, looking to fill his first ministry role. In 2000 this man and his family moved to Abernathy and began ministering to ACC. This man recalls the transition as a positive move and reports that the congregation was "very open and eager" to have them come. He went on to point out that people in the community did not appear to exhibit the same excitement about his family's move to Abernathy. On multiple occasions community members would cease conversation once they learned that the man was the ACC minister. From his perception much of the community's defensive posture was credited to an underlying and unfavorable understanding of ACC's character. He justified this thought by pointing to a number in the community who perceived ACC as a group focused on convincing those outside the ACC faith community to conform to the perspectives of the congregation. These conclusions were validated through comments the minister recalled from a number of members, primarily former leaders or of the older members. Shortly after he began ministering within ACC, a "disconnect between the older demographic and himself" emerged to separate the preacher and the ACC theological foundations. A volatile situation was beginning to build as tensions continued to escalate.

#### 2002: Controversial Focal Point

In the year following this new minister's arrival, a catalyst was introduced that ignited hostility and fragmented the ACC. In 2002 ACC adopted a practice of hanging

banners at the front of the auditorium as a tangible illustration of the congregation's narrative. At the top of each banner was a stated theme that served as a vision for the marked year.<sup>12</sup> To commemorate the narrative, individuals were invited to place patches on the banners that celebrated particular moments or activities.<sup>13</sup> The adoption of these banners was met with mixed reactions from participants at ACC. For a number of participants, the banners were a welcomed change. These participants recognized the banners as a valuable resource for commemorating the ACC narrative. As a result this group expressed excitement at the opportunity to place patches on the banner. As the years have passed, this group has continued to look at the banners as a means of telling and reliving ACC's story.

In contrast, a number of participants voiced opposition to hanging the banners and cited a number of reasons.<sup>14</sup> Some participants believed the placement of patches was an exercise in boasting the accomplishments of one participant over other participants.<sup>15</sup> Other objections grew out of some participants' backgrounds in other faith traditions. Several from this group were raised in faith traditions that honored decorations and practices such as the banners. One former minister observed that at the time of adopting the banners, most of the older husband and wife couples were made up of one spouse that had grown up in another faith tradition and had been convinced to become a member of

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<sup>12</sup> The themes derive from a verse of Scripture (e.g., "Cloud of Witnesses" emerged from Hebrews 12:1) or an attribute the ACC wants to nurture within the congregation (e.g., "Unity").

<sup>13</sup> Patches placed on the banners were shaped according to the celebrated scene. A graduation cap with a name is placed on the banner to celebrate a participant's completion of an academic career. A teddy bear with a name is placed on the banner to celebrate the birth of a child (blue bears are used for boys, pink bears are used for girls). In addition, some patches celebrate rites individuals participate in (e.g. dove patch for baptism, wedding bells patch for weddings or anniversaries).

<sup>14</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1996), 55, writes "Grumbling is apparently endemic to human beings and, among some, epidemic. Put people together and inevitably someone will express contrariness."

<sup>15</sup> One couple quickly argued the banner patches placed greater emphasis on the accomplishment of the participant and detracted from other participants. In addition, the placement of patches was claimed to detract from bringing glory to God.

the Church of Christ.<sup>16</sup> The presence of these banners recalled the faith tradition(s) these individuals had stepped away from at an earlier point in life. Some claimed the banners were a distraction that inhibited people from maintaining a reverent mindset.<sup>17</sup> Still others believed the banners defied a biblical precedent by accepting a practice that was not ordained by the biblical writers.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the banners were kept in place and tension between the two groups continued to escalate and cause division to occur in ACC.

### 2009: Climax of Tension

Underlying the escalating tension focused on the banners was an attitude of dissatisfaction with the minister. Since the current elders had decided to hire a preaching minister without the endorsement of the former elders, hostility had been growing. These voices began to gain volume in the form of some participants' verbal outbursts directed at the elders and minister.<sup>19</sup> It was becoming more common for participants to express

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<sup>16</sup> Other participants also pointed out the common practice of decorating the congregation's worship structure in different faith traditions. For these participants the practice of hanging decorations to commemorate a member's accomplishments reminded them of the faith tradition they had once belonged to. As these participants became active in ACC, they refrained from participating in the practices of their former faith tradition. These participants felt they had moved away from the practices of the former faith tradition. The fulfillment of similar practices in ACC reminded these members of the beliefs they had once held and now believed to be false.

<sup>17</sup> This point has been made multiple times from one anonymous couple in the ACC. In particular, this couple claims the children in a worship setting are not able to learn proper worship protocol because they are interested in the banners surrounding the worship center. They claim, "When I look around and see all the kids looking at these banners—they're just not worshipping. I can tell. You can't worship and be distracted by these banners."

<sup>18</sup> Participants have argued a church building should be a place of simplicity and not heavily adorned. Much of the basis for this argument is constructed on Jesus's words to his disciples concerning the beauty of the temple. Luke 21:5-6 reads, "Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.'" Participants have used these words to claim the ACC should not adorn the building because it will eventually be destroyed.

<sup>19</sup> Gil Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1998), 34, writes, "The increase in anxiety prompts people in our congregations to search for *what* is wrong. When they do not find clear and agreeable answers, they quickly try to determine *who* is wrong." Arthur Paul Boers refers to this as "scapegoating." Arthur Paul

disapproval of the elders or the current minister during classes, worship services, or in conversations in the congregational setting or in the community. Participants from the older demographic began planning attempts to separate members of the ACC leadership from each other.<sup>20</sup> Once alone, the participants would rain a torrent of accusations against the ACC leadership. The elders and minister were accused of splitting ACC and attempting to sabotage the congregation by advancing personal agendas. Finally in the summer of 2009, a large percentage of participants in ACC decided to seek worship opportunities in other places.<sup>21</sup> These participants collectively decided no longer to worship or serve in ACC and to participate with different congregations instead. This group was primarily comprised of an older demographic, the former elders and participants with whom they had nurtured friendships throughout their life in Abernathy. In addition, a smaller group comprised of what might be considered “innocent bystanders” also exited ACC during this time of intense conflict. The actions of individuals for whom they cared deeply became a hindrance to their continued worship in ACC.<sup>22</sup>

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Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999), 36, defines scapegoating as “projecting shadows or negative emotions on someone else.”

<sup>20</sup> Speed B. Leas, “The Basics of Conflict Management in Congregations,” in *Conflict Management in Congregations* (ed. David B. Lott; Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2001), 22, points out, “We have entered the realm of disruptive and painful conflict when the congregation has moved from debates and games to fighting . . . when people no longer calculate their remarks to edify or change others, but plan them to hurt, demean, defame, or destroy the other.”

<sup>21</sup> Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 16, observes, “Anxiety provokes change. It prods and pushes us toward innovation or transformation. If, however, it reaches a certain intensity, it prevents the very change it provokes. What is stimulus becomes restraint. We ‘lose our head’ or ‘cool,’ as we say, essentially our awareness and composure; we are too reactive to be responsive.” This was the situation in ACC as tensions mounted and participants became reactive to the crisis. The group exiting the faith community had finally reached a point where they emotionally could not tolerate any more anxiety, moving them to seek other worship opportunities.

<sup>22</sup> One anonymous individual lamented this exodus, saying, “I was tired. These were my friends and fellow Christians. To see them acting this way—I was just tired.”



The aftermath of this exodus left the ACC participants reeling. One of the more challenging consequences has been the loss of a sense of identity and purpose. Following the events of 2009, the remaining congregation has been left to rebuild the congregation's narrative in order to regain identity and direction. Difficulty in crafting this narrative is partly due to the limited resources of participants. Once more ACC finds itself a congregation with a small number of participants in the faith community willing to serve and minister to the surrounding context.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, individuals coming into ACC do not wish to invest time, energy, and resources in ACC. Instead, many choose to drive to neighboring communities in search of other worship experiences and communities of faith. This has made it difficult for ACC to depend on visitor involvement or to discern the direction the leadership should go in order to develop effective ministries.

#### Current Focus: Church Trying to Survive

In the years following the escalation of tensions, ACC has become a congregation content to maintain existence. Chronic anxiety has infiltrated the ACC narrative and birthed attitudes of apathy and survival. Staff turnover in the past five years provides evidence to the presence of chronic anxiety. In 2010 the pulpit minister was offered a preaching role in a neighboring community. He accepted the new role and moved his family out of Abernathy. At the same time the minister's wife, who had served as the church's secretary, stepped down from the role she played, leaving no one on staff at

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<sup>23</sup> "The surrounding context" in this project refers to the ACC ministry context. The ACC leaders have narrowed the focus for ministry efforts to the community of Abernathy and nearby communities. In this move, the ACC leaders have identified the context ACC is called to enter in order to share God's meta-narrative. John Douglas Hall uses the term "contextualization" to summarize a similar move. John Douglas Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 21, writes "To attempt a disciplined and faithful Christian praxis as North Americans today means, concretely expressed, to enter into our historical destiny *as North Americans*, to suffer the critical dimensions of our new consciousness of that identity and destiny and, so far as possible, to alter the direction of our society in ways consistent with the gospel that we are brought to hear in and through this discriminating encounter with our context."

ACC. The role of secretary was quickly filled, with a participant in ACC accepting the part-time position for the congregation. The position for the next minister was substantially more difficult to fill than the role of secretary. The ACC leaders searched for almost two years until a new minister was hired. In 2012 the new minister began ministering to ACC. After one year this minister stepped down to accept a different ministry position. Following a short search, I stepped into the preacher's role and moved my family to Abernathy in 2013. Instability in the church staff has diminished trust for the pulpit minister and contributed to the influence chronic anxiety has on the ACC narrative.

Chronic anxiety is also evident in negative attitudes and complaints from the few participants from the former leaders' group that have remained in ACC following the climax of tension in 2009.<sup>24</sup> These participants persistently second-guess decisions of the ACC leaders. In addition, they repeatedly expressed disapproval for the operations of ACC. The commemorative banners had become the focal point for negative comments. These participants argued the banners were a distraction for the children that should be taught to sit in silence and pay attention to the action at the front of the auditorium. The frustration with the commemorative banners led this couple to claim, "We would go somewhere else if we could find a place close by to worship with." In response to this dissatisfaction, the ACC leaders have either ignored or justified the couple's comments. The ACC leaders were satisfied to allow these participants to vent frustrations as long as they remained active in ACC. The response of the ACC leader to the attitude of

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<sup>24</sup> Participants making up this group have continued to worship with ACC despite frustrations associated with recent conflicts. At the time of this project, this group had dwindled to a husband and wife couple who are unable to pursue worship opportunities elsewhere due to finances, age, and a commitment to the Church of Christ tradition. These factors leave the couple to continue worshipping in ACC, despite dissatisfaction with the congregation's leadership, direction, and teachings.

dissatisfaction indicated a residual presence of chronic anxiety. The ACC leaders worked to pacify upset participants in an effort to promote peace in the congregation. One leader commented, “We need to keep doing these things (e.g., Sunday night worship service) for this group.” Chronic anxiety demanded the ACC leaders allow negative voices to plague ACC through fear these participants would leave if they were not pacified.

A final clue testifying to the presence of chronic anxiety came out of the geographical location of Abernathy. Abernathy is a rural community located fifteen miles north of Lubbock, Texas, and approximately twenty miles south of Plainview, Texas, on Interstate 27. The proximity of Abernathy to these cities offered an abundance of worship options for participants to pursue. Lubbock offered more than one hundred thirty churches to fulfill the worship demands of people in Abernathy. Similar opportunities existed in Plainview as more than forty-five churches invite participation from other communities. The abundance of opportunities allowed participants to discover a worship attitude that, at least during this time, was absent from ACC. In the years following the escalation of tensions, a large number of participants in the ACC chose to travel for worship opportunities instead of coming together with the ACC in worship. The fragile nature of participants in the aftermath of recent conflicts coupled with an abundance of nearby worship opportunities has contributed to chronic anxiety’s presence in the ACC narrative. Leaders fear if a change is introduced into ACC participants will leave the congregation and pursue worship opportunities in these places.

Over the past year the ACC leaders have recognized the congregation’s efforts to survive and taken actions to change the efforts. This shift is evident in the specific banner themes selected to direct the ACC narrative each year. Since 2002, when the banners

were first hung, the themes have focused on maintaining the existing congregation. These themes highlighted specific characteristics (e.g., “Amazing Grace,” “Unity,” “Love”) or developing the nature of the congregation (e.g., “Draw Near to God”). In 2014 the banner theme shifted focus away from the existing ACC to the surrounding context. The adopted banner theme for 2014 was “Here I am, send me.”<sup>25</sup> The focus of the ACC’s ministry efforts shifted from attention placed solely on the existing congregation toward the surrounding context. This shift in the banner theme suggested a growing awareness of the congregation’s survival efforts among the ACC leadership as well as the ACC leaders’ desire to alter this attitude.

#### Statement of the Problem

The identified problem for this project was the presence of chronic anxiety due to unresolved conflicts in the ACC narrative. The escalation of tensions and ensuing exodus have cultivated an underlying presence of chronic anxiety that resulted from a lack of reconciliation on the part of the existing ACC. Chronic anxiety has prevented positive interaction(s) between participants in the congregation and inhibited positive ministry efforts to the people of Abernathy. The reaction of the ACC leadership to chronic anxiety has further complicated healing from recent conflicts. Preceding this project, the ACC leadership did not recognize the presence of chronic anxiety. Failure to recognize the

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<sup>25</sup> In November of 2013 the elders, deacons, and I began exploring possibilities for the driving theme for the upcoming year. To discover 2014’s theme we devoted time in prayer seeking to discern the direction God was leading to discover the next theme. I focused attention on two biblical passages for discovering a concise, thematic expression the ACC could rally behind to guide ministry efforts. The first was Micah 6:8, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The second passage came out of Isaiah 6:8, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here I am. Send me.’” After a period of prayerful consideration for each passage, the ACC leadership met to determine which passage would shape 2014’s banner theme. The ACC leadership decided in this meeting the move to shift ministry focus to the surrounding context was best summarized by Isaiah 6:8. By the end of 2013, the ACC leadership was ready to move forward with the words “Here I am. Send Me.”, and the banner theme was revealed to the congregation.

presence of chronic anxiety left the ACC leaders to misunderstand a need for healing from recent conflicts. Instead, the ACC leadership maintained an attitude of being victimized by the group that left and failed to realize the role they played in the events of the past.

### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to assist ACC in healing the pain associated with unresolved conflicts in the congregation's existing narrative. To accomplish this purpose, the leadership of ACC participated in a process of crafting a "next chapter" in the ACC narrative. The methodology incorporated into this project challenged the ACC leaders to discover the direction in which God is moving the congregation to minister effectively in the Abernathy community. Writing the congregation's story in a way that discovers new trajectories for the future depended on the leaders' overcoming recurring negative emotions from previous tensions and conflicts. Recognizing the roles the ACC leaders have played in unresolved conflicts was a pivotal step in the move toward reconciliation. Understanding their role in recent conflicts positioned the ACC leaders to formulate a next chapter focusing on the direction the congregation would move rather than dwelling on the story in the past.

### Basic Assumptions

This project was developed around three assumptions. The first assumption claimed that the ACC leadership possessed a commitment to overcome ineffective ministry efforts resulting from a lack of reconciliation. The ACC leadership recognized harboring negative emotions from unresolved conflict has prevented participants in the faith community from healing bitterness associated with previous conflicts. In addition,

the ACC leadership is aware that the influence of underlying negativity has hindered ministry efforts in ACC.

Another assumption of this project was the general understanding of the roles and status of elders<sup>26</sup> and deacons<sup>27</sup> in ACC. As a faith community with roots in the Stone-Campbell Movement, elders and deacons at ACC operate in accordance with traditional polity in Churches of Christ. Individuals selected to fill this role are expected to shepherd the congregation and lead through submission to God alone.

The final assumption in this project derived from the personality of a relatively small congregation. ACC is a congregation where participants know each other and are actively involved in the lives of other participants. As a result, relationships thrive in ACC due to the congregation's numerically small nature. Ministry-related activities ACC leads are intended to promote a bond among the people taking part.

### Definitions

Chronic Anxiety—Chronic anxiety refers to a perpetual tension underlying the structure of relationship or composing the fundamental nature of an individual. A

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<sup>26</sup> Elders are recognized as shepherds for a congregation and accept a responsibility for leading the congregation in a direction according to God's direction. D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2013), 23, point out, "Bishops, meaning overseers, also identified as elders or pastors, were to teach, preside at meetings of the church, shepherd the members of the congregation, and rule in matters of discipline." Douglas A. Foster, et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* ("Elder, Eldership": Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 298, note "Elders were to attend principally to the spiritual interests and pastoral needs of the congregation."

<sup>27</sup> Deacons comprised another group recognized by the congregation. This group is described as servants and shares a responsibility for taking care of physical structures. Douglas A. Foster, et al., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* ("Deacons, Diaconate": Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 260, describe Alexander Campbell's and William Kimbrough Pendleton's view of deacons: "Every church had to have a plurality of deacons . . . whose duties would be to collect and appropriate the church's offering, care for the sick, serve in worship services, minister at the Lord's Table, and attend to the secular interests essential to the life of the congregation."

chronically anxious presence is not sparked by an external threat, but operates within a continuous state of anxiety.<sup>28</sup>

Narrative—Narrative refers to the collection of various scenes in a system's history that contribute to the nature of the existing system. Narrative communicates the existence of an organism as well as recounts episodes integral to developing the identity of the system.<sup>29</sup>

### Delimitations

Participation for this project was limited to individuals in formal leadership positions within ACC. This group was comprised of participants who were caught up in recent conflicts as well as some who were not closely involved. Regardless of their perspective, each participant invited to participate in this project was active in ACC during the period of recent conflicts. This study did not include or handle perspectives from the exodus group in the past five years.

### Limitations

Moving a congregation toward healing through reconciliation was an exercise reaching beyond the allotted time for this intervention. Measuring the success of this project required ongoing examinations from the perspective of the leaders on an

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<sup>28</sup> Anxiety is a natural signal that some element within a system needs attention. Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 279, write, "In every relationship system, people eventually become anxious. This anxiety, acting as an alarm system, lets people know that something is not right, that there is a potential crisis. But anxiety also presents the opportunity for the relationship to change and grow." For more on this, see Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006): 15-19; also Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006): 7-14.

<sup>29</sup> S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 55, writes, "Narrative and history are categories constituted by personal relation. Christianity's identification with them reflects the nature of the religious end it seeks." Heim's comment reflects the formation of Christianity as an entity in time communicated through various scenes. The scope of Heim's comment may be narrowed to the historical situation of a congregation, as communicated through the church's scenes responsible for shaping its identity.

individual level, as well as collectively. In addition, the future narrative was subject to future adaptations due to the ever-changing nature of ACC and its evolving context. Beyond the scope of this project, the lasting effectiveness of this project will be gauged as time passes and healing is realized.

### Conclusion

The underlying chronic anxiety resulting from unresolved conflicts produced an environment conducive to fostering healing through reconciliation in ACC. On the whole, ACC was positioned to handle the bitterness of the past years and move forward in order to discover God's transformed narrative for the congregation's next chapter as a prerequisite for developing effective ministry. Ignoring the underlying chronic anxiety has perpetuated an attitude of apathy already present in ACC. In accordance with an apathetic attitude, ACC has experienced a lack of ministry efforts and further alienation of the surrounding ministry context. Even though the presence of chronic anxiety has been disregarded, the ACC leaders were aware of a consuming negative attitude that has inhibited the congregation from participating in ministry to the surrounding context. This has prompted the leadership of ACC to seek change and move ahead by crafting the next chapter of ACC. In order to integrate the next chapter into the ACC narrative, a theological foundation had to be established.



## CHAPTER II

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The theological framework for this project was constructed on the union of God's metanarrative and the narrative of ACC. Recognizing the relationship between these narratives has the potential to fuel motivation for ACC to imitate God's ministry of reconciliation as the congregation heals anxiety associated with past conflicts. To explain the relationship between these stories, I used the insights of Paul Ricoeur to help discover an underlying plot in the congregation's narrative. I followed Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis, culminating in the ACC narrative's progression toward manifesting the image of God. To narrow the scope of God's metanarrative, I focused on 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. Applying Ricoeur's phases to this passage exposed the underlying plot in Paul's letter and how the narrative therein applies to the life of a congregation such as ACC. Discerning the inherent plot of God's metanarrative in Paul's writing helped establish a need for reconciliation in the ACC narrative.

Narratives play a vital role in the experience and communication of life situations. On the surface narratives are expressions of a particular life situation from an individual's perspective. However, peeling away the layers of this superficial connotation reveals more taking place in the crafting and telling of a narrative than merely recounting circumstances. The manner by which an individual expresses a narrative reveals details of deepest importance in the character's memory. Narratives communicate meaning for a character's life situations though they require interpretation in order for their inherent

value to be understood.<sup>1</sup> It is one thing to hear a story as it is retold and another to accurately hear the meaning communicated through an individual's narrative.<sup>2</sup>

These features also hold true of narratives crafted by faith communities. A congregation's life tells a story, set in time and communicating the intricacies of the congregation's existence. From the moment of a congregation's birth to the current time, certain characters stand out, events take place, and a plot is revealed. A congregation's narrative serves as an expression of the participants' experiences. Listening for a congregation's narrative requires hearing the stories of participants in the faith community of the past and present.<sup>3</sup> These stories resonate in the conversations prior to and following the Sunday morning worship time. In addition, one may hear these stories in the practices and rituals that a congregation observes. An examination of this type may reveal the congregation's culture<sup>4</sup> and disclose the foundation for a church's existence. "Founding personalities and early events create a kind of genetic inheritance and

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<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 93, points out, "We cannot escape particular standpoints, but we can compare and debate positions formulated *from* particular standpoints." According to Volf, narratives operate to shape one's understanding of life situations. This understanding is only according to one's interpretation from a particular perspective of a life situation.

<sup>2</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), 88, writes: "Narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist's interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society's refusals of visibility. We come to see how circumstances shape the lives of those who share with us some general goals and projects; and we see that circumstances shape not only people's possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears."

<sup>3</sup> Listening is an ethnographic practice that requires the hearer pay careful attention to verbal and nonverbal cues from the speaker. The difficulty in this practice lies in the abilities of the hearer to focus solely on the story uttered from the speaker without clouding the story with personal interpretations and counsel. Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2008), 141, writes, "In order to hear the deeper stories, pastoral ethnographers must 'listen' with all their senses, for what is communicated in words, tone of voice, silences, gestures, and actions."

<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 34, defines culture as "The complex of values, customs, beliefs, and practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group." This definition is part of a work by Terry Eagleton in which the author breaks down the presence of culture, even when people claim culture does not exist or has no influence on the system. Throughout this project culture is understood according to Eagleton's definition.

determine the way the congregation positions itself within its environment.”<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, a congregation’s narrative is more than the mere communication of stories, but the expression of an overarching metanarrative composed of a church’s heritage and history, for the sake of future generations.

### Narrative Theology

The narrative of a faith community is an ontological expression<sup>6</sup> responsible for developing the congregation’s foundations. At the center of a congregation’s narrative is the tale of a relationship between the creator of the cosmos and the created. This relationship serves as the basis for the congregation’s existence and invites the faith community into an even greater metanarrative—the story of God.<sup>7</sup> The degree a faith community’s narrative fits into the metanarrative of God’s own movement establishes the congregation’s faith foundation and provides a rationale for the nature of the

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<sup>5</sup> Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003), 113. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 11, expand this thought through discussing the communicative power of stories for an individual’s or community’s culture. They write, “Telling stories or fashioning a narrative are not, at their root, just speech patterns but life patterns—not simply a way of talking to explain the world or communicate ourselves but a way of being in the world that, in turn, becomes the basis of our explanations and interpretations.”

<sup>6</sup> “Ontological expression” refers to the way a congregation communicates its nature and existence. Storytelling as an ontological expression recounts the transformation a congregation has experienced to manifest the image of God. Jason E. Vickers, “Canonical Theism and the Primacy of Ontology: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in Trinitarian Perspective,” in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (eds. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 173, writes “When canonical theists speak of the primacy of ontology over epistemology, we intend to call attention to the transforming presence and work of the triune God in the life of the church.”

<sup>7</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 5, defines metanarrative as “An overarching story that claims to contain truth applicable to all people at all times in all cultures.” Anderson and Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, ix, note, “Storytelling and rituals together provide the vehicle for reconnecting God’s story with our human stories.”

congregation's existence.<sup>8</sup> Narrative theology seeks to understand the relationship between individual narratives and God's action.<sup>9</sup>

Two elements stand out from this relationship that are helpful for understanding God's action. The first evaluates the impact that a culture of faith has on the way one develops and communicates a theological foundation. The very environment that characters of a narrative inhabit has a profound influence on the development of a theological foundation. In addition to recognizing God's nature, the second element focuses on God's transforming power in participants' lives. God's action within a congregation's narrative inevitably transforms the congregation's narrative to manifest God's metanarrative.

### Culture

The first focal point is concerned with the role a congregation's culture plays in bringing together God's narrative and the narrative of a congregation. A faith community's culture consists of the words and actions that reveal the foundations of a congregation's existence.<sup>10</sup> The words used to communicate a congregation's narrative are powerful in revealing a faith community's narrative. Regarding the power of

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<sup>8</sup> J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 69: "The Bible has its place and is to be interpreted in the context of the overarching narrative movement of creation, fall and redemption, the epic drama of God's purposes for the world and for humanity being worked out through Israel, Jesus and the church."

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, introduction in *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory L. Jones; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 1-18, write: "Narrative is a crucial conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity, and displaying the content of Christian convictions."

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," in *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology* (eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory L. Jones; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 65, writes, "Cultural expressions are *conditions* of historical existence; their expressions are moulded in the historical process itself into definite *products* of particular cultures." Crites continues this article by focusing on the movement of narratives, similar to music, for communicating a recalled cultural expression in a particular time. He points out, "Narrative, after all, is the other cultural form capable of expressing coherence through time, though temporality is not so pure as that of music."

language, Paul Ricoeur wrote, “Whatever ultimately may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language, it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression.”<sup>11</sup> Narratives operate through story-telling to create a metalanguage.<sup>12</sup> The metalanguage a congregation develops is used to express its understanding of the way God moves within the particular system. A faith community’s adopted metalanguage applies specific definitions to common words (e.g., redemption, justification). As such, this language creates a barrier between those inside the community and those outside the community since it is used and understood best by insiders. The wall of separation can be removed, or at least reduced, when individuals from outside the faith community move to play a role in the congregation’s narrative. Simultaneously and inevitably, stepping into a congregation’s narrative also brings these characters to occupy a role in God’s story.

In addition to language, a faith community’s culture is informed by the actions of the congregation. “In our rituals, like our stories, we narrate our existence, that is to say, we individually and collectively express and create a vision of life.”<sup>13</sup> The significance of rituals is found in the non-verbal expression of an inherent meaning to shape the reason behind performing a rite. Ray Browne describes a ritual’s role: “Rituals and ceremonies are codifications and statements of attitudes. Ideas create rituals and rituals spawn

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (4th ed.; Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 349, describes metalanguage as “A language (words) used to describe or talk about language.” According to Bressler, the language used to communicate a congregation’s identity reveals how a text means, rather than simply what a text means. The stories told in a congregation communicate the reason behind the stories instead of just retelling the stories. The metalanguage of a congregation functions to express the identity of the congregation.

<sup>13</sup> Anderson and Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, 26.

ideas.”<sup>14</sup> The rituals responsible for shaping the attitude of a faith community are not dependent on the language of the culture. Instead, these rites have the ability to impact one’s attitude through participation. Participation in certain rituals recounts a congregation’s narrative as well as expresses the faith community’s culture. Through language and rituals alike, God’s metanarrative establishes a foundation upon which the congregation’s culture of faith is based.

### Transformation

Another important way of characterizing the relationship between God’s narrative and the story of a congregation focuses on the transformative power stories carry for developing a faith community. The relationship between God’s story and a congregation’s story is transformative in the sense of the community’s development into the image of God.<sup>15</sup> As a faith community discovers meaning through the retelling of God’s story, a portrait of God’s nature is revealed. Recognizing the image of God elucidates attributes of God’s nature the congregation is called to imitate. A faith community’s participation in God’s story inevitably transforms the congregation’s culture. “Ritual enactment not only expresses our alliance with a particular story or broader narrative, it also creates it.”<sup>16</sup> A faith community is transformed by actively

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<sup>14</sup> Ray B. Browne, *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 1. While Browne’s comments are focused at an ever-changing secular culture, these words have merit for the culture of a faith community. For example, participation in the Eucharist on a weekly basis is an empty action without a corresponding attitude. To participate in this rite does not require words to move participants. Instead, the attitude of each participant reveals the significance of the rite.

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Moltman, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 5, surmises: “Experience of the self has to be integrated into the experience of God, and that experience of God has to be integrated into the trinitarian history of God with the world. God is no longer related to the narrow limits of a fore-given, individual self. On the contrary, the individual self will be discovered in the over-riding history of God, and only finds it meaning in that context.”

<sup>16</sup> Anderson and Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, 28

participating in the congregation's narrative and placing it in God's metanarrative.<sup>17</sup> As the faith community is transformed, the congregation's narrative assimilates into God's metanarrative. Transformation is a process that requires time and diligence on the part of the congregation. Through active participation over the course of time, a congregation's narrative is altered to manifest the image of God's metanarrative. Paul Ricoeur uses time to break down a narrative's composition, revealing the transformative progression a narrative follows to imitate God.

### Three Moves toward Imitation

Paul Ricoeur has worked to discover a process that narratives follow to be transformed into a final form. Ricoeur brings Aristotle's *Poetics* alongside Augustine's *Confessions* to discern the way a narrative arrives at a transformed image. The relationship between Aristotle and Augustine's writings reveals the impact of time on the development of a narrative in the creation of a plot (*muthos*).<sup>18</sup> From Ricoeur's writings, temporal conditions influence narratives to create identity of participants through a character's actions.<sup>19</sup> He points out:

Narrative identity is said to be a mark of power in that it has as its counterpart the temporal constitution of an identity, along with its dialogical constitution. Here we find the fragility of human affairs submitted to the double test of temporal distension and confrontation with the disturbing alterity of other human beings.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Michal Beth Dinkler, "Telling Transformation: How We Redeem Narratives and Narratives Redeem Us," *World and World* 31 (Summer 2011): 287, summarizes this point saying, "To read or hear a story is not a passive activity. Narratives . . . have the power to transform us, to redeem us and make us new."

<sup>18</sup> Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 236-42.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 18.

Identity created through a narrative is the result of action in time communicated by narrative. This is the underlying notion of Ricoeur's phases leading to imitation. This process is referred to as mimesis<sup>21</sup> and points to the moves from a point of action (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) through a point of mediation (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) to produce a transformed narrative (mimesis<sub>3</sub>). The progression through these phases reveals a seamless representation of a congregation's narrative being transformed to manifest the image of God. Before these phases may be applied to ACC, it is necessary to provide a deeper understanding for each phase.

### Mimesis<sub>1</sub>

Following Paul Ricoeur's process of narrative composition, a congregation's life exists in time and is communicated through narrative.<sup>22</sup> Both elements merge into a harmonious relationship resulting in the development of a plot.<sup>23</sup> Plot is the movement of a narrative toward transformation into a specified final image. Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is used to pinpoint moments of a narrative that appear void of an underlying plot.<sup>24</sup> Referred to as "prefiguration," mimesis<sub>1</sub> consists of a narrative's scenes in a temporal setting. This

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<sup>21</sup> Mimesis denotes the manner action is transformed into the image of something else. Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 62, writes: "For [Aristotle], mimesis must involve *making*: it is the specifically human activity of creating one thing to be like another thing. Mimesis is not the mere imitation, accidental or otherwise, of something, but the deliberate creation of something in order to represent something else." The understanding of mimesis Aristotle arrived at stood in contrast to the Platonic line of thought attributing mimesis to be an imitation of anything. The difference, though subtle, involves the presence of a plot or a conscious awareness of the developmental process responsible for creating the representation.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 52, writes: "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."

<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur directs much of this discussion to Aristotle's *Poetics* as a means for understanding the poetic nature of an individual's life. Ricoeur points to plot as a structuring of events and the narrative sequence of the character's life. By fitting the differing elements into a narrative structure, a practical field emerges to establish reason behind the character's narrative. For more on this see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1.56.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.57.



phase is filled with random and chaotic activity performed apart from a cohesive storyline, or plot. “Our lives are inchoate stories in the sense that all the raw ingredients of an identity narrative are already in place, awaiting the configuring influence of a plot.”<sup>25</sup> Thomas Long expands this point:

We go through our daily existence, humming along at the level of mimesis<sub>1</sub>. We get dressed, fix the coffee, go to work, wave at a friend across the hall, turn on the computer, start the workday. It doesn’t feel like a coherent narrative; it doesn’t seem organized or profoundly meaningful.<sup>26</sup>

This level of imitation is characterized by actions performed without an association to an underlying reason. Without plot these actions appear as random and mundane elements of one’s narrative.

The phase of mimesis<sub>1</sub> sets the stage for characters to discover a narrative’s underlying plot. This point invites participants to become conscious of temporality as they experience the timing of the narrative in which the faith community exists. The imitation process commences as a narrative’s random actions are recognized. Ricoeur notes:

We can see the richness in the meaning of mimesis<sub>1</sub>. To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 46. Long’s comment includes practices on an individual level to express mimesis<sub>1</sub> in the actions a person carries out from day to day. The principle behind Long’s statement is applicable on a larger scale to include the actions of a congregation. For instance, the random activities of a worship service would fit into mimesis<sub>1</sub>. A congregation sings songs, recites prayers, observes the Lord’s Supper, and takes up a contribution. These practices, separated from an underlying plot, would seem random and mere rituals. As the conversation moves to mimesis<sub>2</sub> and a plot is revealed, the seemingly random acts of a congregation are understood according to the discovered meaning associated with the plot.

<sup>27</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 64.

The foundation of imitation is paramount for developing the plot of the actions. Only after participants become aware of their actions in time are they positioned to move into the next phase and discover the plot behind these actions.

### Mimesis<sub>2</sub>

As the recognition of actions takes shape, the narrative moves from mimesis<sub>1</sub> to mimesis<sub>2</sub> in a natural progression toward imitation. Whereas mimesis<sub>1</sub> revealed random actions seemingly void of a recognizable plot, mimesis<sub>2</sub> handles the revelation of a hidden plot, providing reason behind the actions identified in mimesis<sub>1</sub>. Referred to as “configuration,” mimesis<sub>2</sub> brings cohesion to the chaotic exercise of random actions. This move is accomplished as the seemingly random actions are configured to the underlying plot. Understanding the narrative’s plot underlying the actions allows one to discern the purpose as to why these actions are performed. No longer are these scenes random occurrences taking place within a temporal setting. Mimesis<sub>2</sub> marks the phase in which the underlying purpose is discerned and the narrative’s plot brings meaning to the narrative’s scenes. This move from mimesis<sub>1</sub> through mimesis<sub>2</sub> is crucial in preparation for participants to be transformed into the manifestation of a specific image (mimesis<sub>3</sub>).

Mimesis<sub>2</sub> functions, then, as a mediator between the image of what was and the image of what is to be. Turning once again to Ricoeur:

The dynamism lies in the fact that a plot already exercises, within its own textual field, an integrating and, in this sense, a mediating function, which allows it to bring about, beyond this field, a mediation of a larger amplitude between the preunderstanding and . . . the postunderstanding of the order of action and its temporal features.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 65.

The move from preunderstanding to postunderstanding requires an understanding of the plot, which provides an underlying reason for this move. Thus the actions performed by a character move from being a collection of spontaneous acts to possessing a purpose for the overall plot. During *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, the action of imitation is configured to form a plot offering meaning to the temporal existence of the narrative. From *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> the narrative is positioned to move into Ricoeur's third phase and take on the image of a transformed narrative.

### Mimesis<sub>3</sub>

As the random actions of one's temporal existence discover meaning in the underlying plot, a narrative moves into *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>. Referred to as "refiguration," *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> describes a narrative's transformed action according to the underlying purpose. Temporal action is brought into association with a purpose for performing those actions in an applicable manner to reshape the narrative. Ricoeur points out, "Mimesis<sub>3</sub> marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality."<sup>29</sup> A narrative discovers its deepest value when it is allowed to impact participants by shaping their lives. Karl Simms writes, "If narrative did not have this referential function, its purpose would be lost, and we would not 'understand' it in any deep sense."<sup>30</sup> A narrative's significance is found exclusively in the manner it impacts the character's life situation.

The move from *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> through *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> into *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> creates a process through which a narrative's actions are transformed into the manifestation of a specific

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>30</sup> Simms, *Paul Ricoeur*, 86.

image. The seemingly random actions of everyday life are refigured into a different image by the development and discovery of a narrative's plot. Thomas Long summarizes this process: "The prefigured world of the hearer is gathered up into the configured world of the story, and on the other side of the transaction emerges that which did not exist before the encounter: the world of the hearer refigured."<sup>31</sup> Ricoeur's three phases leading to imitation illustrate the process a narrative undergoes to become a transformed narrative. Applying this model of understanding narrative formation and transformation to 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 sheds light on God's work in transforming the Corinthian church's narrative to manifest the Lord's image.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Paul Ricoeur's process for narrative composition exemplifies a faith community's transformation to manifest the image of God. In accordance with Aristotle's connotation of mimesis,<sup>32</sup> Christian faith communities develop a narrative indicative of a diligent effort to be transformed into the image of God. Incorporating Ricoeur's phases of mimesis into a reading of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 reveals God's transforming power in the Corinthian narrative. The apex of this narrative is realized as the Corinthian narrative changes to imitate the image of God. A superficial reading of this passage misses the underlying narrative communicated by Paul in these verses. However, applying Ricoeur's three phases toward imitation elucidates an underlying plot that brings cohesion to the Corinthian church's narrative. In addition, Paul's writing depicts the image of God the

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<sup>31</sup> Long, *Preaching from Memory*, 48-49.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle's view of mimesis entails a visible entity that becomes the image a system seeks to imitate. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 560, summarizes Aristotle's view of mimesis: "It is when the *muthos*, the fable, the plot succeeds in producing a mimesis, an imitation, a representation 'of men acting and in act' (*Poetics* 1648a24). A bridge is thereby constructed between visibility in discourse and the energy in human things, between the live metaphor and live existence."

Corinthians are expected to emulate as they grow into the image of God. Paul's focus on reconciliation in this context makes the passage especially appropriate for this project.

We may separate this passage into the three phases of mimesis as follows:

Mimesis<sub>1</sub>—The Corinthian Life Situation (Vv. 11-17)

Mimesis<sub>2</sub>—God's Reconciliation (Vv. 18,19,21)

Mimesis<sub>3</sub>—Ministry of Reconciliation (Vv. 18-21)

Cohesion is brought to the Corinthian church's narrative through the presence of God's reconciliation. Reconciliation functions to transform the Corinthian church's narrative from a temporal existence into a narrative that manifests God. The reader recognizes in mimesis<sub>1</sub> the action(s) taking place in the daily life of the Corinthian church. Mimesis<sub>2</sub> exposes God's reconciliation as the underlying plot that brings purpose to the seeming random actions of the Corinthian church. Finally, in mimesis<sub>3</sub>, the reader witnesses the transformed community's role in the ongoing story as ministers of God's reconciliation. Collectively, these phases reveal the progression the Corinthian church may undergo to manifest the image of God's metanarrative and participate in his work of reconciliation.

#### Mimesis<sub>1</sub>

Paul begins this passage by emphasizing the narrative structure that both the Corinthian community and Paul share. As is customary for narrative composition, certain characters stand out for their contribution to the Corinthian story.<sup>33</sup> For the purpose of

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<sup>33</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 34, points out: "The reader reconstructs a character from the information provided to him in the discourse." Inference is necessary for developing the story of the Corinthian church in this passage. The author does not explicitly retell the narrative and relies on the audience to deduce the story or be familiar with the story.

this discussion, three characters<sup>34</sup> play a role in the Corinthian story: Paul, Jesus, and the Corinthian church.

*Paul*

From the beginning of this passage, Paul emphasizes an attitude of boasting in the Corinthian church's narrative. A boastful attitude is indicative of the overall tone for Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. In 2 Corinthians 1:12 Paul points out, "Now this is our boast," which prepares the reader to discover an underlying reason for boasting later in the letter. An attitude of boasting is echoed as Paul invites the Corinthian church to boast in 5:12, saying, "We are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us." Both occasions hint at an underlying reason behind boasting that remains hidden to the hearers. Paul does not proceed to expound on the underlying reason behind boasting. Instead, he argues for the legitimacy of boasting and invites the Corinthian church to participate with him. Paul's boasting stands in contrast to the attitude of an unnamed group that opposes him.<sup>35</sup> Paul later speaks against the group's opposition as he differentiates between his and the other group's reason to boast. He writes:

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves, they are not

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<sup>34</sup> Included in this narrative is a fourth group that indirectly contributes to the Corinthian church's narrative. This is the group of unnamed characters that stand in opposition to Paul's ministry. The action this group conducts is an attempt to persuade the Corinthian church of Paul's lack of credibility. I have selected not to include this group as a character in mimesis<sub>1</sub> to maintain focus on the action taking place concerning Paul's writing to the Corinthian church.

<sup>35</sup> James W. Thompson, "Reading the Letters as Narrative," in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation* (eds. Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello III; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 81-106, notes the presence of conflict in the form of a triangle, saying, "Paul faces a triangular situation composed of himself, the readers, and unnamed third parties who have disturbed Paul's relations with the Corinthian church." In this article Thompson points to the underlying story of Paul's letters as an underlying narrative for individual Christians as well as faith communities. The underlying plot emerges from within Paul's conflict with the unnamed group in Corinth. Paul focuses attention on the life of Jesus to intentionally establish the basis for a healthy relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church. Thompson also points out, "The consequence of the Christ-event . . . is Paul's claim that his unusual ministry is defined by the standard of the new creation and that all believers exist within the new creation."

wise. We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. (10:12-14)

The reason behind Paul's boasting remains hidden to the hearers at this point, indicative of mimesis<sub>1</sub>. The narrative in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 exposes the scene from Paul's vantage point regarding the conflict between Paul and an unnamed antagonist. To combat this resistance, Paul turns attention to the basis for his actions, "If we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you" (5:13).<sup>36</sup> This connection makes it clear that Paul is placing his own life situation into the situation of his audience by focusing attention on similar actions within temporal existence.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the concept of boasting, Paul also draws attention to the manner in which he formerly regarded others in the name of Jesus. "Although in his former life Paul once regarded Jesus and others *κατὰ σάρκα*, he does so no longer. Instead, Paul now possesses the epistemology of the new age in which he no longer regards anyone by 'fleshly,' or human, standards (*κατὰ σάρκα*)."<sup>38</sup> Paul has undergone a transformation that redefined the way he treats others. As a result of this transformation, Paul has embraced a different type of action directed at others. Refusing to participate in reorienting his attitude toward others would only escalate tensions and create hostilities. David Garland

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<sup>36</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 186 writes, "With these lines Paul is launching an attack against his opponents by taking the sting out of their boast." Paul exposes the conspiracy of those in opposition to his message and emphasizes God's action to establish his own ministry. He experienced a personal encounter with the risen Christ (cf. Acts 9:1-19); he was instructed to leave Jerusalem and escape the unbelieving Jews (cf. Acts 22:17-18); and he was called up into the third heaven by way of a revelation (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2). These instances among others point to actions of Paul's life that warrant boasting.

<sup>37</sup> Characteristic of mimesis<sub>1</sub> is the purpose for the boasting that comes out later in the story structure. It is important to point out in this initial move that Paul is laying the groundwork of understanding that will eventually be shaped into the underlying plot. The reader is left to wonder why Paul boasts and has urged his audience in Corinth to boast (cf. 1:14).

<sup>38</sup> Mason Lee, "'Now is the Acceptable Time; Now is the Day of Salvation': Reading 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 in Light of Its Narrative Substructure," *ResQ* 56 (2014): 1-13.

points out, “To judge others according to worldly standards, or from a sinful point of view, only furthers division and discord.”<sup>39</sup> Paul has relinquished an attitude of exclusion and, as a result, seeks to include others in a different plot. Through Paul’s encouragement for boasting and the shift toward accepting all people, the reader is left to question the reason behind Paul’s transformation.

*Jesus*

Paul has already called for the Corinthian saints to boast and has referred to a significant change in his personal life concerning an escalation of regard for other people. Now Paul offers clues to what might be the reason behind these points. Jesus is an indirect character in this narrative, even though his role carries tremendous impact for the Corinthian church’s narrative. Paul includes Jesus’ character in the Corinthian church’s narrative for the effect he has had on other people, namely Paul. Paul highlights the love of Christ that compels him to love, and the death of Christ moves Paul to give his life for the message he feels adamant about. The attitude and actions of Jesus instill a desire for people to follow his example. It is as Ralph Martin surmises, “The love of Christ compels us to be included in Christ and his mission.”<sup>40</sup> The insurmountable love of Christ leads to a foundational shift that alters the way Paul views others. Jesus’ role in the Corinthian church’s narrative offers clues for discovering the underlying reason in this narrative.

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<sup>39</sup>David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scriptures* (The New American Commentary 29; Nashville: B&H, 1999), 283. Paul’s focus on the distinction between the former treatment of people over more recent actions toward others connotes the presence of hostile actions in Paul’s life. Again, through Paul’s words the underlying reason for this transformation remains hidden to the reader. Paul is still operating in the realm of mimesis, as he lays the foundation for configuring the reason behind this shift.

<sup>40</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 128. Martin’s point focuses on the effect of Jesus’ love for humanity expressed in the laying down of his life for others. Paul has no other option than to minister in the name of Jesus, due in part to the shift in Paul’s attitude toward all people. Martin continues this thought, saying, “What Christ has done for Paul is the basis of the apostle’s life” (128).



However, the identification of the plot remains hidden to the hearers. The reader must still question the purpose behind Christ's love and death. In addition, one is left to ponder why Jesus' actions would have such a motivating effect on Paul. The characters' actions are seemingly void of a cohesive element at this point in the narrative. While Jesus' love and death prompt Paul to be transformed, the discovery of the reason is not yet made known.

### *The Corinthian Church*

In addition to the individual roles of Jesus and Paul is the role of the Corinthian church as a collective character. Inherent to the life situation behind Paul's writing are the activities of an audience being persuaded to either boast in Paul's ministry or be suspicious of Paul's ministry. Regardless of the manner in which the Corinthian church responds to Paul's ministry, the community is caught up in a battle between Paul and an unnamed group in opposition to Paul. From the onset of the Corinthian church's existence, Paul has brought participants into his story. He makes mention of the task he has been called by God to carry out.<sup>41</sup> Paul writes, "What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (4:5). Paul emphasizes the ministry he is carrying out in the name of Jesus which provides a reason for the Corinthian church to boast.<sup>42</sup> The underlying story providing reason for Paul's

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<sup>41</sup> James W. Thompson, "Paul and the Mission of the Church," in *Christian Studies: Scholarship for the Church* 25 (2011-2012): 35-45, writes, "Paul announces that his personal mission is to evangelize a world that remains unreconciled to God."

<sup>42</sup> I. Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis, and Ian Paul, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Letters and Revelation* (vol. 2; 2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 102, writes, "This explains Paul's zeal to persuade other people to believe, and should convince his readers of his sincerity." The passion Paul exemplifies for proclaiming God's divine story reveals an underlying strength that can only be explained as offered from the divine realm. This would testify that Paul is in his right mind, despite what the opposing party might allege.

boasting is one of invitation for the Corinthian church. Paul invites the Corinthian church to share in the transformed life of Jesus.<sup>43</sup>

These characters make-up the narrative of the Corinthian church in mimesis<sub>1</sub>. The role each plays is important for setting the narrative in motion. Paul invites the Corinthians to boast in the actions of others. Jesus serves to transform the Corinthian church into a different image. For its part, the Corinthian church is caught in the middle between efforts to divide and efforts to maintain harmony in the Corinthian church. Through these roles the narrative's underlying plot remains hidden. The reader is left to question the purpose that brings cohesion to the narrative. The plot emerges as the narrative moves into mimesis<sub>2</sub>.

#### Mimesis<sub>2</sub>

The shift to mimesis<sub>2</sub> focuses on the revelation of the underlying plot in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. The primary objective in this phase focuses on discovering the reason behind the prefigured understanding and the postfigured understanding. Three phrases in this passage lead to the discovery of the obscure plot. The first is "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (5:18). The second phrase reads "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (5:19). The third phrase is "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). These three phrases communicate a central concept regarding God's action in the overall plot: that action is reconciliation made possible through Jesus. Reconciliation is recognized as the underlying theme of God's

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<sup>43</sup> James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 143, notes, "Paul's aim is a transformed community that shares with him the continuing significance of the cross. This outlook includes a totally new epistemology that is taken up not only by Paul but by 'anyone' who is in Christ. This new epistemology . . . is the basis for the reciprocity of boasting that Paul desires."

metanarrative and is expressed through an ongoing narrative of God's actions. "In 5:18-21 Paul shifts from a focus on Christ to what God has done and reflects on the role his apostleship plays in God's redemptive plan of reconciling the world."<sup>44</sup> God's reconciliation brings cohesion to the everyday life situation of the narrative in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.

These three verses explicitly point to God's reconciliation of creation through Jesus. Reconciliation is a recurring theme in the Pauline corpus (cf., Rom 5:9-11; Eph 2:16; Col. 1:21-23), denoting God's action in creation. God's action in creation through Jesus reveals a connection between reconciliation and justification emerges. Michael Gorman notes, "The terms 'justification' and 'reconciliation' are, thus, essentially synonymous for Paul. Justification as reconciliation includes both forgiveness of sins and liberation from Sin as a power."<sup>45</sup> The focus of Paul's writing moves away from boasting about Paul's pre-understood story or from Jesus' expression of overwhelming love. Now Paul is focusing instead on what God is doing through Jesus. Gorman summarizes this point, saying, "In the sphere of Christ's power, humans are liberated from sin so that the formerly impossible is now possible. They are no longer covenantally dysfunctional."<sup>46</sup> God's reconciliation is offered through Christ to transform creation into a new image. "Reconciliation was brought about by the death of Jesus, once for all. Reconciliation is the basis for the new creation."<sup>47</sup> This new creation is shaped by reconciliation in the configured image of a different being: God.

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<sup>44</sup> Garland, "2 Corinthians," 288.

<sup>45</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 56.

<sup>46</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 106.

<sup>47</sup> J. Bieringer and J. Lambrecht, "Reconcile Yourselves to God," in *Studies on 2 Corinthians* (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1994), 363-412.

The concept of reconciliation underscores the transformation of creation into the image of God. Transformation is a process through which an image is moved from one point to another. Fulfilling this process requires the removal of a specified attribute and the replacement with another. Reconciliation is transformative when participants sacrifice a specific quality and embrace a different quality. Stanley E. Porter writes:

Reconciliation language focuses around *katallasso* and its derived cognates. The word-group seems to have been used by Greek writers to describe the exchange of goods or things, and to describe the process by which hostility between parties is eliminated and friendship is created. Thus, the basic sense of the word for exchange can be metaphorically extended to include the exchange of relations, such as the exchange of enmity for friendship, between persons or larger political entities.<sup>48</sup>

In accordance with Porter, Paul's use of *καταλλάσσω* draws attention to God's transformative power at work in a narrative. Reconciliation brings cohesion to a narrative through an exchange. Additional Pauline texts substantiate a transformative connotation of reconciliation as relinquishing a former way of life and taking up a new self.<sup>49</sup>

Reconciliation is recognized as the underlying purpose behind the Corinthian church's narrative. Reconciliation prompts Paul to boast and gives reason for the Corinthian church to have pride in Paul's ministry. Reconciliation is accomplished through Jesus and offered to creation. Reconciliation functions to transform the Corinthian church into a new image.<sup>50</sup> This is the point where *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> moves into *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>.

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley E. Porter, "Paul's Concept of Reconciliation, Twice More," in *Paul and His Theology* (ed. Stanley E. Porter, Boston: Brill, 2006), 131-52. Porter expands this argument to focus on the different examples of *katalasso* within different cultures surrounding Paul's life. For more on this, see Stanley E. Porter, *Katallasso in Ancient Greek Literature, with Reference to Paul's Writings* (Estudios de Filología Neotestamentaria 5; Cordoba: Ediciones el Almendro, 1994).

<sup>49</sup> E.g., see Rom 12:1-3; Eph 4:17-24.

<sup>50</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 151, writes, "God doesn't just forgive sin; he transforms the sinners into Christ-like figures and clothes them with Christ's righteousness."

Mimesis<sub>3</sub>

In the three verses discussed above, the move through mimesis<sub>2</sub> creates a transformed image for the church in Corinth. The concept of reconciliation stands out as a fundamental element of God's transformative power. Paul invites the Corinthian church to be transformed by God's reconciliation through the love and death of Christ.<sup>51</sup> Embracing reconciliation places a responsibility on the Corinthian church to participate in God's metanarrative. As a church of reconciled people, the Corinthian church has been transformed into a faith community with a mission to share God's reconciliation. The re-figured role they enter into is described by the epithet "ministry of reconciliation" (5:18b). God not only reconciles creation but invites characters to play a role in a divine metanarrative. The invitation to be transformed into a community with a ministry of reconciliation comes in the embrace of God's reconciliation, a point Paul implores the Corinthian people to embrace (cf., 5:20b):

Paul's tightly wound theological rationale here runs from God's reconciliation for the world through Christ to Paul's agency of this reconciliation to the alienated Corinthians themselves, whom Paul then admonished to "be reconciled to God" and to become participants in and agents of God's righteousness, i.e., reconciliation.<sup>52</sup>

For in Paul the process leading to a ministry of reconciliation comes full circle back to a point for boasting. This is not something Paul has done, but emphasizes God's action through reconciliation. Paul concludes this passage with a final challenge for the

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<sup>51</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 15, writes, "The experience of reconciliation is the experience of grace—the restoration of one's damaged humanity in a life-giving relationship with God." Inherent in this treatment of reconciliation is the metanarrative through which God (creator) and the cosmos (creation) are brought into union.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin J. Roetzel, *2 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 83.

Corinthian church to embrace God's reconciliation and share in the responsibility of the transformed community to share God's reconciliation with others.

Working through 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 with Paul Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis in mind reveals the underlying narrative in the Corinthians' context. The plot emerging from Paul's writing emphasizes God's reconciliation as an action of transformation from an old self to a new self. Through God's reconciliation the Corinthian church is challenged to be transformed into the role of ministers with a charge to share God's reconciliation with others.<sup>53</sup> Reconciliation emerges not only from Paul's writing in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2. This is a theme throughout the Bible narrative and reveals an aspect of God's most basic nature.<sup>54</sup> God's narrative is characterized by reconciliation. As such the challenge that was presented to churches in the Pauline corpus and that remains applicable for the churches of today is to embrace God's reconciliation and invite others to embrace God's reconciliation.

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<sup>53</sup> James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation according to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 119, surmises, "Paul envisions the church as the recipient of God's offer of a new creation which results in reconciliation." This transformation into a new creation brings God's kingdom on earth to bear the image of the Lord. It is, as Ricoeur's moves point out, a transformation into the imitation of God.

<sup>54</sup> The prophet Isaiah described God's salvific nature (e.g., Isa 41:21). In addition, prophets such as Micah foretold impending deliverance by the Lord's hand, connoting God's reconciliation for the people of Judah (e.g. Micah 2:12, 13). Likewise, the author of Revelation emphasizes God's salvation from the mouths of a heavenly host (Rev 7:10). Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 38, writes: "According to the Bible, God's ultimate desire is to create from all nations a reconciled people living within a renewed creation and enjoying the presence of the Triune God." As followers of Jesus, ACC joins other Christian people to proclaim God's salvation as communicated through the divine metanarrative. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 90, says, "Only if our Lord is a risen Lord, therefore, can we have the confidence and the power to be a community of forgiveness. For on the basis of the resurrection we have the presumption to believe that God has made us agents in the history of the kingdom. The resurrection is not a symbol or myth through which we can interpret our individual and collective dyings and risings. Rather the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate sign that our salvation comes only when we cease trying to interpret Jesus' story in light of our history, and instead we interpret ourselves in the light of his."

### Conclusion

Paul Ricoeur's three phases leading to imitation present a concise process for understanding narrative development. Breaking down a narrative according to each mimesis elucidates an underlying plot responsible for bringing cohesion to the narrative. Applying Ricoeur's moves to the narrative in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 identifies the centrality of God's reconciliation for transforming the Corinthian church's narrative. Reconciliation prompts Paul to boast in the Lord. In addition, reconciliation is depicted as a gift from God through Jesus that is offered to creation. Reconciliation invites the Corinthian church to play a role as "ministers of reconciliation" in God's metanarrative. The invitation to embrace reconciliation and experience transformation into a new image transcends temporal or spatial existence; it is an invitation that stands open for the church of every age. In 2014, ACC has been encouraged to embrace God's reconciliation and invited to share God's metanarrative. This project uses this invitation to move the ACC narrative into the next chapter as "ministers of reconciliation."

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This project was an exercise to assist the ACC leaders in healing chronic anxiety as a result of unresolved conflicts in the ACC narrative. Recognizing the centrality of reconciliation in God’s metanarrative provides a lens through which healing for ACC may be envisioned. This chapter lays out the methodology I followed to assist the ACC leaders in discovering the congregation’s future narrative. The method I incorporated into this project coupled ethnographic inquiry with Paul Ricoeur’s three phases toward imitation. The blend of ethnography<sup>1</sup> and Ricoeur’s moves culminated in the development of the ACC’s “next chapter.”<sup>2</sup> The current piece also includes the tools I used to analyze data collected throughout this project. In addition, it outlines the structure this project followed to implement the selected methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Ward refers to seven values of ethnography developed by Scott Jones and Sal Watt. Pete Ward, “Introduction,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (ed. Pete Ward; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1-10, lists 1) participation, 2) immersion, 3) reflection, reflexivity, and representation, 4) thick description, 5) an active participative ethics, 6) empowerment, and 7) understanding.

<sup>2</sup> “The next chapter” is used to refer to the future vision for the ACC. The formulation of the next chapter is the ACC leadership’s adoption of the direction the ACC is moving to develop future ministry efforts. The crafted next chapter brings together the textual, as well as metaphorical, document of the ACC future narrative. The next chapter was not developed solely as a literal document or as an abstract notion. Instead, following Ricoeur, the next chapter was a representation of the vision the story-writing group felt led by God to adopt. Rebecca K. Huskey, *Paul Ricoeur on Hope: Expecting the Good* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 6, writes: “A narrative consists of a beginning, middle, and an end, and hearing or reading this form we can experience a sense of completeness. The process that the understanding of metaphor entails, however, creates a rupture in the logic of the narrative and qualifies this sense of completeness. While the reader is in a sense caught within this tension, the tension also produces new modes of thought.”



Underscoring the methodology for this project was the relationship between God's metanarrative and the ACC narrative.<sup>3</sup> The design of this methodology was intended to challenge participants to discover how the ACC narrative fit into God's metanarrative. As the evaluations included below reveal, participants in this project emphasized a strong dependence on God's presence in ACC. At times this dependence almost seemed to connote participants passively waiting on God to act. However, the introduction of the idea that the ACC narrative plays a role in God's metanarrative demanded that participants embrace an active presence in God's story. This project challenged participants to accept the role they have been called to play as "ministers of reconciliation" in God's metanarrative. As characters in God's divine story, participants were encouraged to engage God's transformation of the ACC narrative rather than wait passively for the story to unfold.

This project was an exercise in qualitative research. Qualitative research is characterized by the close examination of a study group to discover data correlating to a specified problem.<sup>4</sup> The selected group of participants plays a vital role in collecting and interpreting data. Participants engage the research process from unique points of view to discover key insights applicable to the project's purpose. In participatory action research,

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<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church, and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34, writes "Narrative theology cannot begin with the Bible without at the same time beginning with its readers: the church." The point Loughlin makes is that God's metanarrative relies on people to read and retell God's story. The way God's metanarrative and a congregation's narrative interact becomes a symbiotic relationship. The church relies upon God and discovers its role in God's story. At the same time, God interacts with a congregation to provide purpose and reason for the congregation's existence.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2d ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 5-6, discuss eight features of qualitative research as 1) conducted in life situations, 2) gain a holistic view of the context, 3) capture data from engaged participants, 4) attention to recurring themes and patterns, 5) explicate ways participants perceive the situation, 6) identify applicable points, 7) researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, and 8) analysis is conducted by words. Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3d ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 4, reduces the features to three types of research. Data are collected by interviews, observations, and documents.

participants are invited to serve as researchers in order to collect data. In accordance with action participatory research, I invited a group to participate in the collection and interpretation of data collected throughout this project. Each participant's point of view was valuable and informative, and enabled the group to take ownership of discovering the ACC "next chapter."

Inviting the ACC leaders to participate in this project provided an opportunity to retell, as well as hear, the ACC narrative. Incorporating narrative composition as a research tool enabled each character to tell the ACC narrative from a unique vantage point.<sup>5</sup> Through narrative conversations<sup>6</sup> and the subsequent exercise in crafting the next chapter, the ACC leaders were positioned to discover God's direction for the ACC narrative. Identifying God's inherent story in the ACC's next chapter was an integral characteristic for the transformation of the ACC narrative. Throughout this project reconciliation emerged as a central attribute to transform the ACC narrative. As the ACC leaders crafted the next chapter in accordance with God's reconciliation, the influence of chronic anxiety diminished.

#### Format

This project invited a group of selected individuals to participate in a narrative conversation, two Saturday seminars, and an evaluative questionnaire conducted after the writing of ACC's next chapter. These exercises provided 1) a theological understanding of reconciliation in God's metanarrative, 2) an understanding of the way unresolved

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon, "Assessing 'Good' Qualitative Research in the Work Psychology Field: A Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 84 (2011): 633-50, refers to this as "sensemaking," saying "Sensemaking can be understood as the process through which people generate credible shared understandings of the situation they are in, and the ways they should exist and progress within those situations."

<sup>6</sup> These are often referred to as "interviews" and in which a researcher asks open-ended questions to illicit a participant to share information or a story. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (3d. ed.; Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008), 27-29.

conflict hinders healing in ACC, and 3) an opportunity to craft a future narrative of hope for ACC. The narrative conversations served to construct the existing ACC narrative from each participant's point of view.<sup>7</sup> Following the interviews, members of the participant group took part in two five-hour Saturday seminars. These seminars highlighted the relationship between God's story of reconciliation and the ACC narrative of healing.<sup>8</sup> During the final session the participant group crafted the ACC's next chapter according to the direction they believed God was leading. The story-writing process enabled leaders to accept responsibility for healing lasting anxiety that continues to plague the congregation as a whole. As the next chapter materialized, the participant group recognized a transformed narrative characterized by reconciliation expressed through God's metanarrative.

#### Story-Writing Group

All six elders and deacons, along with their spouses, were invited to participate in this project's story-writing group.<sup>9</sup> These leaders offered diversity of perspectives regarding the escalation of tension that climaxed in 2009. One of the elders and his spouse were active in a leadership position during the time of major conflict with the opposing group of former leaders. This couple experienced first-hand escalating tensions due to the discussions and decisions that created conflicts. The remaining elder and

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Lou Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 23, writes, "By discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future." This step is a crucial stepping stone for crafting a future with a healed identity. Failure to appropriately handle the ACC past narrative will not resolve the pain of previous conflicts but push it into the shadows.

<sup>8</sup> Underlying the purpose of these sessions is an objective of connecting the story of God with the story of ACC. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 110, points out, "Reconciliation with the other will succeed only if the self, guided by the narrative of the triune god, is ready to receive the other into itself."

<sup>9</sup> Hereinafter referred to as SWG.

spouse witnessed the tension escalate and the ensuing split from a distant point of view. This elder and spouse were participants in ACC but did not fill a leadership position at the time of conflicts. The diversity of these perspectives shed light on the presence of chronic anxiety in the wake of unresolved conflicts in the existing ACC narrative. The proximity with which each couple witnessed conflicts play out correlated with the presence or absence of reconciliation in each retelling of the ACC narrative.

Diversity was also offered through the perspectives of the ACC deacon couples. Two of these couples witnessed recent conflicts play out through ongoing association with opposing groups. The relationships with members on opposing sides of the conflicts enabled these couples to witness negative actions directed from one side toward the other. In addition, both couples witnessed the stress recent conflicts placed on their friends and families. The remaining deacon couples observed recent conflicts play out from a distant vantage point. These couples were not in a position of leadership as tension between opposing parties increased. They were not closely associated with either group, nor did they feel one side was correct and the other wrong. The deacon couples' perspectives of the ACC narrative contributed to understanding the congregation's story through recent conflicts. The individual accounts of the ACC narrative came together to set the stage for discovering how God has impacted, and will possibly continue to influence, the congregation's story. Participation in this project allowed these couples to recognize their role as characters in the ACC narrative as well as how God has transformed this story.

### Criteria for Selection

The invitation to participate in SWG was limited to the ACC leadership. Crafting the future narrative relied on leaders to actively engage in the story-writing process.<sup>10</sup> The effectiveness of developing the ACC narrative's next chapter depended on leaders committed to healing chronic anxiety permeating the existing ACC narrative. Agreeing to craft the ACC's next chapter placed the SWG in a position to relinquish lasting anxiety from previous conflicts that continued to plague the existing ACC narrative. Through this process, SWG was encouraged to discover a transformed narrative that bears the image of God's metanarrative.

Those included in SWG were also challenged to relinquish hostility and bitterness deriving from conflict in the past five years. Leading ACC away from chronic anxiety necessitates leaders committed to letting go of personal anxieties associated with recent conflicts. Reconciliation was witnessed during this process as leaders substituted the pain of past struggles with a hope for a positive future. The vantage point participants witnessed recent conflicts from had a direct impact on the leader's ability to handle lasting anxiety. Leaders who were deeply entrenched in recent conflicts had a more difficult time releasing anxiety associated with this event. In contrast, participants who had observed recent conflicts from a more distant vantage point were able to release anxiety from recent conflicts with greater ease.

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<sup>10</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 30, writes, "Only leadership can blast through the many sources of corporate inertia. Only leadership can motivate the actions needed to alter behavior in any significant way. Only leadership can get change to stick by anchoring it in the very culture of an organization." Kotter's writing highlights the power leaders carry for implementing a change in a system. Even though Kotter discusses leadership and change in business, the concept is applicable to church leaders and implementing changes in congregations. When a congregation's leaders support a change being offered, the transition is more likely to succeed. In contrast, if a congregation's leadership is in opposition to a change, attempts to usher a transition are futile.

A final criterion for participating in SWG was an active presence in the congregation. Leading ACC into a future narrative demands that leaders take an active role in the ministry efforts of ACC. Leaders that did not maintain a visible presence were inadequate for directing the congregation into a future narrative. Members of ACC needed leaders that were active in the congregation's narrative. Participants in the congregation would not follow a leader into a future narrative if the leader was not tangibly present.<sup>11</sup>

#### Description of Ministry Intervention

The format for this project was composed of a narrative conversation with each couple, two Saturday seminars, and a final evaluative questionnaire. Narrative conversations were completed prior to the Saturday seminars. To conduct these conversations, I met with each participant couple at a time and place best suited to the participants' comfort. These conversations were designed to evoke the ACC narrative from the participant couple's point of view. The allotted time for each narrative conversation was approximately one hour. However, some participants went beyond the one-hour mark as they recounted the story. Prescribed questions served as prompts to initiate dialogue for communicating the ACC narrative from the participant couple's perspective. Prompts for the narrative conversations were separated into two categories corresponding with the allotted time restraints. The first thirty minutes consisted of questions stimulating participants to construct the ACC narrative as they had witnessed

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<sup>11</sup> To encourage leaders' active participation, I practiced flexibility with scheduling interviews and seminar sessions. Scheduling conflicts presented a challenge for bringing the story-writing group together at predetermined times. All the ACC leaders were involved in a number of extra-curricular events demanding time and resources outside of the congregational context. Some had children/grandchildren participating in school related activities (e.g., sports, Future Farmers of America, band). In addition conflicts with work schedules posed a challenge for assembling the story-writing group. A few of these leaders had jobs with scheduled shift work that does not follow a consistent schedule.

the story. The latter thirty minutes shifted attention away from the past narrative and focused on a vision for ACC to minister effectively in the surrounding context. This portion of the conversation allowed participants to pinpoint characteristics of effective ministry as well as present expectations for the ACC's next chapter.

Following the narrative conversations, participants of SWG met for two five-hour Saturday seminars. These seminars were completed by October 4 to ensure adequate time for collected data to be interpreted. To conduct the Saturday seminars, SWG met in the prayer room at the Abernathy Church of Christ building. The prayer room provided a relaxed environment and promoted natural conversation among SWG. I provided breakfast and lunch for SWG at both Saturday seminars. I also prepared coffee and drinks for SWG. Lunch was prepared in advance for each seminar and served as a natural break between the morning and afternoon sessions. This break allowed SWG to process the morning's discussion. The lunch break also provided a natural transition in the discussion of Ricoeur's phases toward imitation. This meal took place in the youth room located apart from the prayer room.

The Saturday seminars followed the natural progression of Paul Ricoeur's three phases toward imitation. Each session focused on a particular phase from Ricoeur's narrative composition process and discussed corresponding elements of the ACC narrative. *Mimesis*<sub>1</sub> focused on the scenes of the ACC narrative. *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> emphasized God's underlying purpose of bringing cohesion to the scenes in the ACC narrative. *Mimesis*<sub>3</sub> revealed an image of the transformed ACC narrative for the future. The final session was used for SWG to craft the ACC's discovered next chapter.

Session 1, entitled “An Attitude of Reconciliation,” introduced the project and discussed the role of reconciliation in God’s story. This session handled the discovery of a narrative’s underlying plot indicative of mimesis<sub>2</sub>. In this session SWG established a theological foundation that guided the remainder of the project. This session highlighted God’s reconciliation through Jesus in 2 Corinthians 5 with specific emphasis on verses 17-19. The objective of this session was to identify the role reconciliation plays in God’s metanarrative. Recognizing reconciliation in God’s metanarrative was pivotal for introducing the need for reconciliation in the ACC’s narrative. The material presented that morning included theological underpinnings of this project for SWG’s consideration and led the discussion of reconciliation for the group. SWG was invited to compare positive effects of reconciliation against an attitude indicative of a lack of reconciliation. After the discussion of reconciliation, SWG broke into small groups to discuss the presence and effects of forgiveness in ACC.<sup>12</sup> I encouraged participants to form groups that separated spouses. The time for group discussion allowed the group to process the morning’s discussion and transition to the lunch break.

The afternoon session of the first seminar, entitled “Learning from the Past,” focused on orienting SWG with the existing ACC narrative leading up to the seminar. Material for this session was constructed from Ricoeur’s writings regarding mimesis<sub>1</sub>. We began this session with a look into the narrative behind Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth. Curriculum presented in this session focused particular attention on 2 Corinthians 5:11-15, highlighting Paul’s boasting in contrast to the opposition group’s allegations. This session presented the roles different characters play in the development of the narrative’s scenes. The purpose behind exposing the characters’ roles set the stage

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<sup>12</sup> This handout is included in Appendix C.



for SWG to recognize the way scenes in the ACC narrative influenced the identity of the congregation as a whole. In this session the ACC narrative was reconstructed according to the diverse perspectives of SWG. The narrative conversations conducted beforehand served as the basis for constructing the ACC narrative.

The primary objective of this session was to reconstruct the ACC narrative according to participants' points of view. I placed a large piece of butcher paper on the wall with a timeline to visually enhance the retelling process.<sup>13</sup> This timeline for the ACC narrative began with the birth of ACC<sup>14</sup> and ended with the date of the seminar session. A portion of the paper was intentionally left blank and used to record SWG's next chapter, crafted in the final session. I used data collected during the narrative conversations to reconstruct the ACC narrative on this timeline. Following this exercise SWG divided into groups to discuss the reconstructed ACC narrative. During this time I encouraged SWG to recognize the way the ACC narrative has impacted each participant. In addition, I invited SWG to realize the role they have played in crafting the ACC narrative to the present date. This activity brought the first Saturday seminar to a close.

The second seminar's first session, entitled "Looking to the Future," shifted attention away from the ACC's past narrative toward the congregation's next chapter. The foundation for this session was Ricoeur's discussion of mimesis<sub>3</sub>, focusing on a refigured narrative. This session emphasized the responsibility that reconciliation instills

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman et al., eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 209-10, describe this exercise as constructing a congregation's timeline. This is an exercise for a participant group to recount: "A historical rendering of the life of the congregations recalled by its members. The goal of this exercise is to understand how congregational members situate both themselves within that history and their congregation within a broader context."

<sup>14</sup> The birth year for ACC is 1922, and the year the first participants in the story writing group came to Abernathy was 1979. The story-writing group was not active in the ACC narrative through the interim period. To construct the story of the ACC throughout the fifty-seven year period, I looked at the congregation's annals and developed the initial scenes that recorded the ACC inauguration.

for sharing God's metanarrative with others as noted in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. Similar to the Corinthian church, ACC entered into a responsibility to serve as ministers of reconciliation to the community of Abernathy. To help SWG accept this responsibility, I introduced the research of narrative therapy.<sup>15</sup> In particular I encouraged SWG to accept their role in the existing ACC narrative and in the development of the next chapter. I also introduced SWG to Robert Dale's model for a church's life cycle to illustrate the need for discovering a God-given direction to develop the ACC ministry efforts. The discussion of Dale's model prompted SWG to identify the life stage of ACC. Recognizing the current life stage of ACC was a prerequisite for determining a dream to guide ACC into the next chapter. After this discussion participants separated into groups to share the image of the congregation's next chapter.<sup>16</sup> This became a pre-cursor to the final writing session and allowed SWG to begin imagining what the ACC's next chapter would look like. Following this time of sharing, SWG took a break for lunch.

In the final session, entitled "Writing the Story," SWG was invited to discuss the next chapter of the congregation's story. This was the culmination of the project and the final piece for looking toward the future of ACC. For this exercise, I stepped out of the facilitator's role and into an observer's role. This move allowed the group to write the story apart from my leading. Stepping aside was important for enabling SWG to develop the congregation's narrative according to the direction the group believed God had led

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen Madigan, *Narrative Therapy* (Theories of Psychotherapy Series; ed. Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011), 33, writes "Narrative Therapy is organized through the text analogy, with the central idea that it is the stories people tell and hold about their lives that determine the meaning they give to their lives." Incorporating narrative therapy into the ACC narrative focuses on moving the story-writing group to accept the role participants played in escalating tension leading to recent conflicts. Taking ownership of the role each participant played stands in contrast to placing blame solely for recent conflicts on the group that left in 2009. As the story-writing group accepts the role participants played in recent conflicts, they realized the need for reconciliation in order to transform the ACC narrative.

<sup>16</sup> A copy of this handout is in Appendix D.

them. The timeline recorded in the previous seminar was brought back into view as a visual aid for the story-writing exercise. The blank space intentionally left after the date of the previous seminar was used to record the crafted future narrative. I included a list of questions to help keep SWG on the task of crafting the future narrative.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of this exercise was to identify a transformed narrative manifesting the image of God's metanarrative. Through this exercise SWG was encouraged to discover how ACC might operate as ministers of reconciliation, rather than setting dates or concrete goals to gauge the ministry efforts. The discussion of the ACC's next chapter brought the seminar to a close.

At the conclusion of the second week's seminar, I handed out a questionnaire<sup>18</sup> for each participant couple to evaluate the project. This evaluation was designed to challenge the group to identify how this project had impacted the ACC narrative as well as participants' personal narratives. In particular, I encouraged the group to examine the role of reconciliation in these stories. In addition, I asked the group to examine how this project had helped handle anxiety resulting from previous conflicts.

The methodology incorporated into this project was an exercise intended to discover God's transforming power on the ACC narrative. Leading SWG through Ricoeur's three phases toward imitation exposed how the congregation's story has changed in the wake of recent conflicts. The narrative conversations allowed SWG to retell the ACC narrative as they have witnessed it during their tenure with this congregation. The Saturday seminars introduced SWG to Ricoeur's phases of mimesis, while simultaneously blending the ACC narrative into God's metanarrative. The

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<sup>17</sup> A copy of this handout is in Appendix F.

<sup>18</sup> A copy of this handout is in Appendix H.

culmination of the project was SWG's crafted "next chapter" in the ACC narrative. The next chapter served as illustration for the transformation of the ACC narrative away from anxiety produced in recent conflicts toward reconciliation. From this project reconciliation became the identified attitude that motivated SWG to develop future ministries for the community of Abernathy.

### Evaluation of Methodology

To evaluate the success of this project, I used three points of view for interpreting obtained data. Triangulation<sup>19</sup> helps provide an accurate and unbiased reading of the data gained from the project.<sup>20</sup> The different perspectives for data collection in this project were as follows.

#### Researcher

Throughout this project I served as a project researcher. As a researcher I paid careful attention to conversations and seminar sessions, looking for key themes and reactions from SWG. I made audio recordings<sup>21</sup> of each narrative conversation. These recordings ensured I had heard the ACC narrative accurately from each participant couple's vantage point. In addition, I visually recorded the seminar sessions. These recordings revealed SWG's reactions to materials presented in the Saturday seminars

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<sup>19</sup> David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (2d.ed.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 380, defines triangulation as "the comparison of different kinds of data (e.g., quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g., observation and interviews) to see whether they corroborate one another."

<sup>20</sup> David A. Erlandson and others, *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 115, writes, "By this method, the researcher seeks out several different types of sources that can provide insights about the same events or relationships." The authors continue, "Triangulation may establish that the information gathered is generally supported or disconfirmed; more important, however, it enhances meaning through multiple sources and provides for thick description of relevant information."

<sup>21</sup> The amount of data discerned from these recordings is limited by the inability to see participants. Nonverbal cues, body language, and facial expressions cannot be captured through voice and will be missed by the audio recordings.

from a different point of view.<sup>22</sup> Following each session I documented the observations made during each session and took careful notes of key data points. I noted characteristics of each participant, impressions throughout sessions, as well as moments of expressed reaction (i.e., silences, shouts, body language/posture). I also paid careful attention and recorded the effect this project had on my role in the ACC narrative. Practicing self-awareness enabled me to understand the manner in which I might filter the data received from my perspective.

I saved all recordings and stored data in a safe place, inaccessible to other people. I applied a coding<sup>23</sup> system to these findings to highlight 1) how participants understand the presence and importance of reconciliation, 2) how participants understand the story of the ACC in the aftermath of previous conflict, and 3) how participants have refrained from or have embraced healing to craft the future narrative of the ACC. I logged data in a Venn-diagram congruent with Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis. The center of the diagram was the central element of God's metanarrative (i.e., reconciliation) with the three surrounding circles identified as 1) mimesis<sub>1</sub>, 2) mimesis<sub>2</sub>, and 3) mimesis<sub>3</sub>. Analyzing data according to this coding system and recording data in a Venn-diagram helped measure the effectiveness of this project. Utilizing these tools exposed dominant themes that have emerged from within the ACC future narrative.

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<sup>22</sup> The video recorder was positioned behind SWG, offering a different perspective to recognize nonverbal cues from the participant group.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 56, defines coding as, "An abbreviation or symbol applied to a segment of words—most often a sentence or paragraph of transcribed field notes—in order to classify the words."

My wife, Tamber Carr, operated as a participant observer<sup>24</sup> in this project.<sup>25</sup> Tamber recorded notes in each of the seminar sessions, including her observations regarding SWG. This vantage point provided insight from within the group I may not have noticed from the facilitator's role. To document these data, I provided her with sheets of paper divided into three columns.<sup>26</sup> The first column was used to record Tamber's observations. The second column was used to note initial thoughts associated with the observations in column one. Tamber did not record observations in column 2 unless an idea or interpretation was made clear from the observed action. Column 3 remained blank and was not used to record Tamber's observations. This column was intentionally left for me to include field notes in response to Tamber's observations in column 1 and column 2. At the close of each seminar, I carefully documented field notes based on Tamber's observations.

### Story-Writing Group

Participants in SWG comprised the second point for discerning research data. SWG was responsible for discovering the ACC's next chapter. Group participants witnessed recent conflicts in ACC and have remained committed to leading this congregation. Serving in SWG provided opportunity for participants to embrace reconciliation through relinquishing anxiety from previous conflicts. In addition SWG

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<sup>24</sup>Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 79, writes, "Participant observation is a special form of observation and demands firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for study. Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do."

<sup>25</sup> I invited Tamber to serve as a participant observer due, in part, to her training as a licensed social worker. Tamber was trained in the field of social sciences to read peoples' reactions and recognize subtle communicators (e.g., silences, body language, detachment). In addition, Tamber was an active participant in ACC and was familiar with ACC's existing narrative. At the same time, she was disconnected from the congregation's narrative since she was not present during the scenes of conflict leading to the climax of tension in 2009. Beyond these points, I invited Tamber based on her familiarity with me as the project researcher. I felt Tamber would provide valuable insights from her training and assist me in discerning the effectiveness this project had on the story-writing group.

<sup>26</sup> This handout is included in Appendix E.

sought to discover a direction for ACC's future that would enable it to share God's metanarrative with people in the Abernathy community. I included the following questions as prompts to aid SWG for discovering God's direction in the ACC's next chapter.

1. What do you appreciate about the future of the ACC?
2. In what areas do you see the ACC having a positive effect on the surrounding context? How are you willing to participate?
3. What resources might the ACC need to minister effectively in the surrounding context? What are you willing to commit to?
4. What are some possible hindrances to effective ministry efforts of the ACC?  
How might these be prevented?
5. How might reconciliation hinder/foster growth for the Abernathy Church of Christ?
6. Other comments.

These questions were designed to discover areas of the ACC narrative that reflect an absence of chronic anxiety. The motivation behind these questions was to help SWG focus on characteristics of ACC that participants appreciated. At the same time, I gently nudged SWG to realize the lasting presence of chronic anxiety in ACC and the influence anxiety continued to have in the ACC narrative.

Upon conclusion of the second week's seminar, I provided a questionnaire for SWG to complete. Answers offered from SWG revealed the impact this project has had on the participants' lives as well as on the general ACC narrative. I requested that the completed

evaluations be returned to me in the week following our final Saturday seminar.

Questions for this evaluation were:

1. How has this project shaped your understanding of the ACC narrative?
2. How has this project shaped your understanding of reconciliation? Can you pray for God to bless the lives of those that have hurt you?<sup>27</sup>
3. How has this project altered your attitude toward ministry in the ACC?
4. How might an attitude shift such as this to be carried out by the ACC?

The work of SWG, who crafted a “next chapter” and an important evaluation, provided a lens to view the presence of healing in the ACC leadership.

#### Outside Expert

The third point for evaluating this project involved feedback from Dr. Jesse Long, dean of the College of Biblical Studies and Behavioral Sciences at Lubbock Christian University. He is trained in Hebrew narrative interpretation and teaches courses on preaching and archaeology. Long’s background in narrative analysis, coupled with years of ministry experience, qualifies him to serve as an independent consultant for this project. I delivered a packet of compiled data for his consideration October 22, which allowed adequate time for him to interpret data collected throughout this project. The packet I delivered to Long consisted of the existing ACC narrative, notes for the SWG’s crafted next chapter, and project evaluations. Long read the data and returned findings in regards to the construction of the ACC’s future narrative. In addition, I solicited insights

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<sup>27</sup> R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), 63, points to a challenging practice for forgiveness to reach fulfillment. He writes, “To truly pray for those who hurt you means to pray that they will be blessed, that God will show favor to them rather than punish them that they will prosper in every way. In other words, pray that they will be dealt with as you want God to deal with you.” Forgiveness is attained, at least in the particular moment, when an individual can pray for God to bless the life of the offender.



from Long concerning techniques for assimilating SWG's next chapter into the overarching ACC narrative.

### Data Analysis

Collected data were recorded and processed using NVivo 10. NVivo 10 breaks data into categories based on a specified code that I included. My coding system follows Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis. The first category of coding addresses aspects of the ACC narrative shaped by unresolved conflict. This is the category of "pre-figuration" (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) and focused on the existing ACC narrative. In this category I looked for random scenes from the congregation's story that seemed separated from an underlying plot. In pre-figuration I looked for the impact random scenes have had on the existing ACC narrative. The second category focused on God's activity as a cohesive element uniting the ACC narrative. This is the category of "configuration" (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) and seeks to realize God's purpose behind the scenes in ACC. In this category I looked for areas where God's reconciliation appeared to move participants in ACC to offer reconciliation to other people. The final category addressed the discovered narrative of ACC as God has transformed it. This is the category of "re-figuration" (mimesis<sub>3</sub>) and seeks to understand the manner in which God is transforming the ACC narrative. Re-figuration revealed the transformed community as ministers of reconciliation actively sharing God's metanarrative in the Abernathy community. With these categories and criteria in place, NVivo 10 allowed me to recognize Ricoeur's phases toward imitation within the ACC narrative. This analysis exposed areas in need of continued healing as well as areas of recovered health.

As data were categorized according to Ricoeur's phases, I looked for concordance and discordance in the themes I discovered. The effectiveness of this project relied on agreements between various angles in the research triangle. In order to substantiate reconciliation in SWG's next chapter, I needed data to be consistent. To identify the positive and negative correlations, I focused attention on three elements. Interpretations noticed from a majority of angles are "slippages." A slippage does not require agreement from every vantage point but should be observed from more than one point of view. Areas that go unnoticed by interpreters are "silences." Interpreters miss silences during the evaluation process; hence they are not included in the data. Finally, I focused attention on discovering themes and patterns elucidated by Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis. The emerging themes from the research process were pieces of data that revealed the impact this project had on the ACC narrative. I locked all data in a secure location in the minister's office at the ACC church building. This ensured confidentiality of the research data.

This project was an effort to discover God's direction for the ACC narrative. As a byproduct to discerning God's guidance, SWG was also encouraged to heal chronic anxiety resulting from unresolved conflicts. Reconciliation is a necessary attitude for relinquishing pain associated with the previous conflicts. Separating collected data into categories corresponding with Ricoeur's moves exposed the effect reconciliation has had on the ACC narrative. Emerging themes from within specified categories of mimesis established a direction to move the ACC narrative into the future.

### Conclusion

Vision for the future is imperative for redirecting ACC's narrative. The methodology discussed in this chapter was designed to discover God's direction guiding the ACC narrative into a transformed image. SWG's efforts to craft the next chapter in the ACC narrative was an exercise intended to provide a tool that could help heal chronic anxiety stemming from unresolved conflicts. Using the methodology laid out in this chapter enabled the ACC leadership to write the congregation's next chapter. This chapter was characterized by the relationship the ACC narrative shares with God's metanarrative. As data were recorded, processed, and interpreted, the presence of a transformed narrative became evident through SWG's crafted "next chapter." SWG had shifted focus away from the existing ACC story to a narrative as ministers of reconciliation.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The methodology incorporated into this project generated an abundance of research data that helped determine the effectiveness of this intervention. Interpretation of the research data determined the narrative conversations, and Saturday seminars discussed in the previous chapter had a profound impact on SWG. Overall, participation in this project helped the group discover the relationship between God's metanarrative and the ACC narrative. Examination of the research data disclosed four results that substantiated the effectiveness of this project. This chapter reveals the results of this project as well as the impact this methodology had on SWG. In addition, the pages that follow include the evaluations from the participant observer, story-writing group, and independent consultant.

The first result exposed the residual presence of chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative. As the evaluations included below point out, the ACC narrative has been shaped in part through a recent period of conflicts. SWG unanimously highlighted this scene as a definitive episode for shaping the nature of ACC. In the wake of recent conflicts, chronic anxiety has been allowed to reside within ACC and dictate ministry efforts in the Abernathy community. As discovered in one of the Saturday seminars, ACC was limited in ministry efforts to the surrounding community. The lack of ministry efforts is credited, at least in part, to the lasting presence of chronic anxiety. The negative emotions associated with recent conflicts became a hindrance for the development of

influential ministries. Participation in this project resulted in SWG's recognition that chronic anxiety was present in the ACC narrative and that it has hindered the development of positive ministry efforts to the community of Abernathy.

As the presence of chronic anxiety was realized, SWG also recognized a need for further reconciliation in the ACC narrative. Reconciliation was the second result produced through this project. SWG reached the conclusion that God has reconciled creation and invites creation to offer reconciliation to others as well. For some, reconciliation was only possible if opposing parties in recent conflicts restored the severed relationship that had been broken as tensions climaxed. Others in the group argued reconciliation was solely an attitude of forgiveness on the part of each individual. While these differences were present, both sides agreed reconciliation was the responsibility of each participant. This recognition opened the group to relinquishing the negative emotions associated with recent conflicts. Through the need for reconciliation, SWG shifted attention to bringing the ACC narrative into harmony with God's metanarrative. Focusing on reconciliation enabled SWG to identify God's direction.

As SWG perceived the need for the ACC narrative to blend into God's metanarrative, I observed that SWG was beginning to discover God's guidance to formulate ministry efforts. God's direction is the third result produced through this project. SWG reached the conclusion that telling God's story to other people required being present with other people. In the wake of recent conflicts, ACC focused on maintaining the existing congregation. Members and leaders had turned inward to prevent more people from leaving. Chronic anxiety demanded SWG reside in the pain associated with recent conflicts. Through this project the group was convicted that God was leading

ACC to shift focus away from the congregation and engage the surrounding community. SWG became conscious of forming relationships with people outside of the congregation. Nurturing relationships enabled SWG to recognize that God has called ACC to be involved with the people of the Abernathy community in order to share God's metanarrative.<sup>1</sup>

The final result produced through this project was the development of the ACC narrative's "next chapter."<sup>2</sup> The next chapter came as a result of discovering the relationship between God's metanarrative and the congregation's story. Recognizing the union of God's metanarrative and the ACC narrative challenged SWG to shift focus away from the negative scenes in the congregation's existing story. In this chapter, SWG discussed the ACC narrative as a transformed story personifying God's image of reconciliation. As a transformed story, participants of SWG enter into the role of ministers of reconciliation, sharing God's metanarrative with others in the Abernathy community. The next chapter was developed to illustrate the transformation of the ACC narrative toward imitating God's metanarrative.

Participation in the project helped SWG realize God's transforming power, moving the ACC narrative to manifest the image of God's metanarrative. The recognition of chronic anxiety enabled the group to embrace the need for further reconciliation in the

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<sup>1</sup> One way ACC has promoted relationships is through the development of a small-group ministry. The congregation has started to meet on Sunday evenings in homes to promote a comfortable atmosphere for relationships to thrive. The mentality behind this move attests people of the Abernathy community are more likely to be involved with ACC if the congregation is not at the church building.

<sup>2</sup> The story-writing group's "next chapter" was produced through conversation in the final Saturday seminar session. To conduct the story-writing process, the group returned to the story recorded on a piece of paper placed on a wall where we met. Conversation was moved by six questions that are included in Appendix F. The next chapter was written primarily through discussion and visually recorded. The written responses and themes of the next chapter were documented on the board and the results are included in Appendix G. In addition, the major themes are included in the story-writing group's data evaluation below.

ACC narrative. Reconciliation invited the group to serve as ministers of reconciliation and formulate ministry efforts to the community of Abernathy intended to tell God's metanarrative. Through these moves, the ACC narrative from the perspective of SWG was reshaped to bear the image of God's reconciliation.

### Description of Evaluation Results

To evaluate the effectiveness of this project, I compared data interpretations from the perspectives of three different groups: 1) participant observer, 2) story-writing group, 3) an independent consultant. The diversity of these vantage points created a triangle by which to analyze collected data according to three different angles and discern key themes that might otherwise have remained hidden from a single perspective. From these angles I looked for recurring clues to measure the presence of reconciliation as SWG moved from a consideration of the existing ACC narrative to craft the next chapter in the congregation's future story.

#### Participant Observer

Throughout the narrative conversations and two Saturday seminars, I served as a participant observer. I played an active role alongside other participants involved in this project. I was also in a position to witness the effect this project had on other participants. The project's initial step was to conduct narrative conversations with each couple in SWG. This step was intended to facilitate a hearing of the ACC narrative from the unique perspective of each participant couple. I incorporated the practice of ethnographic inquiry to navigate the retelling of the ACC narrative. Questions were designed to prompt the participant couples to share the ACC narrative and to keep conversations focused on the task of sharing the story. These conversations were audio recorded and kept in a secure

location to ensure confidentiality. In addition, I paid careful attention to subtle communicators (e.g., body language, facial expressions) that would not be evident from the audio recordings. Following each narrative conversation, I recorded insights concerning the retelling of the ACC narrative. To guarantee data were accurately recorded, I replayed the narrative conversations and documented each participant couple's retelling of the ACC narrative on a large piece of paper. At the conclusion of the narrative conversations I incorporated a color-coding scheme to differentiate dominant themes that emerged. By color-coding the results I was able to create a visual representation of the integral scenes that had shaped the ACC narrative from SWG's perspective.

Following the narrative conversations, SWG participated in two Saturday seminars. During these meetings I solicited the perspective of my wife, Tamber Carr, to record insights congruent with the prescribed coding system. The coding system was based on Paul Ricoeur's three phases toward imitation. I have placed these moves into a Venn-diagram (see Figure 1 below) as a tool to facilitate identifying themes of reconciliation in SWG's next chapter for ACC. Tamber documented SWG's reactions to the materials presented in the Saturday seminars. Her observations helped measure the effect this project had on SWG. Following each seminar, I carefully recorded data from my vantage point to gauge the project's impact on SWG from my perspective. I compared data from Tamber's insights with personal observations after each seminar and carefully logged key findings. Research data were locked in a secure location with other data collected throughout this project.



The data collected from these seminars revealed SWG's perception of the ACC narrative. Tamber's observations coupled with my remarks raised questions about the ACC narrative while elucidating further need for reconciliation in ACC. The Venn-diagram illustrating Ricoeur's phases is shown in figure 1.

Collected data were categorized according to Ricoeur's three phases. This analysis shed light on the possible transformation of ACC's narrative toward imitation of God's metanarrative. The diagram above was used as a tool for documenting the ACC narrative from my perspective as a participant observer. As the congregation's story was recounted, scenes were placed into the appropriate phase. The scenes identified and themes discovered were then cross-examined with the remaining two research perspectives to gauge the effectiveness of this project.

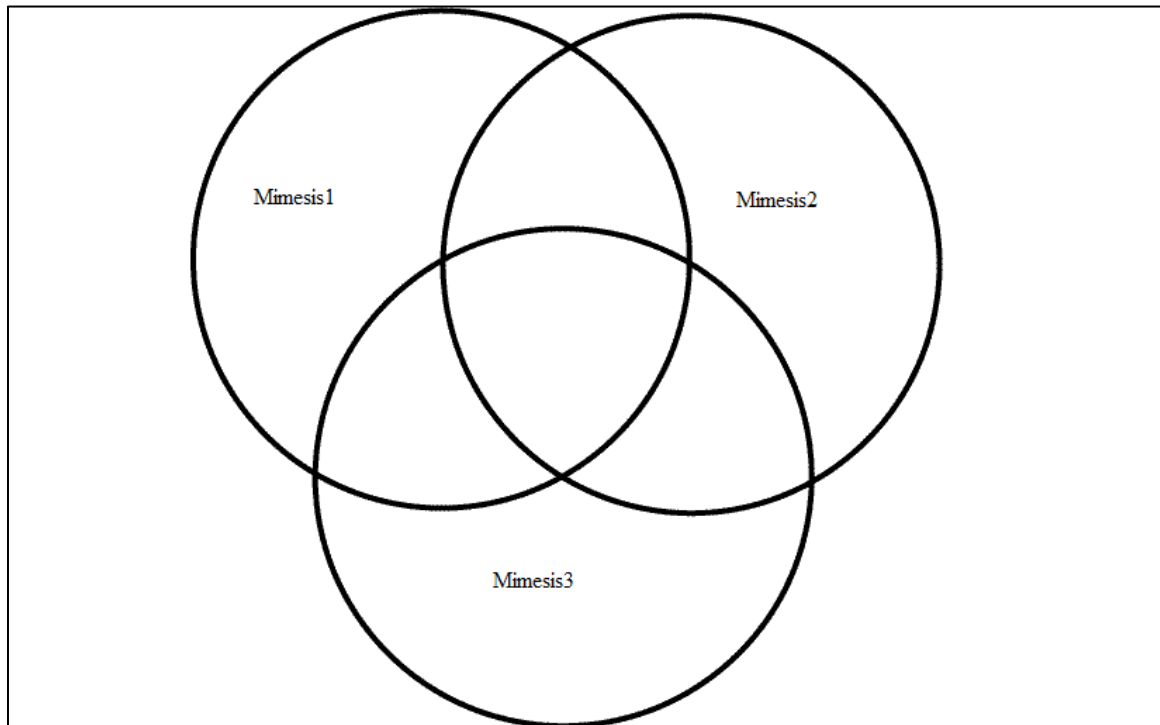


Figure 1. Venn-diagram with mimesis.

*Mimesis<sub>1</sub>*

The category of *mimesis<sub>1</sub>* includes the scenes from the ACC narrative that have shaped the identity of the congregation. Conversation indicative of *mimesis<sub>1</sub>* focused on dominant themes that have played significant roles in shaping the ACC narrative. Data placed into this category were collected primarily from the narrative conversations. For instance, from these conversations SWG highlighted the recurring episode of escalated tension in 2009. Tension in 2009 had reached a climactic point as intense conflicts took place in ACC. SWG unanimously identified this event and the ensuing exodus of a relatively large group as a definitive scene in the ACC narrative. For some this event was met with disappointment as expressed in the lament, “We were heartbroken by these people leaving.” For these participants the split in 2009 continues to evoke feelings of pain, as one stated, “There have been times when we wanted to just walk away from all of this and go somewhere else.” Other participants displayed different emotions, claiming a sense of relief after the split in 2009. For example, “We almost felt a release of stress and tension as soon as the other group left. It was as if a peace had come into the congregation in the place of hostility.” The mix of emotions in SWG revealed a paradox in the lasting effect this event has had on the ACC narrative. Some claimed the conflicts did not influence ACC’s attitude or that the split in 2009 had a positive effect on the ACC narrative. In contrast, other participants expressed regret in the way the recent conflicts were handled and recognized a lasting effect this particular scene has had on the ACC narrative.

Analyzing these reactions, I noticed that the emotions participants experienced appropriately correlated to the role each individual played in the conflicts. Those deeply

involved in the conflict spoke of betrayal and aggression from the opposing group. Participants from this vantage point also noted the presence of peace following the climax of tension. In contrast, participants who witnessed the conflicts from a distance experienced emotions of disappointment at the lack of love expressed from one to another. One of the younger participants noted in a Saturday session:

This event was difficult to stay for. And, it had a different impact on the people of our age. The people that left were not our friends. They were people from the older generation. We did not really know them and they did not really know us. For those that were older than us, this event had more of a direct impact on their feelings. They were the ones watching as their friends beat each other up. They were the ones taking most of the beating. They were the ones that were left to watch as their friends left.

Proximity to this conflict contributed to each participant's willingness to move the ACC narrative toward reconciliation. Due to the struggle from this conflict, some leaders expressed a longing to "Just keep peace." Participants such as these who were closely involved in this conflict have had a more difficult time moving away from the pain associated with this situation. In contrast, some from SWG do not share the same hesitancy for reshaping the ACC narrative. These participants confessed eagerness in the narrative conversations and throughout the Saturday seminars to move the ACC narrative toward reconciliation.

At the most rudimentary levels, SWG was aware of the need for ACC to experience healing from this event. Participants recognized the debilitating impact this scene has had on the ACC narrative. In the time since the conflict climaxed in 2009, these participants have been conscious of a need to heal the pain. At the time of this project, opinions varied concerning the presence of chronic anxiety remaining in the ACC narrative. One participant argued, "This group, as a whole, has moved past this scene."

This claim was supported as another participant remarked, “To be honest, I’m surprised we are still talking about this.” A rebuttal was quickly offered as a different participant pointed out, “We need to bury the hatchet and move on. It is obviously still having an impact on us since that is what we bring up when asked to reflect on our story.”

Discrepancies in SWG’s recognition of lasting negative effects from conflicts in 2009 suggested a presence of chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative. Conversation in *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> exposed a scene that required attention and needed to be remedied in order for the ACC narrative to imitate God’s metanarrative fully.

### *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub>

*Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> expounds upon the defining scenes of *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> and exposes God’s presence behind the performed actions. In accordance with Ricoeur’s phases toward imitation, God brings cohesion in *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> as a narrative plot is discovered. In accordance with *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, SWG discussed God’s presence as the plot that has brought cohesion to the ACC narrative. This conversation was important for SWG. Discussing God’s presence helped SWG acknowledge a lack of focus on God’s unity, which produced tension between different groups. One participant pointed out, “People reached a point where everyone was just doing what they wanted. They were not interested in working together or following God’s lead. They only wanted to do what they wanted.” According to this, ACC had lost sight of God’s direction and experienced an absence of unity among the members.

Distinguishing God’s presence was a requisite for the development of SWG’s next chapter. Discussion of God’s presence led SWG to accept the role participants played in the escalation and resolution of recent conflicts. Conversation surrounding

mimesis<sub>2</sub> led SWG to accept that conflict was created through the actions carried out by participants in SWG as well as former members of ACC. This realization testified that opposing groups had lost sight of God's presence, a fact that served as a cohesive element uniting the narrative. In an effort to focus attention on God's unifying presence, SWG accepted the role each character played. Remarks such as the following were made and repeated throughout the project: "We are only responsible for our actions, attitudes, and thoughts." SWG accepted responsibility for their actions in the conflicts of 2009, indicative of a transformed focus on the narrative's underlying plot. The discovered plot elucidated God's presence throughout the 2009 conflicts as a call for SWG to bear a distinct image of God. Mimesis<sub>2</sub> convicted SWG to recognize the contribution each participant made to increase tension in recent conflicts.

God's presence in the ACC narrative exposed a hidden need for reconciliation among SWG. Accepting ownership of participants' conduct in recent conflicts helped introduce reconciliation as an attitude transformation. Retelling the ACC narrative moved SWG to realize the responsibility each participant has to experience transformation. Reconciliation understood as a transformation in the ACC narrative would consist of relinquishing anxiety and manifesting God's metanarrative. Reconciliation defined as an attitude transformation proved difficult for some participants in SWG. These participants conceived of reconciliation as a restoration of a broken relationship. The plot that emerged in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 was iterated to substantiate a restorative connotation for reconciliation. Others in SWG accepted the explanation of reconciliation as a personal transformation for which each participant is responsible. According to these participants, reconciliation is a progression characterized by relinquishing pain from recent conflicts

and embracing hope for the ACC's next chapter. Differences of opinions concerning reconciliation led SWG to compare attributes indicative of reconciliation with a lack of reconciliation. The lists they compiled as a result are included in table 1.

SWG identified God's presence as the agent capable of transforming the ACC narrative. One individual pointed out, "We cannot change things; we must move forward and let God transform us." The plot that SWG discovered pinpoints God's reconciliation as the locus of transformation of the ACC narrative. The group identified God's reconciliation as the driving force that should direct the development in the ACC narrative. Recognizing God's power to transform the ACC narrative potentially brings cohesion to the movement away from chronic anxiety toward an attitude of reconciliation. Through the discovery of this underlying plot, the ACC narrative found a basis for transforming so as to manifest the image of God's metanarrative.

Table 1. Lack of reconciliation vs. presence of reconciliation

Lack of Reconciliation	Presence of Reconciliation
Bitterness	Peace
Pride	Joyfulness
Apathy	Hope
Complacency	Contentment
Lack of energy	Excitement
Negativity	Vibrancy
"The Blues"	Happiness
Brokenness	Love
Turmoil	Optimism
Resentment	Energetic
Hatred	Health
Health detriments	Positive relationships
Satan's happiness	Fruitfulness
	Care for others
	More likely to practice forgiveness

*Mimesis<sub>3</sub>*

The final phase toward manifesting the image of God in the ACC narrative is the transformation to a new creation. In accordance with Ricoeur, *mimesis<sub>3</sub>* reveals a newly formed narrative through the discovery of a plot underlying definitive scenes. *Mimesis<sub>3</sub>* is the ACC narrative's final move toward imitating the image of God. The imitation of God's metanarrative was realized as SWG discussed the ongoing transformation of the ACC narrative. The group reached a conclusion that a congregation's reception of reconciliation invites participation in the task of proclaiming God's metanarrative. This invitation issues a responsibility for participants to become ministers of reconciliation. One participant in SWG connected transformation and responsibility: "When we are changed by God, we have a job to do to share the change." How ministers of reconciliation proclaim God's metanarrative constantly changes. SWG reflected on past ministry techniques ACC has used to impact the surrounding context. Participants determined that the ways in which God's metanarrative is shared are not as important as telling God's story. SWG also recognized that God's transformative power moves ACC to imitate God's reconciliation for others to experience. As ACC takes on the image of God's reconciliation, participants may be transformed into ministers of reconciliation for the people of Abernathy.

A transformed vision for sharing God's metanarrative is necessary to direct the actions and attitudes of ACC. SWG was quick to point out the yearly practice of adopting a vision for ACC. One participant commented, "Each year we determine our vision for the next year. The banner themes we select are our vision for the coming year." These themes have emerged as a result of time spent in prayer and have served to keep ACC

focused on the image of God. The practice seeks to blend God's direction and transformation into the ACC narrative. Through God's transformation participants have been compelled to share God's metanarrative in the surrounding context. One participant surmised, "The role of God's story brings people to proclaim God's story." Activity shaped by the characteristics of mimesis<sub>3</sub> revealed to SWG the responsibility ACC has been given to share God's metanarrative. God has transformed the ACC narrative, casting participants into the role of ministers of reconciliation.

Following the ACC narrative through Ricoeur's phases revealed God's transforming power at work to create a new narrative. In particular, the definitive scene of conflict in 2009 created a presence of chronic anxiety. Anxiety has plagued the ACC narrative, at times unnoticed, at least to SWG. God has worked to remedy this situation in the ACC narrative through his work of reconciliation. Reconciliation in the ACC narrative is characterized by the transformation of the congregation's story to manifest God's image. Through reconciliation, ACC is transformed to emulate virtues exhibited in Jesus' life (e.g., mercy, love, compassion). These virtues are exhibited to the people of the Abernathy community through relationships and the active engagement of participants in the transformed narrative with people outside of the ACC narrative. Reconciliation transforms the ACC narrative through the congregation's manifestation of God's metanarrative. A new narrative has been revealed as a result of God's transforming power. SWG recognized the responsibility ACC has to minister in the surrounding context. Whereas chronic anxiety disabled the ACC ministry efforts, God's reconciliation has transformed the ACC narrative with a direction to proclaim God's story.



Charting the ACC narrative in a Venn-diagram according to Ricoeur's phases opened SWG to recognize God's transformative power. The Saturday seminars prompted discussion of the ACC narrative's transformation to imitate God's metanarrative. The spaces of the Venn-diagram, marking the moves between Ricoeur's phases, revealed three themes that have influenced the formation of ACC's next chapter. Placing these themes alongside Ricoeur's moves, the Venn-diagram appeared as shown in figure 2.

SWG's themes of purpose, transformation, and dream function as cornerstones on which ACC's future narrative could be built. Each theme played a fundamental role to the establishment of SWG's next chapter. In addition, these themes emerged to help SWG recognize the transformation of the ACC narrative to manifest God's metanarrative in the Abernathy community.

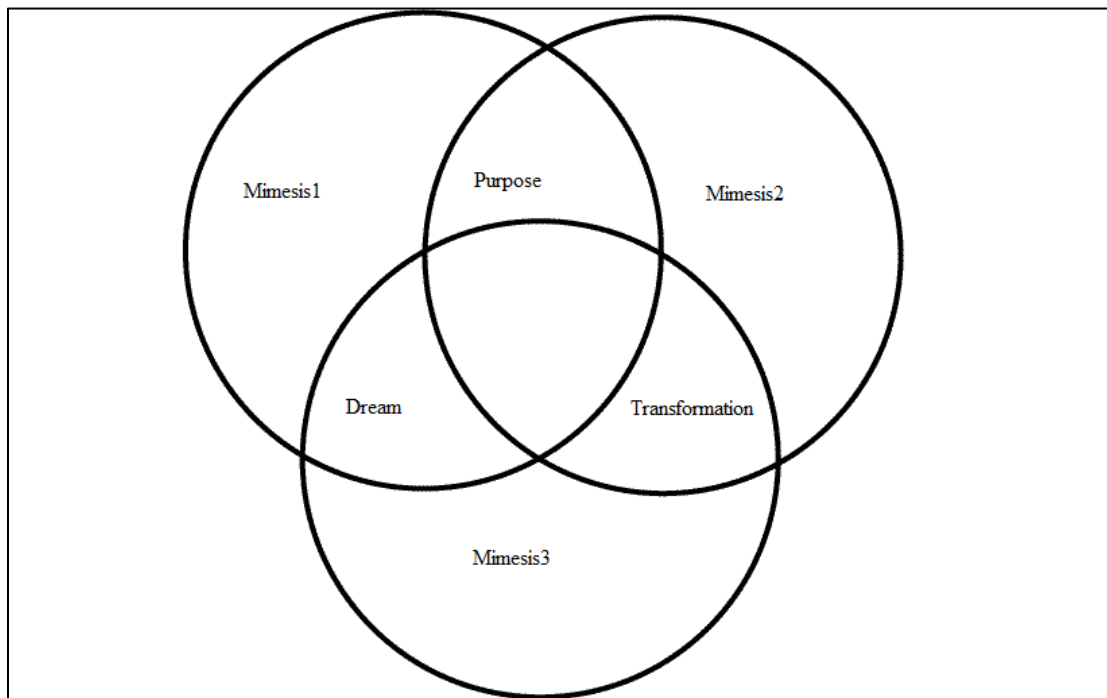


Figure 2. Venn-diagram with transition points.

### *Purpose*

Studying the move from *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> to *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> brought out SWG's first theme: purpose. The overlap between *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> and *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> identified an underlying purpose that provides meaning for ACC's narrative. A narrative's underlying purpose guides the movement of the narrative toward a specific destination. The purpose functions in similar fashion to the rudder on a large sailing vessel. The rudder's sole function is to steer the vessel so that it remains on a predetermined course. Purpose in the ACC narrative operates to keep the congregation on course toward manifesting the image of God's reconciliation. SWG commented on the importance of purpose: "We don't need to get so busy we have lost the purpose. As a congregation, we don't need to plan activities and events just to have something going on." SWG confessed that losing sight of purpose contributed to the ACC narrative's lack of cohesion. Participants contended that had ACC remained focused on an underlying purpose, its narrative would likely have stayed on course.

Recognizing the importance of purpose prompted SWG to question the central reason behind the ACC's next chapter. Through the Saturday seminars SWG established the life of Jesus as the purpose behind the ACC narrative. The point was made, "Everything depends on Jesus; fixing our eyes on Jesus is priority number one." To this another participant responded, "Well, it's on our big ol' sign out front: We are focused on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Included in these comments is an understanding that the life and virtues of Jesus' story direct the ACC narrative. In conjunction, ministry efforts to the surrounding context should resonate with the life and virtues of Jesus. Maintaining focus on Jesus' life as the purpose behind the ACC

narrative brings cohesion to the actions and attitudes of the congregation, keeping the congregation's narrative moving toward an imitation of God's metanarrative.

### *Transformation*

The move from *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> to *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> marks the location of SWG's second theme. This space was labeled "transformation," and it revealed how God has worked to shape the ACC narrative. Turning again to the imagery of a large sailing vessel, transformation is likened to the sails. The sails are the point at which the energy from the wind is transformed into the energy that moves the vessel. Without the effects of the wind, the ship remains idle and the sails defunct. This imagery resonated with ACC's narrative. SWG identified God as the agent responsible for moving the narrative. Participants confessed that removing or blocking God as the source of energy inhibits transformation. God's transforming power is the sole agent capable of moving the ACC narrative to manifest the image of God's metanarrative.

SWG devoted considerable time to the topic of the congregation's transformation into the image of God. Participants concluded that transformation of ACC's narrative into the image of God is a prerequisite for sharing God's metanarrative in the surrounding context. The comment was made, "We are agents of God; we must throw off the blinders and be transformed into the people God has called us to be." This comment implies a sense of responsibility for active involvement in the ACC narrative and allowing God's transformation to move the story. Accepting responsibility in the ACC narrative was important for this project. SWG recognized that God's transforming power demanded engagement on the group's part to allow God to transform the ACC narrative. Comments

that concerned accepting responsibility in the congregation's story were made throughout the narrative conversations and the Saturday seminars:

1. "I am only responsible for myself and what I am going to do."
2. "Bottom line . . . I am only responsible for my actions."
3. "We are responsible for our actions and transforming our attitudes."
4. "Our job is not to look down on people, but make available God's reconciliation."

These comments indicate recognition of the need to allow God to form the ACC narrative. The responsibility was placed on each participant to discover God's presence and the way God directs the ACC narrative. This point contrasted an attitude of victimization, which claimed the ACC narrative was constructed by participants following personal gains. SWG realized the ACC narrative was not reliant upon the actions and attitudes of other people. Instead, the ACC narrative depended on participants to allow God to transform the actions and attitudes of the congregation. The energy God provided moved the ACC narrative toward bearing the image of God's reconciliation.

### *Dream*

The transition from *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> marks the final theme SWG identified as critical to their next chapter. This theme was the discovery of SWG's dream, which sets Ricoeur's moves toward imitation in motion again. Recalling the imagery of a large sailing vessel, the dream is likened to the bow. The bow is the foremost point of a vessel and is designed to cut through the water's current with the least amount of possible resistance. SWG's dream functions within the ACC narrative to cut through current and previous ministry efforts to forge a new path toward manifesting God's metanarrative.

SWG alluded to the importance of a dream to reduce potential resistance from the congregation. The point was made that a dream introduced with sensitivity into ACC will likely achieve more member participation to carry out the dream.

Through the Saturday seminars, SWG identified the dream of focusing ACC's ministry efforts on the surrounding context rather than on itself. Participants admitted ACC has placed priority on maintaining the existing congregation. SWG's dream calls for ACC to focus ministry efforts on the people in the Abernathy community instead. The identification of SWG's dream challenged the ACC participants to actively engage the surrounding context with God's metanarrative. SWG also acknowledged that resistance was likely to result from introducing a shift in the ACC ministry focus. One individual observed, "Anytime you make a decision to move a congregation forward, someone is not going to like it." Despite expectations of resistance, SWG felt confident that the dream to minister in the surrounding context upheld the adopted purpose and was necessary for telling God's metanarrative. One participant pointed out, "We need to recognize if we are formulating ministries around tradition or being guided by God." SWG's dream has the potential to cut through the flow of current ministry efforts and help the congregation discover effective ways to share God's metanarrative in the surrounding context.

SWG concluded that the established dream would serve as a concept the congregation would embrace, provided God's direction was evident in it. Identifying God's guidance shifted SWG's discussion to available resources in ACC. The observation was made, "If God is moving us in a certain direction, he will provide the resources to see it through." This statement led SWG to identify resources ACC currently

possesses. As a relatively small congregation, ACC lacks abundant resources to develop ministries. However, SWG confirmed the number of participants in ACC is a natural resource that may be utilized to minister in the surrounding context. “What we have . . . is a natural environment to nurture healthy relationships because of our smaller number.” SWG realized the intimate environment of a smaller congregation has been an asset for fostering relationships. The group discussed various ways relationships have benefitted ministry efforts, recognizing this as a natural resource for sharing God’s metanarrative in the surrounding community. This discovery prompted SWG to look for ways in which relationships may be fostered with the people of Abernathy. SWG’s dream to minister in the surrounding context was made possible through relationships formed with people outside of the congregation.

#### *Reconciliation*

The center of the Venn-diagram demarcates the point at which all three phases of mimesis merged together in harmony. This point is labeled “reconciliation” based on the centrality of reconciliation in God’s metanarrative, an attitude necessary for the ACC narrative. Each move of mimesis and each identified theme revolved around the theme of reconciliation in God’s metanarrative and the ACC narrative. With reconciliation in place, the final form of the Venn-diagram is as shown in figure 3.

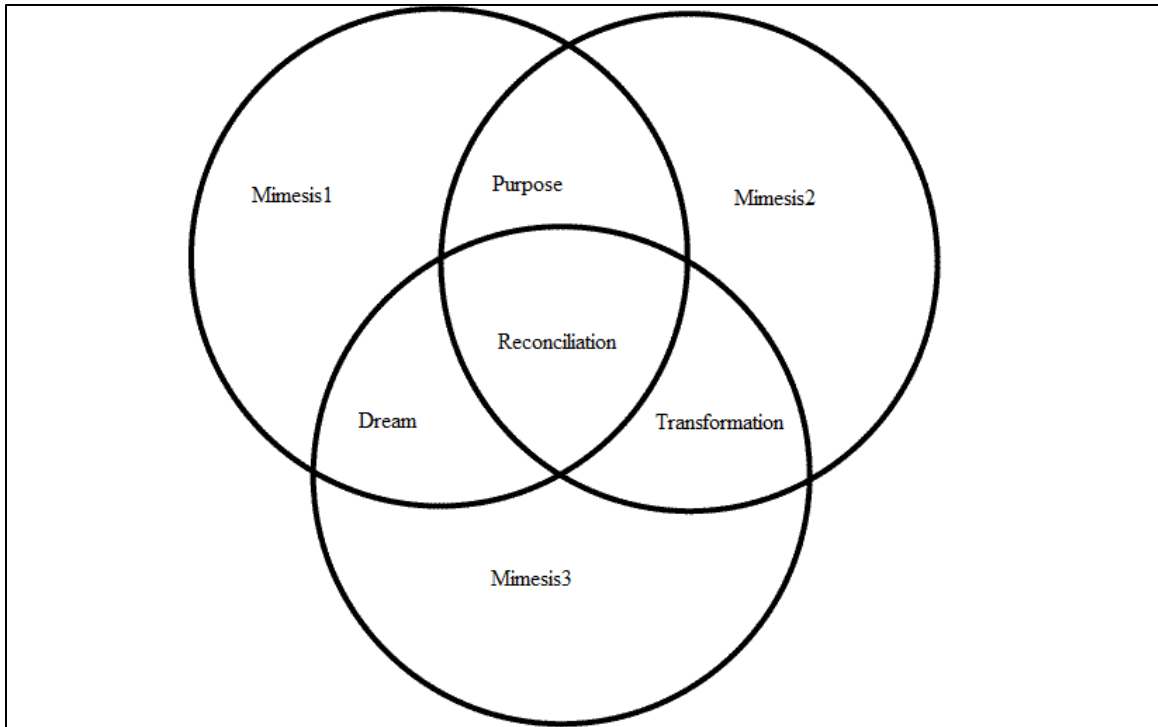


Figure 3. Venn-diagram with central point.

The diagram depicts each move of mimesis and the different themes SWG identified as united in reconciliation. Informed by the study of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, participants attested that Jesus brings reconciliation in God's metanarrative. The comment was made during one of the seminars, "Since the time of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, God has been restoring people to himself." This point was highlighted as SWG discussed Jesus' role in God's metanarrative, as communicated by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18. For some in SWG, reconciliation was solely understood as the restoration of a broken relationship. For these participants Jesus' role in God's metanarrative is limited to the restoration of God and man's broken relationship through reconciliation. In accordance with a connotation of restoring relationships, reconciliation is accomplished only after broken relationships in the ACC narrative have been restored.

Defining reconciliation as the restoration of relationships created a predicament for SWG. Participants affirmed relationships may never mend from the conflicts in the ACC narrative. One participant's post-seminar evaluation read, "This project helped me to realize members hold different points of view concerning reconciliation. Some members will hold firmly to the particular viewpoints and beliefs. Others will have an open mind and enter conversation concerning different thoughts and beliefs." The attitude reflected in this comment was indicative of the presence of chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative. This participant vocalized the expectation that reconciliation depends on people discussing differences until one side is persuaded to accept the other's conclusions. According to a restorative understanding, reconciliation is only achieved when one side in the conflict wins the other over to the opposite side and the relationship is brought, once more, into balance. This connotation of reconciliation has placed unrealistic expectations on healing chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative.

Other participants in SWG were open to the idea of reconciliation as a transformation of the ACC narrative into a new image. Participants from this point of view recognized that the restoration of relationships in the ACC narrative was not always possible. For these participants reconciliation was understood as a personal responsibility that culminated in a transformation of attitude. This mindset was expressed by another participant who said, "There must be some kind of reconciliation; it might not be between two groups, but at least one side must reconcile to move on." Reconciliation as a transformation positions each participant to accept responsibility of the character's role in the ACC narrative. Accepting responsibility enabled participants in SWG to recognize how their actions fueled the escalation of tension in recent conflicts. Participants open to



the idea of reconciliation as transformation recognized the need to heal chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative through surrendering negative emotions associated with previous conflicts. This transition is imperative for the congregation to reconcile anxiety produced in previous conflicts. Once made, this point was met with excitement as one participant voiced, “I’m ready to go! Let’s move forward! Let’s ignite a passion church-wide.” As a whole, SWG recognized a need for reconciliation in the ACC narrative. Reconciliation was the identified theme that brings God’s metanarrative and the ACC narrative into harmony. In addition, reconciliation stood out as an attribute ACC has emulated to manifest the image of God.

My conclusions as a participant observer confirmed the project’s effectiveness in assisting SWG to discover and craft ACC’s next chapter. Through this project the presence of chronic anxiety emerged as a dominant characteristic in the ACC narrative. Recognizing chronic anxiety’s presence enabled SWG to also realize an ongoing need for reconciliation. Breaking down the ACC narrative according to Ricoeur’s three phases of mimesis helped SWG realize God’s transformative effect on the ACC narrative. Throughout this project, SWG identified an underlying purpose that had navigated ACC toward the manifestation of God’s image. In addition, SWG was led to recognize the way God has worked to transform the ACC narrative. Transformation was a pivotal element for SWG to share God’s metanarrative to the people of Abernathy. Finally, SWG identified a dream to introduce God’s metanarrative to the surrounding context. The themes of purpose, transformation, and dream merge with Ricoeur’s phases of mimesis around the central matter of reconciliation. Reconciliation conceptually brings the ACC

narrative into harmony with God's metanarrative and potentially reduces the influence of chronic anxiety in the wake of recent conflicts.

### Story-Writing Group

The second point of view used to assess research data was that of the SWG itself. Similar to that of the participant observer, the SWG's perspective provided an important vantage point to discover key themes throughout this project. Themes that emerged from within SWG were then compared to those of the participant observer and the independent consultant to gauge the effectiveness of this intervention. Participants in SWG were invited to address chronic anxiety in the ACC narrative. The group was also invited to discover God's direction in the next chapter for the ACC narrative. From the onset of this project, the challenge of dealing with the presence of chronic anxiety in ACC has repeatedly surfaced. A minority of SWG participants claim that ACC has moved away from the pain produced in recent conflicts. One participant remarked, "I feel, as a group, we have moved on from this event." Another quickly expressed a similar thought: "I'm surprised we're even talking about this." However, the argument was also made that "When asked about the story of the Abernathy congregation, this is the event we focus on right away." This project exposed some of the negative effects unresolved conflicts have had and continued to have on the ACC narrative, even as participants deny the presence of chronic anxiety. Yet this project has helped move SWG away from chronic anxiety and toward healing through the development of the ACC's next chapter. Both objectives were accomplished in the development of SWG's next chapter. The final session of the Saturday seminars allowed SWG to discuss and adopt the next chapter in the ACC

narrative. Through this process SWG identified three criteria to move the ACC narrative into the next chapter.

### *Purpose*

SWG's first criterion was the discovery of a central purpose to guide the ACC narrative. In accordance with this point, SWG asked, "Why are we doing what we are doing?" Questioning the underlying reason for developing ministries<sup>3</sup> in ACC helped SWG identify the central purpose for ministry efforts in the congregation. In order to identify potential reasons for ministry efforts SWG compiled a list of current ministries conducted in ACC. The list of current ministry efforts is laid out in table 2.

As this list was collected, SWG realized ACC has not actively engaged opportunities to proclaim God's metanarrative to people of Abernathy. The point was made in conversation that the ACC ministry efforts were designed to adhere to the existing congregation. Ministries have been developed to maintain the congregation rather than impact the lives of people outside the congregation. Scrutiny of the current ACC ministries revealed to SWG a lack of purpose behind current ministries as well as a need for purpose in future ministries. One participant advised against losing purpose, saying, "We don't need to get so busy we have lost the purpose. As a congregation, we don't need to plan activities and events without an underlying purpose." The ministries conducted by ACC should have a concise, established purpose. SWG concluded those ministry practices that lack or have lost sight of a guiding purpose need to be assessed to determine the best course of action for handling them in the future (i.e., reform, discontinue).

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<sup>3</sup> The ministries discussed by SWG are limited to recurring ministry efforts. This conversation did not handle specific events (e.g., youth rallies) or efforts conducted annually (e.g., "Senior Sunday").

Table 2. Current Abernathy Church of Christ ministries

Internal	External
1. Sunday morning/evening worship	1. Food pantry
2. Wednesday night suppers	
3. Ladies' Bible study	

Participants identified the life of Jesus as the purpose to guide the ACC's next chapter. This identification prompted SWG to focus on Jesus' life and teachings as a foundation to develop the ACC ministry efforts. "Everything depends on Jesus. We must be a people that fixes our eyes on Jesus and place him as the number one priority." Placing Jesus in a role as the congregation's purpose left SWG to question ministries that have lost focus on sharing God's metanarrative. SWG identified current ministries of ACC and examined the underlying purpose behind each. From this evaluation came the need to determine how to handle ministry efforts that no longer focus on advancing God's kingdom in the immediate context.

SWG set out to determine which ministries from the compiled list above were centered on the underlying purpose of Jesus' life. Examining ministry avenues is a never-ending task to determine an appropriate focus on Jesus' life in ACC. The ladies' Bible study was quickly acknowledged as an effort committed to ACC's underlying purpose. One participant repeatedly pointed to the impact the ladies' Bible study has had on helping her heal from various struggles, praying for one another, and helping deepen the faith she possessed. The food pantry was also recognized as a ministry devoted to sharing Jesus' life with others. A number of people have been exposed to Jesus' life through the efforts of the food pantry participants. The purpose behind this ministry is to exemplify a Christ-like image for other people. Both of these ministry efforts have upheld SWG's established purpose for sharing God's metanarrative in the surrounding context. As

conversation continued, SWG noticed a contrast between these influential ministries and the purpose behind Sunday evening worship services. Participants claimed this practice was a habitual observance void of effort to share Jesus' life with other people. One participant pointed out, "Really, we are only doing Sunday evenings to keep one person happy." The question SWG pondered was how to approach Sunday evening worship to realign this effort according to the established purpose.

From this discussion, it was made clear the purpose behind every ministry should be a foundation that will not waiver. Ministry techniques adapt in an effort to maintain effectiveness. SWG identified Jesus as the central purpose to guide development of ACC ministries. Although a clear sense of precisely what it might mean to do so was never fully defined, SWG concluded that ministry efforts to the people of Abernathy should be firmly established on Jesus. God's metanarrative manifest in Jesus demands to be shared in the most effective ways. "It's on our big ol' sign. We want Jesus to be the author and perfecter of faith. We want people to be transformed by Jesus." The ACC ministry efforts have endured and will undergo seasons of change in order to discover effective ways to proclaim God's story. With Jesus as the identified purpose, SWG has at least established a focal point to develop ministry efforts for the purpose of sharing God's metanarrative. Although the implications of a Christ-centered focus remains to be fully explored, holding Jesus as the purpose of the ACC ministries keeps the ACC narrative moving toward the manifestation of God's image through reconciliation.

#### *Direction*

SWG also discovered a clear direction to guide ACC's ministry efforts to the surrounding context. In its conversation about direction, SWG asked, "What is God

calling the Abernathy Church of Christ to do?” During the final Saturday session SWG identified the importance of having a clear direction (vision, dream) in order to construct ministry efforts that fit the congregation’s central purpose. The statement that captures this dominant point in the conversation was “the vision has to come from God.” God’s metanarrative was identified as the source for directing the ways ACC should minister to the surrounding context. The direction SWG followed into its next chapter was discerned solely on the basis of God and issued an invitation for ACC to develop ministry efforts for the Abernathy community. SWG measured current ministries in ACC against the discovered purpose to substantiate validity. A misconception present in ACC is “Well, this worked in the ‘60s, so it should be good to work today.” SWG recognized the fallacy with this mentality, noting that life in 2014 is drastically different. The culture of the ministry context continually shifts. SWG concluded that the differences in the surrounding context warrant discovery of a direction that fits contemporary needs yet is still in tune with the life of Jesus.

SWG was quick to point out the recurring practice of discovering a clear direction for ACC. From year to year the leadership identifies the direction God leads the congregation. In 2014, the leadership rallied around the phrase “Here I Am—Send Me.” Proclaiming Jesus’ life was the motivation that prompted this theme’s adoption. SWG identified four components that recommended this direction in 2014 for ACC. The stated direction is concise and simple, inviting the congregation to gather behind the concept. It offers a focal point for the congregation to seek effective ministry. It operates to move ACC away from focusing on itself to proclaim Jesus’ story. The direction provides a gauge for measuring ministries to the people of Abernathy. These four criteria helped

SWG discover the direction in which God was calling ACC to move. Through this project SWG was convicted that God has directed ACC to minister in the Abernathy community. The point was made that if we want to be a congregation committed to following God, we must be a congregation that goes outside of itself to share God's story. This shift of direction upheld the central purpose and helped SWG decide upon ways to effectively proclaim God's metanarrative in the surrounding context.

### *Relationships*

SWG's final theme was discerned through blending the identified purpose with the established direction. As a result of their work, SWG realized the significance of relationships for sharing God's metanarrative with the people in the Abernathy community. The theme of relationships revolved around the question "How is the Abernathy Church of Christ working to proclaim God's story?" Asking why the church operates (purpose) and what God calls the church to do (direction) naturally led the group to witness how the church functions (relationships). SWG concluded that relationships are a valuable tool for sharing God's metanarrative with other people. One group participant summarized, "Relationships are important for helping people get a sense of belonging to a group." This point was made to attest that as people experience a sense of belonging to a group, they are more likely to build trust with the group and listen to the story the group tells. Prior to the Saturday seminars participants had alluded to the importance of relationships. Multiple couples described a welcoming attitude in ACC at the time of their initial contact with the church. These participants confessed that the value and presence of relationships had created a family atmosphere in ACC. Though

limited in scope, this testimony suggests that the “family feel” is an attribute that created relationships between participants in ACC and the surrounding community.

SWG concluded that development of positive relationships has been a foundational characteristic of ACC. Participants described ACC as “good people meeting here.” In addition, the congregation has “a pretty solid core.” The quality of relationships at ACC was identified as a resource that supported ministry opportunities. One factor is size. The group acknowledged that ACC’s size helped create an atmosphere to nurture relationships. SWG observed, “What we have is a natural environment to nurture healthy relationships because of our smaller size.” The relatively small size of ACC merges with the compassionate quality of the congregation to produce an atmosphere in which relationships thrive. Members have invested and remained active in the lives of others. One participant commented, “You see people around town: at football games, walking the school halls, going to the store. You have the chance to be involved in the lives of others outside of the church setting.” Opportunities to be involved in lives apart from the formal worship experience have provided a way for ACC to share God’s metanarrative with the people of Abernathy. Nurturing relationships was identified as a resource for ACC to share God’s metanarrative.

SWG’s next chapter identified an underlying purpose, a direction for ministry efforts, and an avenue for sharing God’s metanarrative in the surrounding context. The transformation of the ACC narrative, from SWG’s perspective, has been a move from a painful past toward a hope-filled future. Through this project, SWG identified sharing God’s metanarrative manifest in the life of Jesus as the purpose behind the ACC future narrative. Along with the purpose, SWG discovered God’s direction to guide the ACC



ministry efforts to people of Abernathy. SWG realized the inherent value relationships offer as a resource for effectively sharing God's metanarrative with the surrounding context. Together these themes have invited participation from ACC and reiterated the congregation's role to serve as ministers of reconciliation.

SWG's discovered themes helped reduce chronic anxiety associated with recent conflicts in the ACC narrative. Through this project participants were enabled to shift focus away from the actions and emotions of the existing ACC narrative toward a story with an underlying purpose. SWG identified the life of Jesus as the central purpose for ministry actions conducted in ACC. In addition, the group realized it was God who was directing ACC to share God's metanarrative with people outside the congregation. Finally, SWG established forming strong relationships with people in the Abernathy community as a natural resource enabling ACC to share God's metanarrative.

#### Independent Consultant

The perspective of an independent consultant serves as the final angle to interpret data collected through this project. For this perspective I invited Dr. Jesse Long to read research data and offer findings from an objective point of view. Long is dean of the College of Biblical Studies and Behavioral Sciences at Lubbock Christian University and teaches courses in archaeology and Old Testament. He is trained in Hebrew narrative interpretation and has written extensively about narrative in the Old Testament. Long's background in narrative analysis, coupled with years of ministry experience, qualifies him to measure the move from the ACC's existing narrative to a future narrative. The data I submitted to Long were comprised of the existing ACC narrative, SWG's identified three themes (purpose, direction, relationships), and personal observations that

I recorded as a participant researcher. After Long completed reading the collected data, we discussed questions raised and insights he discovered while reading the research materials.

Long was complimentary of the work this project accomplished and the potential this exercise set out to achieve. He summarized the analysis of these data: “Everything looks like it is moving along well. The church seems to be in a good place and ready to move forward with this story.” From this point our conversation moved to discuss techniques for implementing SWG’s formulated chapter into the future ACC narrative. Long was quick to offer two suggestions for integrating the crafted chapter. The first suggestion consisted of a meeting with the “silent leaders” that operate within the congregation’s narrative. In this meeting the silent leaders would be led through a condensed version of the project in which SWG has already participated. The motivation behind bringing in the silent leaders would be to gain investment from prominent participants in the congregation, an action that should help the narrative flourish. However, the question was raised concerning how much input the silent leaders should be given. On one level, Long pointed out—if the silent leaders are given too much freedom to alter the next chapter, they may completely reshape the formulated chapter SWG has already composed. On another level, to restrict the silent leaders’ input might leave participants feeling unheard as the next chapter is introduced to ACC. Long agreed with my conclusion that it is important for the silent leaders to have a role in bringing forth the future narrative of ACC. He continued to point out that it is of equal importance for a unified narrative to exist between SWG and the silent leaders. Introducing a different

narrative into a congregation has a better chance for acceptance based on the support the narrative receives from key participants.

The second suggestion Long offered to integrate the formulated chapter into the ACC narrative was a sermon series presenting the identified themes from the seminar conversations. In this suggestion Long asked about the different themes that emerged from the participant observations (purpose, transformation, dream) and the themes in the crafted story (purpose, direction, relationships). To bring cohesion to these themes, Long encouraged focus on the centrality of reconciliation as an individual transformation and as a collective transformation. Long concluded by noting, “Regardless of the themes used to guide the narrative, reconciliation is the foundation for the ACC future narrative.” Reconciliation is found in the life of Jesus and becomes an expression of the ACC. According to Long’s interpretation, reconciliation has been experienced in ACC through the development of SWG’s next chapter. The effectiveness of this project in fostering healing was realized as Jesus became the defining element for the ACC narrative and motivated the actions of the congregation. Reconciliation has prompted the ACC narrative to blend into God’s metanarrative in an effort to transform the surrounding context. Reconciliation allows ACC to move into the future with a crafted story that coheres with God’s metanarrative. The sermon series invites the input of the silent leaders to join with SWG’s future chapter. The culmination of this union is reached in an invitation for the remainder of ACC to step into the role of proclaiming God’s metanarrative in the Abernathy community.

### Conclusion

The purpose for this project was to assist the SWG in discovering God's direction and formulate a reconciled narrative for ACC in the wake of recent conflicts. Data collected from the perspectives of a participant observer, the SWG, and an independent consultant suggests the project accomplished this purpose. The narrative conversations, Saturday seminars, and crafted next chapter helped SWG move toward blending the ACC narrative with God's metanarrative. As a group, SWG recognized the remaining presence of chronic anxiety as well as the residual negative effects anxiety had on the ACC narrative. Realizing anxiety's presence necessitated further need for reconciliation. As a characteristic of God's metanarrative, reconciliation was identified as the unifying piece for the ACC narrative and God's divine story. The reformation of the ACC narrative from the point of view of the SWG from anxiety to manifesting God's metanarrative was indicated through the discovery of an underlying purpose and a guiding direction. Through this project SWG identified Jesus' life as the underlying purpose for the ACC narrative. This purpose helped SWG understand the reason behind and gauge the effectiveness of ministry efforts in ACC. From the purpose SWG also discovered a direction for proclaiming God's metanarrative. Participants realized as ministers of reconciliation, SWG has been called to share God's metanarrative in the community of Abernathy. This responsibility was not unique to SWG but also includes ACC as a whole. From this project the opportunity emerged to invited ACC into the discovered next chapter and embrace the role of ministers of reconciliation.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The general purpose of this doctor of ministry project was to incorporate material from the doctor of ministry program to a specified need in the Abernathy Church of Christ. This purpose was accomplished by guiding a small group of leaders through an ethnographic examination of the ACC narrative. In addition, the project has nurtured an attitude of reconciliation through the development of a “next chapter” to shape the ACC efforts for proclaiming God’s metanarrative to the people of Abernathy. The final chapter of this thesis establishes credibility for this project and discusses the validity this project has for different contexts. In addition, this chapter presents the next steps for prompting the ACC to carry out the next chapter. Finally, this section offers suggestions for other congregations intending to replicate this research project.

The methodology for this project morphed into a vision different than the intended image of reconciliation originally adopted. The initial stages of this project focused on leading an exercise to assist healing chronic anxiety produced from recent conflicts. Through the methodology’s implementation the project evolved to discover God’s purpose for ACC’s next chapter. Despite the shift of primary purpose, reconciliation remained a valuable characteristic for SWG to embrace. The project maintained the hope that a discovered narrative would instill an attitude of reconciliation in SWG. In this modification, discovering the next chapter became the vision the project helped create. Instead of following a single technique (e.g., narrative therapy), I

implemented a variety of resources (e.g., appreciative inquiry, ethnography) to help lead SWG toward God's revealed purpose. The motivation behind utilizing different resources was to encourage SWG to take the leading role in discovering God's intended purpose for ACC's narrative. Diversity in methodologies enabled SWG to retell the congregation's past narrative and discern God's direction for the future narrative. Through the evolution of this project's methodology, SWG was encouraged to recognize appreciated elements of ACC's narrative. Appreciated elements appeared to indicate God's purpose from SWG's point of view.<sup>1</sup>

Emphasizing appreciated elements coupled with retelling ACC's narrative from unique perspectives seemed to encourage participation from the group. The effectiveness of discovering the "next chapter" relied on willingness from participants to discover the direction in which God had led them. As the facilitator for the narrative conversations and Saturday seminars, I had the option to retell the ACC narrative from a personal point of view. To do so would have likely silenced SWG's voice and communicated only my interpretation of the ACC narrative. I also could have approached the project with a predetermined vision in mind and attempted to convince SWG to accept my notion. This approach would have possibly divided SWG and me, inhibiting group participation and preventing the discovery of God's intended purpose. I wanted SWG to work toward the particular vision as a way for owning the story-writing process instead. Placing responsibility with SWG proved beneficial for the project's effectiveness. SWG granted a

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<sup>1</sup> SWG did not push back on the practice of discovering God's direction as might be expected from a system characterized by a high regard of biblical authority. ACC holds to the understanding that God's written word is the foundation for shaping a congregation's narrative. This view was never challenged through the narrative conversations or Saturday seminars. Discovering God's purpose for ACC was never presented as an exercise conducted apart from biblical credibility. Because of this the group did not feel a need to protect biblical principles while writing the ACC's next chapter.

high level of trust in my role as a participant observer and allowed me to see into the difficult scenes of the ACC's narrative.

### External Validity

The methodology incorporated into this project was developed exclusively from the ACC narrative. The existing narrative pieced together from the narrative conversations was unique to ACC. The need exposed from the existing narrative emerged from unresolved conflicts in the recent scenes of the ACC story. The challenge to heal chronic anxiety associated with recent conflicts was an identified prerequisite for ACC to positively impact the surrounding community. Since this project originated exclusively from the ACC narrative, SWG was not asked to compare the congregation's story to other contexts. Participants were also advised not to develop the ACC narrative according to a different context. Other congregations' narratives were not used to model or develop the ACC's next chapter. Despite the contextual nature, this project revealed two important points for validating the application of this project in other contexts. The first is the recognition of an underlying narrative that communicates the past and directs the congregation into the future. In the time since its birth up to the present moment, a congregation is a living system. The life of this system may be communicated through a narrative. Included in a congregation's narrative are characters, a background, a setting, and a timeline. As the story is recounted, certain scenes stand out as definitive episodes. The various scenes of a congregation's narrative shape the identity of that congregation as well as influence participants' attitudes.

This project sought to assist the discovery of a congregation's narrative through the identification of definitive scenes. From this discovery participants were encouraged

to shift attention toward developing future scenes in the narrative. This is not to say a congregation's definitive scenes will be plagued by anxiety associated with a painful situation. The need for reconciliation in ACC was certainly raised from the ashes of conflict. However, some congregations may incorporate scenes filled with joy and discover a next chapter that resonates with corresponding emotions. The point of validity for this project in other contexts does not rely on the narrative a congregation has written in the past. Instead, validation of this project across contexts depends on a commitment to discover the congregation's narrative that God is writing for the future.

The second indicator of this project's validity for other contexts is the congregation's transformation to manifest the image of God. Imitating the image of God is paramount for a congregation to positively influence a particular ministry context. The facet of God's image this project presents and encourages is reconciliation.

Reconciliation is foundational to a congregation's narrative. Reconciliation is a key characteristic of God's metanarrative as a gift for all creation through the life of Jesus. A congregation that accepts this gift of reconciliation inevitably becomes responsible for sharing a story of reconciliation with others. As a result, a faith community's ministry efforts revolve around God's reconciliation as it motivates action within an immediate context. God's reconciliation transforms a congregation through the assimilation of the congregation's narrative into God's metanarrative. As God's metanarrative transforms a congregation's narrative, participants take on the image of God's reconciliation.

Conducting this project in ACC exposed one piece of advice I offer other leaders repeating this exercise. Leaders would do well to remember the pastoral role they fill for the members of the church. Leading a congregation through the retelling of the church's



narrative has the potential to raise memories that are difficult to face (e.g., divorce, death). In those moments leaders should recall that the motivation behind this project was and remains to advance the well-being of the congregation. This may mean the retelling of the congregation's narrative is paused until the emotions can be addressed. Leaders may need to step away from the project to allow participants to work through particular situations. Above all, leaders should remember the group of participants invited into this project has agreed to allow others a glimpse into their story. With permission to see into the story also comes vulnerability in the story-teller's recollection of significant scenes. Leaders should resist becoming so enmeshed with the project that they miss opportunities to help the group.

#### Internal Validity

The unique context of ACC raises a need for reshaping the narrative before developing ministries to the Abernathy community. As such the content of this project presents an intervention with internal validity for shaping the ACC narrative. The curriculum, collected data, and data examinations were conducted with integrity to aid SWG in crafting a developed next chapter firmly rooted in reconciliation. The theological foundation discussed in chapter 2 revealed a theme of reconciliation at the center of God's metanarrative and has become the centerpiece for the formulated narrative of the ACC future. The data collected and assessed throughout this project were obtained by recognized qualitative methods, including participant observation, a story-writing group's crafted next chapter, and an individual consultant. Reading the collected data from three angles forms a triangle that functions to minimize biases that might hinder gaining an accurate interpretation of gathered data. The themes that surfaced from collected data

were discovered through conversations with various participants and were discussed at greater depth during the Saturday seminars. To ensure that I understood comments from SWG, I adopted a practice of reciting back to the group information I had heard. Repeating personal observations helped clarify possible ambiguity and minimized miscommunications in the retelling of the ACC narrative or in the development of the transformed narrative. Accurately hearing SWG's retelling of the ACC narrative and next chapter helped guarantee this project was conducted to benefit ACC.

Given the opportunity to repeat this project, I would incorporate a system of categorizing to differentiate three dimensions of the ACC narrative. The first category comprises the formal story of ACC. This story written down in the church's annals directly communicates the history of the congregation leading to the present date. I discovered this story through church documents beginning with the inaugural meeting in 1922 and covering the span of the congregation's ninety-two-year history. The second category consists of the informal stories communicated from person to person in general conversation. These stories talk of significant moments from the perspective of the story-tellers and communicate details of the story these persons believe were important. I heard these stories in conversations before and after the worship services as well as in informal conversations with participants of ACC throughout the week. The final category was made up of tacit stories. These stories were implied through distinct cues evident in the story-tellers' demeanor. These cues were subtle, such as a silence when a name was mentioned or a recognizable change in voice, depending on the raised topic. I also noticed these stories through body language and conduct, without storytellers communicating the implied story. Separating these types of narratives would significantly

benefit the retelling of the ACC narrative. Differentiating between the formal, informal, and tacit retelling of the ACC narrative would enhance understanding what is truly taking place within the congregation's story.

### Remaining Questions

Discovering God's direction for the ACC narrative raises three questions that remain unanswered:

1. How has ACC embraced/rejected SWG's discovered next chapter?<sup>2</sup>
2. How has God's transformation of the congregation's narrative been realized in ACC?<sup>3</sup>
3. How does ACC develop ministry opportunities in accordance with the crafted next chapter to the surrounding community?<sup>4</sup>

Inherent in these questions is an invitation for ACC to embrace God's direction in a transformed narrative to share God's metanarrative with the community of Abernathy. These questions have yet to be realized from within the timeframe of this doctor of ministry project. The small group of participants included in this project represent a fraction of ACC. Through the narrative conversations and Saturday seminars, SWG was introduced to similar questions. The conclusion of this project poses an opportunity for ACC to step into the role of ministers of reconciliation and participate in sharing God's

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<sup>2</sup> Following the meeting with ACC's silent leaders and the presentation of SWG's next chapter, the congregation should have opportunity to accept or reject the proposed direction. This move allows ACC to recognize God's direction and invest in the efforts of ACC according to the discovered direction.

<sup>3</sup> This question is intended to measure the movement of the congregation as a community away from chronic anxiety produced in recent conflicts. Similar to questions for SWG, ACC is invited to examine the effects anxiety has produced in the congregation as well as in the personal lives of each participant.

<sup>4</sup> This question is a recurring question that requires ACC to measure efforts according to SWG's identified purpose. Similar to SWG's discussion of current ministries in ACC, the routine evaluation of ministry efforts to the community of Abernathy is necessary to determine the impact ministries have for sharing God's metanarrative.

metanarrative. As answers to these questions are revealed, the validity of this project will be realized more fully. I expect ACC will embrace SWG's discovered next chapter. In addition, I believe transformation of the ACC narrative will be realized as the congregation shifts attention away from chronic anxiety associated with recent conflicts. Finally, I am optimistic ACC will be enabled to positively impact the community of Abernathy through retelling God's metanarrative.

The impact this project has had on SWG was realized in the short-term benefit, as well as long-term potential on ACC as a whole. The greatest short-term benefit was a renewed passion and energy for conducting ministry efforts in the community of Abernathy. The discovered next chapter served as a catalyst to spark participation among members in ACC to fill the role of ministers of reconciliation. As a result of this participation, the ACC leadership has recognized an opportunity to develop ministries focused on nurturing relationships with people outside the congregation as well as inside ACC. The long-term benefit of this project will come as the ACC narrative is transformed to manifest reconciliation indicative of God's metanarrative. As SWG's next chapter is introduced to ACC, people will discover the role they have been called to fill as ministers of reconciliation. As this role is assumed, God's metanarrative will be proclaimed and the ACC will be shaped to manifest God's reconciliation in Abernathy.

#### Future Actions

As SWG shifted focus toward the discovered next chapter, pivotal steps remain that must be carried out to gain the congregation's support. On the immediate horizon for implementing this narrative is a meeting with silent leaders in ACC. These are participants of the congregation that lead without an official title or recognized role. This

group is comprised of participants with a long tenure in ACC. In addition, this group consists of participants currently involved in the fulfillment of various ministry avenues already in place in ACC (e.g., food pantry, ladies ministry). Beyond this meeting, a sermon series will be developed to communicate SWG's next chapter in the ACC narrative. The intention behind this sermon series is to communicate with ACC God's direction SWG discovered to lead the congregation into future ministry. These sermons will express the need for a purpose, transformation, and a dream for moving toward a predetermined destination. The concept of reconciliation will be used as the foundation for these sermons. For the remainder of 2014 and into 2015, SWG will evaluate current ministries. The objective behind these evaluations will be to determine whether current ministries are founded on the established purpose (i.e., Jesus' life). From these evaluations, SWG will move to evaluate God's transformation and to cultivate a dream for cutting through the tide of current ministries as ACC progresses toward manifesting the image of God.

### Suggestions

After implementing this project with SWG, I suggest three ways of improving the methodology. The first is to follow the natural movement of a narrative's composition according to Ricoeur's three phases of mimesis (i.e.,  $mimesis_1$ ,  $mimesis_2$ ,  $mimesis_3$ ). The methodology I incorporated into this project traded  $mimesis_1$  and  $mimesis_2$ , attempting to discover the narrative's underlying plot before identifying the narrative's scenes. Prior to conducting this project, I felt laying the theological basis discovered in  $mimesis_2$  would help motivate SWG toward reconciliation. The afternoon session of the first Saturday seminar was used to present  $mimesis_1$ , revealing the scenes that have shaped the ACC

narrative. After conducting this intervention I believe following Ricoeur's order of mimesis would have been advantageous for SWG to understand God's transformation of the ACC narrative. Ricoeur's phases would have enabled SWG to recognize the scenes of the congregation's story before discovering the underlying plot responsible for bringing cohesion to these scenes. This move would have offered SWG greater awareness of the presence/absence of reconciliation in the ACC narrative as the narrative was transformed.

The second suggestion for improvement is to clarify more fully the different connotations of reconciliation at the heart of God's metanarrative and the congregation's narrative. Determining a suitable connotation of reconciliation posed a problem for some in SWG. Several participants could understand reconciliation only as the restoration of broken relationships. For these, reconciliation is experienced only if every side of a conflict is brought back into harmonious relationship with the other side(s). Holding onto the idea of reconciliation as strictly a restoration made it difficult for these participants to appreciate the opportunity to move out of the anxiety resulting from recent conflicts, apart from full restoration. The methodology incorporated into this project would have been better served if it had more fully redefined reconciliation in the understanding of these participants.

The final suggestion has to do with expectations. The project's facilitator should not expect SWG to possess the same degree of hope for reconciliation as the facilitator may have. The perspective from which I viewed this project revealed a deep need for reconciliation in ACC. However, SWG did not hold the same degree of desire for reconciliation in ACC. In addition, several in SWG were blind to the presence of chronic anxiety in ACC. This naïveté led to the belief that reconciliation from recent conflicts

was no longer needed in ACC. I am convinced these suggestions point to ways in which this project could have had greater impact for SWG in ACC.

### Conclusion

This thesis presents a doctor of ministry project designed to foster healing through reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ. Reconciliation has been introduced into the ACC through the development of SWG's next chapter, guiding the congregation to have a positive ministerial effect on the surrounding context. By bringing the ACC narrative in tune with God's metanarrative, SWG has discovered a direction for ACC to move into the future with hope and optimism to proclaim God's metanarrative. As the crafted chapter continues to take shape and guide the action of ACC, God's reconciliation will be the foundation for the congregation to continue writing the ACC future narrative. In addition, God's reconciliation will become the image ACC emulates as God transforms the congregation's narrative.

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## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** Fostering Healing through Reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ.

**Researcher:** Randall K. Carr  
Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

**Advisors:** Dr. Jeff Childers  
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University  
Dr. Dale Bertram  
Department of Marriage and Family Therapy, Abilene Christian University

**Process:** I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand I am being invited to participate in the writing of the Abernathy Church of Christ's future narrative.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to foster healing through reconciliation in the Abernathy Church of Christ. Healing is made possible by relinquishing hurt that stems from the unresolved conflict in the past five years. Recognizing the ACC leadership's role in the unresolved conflict is a primary building block to moving toward healing.

**Procedure:** SWG will develop the "next chapter" of the Abernathy Church of Christ's narrative. For this project participants will retell the Abernathy Church of Christ's narrative in order to heal pain from unresolved conflict. The story-writing group will participate in narrative conversations to gain individual perspectives on the congregation's existing narrative to be completed by August 26th. Following these conversations the story-writing group will meet for two, five-hour seminars. These seminars will be divided into morning and afternoon sessions leading participants to deal with bitterness from escalated tensions and shift focus to a positive narrative. At the conclusion of these seminars the story-writing group will be given a questionnaire to evaluate the process. Questions for evaluation will focus on the degree of healing participants have experienced through this project.

**Potential Risks:** Dealing with emotional pain raises a potential risk to escalate emotions. In addition, a project of this nature risks exposing scenes in the Abernathy Church of Christ's narrative participants are not willing/able to handle at this time.

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation in this process will benefit you by 1) Giving you ownership in the direction of the Abernathy Church of Christ's future narrative; 2)

Establish a theological foundation shaped by God's reconciliation for the world; and 3)  
Providing motivation to develop a spiritual imitation of the image of God.

**Compensation:** There is not compensation for your participation in this project.

Rights of Research Participants: I have read all of the information provided above. I am satisfied in my understanding of this research project. Mr. Carr has informed me about the nature of this project and the possible risks and benefits involved.

I understand my participation in the project is not mandatory and I may withdraw my participation at any time.

I understand all information will be kept confidential at all times.

If I have any further questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Carr by phone at (806) 632-1987 or by e-mail at [randallcarr72@yahoo.com](mailto:randallcarr72@yahoo.com).

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### NARRATIVE CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

1. How long have you attended the Abernathy Church of Christ?
2. What episodes drew you to the Abernathy Church of Christ?
3. What is the overall attitude of the Abernathy Church of Christ toward others?
4. How would the Abernathy Church of Christ be described in the surrounding community?
5. How have you ministered within the Abernathy Church of Christ?
6. How have you witnessed God's presence in the Abernathy Church of Christ?
7. What events have defined/shaped the Abernathy Church of Christ's story?
8. How has the Abernathy Church of Christ's story impacted ministry efforts to the surrounding community?
9. What would it look like for the Abernathy Church of Christ to minister effectively in the surrounding community?
10. What would be the guiding attitude(s) of the Abernathy Church of Christ?



## APPENDIX C

### PAIR SHARE #1

1. How have you witnessed God's reconciliation in your life? In the Abernathy Church of Christ?
2. How effective is reconciliation for opening opportunities to minister in the lives of people that may not have embraced God's reconciliation?
3. How has God been present in formulating the story of the Abernathy Church of Christ?
4. List and discuss ways you have witnessed the effects of forgiveness. List and discuss ways you have witnessed the effects of not forgiving.

## APPENDIX D

### PAIR SHARE #2

1. How have you witnessed God's transforming power in your life? In the life of the Abernathy Church of Christ?
2. In what ways have you worked to minister within the Abernathy Church of Christ? In what ways would you like to see the Abernathy Church of Christ minister to the surrounding area?
3. What does it look like for a faith community to dream? How does a congregation's dream fit into the transforming power of God's story?
4. How do you think God is transforming the Abernathy Church of Christ's story into a vision for ministry to the surrounding community?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS SHEET

Initial Observation	Initial Reaction	Researcher Analysis
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.
- 17.

APPENDIX F  
CRAFTING THE STORY

1. What do you appreciate about the Abernathy Church of Christ going into the future?
  
2. In what areas do you see the Abernathy Church of Christ having a positive effect on the surrounding context?
  - a. How are you willing to participate?
  
3. What resources might the Abernathy Church of Christ need to minister effectively in the surrounding context?
  - a. What are you willing to commit to?
  
4. What are some possible hindrances to effective ministry efforts of the Abernathy Church of Christ?
  - a. How might these be prevented?
  
5. How might reconciliation hamper/foster growth for the Abernathy Church of Christ?
  
6. Other comments

## APPENDIX G

### THE NEXT CHAPTER

1. What do you appreciate about the Abernathy Church of Christ going into the future?
  - God-centered
    - “What does God want from us?”
  - Relationships
    - People that are here
      - Caring
      - Want what best for others
      - Salvation
      - Servants
      - Friendly
      - Love
  - Future
    - Examples
2. In what areas do you see the Abernathy Church of Christ having a positive effect on the surrounding context?
  - Potential avenues for impact
    - Chamber of Commerce
    - School system
    - Senior Citizens
    - Meals on Wheels
    - Farming community
  - Events
    - Sr. Skating
    - 5<sup>th</sup> Quarter
    - Ministerial Alliance
    - Back to school dinner
    - Area-wide services
  - Rituals/Practices
    - Sunday evening worship
    - Sunday morning worship
    - Wednesday evening suppers

a. How are you willing to participate?

- “I will help out in any way I can.”

3. What resources might the Abernathy Church of Christ need to minister effectively in the surrounding context?

- Participation
- Money
- Energy
- God
- Time
- Technology

a. What are you willing to commit to?

- “I will do whatever I can.”

4. What are some possible hindrances to effective ministry efforts of the Abernathy Church of Christ?

- Negative attitudes
- Nostalgia
- Tradition
- Audience disconnect
  - Communication
  - Knowledge
- Technology

5. How might reconciliation hamper/foster growth for the Abernathy Church of Christ?

- Direction
- Peace
- Knowledge

6. Other comments



## Brief Vita

Randall Carr was born July 22, 1981, in Mt. Vernon, Texas. In 1989 Randall moved with his family to Petersburg, Texas, where he graduated in 2000. Randall went on to attend Lubbock Christian University and received a bachelor of arts in Bible and preaching in 2004. He continued academic studies at Lubbock Christian University and completed a master of divinity in 2009. Randall and his wife, Tamber, have three children, Brayden, Rylan, and Brynn, and currently live in Abernathy, Texas, where Randall serves as the pulpit minister for the Abernathy Church of Christ. Prior to this he served as a pulpit minister in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, and ministered to youth and families in Kerrville, Texas, and Levelland, Texas.



