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ABSTRACT

WESLEYAN NARRATIVE PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS: COAUTHORING THE PARISHIONER'S STORY THROUGH WESLEYAN THEOLOGY, NARRATIVE THERAPY, AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

by

Christie Robbins

Parishioners active in local parishes often seek pastoral counseling from the pastor on an array of daily problems due to the desire for a spiritual perspective. Many pastors refer to mental health professionals due to a perceived lack of skills in pastoral counseling or lack of time.

The counseling model called narrative therapy and the theology of John Wesley share a belief in free will, the role of the community in the life of an individual, and, most importantly, transformation. Thus, the problem of the dissertation was to create the intersection of narrative therapy and John Wesley's theology, particularly Christian perfection, hereby entitled Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations for use within parish ministry. The research possessed a dual purpose: to create Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations and to evaluate the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Designing a qualitative, multiple case-study ministry intervention using a comprehensive literature review of John Wesley's theology, narrative therapy, and qualitative research provided the underpinnings of the research project. This intervention

occurred over six weeks with up to six self-selected parishioners and the pastor-researcher in a participant-observer role. Using questions that combined narrative therapy and Wesleyan theology, particularly focused on the doctrine of Christian perfection, the pastor-researcher served as the conversation architect with parishioners to coauthor an alternate hope-filled future story from a presenting problem-saturated narrative.

Analysis of pertinent data revealed major findings from the ministry intervention. Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations can serve to transform an individual's story when participation in pastoral counseling stems from a perceived personal need to reauthor a problem-saturated narrative. Letter writing is a shared communication tool used by New Testament authors, John Wesley, pastors, and practitioners of narrative therapy. However, analyzed data did not reveal that that letters written by the researcher served to facilitate change in the narrative of the parishioner. Changes in the parishioners' behavior and perception of story were evident due to participation in the research project, as well as the pastoral researcher observing a movement toward Christian perfection in the narratives of some participants. Prominent narrative therapy techniques also proved useful during the intervention. Finally, an unexpected finding of the research was the number of parishioners who mentioned, without prompting, the desire for peace in their lives.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

WESLEYAN NARRATIVE PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS:

NARRATIVE THERAPY INTERPRETED THROUGH

JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

presented by

Christie Robbins

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A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Ministry

by

Christie Robbins

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> This is my story, this is my song.
> Praising my Savior, all the day long.
> This is my story, this is my song.
> Praising my Savior, all the day long. (Fanny Crosby)

And, thinking not so theologically about my future story: "Christie Robbins, you just successfully completed your dissertation. What are you going to do?"

"*I'm going to Disneyland*!"

And, thinking not so theologically about my present story:

> Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof.
> Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth.
> Clap along if you know what happiness is to you.
> Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do.
> Because I'm happy! (Pharrell Williams)

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

Recently, at a denominational meeting, conversation turned to my continued pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree. A colleague from Round Rock, Rev. Lee Trigg, kindly inquired about the topic of my dissertation research. I explained my interest in the intersection between narrative therapy and John Wesley's theology, particularly the doctrine of Christian perfection, for the use of pastors counseling within the local parish. Trigg nodded his head and said, "Yeah, I like narrative therapy, but I have some problems with it." Wondering if his problems with narrative therapy were similar to the dissertation project, I asked if I might interview him. About a month later, we had a conversation about Triggs's experiences with narrative therapy as a parish pastor.

We discovered a shared experience of first encountering narrative therapy in seminary, and Trigg possessed a good knowledge of the discipline. His professor, a prominent pastoral narrative therapist, highly recommended the technique for all pastors in the parish setting because, as Trigg summarized, it had "the potential for doing the least harm." Trigg also understood the professor's view that narrative therapy lent itself to the type of short-term counseling a parish setting demands. Initially, he was enthusiastic about the discipline and the possibility of implementing narrative therapy in the parish setting. However, as he began that process, Trigg experienced disappointment with narrative therapy and felt particularly conflicted when the discipline encountered the faith or moral issues presented by parishioners. Rev. Trigg began to use one approach when parishioners presented a biblical or faith crisis, and narrative therapy when family

or relationship problems brought individuals in for pastoral counseling. Our conversation deepened when Trigg confessed, "I'm anxious to see what you do ... because I've always been ... disappointed ... in my experience with it." Even though he did not fully embrace narrative therapy, he still found it to be a useful tool in the parish setting when people desire to tell their stories. Our time ended, and I offered Trigg the opportunity to share any final thoughts about narrative therapy. He concluded that he did not trust it.

Similarly, even after obtaining an MDiv with a concentration in pastoral care and counseling, I found myself abandoning the discipline in the local parish because I could not reconcile the postmodern leanings of narrative therapy, particularly the lack of a metanarrative, with my Christian worldview, which offers a grand narrative of salvation. Pressures within local church settings can cause pastors to offer parishioners counseling light: advice, prayer, and Scripture followed by referral to a licensed professional counselor (LPC). Referrals left behind a nagging belief that individuals know how to find an LPC on their own, so parishioners must seek out a pastor when facing a problem because they desire the new life transformation they hear the pastor preach from the pulpit. An understanding began to grow that the pastoral counseling professors under whom I had studied in seminary, Dr. Andrew D. Lester and Dr. Howard Stone, were right all along. Parishioners wanted to experience this transformation, this journey towards perfection through sanctifying grace, by telling a problem-saturated narrative to a pastor in a parish setting with the hopes of reauthoring the story into a hope-filled future narrative.

Beginning with undergraduate studies, continuing through an MDiv, and now the completion of a DMin degree, my academic life has followed two parallel tracks of

studying both counseling psychology and theology. A course in narrative pastoral counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary illuminated for the first time that these two tracks did not have to be parallel. Rather, the Holy Spirit offered a new possibility: The intersection of narrative therapy interpreted by Wesleyan theology might be an easily accessible conversation map for a pastor to use when counseling within the parish setting. Additionally, such an intersection might serve to further a parishioner's journey toward Christian perfection by aiding in the transformation of a problem-saturated story into a hope-filled future story. Over time, I thought of the intersection of these two disciplines as Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations.

Long before the advent of postmodernism and narrative therapy, Wesley led a revival within the Anglican Church that authored one new story for Christianity, often called the Methodist movement. Spiritual descendants of Wesley have long placed high value on theological ideas such as free will over predestination, the work of grace in a Christian believer's life, and the journey toward holiness of heart. Being methodical through spiritual disciplines to pursue individual holiness has long been a characteristic of Methodists. Wesley called this process journeying toward Christian perfection.

Wesley's theology and ministry led to a revolution in Protestant practices still thriving today. A few centuries later, Michael White and David Epston similarly revolutionized the mental health profession with narrative therapy, representing a shift from modern therapy practices to postmodernity. White describes the shift in thought by summarizing:

> Here I make the general assumption that, when persons experience problems for which they seek therapy, (a) the narratives in which they are storying their experience and/or in which they are having their experience storied by others do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and (b), in these circumstances, there will be significant and vital aspects of their lived experience that contradict these dominant narratives. (40)

This type of therapy acknowledges that individuals live storied lives, and language plays a large role in forming identity. Practitioners of narrative therapy place special emphasis on the idea of externalizing an individual's problem, so that the problem (not the person) is the problem. A simplified description of narrative therapy includes the counselor and client examining a problem-saturated narrative to coauthor an individual's alternate hope-filled future narrative.

Recognition of the power of narrative within the life of individuals as well as communities is, perhaps, the greatest similarity shared between narrative therapy and the Christian faith. Narrative therapy acknowledges that language shapes an individual's perception of self and the world; ultimately, each person lives a storied life. Christianity also acknowledges that the personal story corporately empowers the lives and story of the faith community. Narrowing the scope from the universal Christian faith to the spiritual descendants of Wesley will bring to mind numerous narratives reaching almost canonical status in Wesleyan history, forever shaping Wesley's life and the lives of his spiritual descendants. Recognition of the power of story in the life of an individual in narrative therapy, and within the Christian tradition, lays the foundation for an intersection of the two.

Any attempt to practice the discipline of narrative therapy using Wesley's theology of Christian perfection will admittedly encounter gaps. The literature review attempts to acknowledge those gaps fully as well as make connections true to Wesleyan

theology. Thus, the problem of the dissertation was to create the intersection of narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, particularly Christian perfection, now entitled Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations for use within parish ministry.

Purpose

The dual purpose of the research was to develop Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations and to evaluate the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Research Questions

Three research questions used to evaluate the parishioners' experience in the ministry intervention guided the research project. Thorough reviewing of relevant literature led to the development of questions, the instrumentation used in the research, and the intervention. The first research question compared the written problem-saturated narrative that the parishioner brought to the first conversation with the written future narrative brought to the fifth session. Research question #2 examines the impact of a pastoral counselor narrative letter on the parishioners' future narrative. Lastly, research question #3 explores any change in the parishioners' narrative or movement toward Christian perfection due to participation in Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations.

Research Question #1

What evidence of change is there, if any, when comparing the hope-filled future narratives coauthored by parishioners and pastor during Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations with the parishioners' problem-saturated narratives prepared for the intake conversation?

Research Question #2

After the third conversation, in what ways did the pastoral counselor narrative letter facilitate coauthoring of the parishioners alternate hope-filled future narratives?

Research Question #3

What changes, if any, did participation in the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations facilitate in the parishioners' narratives and, additionally, in the journey toward Christian perfection?

Definition of Terms

To create and evaluate a ministry project using narrative therapy interpreted by Wesley's theology, and particularly the doctrine of Christian perfection, an explanation of terms used in the dissertation will be helpful. Wesley and narrative therapy use language in purposeful ways, often creating new meanings from common words.

Christian Perfection

Simply defined by Wesley, Christian perfection is becoming perfect in love. "It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love 'rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks" ("Scripture" 374). Attaining this Christian perfection occurs by transforming grace within the process of sanctification or becoming holy as Christ is holy. This particular ministry intervention defines Christian perfection as a journey embarked upon by an individual accompanied by a similarly traveling pastor under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, using the road map of transformative process, for the sanctifying journey that leads to a holy destination of Christlike love and life.

Narrative Therapy

Each individual possesses a past, present, and a future story. Dissonance grows when the anticipated story is interrupted. "There is ample evidence that humans generate stories to make sense of their lives. Narrative Therapists use this idea as a foundational stone for their theory and practice" (Pembroke 16). Developed by White and Epston in the 1980s from wide readings in postmodern literature, narrative therapy holds a central belief that individuals find meaning within their unique stories or narratives. In the research survey, "What is Narrative therapy and What Is It Not?" practitioners responded with the following essential practices of narrative therapy:

> ... seeking unique outcomes or exceptions, making explicit people's skills and knowledge, enhancing connection with social networks, inviting audiences to sessions, writing therapeutic documents, listening to and acknowledging people's experiences, exploring identity through questions about "landscape of action" (what people do) and "landscape of consciousness" (identity and meaning) and focusing on the persons' preferred outcomes. (Wallis, Burns, Capdevila 491)

Story imagery and the lack of technical counseling jargon used in narrative therapy particularly resonates with the Christian gospel, making this particular form of counseling easily accessible for parish pastors with various levels of training in counseling.

Story or Narrative

Often used interchangeably, story or narrative represents a belief that the individual's unique experience and perspective shapes the way he or she understands the present and informs the expectation for the future. Past stories and future expectations inform an individual's present dominant story and can even inform the individual's future narrative.

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations

Regardless of the model used, pastoral counseling often transforms the lives of parishioners. Pastors often possess only a limited role as diagnostician or long-term counselor. However, the need for pastoral counseling more substantial than an opening prayer, empathetic active listening, and a closing scripture led to a desire for a practical pastoral counseling model specific to the theology taught by John Wesley. The result was the creation of Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations (WNPC) as the intersection of therapy and theology for the use of pastors in a parish setting when a parishioner expresses the desire to transform a presenting problem-saturated story into a hope-filled future narrative. The shared pastoral conversation becomes uniquely Wesleyan when the pastor and parishioner continually seek opportunities to coauthor a new story emphasizing sanctification and the journey toward Christian perfection.

Ministry Intervention

Establishing the intersection of a Wesleyan theology and narrative therapy used by a parish pastor required the creation of a ministry intervention. Upon reviewing the literature, a developing expectation began to surface in which a parishioner participating in WNPC with a pastor would present a problem-saturated narrative for coauthoring into a hope-filled future narrative as well as furthering a parishioner's journey toward Christian perfection. The ministry intervention for this dissertation project allowed up to six interested congregants of Ovilla United Methodist Church in Ovilla, Texas, each to participate in six Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations, all taking place at the church.

Prior to the first session of WNPC, the pastoral counselor gave a writing prompt to the parishioner who completed a written narrative of the presenting problem to bring to the initial intake conversation. Reading the problem-saturated narrative to the pastor during the first conversation, the parishioner and pastor agreed to engage in WNPC. Five subsequent weekly conversations allowed the pastor to use a set of questions combining the best of narrative therapy and Wesleyan theology in order to coauthor with the parishioner the presenting problem-saturated narrative into a hope-filled future narrative.

After the third session, observing the tradition of both narrative therapy and Wesley, the pastoral counselor wrote a narrative letter to each parishioner using notes from individual conversations already occurred. This letter contained a summary of the narrative presented at the intake conversation, an understanding of the parishioner's perception of the narrative, and positive questions from the pastoral counselor regarding the parishioner's coauthored future narrative.

Before the fifth session, the pastor provided the same prompts used in the first conversation to the parishioner, who wrote the current version of the newly coauthored alternate narrative. A fifth session then focused on the parishioner reading the alternate narrative aloud to the pastor and discussing the similarities and differences between the original presenting problem and the coauthored alternate future narrative. An exploration of how the alternate narrative might inform the parishioner's future narrative took place in the sixth conversation. Additionally, movement in the participant's relationship with God prior to, and because of, participation in the ministry intervention was verbally assessed using narrative scaling questions. This final conversation also allowed the parishioner to reflect upon his or her participation in WNPC.

Context

Pastors in the theological tradition of Wesley are the widest audience for the dissertation research. Claiming Wesley as their spiritual father within a variety of nondenominational and denominational affiliations, these pastors share a belief in salvation through a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as the first work of salvation and sanctifying grace as the second work of salvation. Particularly, pastors claiming a Wesleyan theological view will also possess at least a cursory knowledge and belief in Christian perfection. The unique role of conversation architect allows pastors to amplify parishioners' movement toward Christian perfection even in the midst of a problem-saturated story, making this type of pastoral counseling distinctly Wesleyan. Lastly, these pastors will be looking for a way to practice pastoral counseling with parishioners in the parish setting, while also desiring a practical application of theology within their counseling.

Parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church made up the participants in the ministry intervention. Ovilla, Texas, is a bedroom community with many of its adults commuting to Dallas or Fort Worth for employment. According to the city, the town has a population of nearly four thousand, and the median resident is 38.7 years old. In 2005, the estimated median household income was $74,100 with a median house value of $200,000 ("Community Profile"). Congregants of Ovilla UMC are primarily white upper-middle class with undergraduate or graduate degrees. Demographics, however, are changing with the addition of a few worshippers of other cultures and races, including African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and a growing population of Latinos. Affiliated with the United Methodist denomination, an average of two hundred regular worshippers

possess an orthodox view of the Christian faith, as professed in commonly recited communion liturgy: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. When not in agreement on political, doctrinal, and polity issues, members invoke the spirit of Wesley : "If there was a *difference of opinion,* where in our religion if we cannot *think and let think?"* (original emphasis Wesley "Scripture Way" 391). A spirit of missional evangelism characterizes the congregation as members continue to reach out into the world to offer Christ to their local and global communities.

Narrowing the context to the smallest scope, up to six parishioners chose to be a part of the therapy intervention. These participants reflect the makeup of the church: mostly white, middle to upper-middle class, with undergraduate or graduate degrees. All participants regularly attended Sunday morning worship.

Methodology

Selecting a qualitative, multiple case study design best fit the research methodology for the ministry intervention. A case study methodology was a natural choice in order to determine if an intervention of WNPC elicited any movement toward a hope-filled future narrative as well as furthered the journey toward Christian perfection. Two narratives written by the parishioners, transcripts made from audio recordings of each conversation, conversation notes from the pastoral counselor, and a pastoral counselor narrative letter formed the data. Each volunteer parishioner represented a different case study and participated in six WNPC.

Participants

Six volunteer parishioners represent the limit designed for the ministry intervention. The parishioners heard several announcements in Sunday morning worship,

received written notification via e-mail, and an automated phone message asking for interested participants. To eliminate intervening variables, announcements specified that volunteers must be over the age of 18, must not be seeking counseling from a mental health professional, and must not be on mood altering psychiatric medication. Ovilla United Methodist Church served as the population of the research project, drawing the sample of self-selected parishioners from the congregation. Each parishioner agreed to meet for a one-hour pastoral counseling conversation once a week for six weeks.

My husband, Rev. Joel Robbins, is the lead pastor of Ovilla United Methodist Church (OUMC). Currently appointed to family leave to raise two preschool aged children, I am also an ordained United Methodist elder with fifteen years of experience pastoring local churches. As part of a clergy couple, I am not the stereotypical pastor's spouse. Instead, I enjoy guest preaching in various pulpits about twice a month and participate in activities at OUMC as time and desire permit. This unique role at Ovilla United Methodist Church has led to a multilayered relationship with the church. Participants prompted to volunteer for the research project may have viewed me as a combination of a pastor's spouse, a preacher, a counselor, a friend, a participant in Sunday school or bell choir, a mom, an individual they rarely see, or as someone they would like to get to know better. Various perceptions of who I am, or who parishioners might desire me to be, undoubtedly influenced the desire of the participants to be part of the ministry intervention.

Instrumentation

Applying five types of instrumentation, the intervention collected the unique narratives from the parishioners. The first instrument included a written problem-

saturated narrative (WPSN). Prior to the first session, parishioners wrote their presenting problem in the form of a story to bring with them to the intake session as a way of sharing their problem-saturated narrative with the pastor. Pastoral conversation notes (PCN) make up the second instrument and include the pastor's observations and reflections at the conclusion of each conversation. These PCNs formed the writing of the third instrument, the Pastoral counselor narrative letter (PCNL), written by the pastoral counselor to the parishioner after the third session. A written future narrative (WFN) was the fourth instrument. Written by the parishioner after the fifth session, the WFN contained the coauthored alternate story created over the previous five sessions by the pastor and parishioner and discussed in the final session. Each parishioner participated in conversations over the course of six weeks, conducted according to the weekly conversation plan found in Table 1.1. Lastly, after each conversation I produced a written transcription from audio recordings. Analysis of the conversation transcripts (CT) occurred at the conclusion of the six sessions for evidence of transformation of the parishioner's story.

Table 1.1. Weekly Conversation Plan

Weekly Conversations	Focus/Intervention/Strategy
Conversation 1	Intake conversation: Parishioner reads WPSN and pastor asks clarifying questions. Wondering or future questioning begins in the last fifteen minutes.
Conversation 2	Assess positive changes during the week. Listen to story for clarification but also amplify unique outcomes or positive steps. Search for changes in relationship with God. Continue to wonder about the future.
Conversation 3	Assess positive changes during the week. Amplify unique outcomes or positive steps. Search for changes in relationship with God. Continue to wonder about the future. Send PCNL after third conversation.
Conversation 4	Assess positive changes during the week. Discuss PNCL. Search for changes in relationship with God. Conversations move toward making unique outcomes or positive steps part of the parishioner's normal narrative while focusing on a hope-filled future narrative.
Conversation 5	Assess positive changes during the week. Wonder strongly about the possibility that the parishioner might experience a future free from the problem-saturated narrative. Pastor asks narrative scaling questions pertaining to parishioner's relationship with God prior to, and because of, participation in WNPC. Conversation concludes with instructions for writing the WFN.
Conversation 6	Assess positive changes during the week. Parishioner reads WFN written during the week. Pastor and parishioner unpack changes between the WPSN and the WFN, as well as project into the future how the WFN might change. Pastor invites parishioner to reflect upon the experience in participating in WNPC.

Variables

The independent variable for the research project is six Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations. This intervention contained two dependent variables: a possible movement from a problem-saturated presenting story toward a future story filled with hope and a possible movement in the journey toward Christian perfection. Intervening variables included, but are not limited to, current exposure to forms of counseling, the possibility of a parishioner failing to attend a conversation, parishioner's level of entrenchment in the problem-saturated story, and the parishioner's pessimistic or optimistic outlook.

Data Collection

Collecting the data took place during six weekly WNPC at Ovilla United Methodist Church. The length of each conversation was one hour. To collect information for the first research question, the pastor and parishioner discussed the presenting problem as found in the WPSN during the first intake conversation. All sessions used narrative therapy questions informed by Wesley's theology, particularly the doctrine of Christian perfection. A second question centered on the sending of a pastoral care letter sent to parishioners and their responses. The case study method protocol, found in Appendix A, contains WNPC questions developed for the purpose of the ministry intervention. A sixth conversation involved the pastor and parishioner discussing the coauthored alternate future narrative contained in the WFN, which collected data for the third research question. Providing research data for the third question were transcribed audio recordings of each conversation.

Data Analysis

Qualitative instruments such as written narratives, Pastoral Conversation Notes, Pastoral Counselor Narrative Letter, and transcripts of audio recordings of each conversation provided a wealth of resources to analyze the transformation of each parishioner's unique story from problem-saturated to hope-filled future narrative. Comparing the WPSN and the WFN for evidence of a co-authored alternate future story provided the data for research question one. Analysis of research question two included comparing the PCN and Conversation Transcripts for parishioner's comments about the PCNL in co-authoring a hope-filled future narrative. Providing data analysis for research question three were all five instruments used to collect data. Use of the qualitative data

analysis software ATLAS.ti evaluated the effectiveness of WNPC. Interpretation of the data analysis led to conclusions and theories discussed in the final chapter of the dissertation. Employment of member checking in order to incorporate the parishioner's interpretation of the data analysis served to broaden the data analysis.

Generalizability

A multiple case study research design of the project admittedly limits the scope to six self-selected parishioners. Another setting would experience a limited ability to replicate the findings due to the personal nature of the ministry intervention. Indeed, each parishioner told a unique story during the conversations. The very uniqueness of each individual, as well as the narrative he or she possesses, makes the results of the ministry intervention difficult to generalize. One notable limitation arose in the population of the study, particularly in the lack of ethnic minorities participating in the research project. Despite the lack of generalizability in the chosen qualitative multiple case study methodology, the dissertation offers WNPC as a pastoral counseling theory for the use of any parish pastor when a parishioner seeks to coauthor a hope-filled future narrative from a presenting problem narrative.

Theological Foundation

An intersection of narrative therapy and the Wesleyan theology of Christian perfection will first reveal that both have a desire to help an individual fully realize potential and calling in life. Narrative therapist Irene Alexander states, "Ethical work is the attempts to transform ourselves … into what Christians have traditionally called sanctification—becoming what we aspire to be, and the process whereby we seek to attain it" ("Power" 79). A student of Wesleyan theology might acknowledge living a fully

actualized life as one spent seeking and experiencing sanctification in the journey toward Christian perfection. Narrative therapy practitioners might define a fully actualized life as one in which the individual's future narrative is being written satisfactorily within the present narrative. At the heart of both rests the belief that an individual can live a life with great hope and expectation of who he or she will become in the days and years ahead.

Another aspect of the intersection of narrative therapy and Christian perfection is the shared value of the individual's experience. As a postmodern discipline, narrative therapy places a great emphasis on personal experience. Viewing experience and perception as reality, our postmodern culture finds common ground with Wesleyan theology. Editor of an anthology of Wesley's sermons, Albert C. Outler famously constructed the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason, noting that for Wesley, personal experience is extremely valuable to an individual's faith:

> This awareness of God's gracious "presence" is what Wesley meant by "experience," and it was, for him, as real and unmistakable a perception as any sensory awareness might be. This doctrine has often been construed as a subjective theory of experience in general. In Wesley's view, however, it is a theory of religious knowledge, a corollary of his view of revelation. (29)

A local church pastor familiar in the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection could practice narrative therapy with an emphasis on individual experience while speaking God's gift of sanctifying grace on the journey toward perfection within the parishioner's life. The sharing of a personal story or narrative might take place during a one-on-one setting such as that used in narrative therapy or in accountability groups such as Wesley's bands or classes. Both practitioners of narrative therapy and Wesleyan pastors will

recognize that people like to tell their stories, and like having their stories heard, and transformation of those storied lives occur within such conversations.

WNPC gives a particular view of theology, offering pastors and parishioners the opportunity to discover the sacred story God is continuing to create and perfect within the life of the individual. However, some problems arise at the intersection of narrative therapy when Wesleyan theology enters into the discussion. The story of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32:22-32 concludes with Jacob receiving a blessing and a new name. In the wrestling between narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, perhaps God will provide a blessing for pastors and parishioners through a practical understanding of transformation and Christian perfection.

First, WNPC must wrestle with the parish pastor's reluctance to use narrative therapy. Pastors familiar with the discipline are reluctant to implement the practice within parish ministries. Lex McMillan writes about the primary issue that Christians have with narrative therapy:

> In order to better understand the relationship between Narrative Therapy and Christian faith I decided in 2002 to explore how followers of Jesus might appropriately and profitably integrate Narrative Therapy into their therapeutic repertoire. ... The most prominent integrative challenge that my interviewees named is the way Narrative Therapy appears to challenge the existence of essential truth, including the existence of God. (27)

Narrative therapy finds its roots in the postmodern movement, which does not recognize a universal truth; each individual experiences his or her own unique truth. Of course, one of Christianity's primary teachings is that Jesus is truth and that Scripture contains universal truth. Pastors' perception of narrative therapy lacking an understanding of universal truth, view of all stories equal to the biblical narrative, and other reservations about postmodernity and the Christian worldview have kept pastors from using the

discipline when parishioners seek pastoral counseling. Christian tradition offers narratives similar to Jacob: stories of individuals submitting to God a problem-saturated story in order to co-authoring a hope-filled future narrative and receive a changed life. The intersection of narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, particularly his understanding of Christian perfection, acknowledges that God is still in the process of transforming people today.

Additional wrestling occurs because Wesley was not a systematic theologian. In his book, author Steve Harper spends some time addressing who Wesley was (or was not) as a theologian:

> For some time now, Wesleyan scholars have known that John Wesley was not fundamentally a conceptual theologian. He did not organize his beliefs into topics. Rather, he developed theology in relation to life. This has caused some critics to deny that he was a theologian at all, but his choice of theology as an 'order of salvation' was deliberate and decisive. (6)

Wesley's life as an itinerant preacher, spending miles and miles on horseback, did not leave much room for developing a systemic theology.

Lastly, Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is often misunderstood. "Wesley viewed the doctrine of Christian perfection as the 'grand depositum' of Methodism. … Sadly, there is no element in Wesley's theology that causes more trouble today than this one" (Harper 81). Any attempt to practice narrative therapy interpreted by Wesley's theology and doctrine of Christian perfection might be a little blurry. Harper acknowledges the value of Wesley's theology of Christian perfection for today's Christian even though Wesley did not provide contemporary theologians a systematic understanding of the doctrine:

> First, the doctrine of Christian perfection cannot be omitted from any serious examination of Wesley's theology. Nor can it be omitted from a contemporary interpretation of Christian experience. Second, Wesley does not answer every question we would like to ask about the doctrine. The result is a kind of tension between items one and two—a tension that can never fully be resolved. (81)

This tension and ambiguity serves any postmodern discipline well, but for the purposes of a dissertation project that demands measurable outcomes, it could leave a dissertation writer on shaky ground.

Wesley cared very much for the doctrine of Christian perfection; it is just as important in the lives of individuals today as it was during Wesley's lifetime. Just because something is misunderstood, viewed with skepticism, no longer used, not preached, or not taught does not negate the truth, but it neglects it. The United Methodist Women's Web page offers "A Short Explanation of Christian Perfection" as written by Wesley:

> This is the doctrine which we preached from the beginning, and which we preach at this day. Indeed, by viewing it in every point of light, and comparing it again and again with the word of God on the one hand, and the experience of the children of God on the other, we saw farther into the nature and properties of Christian perfection. (Lyons)

As people search for meaning in a shifting culture, postmodernity has opened the door for a renaissance of the doctrine of Christian perfection. The practical application of Wesley's theology within narrative therapy can have a great impact within the lives of pastors and parishioners.

Overview

In the chapters that follow, careful thought and practice ensured the intervention and research was methodical in nature. Chapter 2 contains a literature review of narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, including the doctrine of Christian perfection and an

examination of qualitative multiple case study methodology. Using three streams of influence—Wesleyan theology, narrative therapy, and pastoral counseling, Chapter 2 designs, creates, and proposes WNPC. An explanation of the methodology used to carry out and evaluate the intervention is in Chapter 3. Reports from the WNPC reside in Chapter 4 along with the findings of those conversations. Lastly, Chapter 5 evaluates the case studies and discusses the impact of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Inspiration for the ministry project arose from the problem of the dissertation: arriving at the intersection of narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, with particular focus on the doctrine of Christian perfection, for the use of local pastors when counseling parishioners. The problem informed the purpose of the research, which was evaluating the effectiveness of WNPC with parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church. This quest included a review of pertinent literature in order to build the intersection of therapy and theology, resulting in WNPC.

Christianity comprises multiple branches, denominations, and offshoots, all representing a variety of philosophies, beliefs, and ideas. Religious mental health professions labeled as Biblical, Christian, or pastoral (McMinn, Staley, Webb, and Seegobin, 391) may further increase the confusion. Everett L. Worthington, Jr. notes, "Differences in how to integrate counseling and faith abound, even among practitioners with similar theologies and similar counseling theories" (423). Additionally, "the average United Methodist today has little or no awareness of the church's original purpose and mission. Holiness of heart and life has become the lost treasure of Methodism" (Seamands, "Submitting to Be More Vile" 125). Wesley's theological relevance, within its historical setting and within postmodernity, shows sophistication and creativity (Collins 4; Runyon 168) for the use of today's parish pastor.

Interpreted experience in postmodernism similarly muddles a precise definition of narrative therapy. When surveyed, practitioners of narrative therapy professed a wide

spectrum of devotion to the technique (Wallis, Burns, and Capdevila, "Q Methodology" 173-90; "What is Narrative Therapy" 486-97; Admundson 176). Less orthodox practitioners seek an opportunity for greater understanding, which opens the door for new voices.

Despite fundamental differences, transformation is a hope shared in therapy and theology. Narrative therapy transforms the individual through the coauthoring of an alternate narrative, while Wesleyan theology believes in an even greater transformation: The human nature becomes more like the nature of Christ. Shared concerns are meaning making, restoration, and salvation (Johnson and Sandage 6). Harper writes about the shared goal of transformation in a postmodern era:

> In our contemporary quest for truth, we can take guidance and confidence from the notion that truth can be found in many places. We can emerge with a larger and richer view of the body of Christ. The result does not have to be unbounded pluralism (as is sometimes the case in contemporary theology), but it can be the very 'catholic spirit' Wesley espoused in his day and that unites the whole people of God to ours. (149)

Transformation of a presenting problem-saturated story, using narrative therapy interpreted through Wesleyan theology, allows for the parishioner's story to become a part of God's greater narrative, using techniques such as deconstructing, externalizing (Alexander "Narrative ideas" 195), and coauthoring a hope-filled future narrative.

Parishioners seek pastors for counseling in many ways, such as dropping in during office hours, scheduling a formal appointment, conversing before or after worship, during Bible study, and at various meetings. The Holy Spirit invites a pastor's participation in the transformation of parishioners through pastoral counseling because "not only is grace prevenient, it is *therapeutic*" (Runyon 28). Pastors may often neglect the ministerial opportunity of pastoral counseling due to a perceived lack of confidence in

their counseling skills (Worthington 424) or because of hectic schedules (Tracy 333), which lead to many referrals to mental health professionals (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer 53; Seamands *Ministry* 32). Rather than providing substandard care for parishioners (Alexander "Narrative ideas" 195), WNPC allow pastors the opportunity to provide counseling with the same level of excellence expected of them in their preaching, teaching, ordering the church, and administering the sacraments.

Systematic explanation of such vast disciplines lies outside the intent and scope of the literature review. Beginning broadly, the review starts with the historical and theological context of Wesley. Next offered is a basic understanding of postmodernity and narrative therapy. An explanation of the unique ministry of pastoral counseling within the parish is then given. These elements lay the foundation for the intersection of postmodern narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, I called Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations. In order to offer a new and unique Christian interpretation to narrative therapy research, the literature review closes with a brief survey of the methodology used in designing the ministry intervention.

Theology of John Wesley

Born on 17 June 1703 to Anglican priest Samuel and Susanna Wesley, partners in life and ministry, Wesley entered into the church triumphant on 2 March 1791. During the years of his lengthy life, Wesley was ordained as an Anglican priest and, along with his brother Charles, founded a movement within the Anglican Church known as Methodism. Wesley's mother, Susanna, played an enormous role in the development of his faith and values. Susanna believed that girls were not to begin the practice of chores until they had learned to read (Tomkins 14) and led popular prayer meetings in the

parsonage while her husband, Samuel, was in debtors' prison (16). The enormous role of Susanna in Wesley's upbringing undoubtedly led to his welcoming attitude toward female preaching (159) but also to his unique "relationships with women in later life" (12). Wesley did marry, but he and his wife had a strained relationship in which they spent many years apart.

Certainly, his father provided a powerful influence as well, as both John and Charles followed into the family vocation of the Anglican priesthood. Due to Samuel's poor management of money and estates (and possibly the numerous children born to Samuel and Susanna), the family lived very frugally (Tomkins 14). This frugality later influenced some of the teachings within the Methodist movement. Preachers were to dress cleanly and plainly:

> "Let none ever see a ragged Methodist." (This was an important virtue to Wesley. It was he who first said, "Cleanliness is next to godliness," and when he could find little good to say of his wife, he told her, "I still love you … for your uncommon neatness and cleanliness')" (166).

His frugality led him to give away vast sums of money to in order to further the gospel and meet the needs of the poor and oppressed in local and global communities.

Wesley's Core Narrative

Several stories, combined throughout Wesley's life, help to develop his core narrative. Saved from a fire at the parsonage early in childhood, Susanna nourished the idea that he was "a brand plucked from the burning" (Tomkins 7), and both believed in his rescue for a God-ordained purpose. When Charles and John studied at Oxford University, they began to meet with a small group who practiced Christian disciplines:

> They soon became the butt of campus jokes and acquired a wide variety of nicknames, such as 'Sacramentarians,' Enthusiasts,' Supererogation Men,' 'The Reforming Club,' 'The Godly Club,' 'The Holy Club,' and, of course, the one that eventually named the later movement: 'Methodists'" (Seamands "More Vile" 128; see also Stokes 78).

Most interesting in terms of postmodernism's use of language is the way in which John and Charles took a negative title such as Methodists and adopted the label as a positive defining characteristic. In so doing, the Wesleys displayed the epitome of finding hope and promise in a problem-saturated narrative and were not defined or oppressed by such language but used it instead to the movement's advantage.

Although young in his priestly vocation, Wesley's great distress when Charles received assurance and conversion, led John to seek that of his own. Hearing Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* at the Aldersgate society, Wesley famously felt his heart "strangely warmed" and he "felt that now he was truly a Christian" (Heitzenrater 80). This heartwarming moment caused Wesley to experience a stronger desire to evangelize. Understanding for Wesley's motive to offer Christ to the world comes from a variety of stories comprising Wesley's core narrative, including these three: being a brand plucked from a fire, being a Methodist, and having a heart strangely warmed.

Key Concepts in Wesleyan Theology

Methodism began as a derogatory term, but quickly the name became equated with what Stephen Seamands terms "holiness of heart and life. … From the start, Methodism, holiness, and religious nonconformity were a threefold chord that could not be broken" ("Submitting to Be More Vile"130). The pursuit of inward holiness leads to outward holiness, love of neighbor, and social justice, which have the result of individual happiness. This pursuit of perfect holiness is "Wesley's most distinctive contribution to

Methodism" (Tomkins 197). Mack B. Stokes rightly admonishes, "If United Methodism loses this passion for scriptural holiness, it will not only betray its heritage; it will neglect its mission in the world. No one is perfect, but everyone is called to move toward perfection" (98). Still the call placed on the lives of Wesleyan Christians, the movement toward perfection is about both the journey and the destination.

Perhaps Wesley's greatest innovation was his understanding that actions become consistent with the fixed motives of a right heart and right thinking, leading to the expression of right words and right deeds (Harper 86; Headley xi). Wesley's emphasis on God's grace, leading to the pursuit of holiness and Christian perfection, means that, "[h]e permitted membership in the united societies *before* conversion!" (original emphasis; 146). This permission of membership into societies was a unique acknowledgement that grace works in the lives of individuals even before recognition of God's grace and works continually within the individual after acceptance of God's work. The radical acceptance into the church before conversion favors a variety of individuals who seek counseling from parish pastors, ranging from non-Christians to individuals characterized by a mature faith. Theologically, Wesley avoided complex terminology, rendering his work easy to read and understand (16). His emphasis on practical divinity (121) and a theology developed in relation to life with a consistent and deliberate order of salvation (6) was a choice, perhaps made unwittingly, to provide a theology transcendent of his historical context and ultimately relatable to today's culture.

A Biblical Narrative

Zealous love of Scripture had been lost during Wesley's historical setting, prompting a rediscovery of the Bible (Chilcote *Wesleyan Tradition* 28-9). Scripture

influenced the greatest power on Wesley's thoughts of Christian perfection (Headley 26) because of a belief that the Bible shapes individuals and informs the life sought by the individual. The Bible reveals meaning and purpose for human life and the belief that God creates individuals for a purpose (Stokes 29). Thus, United Methodist Christians believe "that the Bible is ageless because of the great stories and events through which God spoke and still speaks" (26). Wesleyan understanding of theology and Scripture "reveals an awareness that *the gospel always leads us to truth larger than the age in which we live.* ... Rather than allowing culture to shape his message, he strove to see this gospel influence the culture" (original emphasis; Harper 144). Similar to Wesley's culture, contemporary Christianity still seeks to communicate the transformative power of Scripture to Christ followers.

Ultimately, Christianity points toward a sacred future story, connecting "the past history of God's actions from creation to incarnation and from exodus to resurrection" (Lester 40). The grand narrative begins with creation of the world and humanity, continues through the falling away of humanity, reaches fulfillment of restoration at the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and anticipates fulfillment of history when God will once again make all things new (Green "Scripture" 48). Contained in this sacred narrative is the symbol of the cross, another reminder of "the sacred story, God with us. God is present with us in our deepest suffering, understanding, and sharing our pain" (Lester 87). God's presence in suffering as well as in the grand narrative the Bible allows Christians to ponder the work of God within their own lives.

In a very real way, the biblical narrative does not just remain an ancient story from the past: "To embrace the Bible as Scripture is not to accept it as one narrative

among others but to accord it a privilege above all others and to allow ourselves to be shaped by it ultimately" (Green "Scripture" 49). Discipleship formation includes individuals writing themselves into the story of God's "redeeming action in the world—being able to find our role in the play, our character in the story" (Smith 75). The Bible becomes a Christian's primary source for belief and conduct (Stokes 26), offering the opportunity to make sense of lived experience (Meteyard 96).

Trinitarian God and the *Imago Dei*

Omnipresent in the life of the individual and in the world, Christians believe in the work of a relational, rather than hierarchical, Trinitarian God revealed as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Stokes 41; Johnson 86; Seamands, *Ministry* 112) with the persons distinct from one another without blending or being subsumed (Seamands, *Ministry* 34). Wesley would certainly agree that a pastor's ministry is one of entering into "the ministry *of* Jesus Christ, *to* the Father, *through* the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world (original emphasis; 20). Participation in the ministry of the Trinity offers simultaneous relationship both vertically with the Lord and horizontally with God's children and creation (35).

Key to this relationship is the manifestation of God in the form of the Holy Spirit at work within the life of every follower of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit also provides discernment of God's will (Seamands, *Ministry* 27), distinguishes God's authentic movement from an individual's "hunches and impressions" (Stokes 54), facilitates change by healing wounds from the past, offering insightful wisdom into problem-saturated stories (Strong 591), and enables individuals to experience justification and sanctification (Headley 43). Present in the life of every believer, the Trinitarian God

affords the opportunity to become more holy because of the indwelling of the Spirit, thus offering hope for individuals.

Profession in a belief of God as self-existent, the "Ultimate Spirit," and "God the Ultimate Person," the church views the notion of self in relation to that suffering and redeeming God (Stokes 40-41, 106), a difference from postmodern narrative therapy. Likening humanity's spirit to that of God caused Wesley to write, "Suffice it then to consider that God is a spirit, as is your soul also" ("On the Omnipresence" 527). God's creation resident in people, Wesley understood this *imago Dei* to have three images: the moral, political, and natural (Headley 40):

> 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him' (Gen. 1:26-27). Not barely in his *natural image*, a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; not merely in his *political image,* the governor of his lower world, having "dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth"; but chiefly in his *moral image,* which, according to the Apostle, is "righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). (original emphasis; Wesley "New Birth" 336).

Wesley kept with religious and scriptural tradition by teaching that individuals possess a created body and a soul, both made in the likeness or image of God (Collins 51; Stokes 63-64).

Genesis 2:7 offers a moral image revealing God's love for humanity, showing creation of the first human occurring in two stages: God first creates from the earth to form a body and then breathes into the body the very breath of life or the soul. Only when finding residence within the created body is the earthly soul complete and whole (Beck 26): "The body dies when it is separated from the soul, the soul when it is separated from God" (Wesley, "New Birth" 337). Wesley believed in the image of God freshly stamped on individual hearts as being the salvation of people's souls, and this image being the

source of renewal. In fact, a soul so full of God would have no room for evil thoughts, which would be vanished away by God's image (Plain Account 9).

At the heart of a Wesleyan understanding of Christianity is the need for redemption and renewal, and humanity embracing the belief that God will renew creation and creatures in the *image of God* (Runyon 8; Outler and Heitzenrater, "Christ's Coming" 441). Creation in the image of God indicates that people are the children of God. Wesley explained that relationship:

> "The Word of God says everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God. Experience, or inward consciousness, tells me that I have the fruit of the Spirit. And hence I rationally conclude: therefore I am a child of God." ("Witness" 396)

A further teaching in the Wesleyan tradition is the allowance of the Holy Spirit in communicating to Christian believers that they are children of God (401).

Free Will

Predestination is the doctrine that "God alone decides who will be saved and who will be lost" (Stokes 126). Influenced by Jacobus Arminius' (1559-1609) theological writings on antipredestination and free grace (Stokes 13), Wesley believed that a just God requires a necessary degree of free will (Runyon 16). Strict adherence to the doctrine of free will began in a sermon entitled "Free Grace" in which Wesley first—and totally—rejected predestination, creating an irrevocable breach between Calvinists and Arminians (Outler and Heitzenrater, Introduction "Free Grace" 49). Wesley rejected predestination as incompatible with free will due to the belief that God gives love and grace to all in order to save and transform the world.

Key to Wesley's theology is the God-given free will to choose or not choose acceptance of the gospel message: "Yet his liberty ... necessarily included a power of

choosing or refusing either good or evil" (Wesley "Christ's Coming" 445). In this notion of liberty, God is not a cosmic puppeteer of God's creatures: "[T]he truth is that it takes a greater God to make people free than to make them puppets" (Stokes 42). This free will choice is love at work in God's omnipotence, offering salvation as a gift in which individuals may lovingly choose God (Collins 28; Headley 126; Stokes 125). Still an important doctrine to Wesleyan spiritual descendants today, free will ultimately concludes with an allowance that even Christians can choose to turn away from Christ (Stokes 125).

After choosing to follow Christ, the Christian begins to work for eternity, doing the will of God on earth as the angels do in heaven: " [H]is end in all his labour is to please God; to do, not his own will, but the will of him that sent him into the world" (Wesley, "More Excellent Way" 515). Granted free will throughout sanctification, the Christian submits to the process of perfected love:

> He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering. ("Christian Perfection" 83)

Freely embarking upon the pursuit of holiness, God is omnipresent but does not force divine will upon created individuals (Headley 47, 155, 73; Collins 38-39).

Sin and Repentance

Optimistically viewing the fall of Adam, Wesley concluded that the Fall affords the opportunity for Christ's death and resurrection to offer new birth for humanity ("God's Love" 483). The new birth through Christ is given regardless of worth, deeds, or merit: "Finally it is the proclamation that God will forgive our sin—not because we are

deserving, but because God is the loving and merciful One who cares for us and desires our fellowship" (Stone, "Word" 371). Sin entered into the world through Adam, a representative of all humanity (Wesley, "Justification" 113), leading to procreation transmitting a fallen soul (Collins 68). The doctrine of original sin "serves as the presupposition of ... prevenient grace, justification, and sanctification" (Runyon 19). Wesley passionately preached about knowing the disease of sin, the cure of grace and Christ's forgiveness of sin ("Marks" 175).

Critics of Christian perfection misunderstood Wesley's doctrine of sin by assuming he meant complete "eradication of sin" (Harper 57). Christian perfection never meant earthly freedom from sin or temptation (Wesley, "Christian Perfection" 73), such freedom belongs only in the coming kingdom of God: "Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions" (*Plain Account* 20). Wesley's nuanced understanding that sin shall not have dominion in the parishioner's life but instead that "sin *remains* but no longer *reigns*" (On Sin" 366; "Marks" 175), resounds with narrative therapy suppositions that problems can be lessened through the living out of preferred stories. Narrative therapy also locates the problem outside of the person, and Wesley defined sin "as an *outward action* [emphasis mine] that is an actual, voluntary, transgression of the written law of God" (Outler and Heitzenrater, Introduction "Great Privilege" 183). Individuals are responsible only for conscious choices to break relationship with God or others (Runyon 86). Wesley explains the viewpoint of the Lord toward God's children: "He feels a displacency at every offence against God, but only tender compassion to the offender" (*Plain Account* 8). Today, Wesley might have used

the Christian colloquialism, "Love the sinner; hate the sin," to describe sin within the lives of the children of God.

Individuals submit personal will to the will of God through the Holy Spirit, "superintending the role in the process of repentance: convicting, illuminating, and teaching..." (Collins 123). The sermon "Salvation by Faith" was an example of Wesley teaching about repentance of the heart:

> The goodness of God ought to lead them to repentance, and so it will those who are sincere of heart. When they know there is yet forgiveness with him, they will cry aloud that he would blot out their sins also through faith which is in Jesus." (45)

Christ's free will choice of death on the cross on behalf of the fallen nature reinstates and restores humanity to this life and life eternal ("Justification" 114-15).

Historically, repentance meant change and self-knowledge (Outler and Heitzenrater, Introduction "Way" 123; Harper 44). Herein resides Wesley's description of saving faith: beginning in repentance, receiving forgiveness, leading to belief, and renewing the *imago Dei* in Christ's followers who pursue a lifetime of development and progress (Stokes 77; Harper 50). Repentance is a necessary part of the sanctification process in which an the heart and mind of an individual is changed:

> frequently means an inward change, a change of mind from sin to holiness. But now speak of it in quite different sense, as it is one kind of self-knowledge—the knowing ourselves sinners, yea, guilty, helpless sinner, even though we know we are children of God." (Wesley, "Repentance" 406)

Wesley intended for the conviction of the Holy Spirit, leading to repentance and change, to be a positive action, demonstrating souls that are still available to God (Harper 44-45).

Grace

Wesley believed, along with traditional Christian thought, that grace is a free gift of love offered to all (Collins 160). The free gift of grace comes from the saving work of Jesus Christ, "the author and perfector of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, ASV). The grace that is "free in all, and for all" (Wesley, "Free Grace" 57) is not dependent on works, merits, power, wisdom, or strength, and it restores humanity to the favor and image of God through the power of the Holy Spirit .

Grace transforms "our inner character and directing our outward conduct," leading to a holiness of heart and life (Harper 120). Wesley's adherence in the total depravity of original sin—apart from a cooperant grace—led him to believe in the ability of grace to restore humanity to God's original creation (Collins 73, 180). The saving grace of God can cause an individual to repent and believe in the gospel (Harper 44). Faith and belief were the second step to responding to the saving grace of God, and for Wesley the process of repenting to faith and belief meant not just turning from something but turning "toward Someone" (47). This process of faith and assurance could happen suddenly, or it could also happen as it did for Wesley: "gradually and imperfectly over a couple of years" (Tomkins 87). Differing from Calvin's views on irresistible grace, Wesley believed that this free gift of God's grace and the resulting new birth could be chosen or rejected by individuals (Collins 197). While Wesley embraced the doctrine of hell, he chose to emphasize grace and love, believing it to be a much more powerful motivator for choosing to respond to God's love and salvation (Harper 98).

"Means of Grace," a sermon preached by Wesley, offers ways in which the Holy Spirit administers cooperant grace: "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs,

words, or actions ordained of God and appointed for this end—to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace" (original emphasis 160). God offers humanity, through these means of grace, an opportunity to respond and grow. Wesley found the institutional means of grace in Scripture:

> The chief of these means are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in rememberance of him; and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men. (160)

The means of grace are only beneficial when the parishioner (and most likely the pastor) move toward inward holiness (Headley 141).

Small groups of individuals meeting together provided a way to communicate the gospel, experience grace, and hold one another accountable. "Let your conversation be with the children of God, and see that it 'be in grace, seasoned with salt'" (Wesley, "Our Own Salvation" 490). Wesley believed in Christian conferencing as a time that two or more Christians gather together to convey grace in matters of faith and practice, and he intentionally structured Methodism as a movement in which conferring believers function as a spiritual guide through personal counsel and correspondence (Harper 92-93). In separate sermons, Wesley preached that through talking with other believers, Christians might learn what recommendations to make to particular people, so the building up of faith, love, or holiness occurs during our conversations ("Means" 169, "More Excellent Way" 517).

In addition to the institutional means of grace, Wesley also believed in prudential means of grace. Kenneth J. Collins, among other theologians, notes that the consciences

and circumstances as experienced by an individual allow the child of God to grow further in grace. Prudential means of grace apply mostly in Wesley's use of reason and experience and are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual (266).

Three varieties of grace are common in Wesleyan theology and seen in both the instituted and prudential means of grace: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying. Prevenient grace might be a new concept (Harper 33), even to some parishioners in churches that profess a Wesleyan theological heritage. In prevenient grace, the work of the Holy Spirit prepares the way, even before the individual has accepted the gospel story of salvation (Stokes 55). Wesley viewed salvation as ordered, with prevenient grace, apart from humanity's ability or initiative, creating an awareness of the need for salvation (Harper 35-37). Thinking theologically, prevenient grace was a brilliant stroke, allowing Wesley "to hold together, without any contradiction, the four motifs of total depravity, salvation by grace, human responsibility, and the offer of salvation to all" (Collins 82). Distinguishing works of grace is one of the hallmarks of Wesley's theology, making every day important in the life of the believer.

Fierce passion for those without the new birth is evident in Wesley's understanding of justifying grace: "God *justifieth* not the godly, but the *ungodly;* not those that are holy already, but the unholy" (original emphasis; "Justification by Faith" 116). Not cooperant, justifying grace "represents the work of God *alone*" (Collins 161). Often experienced upon realization of sin in an individual's life, justifying grace prompts acceptance of the gift of Christ's death on the cross as an act of restoration to God's ideal.

Justification and regeneration begin instantaneously (Runyon 44), demand an individual response, and lead to sanctifying grace. Difficulties arise when trying to distinguish the beginning of sanctifying grace from the end, as Wesley discusses in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

> [H]e does the work of many years in a few weeks; perhaps in a week, a day, an hour. He justifies or sanctifies both those who have done or suffered nothing, and who have not had time for gradual growth either in light or grace. (39)

Sanctifying grace makes optimists out of Wesleyan Christians (Collins 220; Tracy 324): "Stir up the spark of grace which is now in you, and he will give you more grace" (Wesley, "Salvation" 491). The Christian perfection portion of the literature review offers further exploration of sanctifying grace.

Ephesians 2:8 serves as a reminder to refrain from boasting about salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (NIV). When preaching on this Scripture, Wesley reminds, "Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation" ("Salvation by Faith" 40). Wesleyans make much of the order of grace. A reminder that these categories are created by humans will help Christians to remember, "[g]race comes to us at different stages on our spiritual pilgrimage, and it accomplishes different effects and evokes different responses. *But it is all grace"* (original emphasis Harper 34). While grace belongs to God alone, Wesley also believed that grace was a process of collaborating or cooperating with God upon receiving the gift (Collins 254; Runyon 30; Headley 141).

Transformation

If sin is the disease, the solution for the hearts of the children of God is transformation (Harper 26; Hall Law 186). The hope of soul level change motivates

individuals to be a part of Christianity: "Ye know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent" (Wesley, "Original Sin" 309). True religion, Christianity, and Wesley's theology all hold the central belief that experience includes discovery, liberation, freedom, and most importantly, transformation (Runyon 78, 166; Headley 29; Chilcote. "Introduction" 9-10). Transformation and sanctification of the world is the aim of God (Runyon 166), which the Holy Spirit completes when the individual allows change of tempers, affections, and dispositions (Headley 29, 81) through God's grace and love (Chilcote 10).

Transformation begins with renewing the fallen nature, which Wesley said was the great work, the one thing needful ("One Thing Needful" 34). If justification was the act of grace God does for humanity, renewing our fallen nature is the great work carried out within the children of God. ("New Birth" 336). Emerging out of darkness, in trouble crying out to the Lord, the kingdom of heaven opens in the hearts of humanity, sin loses dominion and transforms individuals into the likeness of the Creator (Upon our Lord's Sermon"194; *Plain Account* 10; "Image" 14). Change of mind, conversion, transformation, and new birth occur because God stamps the divine image on the hearts of each created individual (Stokes 92; Wesley *Plain Account* 9). The Holy Spirit plays an important role at the new birth by breaking the hardness of heart (Wesley, "On Living without God" 570). "The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to God" ("Great Privilege" 186). Taking up residence in the heart, (Collins 124), the Spirit turns people

around (Runyon 57), and works within to transform the lives of believers (Harper 60; Stokes 52).

Inner transformation in the life of an individual happens simultaneously in an instant and in a gradual work. "However, there is one Scripture more which will put the matter out of the question: 'If any man be [a believer] in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). "Now certainly a man cannot be a *new creature* and an *old creature* at once" (Wesley "On Sin" 365). Wesley took Paul's account of transformation—of new creation—very seriously, as this new creation enables believers to walk as Christ walked ("On Living without God" 571). Becoming a new creation gives the individual a brand new *imago* (Malcom and Ramsey 28; Runyon 84), causing the person to change purpose, meaning, direction, values, affections, feelings, tempers, and passions (Headley 162; Stokes 92). Throughout this process of new birth, grace plays an important role: pardoning, transforming, forgiving, re-creating, assisting, renewing, circumcising, and altering hearts (Runyon 26, 29; Collins 13; Hall 181-82). For a Wesleyan Christian, the entire self is to be "consecrated" to God (Harper 135), implying that if attention is placed on Jesus, the totality of an individual's focus upon God actually remakes and transforms the inner being (Headley 11). When wills surrender to God, transformed hearts lead to transformed habits and behaviors (Headley 2, 161; Stokes 94).

Whether instantaneous or gradual, transformation is included in the process of sanctification: "'But does God work this great work in the soul *gradually or instantaneously?'* Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some" (original emphasis Wesley "Scripture" 379). This transformation may bring about gradual change, or it can

also mean that God can do a mighty work "*in the twinkling of an eye*" (original emphasis Stokes 94). The process of transformation ends at death, although a possibility remains that God will go on transforming even in heaven "from one degree of glory to another" (Tracy 329). Sanctification as a continually wrought by the Lord, even in the kingdom of God, offers both present and future hope to believers.

Experience

Experiencing God throughout a vital Christian life confirmed for Wesley the grounding of the doctrine of Christian perfection through Scripture (*Plain Account* 13; "Witness II" 402). Christians can learn from Wesley's willingness to run the risk of including 'experience' along with Scripture, tradition and reason to his theological method (Harper 147). Wesley believed in several effects from the one event experienced in conversion (55). God shares experience with humanity in order to connect individuals to one another, nature, and the community of faith (Jankowski 75; Stokes 12). A loving God intimately involved within the lives of believers, Christians are given the opportunity to be a part of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. "Presumptuous as it may seem, we are allowed to share in *God's* experience" (original emphasis; Runyon 162). The journey toward perfection emphasizes experiencing God on the mountaintop *and* within daily life.

Christian Perfection

An exploration of Christian perfection must first acknowledge that Wesley used some terms both distinctively and interchangeably. In reporting on the "First Conference" in 1744, Wesley notes a consideration of "the doctrine of sanctification, or perfection" (*Plain Account* 14). Preaching a sermon entitled "Christian Perfection," Wesley instructs

that perfection is not exemption from sins but another term for holiness: "They are two names for the same thing. Thus everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect" (73). Other terms used to communicate Christian perfection include righteousness, having the mind of Christ, having the image of God, right or singleness of intention, purity of heart and perfect love, the deeper life, and fullness of, or baptism with, the Spirit (Headley 31; Tracy 324). While these terms share meaning, the literature review will focus on sanctification, holiness, and Christian perfection.

According to Wesley, sanctification is a gift from God (Collins 291) that begins instantaneously, "the moment a man is justified" (Wesley, *Plain Account* 14). The moment of justification, believers are "'born again', 'born from above', 'born of the Spirit'", and at that moment, the gradual work of sanctification begins ("Scripture Way" 373, 376). In the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley expands this idea by saying, "Although we are wholly sanctified at the moment of justification, we are not free from temptation or sin" (415). Wesley believed in instantaneous justification, the need for the individual to focus on salvation's immediate availability, as well as the need for justification to "illuminate the way for the reception of saving grace on the part of the convinced sinner" (Collins 186). Instantaneous revelation of justifying and sanctifying grace point to the cooperant relationship on the part of the individual and of God but also illustrate the dependence of the individual on the gradual work of God alone (Collins 184, 187, 290; Outler and Heitzenrater, Introduction "Repentance" 405).

Sanctification is not only a fixed event that relies upon repentance and acceptance of the believer but is also a dynamic movement on the part of both the individual and the

Holy Spirit as the person becomes more like Christ, thus realizing God's plan for a person's life (Stokes 25; Tracy 324). The dynamic movement on the part of the Holy Spirit and the individual begins the journey toward Christian perfection: "The genius of Wesley as a practical theologian, then, is that he held both these elements together, process and realization, a gradual element and an instantaneous one, in a subtle and well-crafted tension" (Collins 295). Wesley viewed sanctification as equally important as justification over and against the antinomian ideas that were popular in his day, and possibly today, that state that salvation provides entrance into heaven while leaving individuals unchanged at all (Knight 65). New birth occurred through "[j]ustification-regeneration-sanctification," or the ordered process of salvation through faith alone (Collins 196; Runyon 142; Knight 65).

This instantaneous initial sanctifying grace begins the process of entire sanctification, being made holy, or journeying on toward perfection: "That is, Wesley is attentive to the crisis of the new birth, the instantaneous, miraculous element *and* to the process of sanctification, the gradual element" (Collins 216). The goal of entire sanctification serves to shape an individual as one who is like Jesus (Smith 106), fulfilling the journey toward Christian perfection, perfect, holy love replacing all sin (Knight 63; Collins 302), embracing the love of God and neighbor (Collins 298). Full attainment of entire sanctification, in Wesley's opinion, is not usually received until just prior to death (304), as established by Wesley in the Fourth Conference in 1747 (*Plain Account* 15), in which he reminds all to press continually after it and remind all others to do so as well.

Inward and outward holiness, or sanctification, begin at the new birth (Wesley, "New Birth" 343). In the sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart," Wesley defined being "born again" into holiness as being cleaned from sin of flesh and spirit, being given the same virtues of Christ, being renewed in the image of the mind, and being made perfect in love as God is perfect (25; Headley 12). In this sermon on holiness in 1733, Wesley first proclaimed the complete doctrine of holiness, entire sanctification, or Christian perfection (Tomkins 38; Outler and Heitzenrater "Circumcision" 23). Holiness was also defined as having "the mind that was in Christ" and the "walking as Christ walked" ("On the Wedding Garment" 564; Headley 12). The unmistakable emphasis on holiness is lost in some traditions of Wesleyan theology, particularly United Methodism: "Wesley's theology is ... not simply grace but holiness *and* grace, ... indicative of Wesley's near lifelong theological project of articulating *holiness* and *sola fide"* (original emphasis; Collins 6). Wesley first focused on personal accountability for holy transformation, meaning each person is held responsible for the daily expression and state of tempers, affections, and passions (Headley 80, 82, 153, 159). This emphasis on personal holiness illustrates that "John Wesley's primary vision of the Christian life was that of wholeness" (Chilcote "Wesleyan Tradition" 31). Personal wholeness through holiness is one of the key elements of transformation and Christian perfection.

Wesley described the Methodist movement as revolving around holiness of heart and life (Seamands, "Submitting to Be More Vile" 123), thus a Wesleyan theology of necessitates holiness and love bound together (Collins 42) and Wesleyan ethics may only be understood by stating that "moral living is absolutely necessary to a life of holiness" (Miles 98). Puzzling is the loss of emphasis on holiness in many Wesleyan

denominations or churches, with an overemphasis on grace. Uniquely Wesleyan is an emphasis on the exciting journey to holiness that begins upon the moment of salvation: "Salvation comes in the struggle towards holiness" (Tomkins 44). Any declining denomination that claims Wesley as a spiritual father must have the hope of Christian perfection as what sets it apart from other prevailing Christian denominations.

In 1744, The First Conference defined perfection and sanctification, prompting Wesley to methodically record:

> QUESTION. What is it to be sanctified?
> ANSWER. To be renewed in the image of God, "in righteousness and true holiness."
> Q. What is implied in being a perfect Christian?
> A. The loving God with all heart, and mind and soul (Deut. 6:5). (*Plain Account* 14)

He found pure love as the center of Christian perfection (Headley 90), reigning alone in the heart and life (24). The necessary scriptural emphasis on love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor (23) means that Christians seeking perfected love are relational, and the journey to holiness itself is relational (Headley 146). Wesley preached the doctrine of Christian perfection for almost the entire duration of his ministry because of his belief that the Bible promised a life free from sin (Tomkins 156).

Even though it was misunderstood and/or misinterpreted, Wesley "continued to teach it, however, as the farthest horizon of his vision of Christian existence" (Outler and Heitzenrater, Introduction "Christian Perfection" 69). The key to interpreting the doctrine of perfection, for Wesley, was an Eastern interpretation of perfect love inspired by the Spirit (Runyon 230; Outler and Heitzenrater, "Christian Perfection" 69), making it attainable in the earthly life. Particularly important for today's culture is the understanding that by *perfection* Wesley did not mean *perfect*. Perfection instead became

a desire to be more like Jesus: "Notice that he modified *perfection* with the significant adjective *Christian*" (original emphasis; Harper 82). In a sermon entitled "Christian Perfection," Wesley shows the ways that Christians are not perfect, including not being perfect in knowledge or free from ignorance, error, infirmities, or mistakes (70-72). Scholars speculate whether or not Wesley himself ever received the gift of perfection, as he never publicly claimed the gift (Tomkins 158; Stokes 96). Nevertheless, Wesley believed strongly that all Methodist pastors should make a point of preaching perfection (*Plain Account* 53; Stokes 96), an admonition sadly lost on many current ministers ordained in Wesleyan theological traditions.

Narrative Therapy

Due to its rise in popularity, many mental health disciplines have made a claim on narrative therapy. Asbury Theological Seminary Professor of Pastoral Counseling Dr. Tapiwa N. Mucherera's PowerPoint of the theoretical linkage of narrative therapy accurately presents the counseling model's different influences (see Figure 2.1). Even the word *narrative* is used in different ways with different meanings (Hayward 6), pointing to its pluralistic roots. Categorized as a type of family therapy (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 69), narrative therapy also overlaps with systemic therapies. These practices similarly value relationships, connection, context, community, action, and meaning making with questioning and curiosity (Hayward 8-9). While sharing similarities with other mental health disciplines, most narrative therapists view the discipline as a paradigm shift, an altogether different "approach" (O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, and Schuman 480) or a holistic process (Alexander, "Narrative" 114).

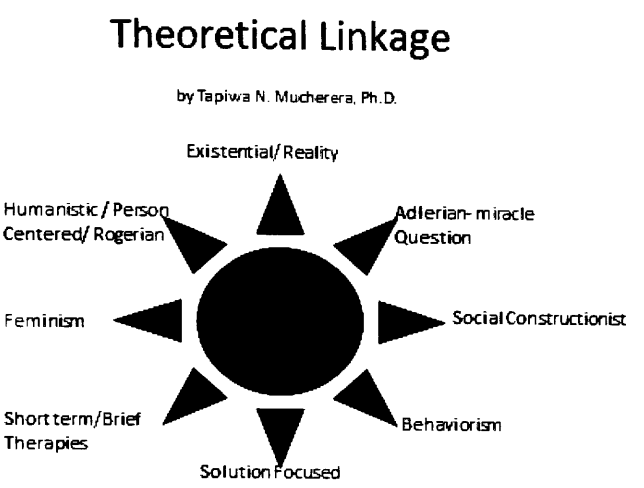

Figure 2.1. Theoretical linkage.

White saw narrative as a story or conversation map that extends over time, with each life constructed through stories (Freedman and Combs 1, 15; Pembroke 16). Individuals do not live out just one story produced in isolation from the world but are "multi-storied" (Walther and Carey 4, 10; Morgan 7, 8), and narratives offer a way to make sense out of each experience, sensation, stimulus, and interpersonal transaction (Lester 28) encountered in the multi-storied world. Each individual's story exists within those of other individuals and is part of a continuing broad cultural narrative, including formation through religious experience (Belzen 408-09; Morgan 5, 7, 9; McLeod 331; Lester 37, 39).

Disruption of a past, present, or future story in the core narrative often prompts an individual to seek help. Narrative therapy sessions thus serve to restory the problem-

saturated narrative into a newly defined preferred identity (Russell and Carey 67) or a hope-filled future narrative. Changes in an individual's core narrative come about through a collaborative relationship between the therapist and client (Cook 56; Hayward 8-9) who use social constructionist approaches (Freedman and Combs 1; Wallis, Burns, and Capdevila, "Q Methodology" 173-90; Hayward 6) to explore "how language is used to construct and maintain problems" (Etchison and Kleist 61-66). Some previous forms of therapy place the therapist in an expert position (Wallis, Burns, Capdevila, "Q Methodology" 186). However, in narrative therapy the client, who possesses a unique and expert knowledge about the problem, shares responsibility for the development of goals. Consistent with postmodernity, narrative therapy seeks to deconstruct power in the lives of individuals and the communities in which they reside, often by focusing on social justice issues (McMillan 35; Alexander "Power" 67; Walther and Carey 3; Weingarten 3; Wallis, Burns, Capdevila, "Narrative" 491; "Q Methodology" 173-90). The literature review details specific techniques employed during sessions.

Postmodernity

Postmodernity is an umbrella term used to describe a vast array of philosophers and their ideas. Significant to White's development of narrative therapy are Michael Foucault and his work on power and knowledge (White and Epston 1), and Jacques Derrida's shift from structuralist to poststructuralist thought (Russell and Carey 95). Important to postmodern narrative therapy and congruent with the teachings of Jesus is the desire to examine and deconstruct the potentially repressive effects of power on individuals and systems that are experiencing more constructed suffering than others (White and Epston 19, 22). The pioneers of American narrative therapy, Jill Freedman

and Gene Combs, discuss a worldview of postmodernism and narrative therapy that adheres to the belief that individual realities gain construction socially through language, with narrative serving to organize and maintain said realities. Another common belief in postmodernity is the lack of absolute, objective, neutral, value-free, or essential truths (Freedman and Combs 22; Lee 222; McMillan 27, 33; Russell and Carey 94; Meteyard 105; Cook and Alexander "History" 5). Absence of absolute truth leads postmodernists to the social construction of individuals and realities. While this idea has met with some criticism from scholars (Smith and Sparkes 183), it simply means that "people, together, construct their realities and live them" (Freedman and Combs 23). Individual construction of lived realities means "all knowing requires an act of interpretation" (White and Epston 2).

Language

Once dependent upon modern therapy models of observation and evaluation (McLeod 331-32), the shift toward language in postmodernity (De Haene 3) leads narrative therapy toward a more interpretive practice (Weingarten 3). Language becomes the primary access to people's experiences (Polkinghorne, "Language" 139), with individuals forming stories to give "meaning to our experience and constitute our lives and relationships through language" (White and Epston 27). The language each individual speaks and hears begins to form stories that construct the person's internal and external identity.

Self as Constructed

Self in postmodernity may be simply defined as "a self with fuzzy boundaries, created and recreated dozens of times each day through interaction with others, the

media, and with the environment" (Bidwell 279). Therefore, narrative therapy concludes that the individual lacks a unitary or unique core (Russell and Carey 49; Richert, "Self" 82). Instead, people are formed through multiple contextual social interactions (McQuaide 342; Freedman and Combs 34), with identities consisting of constantly changing language and stories (Russell and Carey 14; Belzen 402), influenced by social relationships (Walther and Carrey 3-8; Richert, "Self" 86). Past stories serve as the foundation for the construction of selfhood, with narrative therapy assisting in distinguishing which self an individual wishes to become through an exploration of the anticipated future stories shaping core narrative or preferred selves (Freedman and Combs 35; Lester 33).

Not all practitioners agree with narrative therapy's self as completely constructed: "[R]ather than stating that narrative is our identity, it is more the case that a self or identity is a narrative" (Smith and Sparkes 173). Both Alphons J. Richert and Andrew D. Lester define narrative practice as understanding self in terms of an *I* as narrating subplots of various *Mes* into an integrated narrative that may be restructured based on current experience (Richert, "Self" 82-83; Lester 35). From this integrated perspective, self is both the story and the process of storying and regains the meaning and purpose found outside a socially constructed self (Richert, "Self" 79; "Living Stories" 208), a possibility lost in orthodox narrative therapy.

Metanarrative

Metanarrative, defined as one grand story or fixed truth (Lee 230; Weingarten 4) is rejected in postmodernity due to the belief that an overarching truth can lead to the abuse of power, which compounds "the oppression under which clients already live with

their problem-saturated stories" (Lee 227). Narrative therapists still have ideas and values that undergird their work; the difference, however, lies in how these values are introduced into therapy (Weingarten 4), with evaluative judgments being used to problematize metanarratives by looking for positive aspects, including the "telos of human life" (Lee 228).

Pastoral Counseling

Pastoral counseling is difficult to define, and labeling the discipline can be confusing: "Pastoral counseling, Christian counseling and biblical counseling are interchangeable terms to some but mean different processes to others" (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer, 52). Similarly, religious counselors vary in their qualifications. Some may have a professional ministry degree, including a MDiv, a DMin, some other form of certification, or little to no training (Parent 11; Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer, 52) in theology or counseling. Faith-based mental health professionals also self-identify using many different titles, including "pastoral counselors, lay pastoral counselors, Christian counselors, biblical counselors, or spiritual directors" (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer, 52). Finding themselves in multiple roles, pastors function as a "friend, teacher, spiritual advisor, shepherd, and sometimes even coworker" (Parent 8). Pastors specifically might use different terms to identify functions within the parish, including pastoral counseling, pastoral care, spiritual guidance, or spiritual direction (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, and Greer 54) even though all of those terms might have an overlap in function.

Shaped by a specific tradition in an organized religious setting (Worthington 421, Thorne 437), pastoral counseling is identified as being offered by a pastor who may or

may not be a member of a professional accrediting organization within the parish setting (Worthington 422-23; McMinn, Staley, Webb, and Seegobin, 393). Goals of pastoral counseling include discussion and integration of issues surrounding faith beliefs, values systems, and spirituality through psychotherapy or counseling (Sullender 753; Thorne 437; Hunter 24), as well as the religious community's needs, including mental health (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer, 64).

Many mental health professions are influenced by Sigmund Freud (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 185) however, most pastoral counseling is rooted in Carl Rogers' emphasis on unconditional positive regard and an offering of psychological terms for spiritual concepts (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 185; Thorne 440). Howard Clinebell directed pastoral counseling to a postmodern understanding (Sullender 752). Charles Gerkin and Donald Capps urged pastors to elicit narratives of clients' experiences, allowing pastors to "reintroduce theological concerns, and identify social and cultural differences" in the pastoral counseling setting (Hunter 20). A survey of pastoral counseling theorists from 1949-99 by Howard W. Stone, looked into the future of the discipline:

> One might hope that more and more pastoral counseling theorists will begin the new millennium with a fresh and useful body of work that reflects the real-life congregational context of pastoral counseling, the real-life situations of people who do not wish to spend endless weeks or years in therapy, and parish pastor's real-life need for a theory and practice of counseling ministry that is responsive to the present demands of their ministry and their parishioner's circumstances. ("Congregational Setting" 196)

Perhaps this fresh approach in the new millennium is an understanding of pastoral counseling and postmodern thought.

Clients might seek secular mental health professionals in order to go on a "journey of self-discovery" (Stone, "Pastoral Counseling" 32). However, parishioners seek pastoral counseling for a distinct set of problems, including bereavement, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, life stresses, spiritual guidance, and crises of faith (Greenwald, Greer, Gillespie, Greer, 52). Indeed, "[c]lergy counsel people with the full range of psychological difficulties" (Worthington 423). The movement toward diagnosis and an "overemphasis on the specialist" (Dinkins 31) promotes the mistaken impression that pastors cannot offer assistance in the daily lives of parishioners who are experiencing problems.

Whereas long-term pastoral counseling was previously valued, today the pastoral counselor spends between five or six hours with most individuals or families, which implies every session is to be regarded as the last one (Stone, "Pastoral Counseling" 44). An interesting similarity in studies of early Methodism found that transformational conversions generally begin after six weeks of participation in meetings (Harper 147). Pastoral counseling recognizes that humans are "constantly embedded in the context of time," including past, present, and future stories (Lester 4). Given the task of developing a theological lens, pastoral counseling can succinctly provide meaning for the human condition by coauthoring with the parishioner a hope-filled future narrative (2).

Advantageous is the built-in base of people, meaning pastoral counselors perform "much of the mental health work in the United States (probably more than psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers combined)" (Worthington 424). Pastors already have a personal relationship with the parishioners who are seeking counseling, needing less time to develop the therapeutic alliance. Narrative therapy allows a pastor to become an

observer while discovering God's possibilities in the life of the parishioner (Peers 20). Despite all of these advantages, pastors must be aware of limitations as well as other mental health options within the community in order to make sensitive referrals when appropriate (Parent 21). Provision of the prophetic voice within a society yearning for meaning and relationship but skeptical of organized religion offers pastoral counselors the opportunity to be the most viable hidden evangelists (Thorne 441; Tracy 328). Wesley understood the pastoral counseling relationship, assigning new or struggling converts to the care of a "seasoned saint" (Tracy 328). Profession of the Word of God in every pastoral counseling session offers parishioners the hope of transformation.

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations

Parish pastors have an opportunity to use the best practices from secular and Christian disciplines. This position in life and ministry offers a level of creativity that is beneficial for pastors and parishioners alike. A thorough search of literature pertaining to Wesleyan theology, narrative therapy, and pastoral counseling led to the careful the development of WNPC for this research project. Beyond the creation and evaluation of WNPC for the purpose of research and a ministry intervention, the intersection of theology and therapy offers pastors an interdisciplinary model to use with parishioners seek counseling. WNPC offer a unique voice for pastors engaged in the process of coauthoring hope-filled future stories for parishioners (see Figure 2.2).

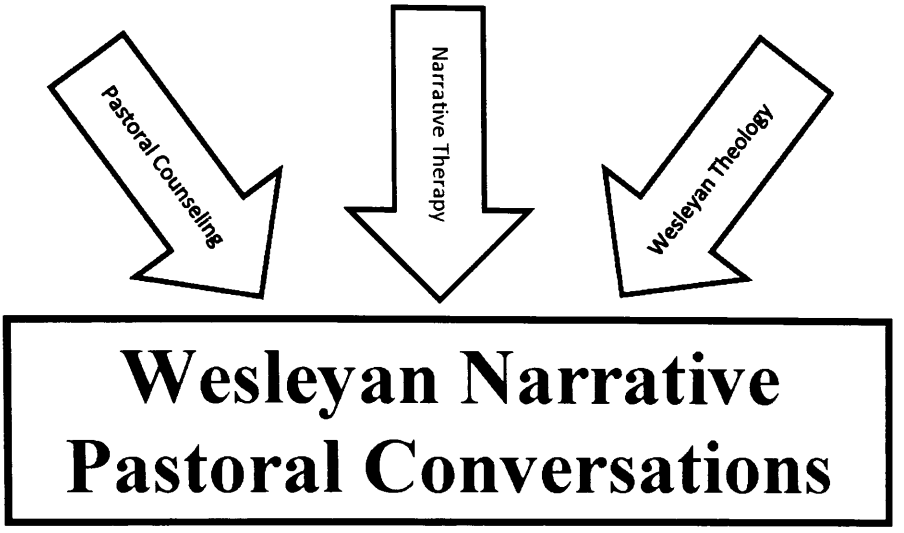

Figure 2.2. Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations.

Modernity, giving way to postmodernity, has trickled into popular culture (Smith 17) and even into churches. Christianity—with its hope and belief in things unseen—is outside the realm of significance within a cultural adherence to modernity's value of scientific proof. The idea of socially constructed individual realities, without absolutes, is both helpful and frustrating from a Christian viewpoint. Christians might rightfully fear that postmodernity leads to an "'anything goes' approach to personal morality" (Meteyard 101). Shifting from the modernist belief that science can lay "claim to an ultimate theory of everything" (Smith 62), postmodernism values a multiplicity of voices. While orthodox Christianity will not choose to subscribe to all philosophies, the postmodern value of multiple voices opens an avenue for speaking the mysterious and

uniquely relevant gospel message of Christian transformation within the cultural discussion.

Long before the postmodern notion of language constructing individual meaning, Wesley attended to the role language plays in the life of the individual in the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*: "Be particularly careful in speaking of yourself … Rather speak of the particulars which God has wrought for you" (47). Seamands describes the role of language for a Christian:

> Our finest words about God are but feeble, faltering attempts to express what can never fully or adequately be conveyed in any human language. …God can't be completely contained and imprisoned in any of our categories. He breaks out of all our carefully constructed boxes." (*Ministry* 101).

John's Gospel uses language to communicate the relational triune God—becoming incarnate through Jesus Christ—implying that the timeless good news of the Word dwells among humanity even today: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:1, 14). Similarly, Wesley preached about Jesus being able to bear, uphold, and sustain all created things simply by using "the same powerful word which brought them out of nothing" ("Spiritual Worship" 433). Language used in narrative therapy feels familiar to Wesleyan pastors used to interpreting biblical texts within the life of a community (Smith 56); allowing such an interpretation to take place within the therapeutic relationship would be additionally beneficial.

Complete abandonment of the idea of a metanarrative has not yet occurred in narrative therapy because of the client's values guiding each session. Narrative therapy offers the opportunity to situate an individual story in "a transcendent narrative context"

within the larger core narrative, thereby revealing the God who suffers, encourages, hopes, and liberates (Lee 230). Perhaps Lester answered the metanarrative discussion best: "My purpose here is not to debate the philosophical question, Is there an absolute truth? Constructionist concepts do not have to be tied to that question" (31). Acknowledging the elements of postmodernism that resonate with Christian values, a WNPC chooses the grand Christian core narrative as revealed through Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason.

Noting that the postmodern socially constructed turn in society (and counseling) essentially means the death of self (Collins 84), and the lack of consensus in defining self within psychology (Belzen 399) provides a problem for Christian practitioners of narrative therapy (McMillan 29). Reclaiming the traditional Christian doctrine of the soul, known only in conjunction with God, offers a "radical reconceptualization of the field of counseling, currently conceived of in thoroughly secular terms" (Johnson 78). The original meaning of the word *psychotherapy*, in which the "Greek *therapeuein* means "to heal," offers a definition of "soul-healing"" (Johnson and Sandage 1). Christian understanding of soul as seen in scripture "possesses a rich emotional life, a complex psychological existence, a capacity for spirituality," as well as a need for a right relationship with God (Beck 33). Renewed interest in the concept of soul in nonreligious circles and Christian counseling "investigating how spiritual formation relates to psychotherapy" leads to a greater emphasis on the relationship between Christian counseling and the church (24). The understanding that both client and counselor are spiritual beings can sometimes blur the lines between where pastoral counseling ends and secular therapy begins (Thorne 436).

Distinguishing Wesleyan theology from postmodern narrative therapy is the idea that each child of God possesses a transcendent self. Seen first in Genesis is the creation of the transcendent self in the very image of God (Collins 51): The first humans gain the possibility of accepting the promise of eternal life and, thus, life beyond death (Stokes 118). Christians move toward an acceptance of the mystery that surrounds the notion of a transcendent self (Collins 85), resting on the promise found in Paul's godly definition of love: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Even without the ability to see fully face-to-face, faith-based practitioners of narrative therapy have "developed the ability to cherish that people have both an essential self *and* the new idea that people are also spoken into being through language" (original emphasis, McMillan 30). The intersection of narrative therapy interpreted through Wesleyan theology possesses a shared use of the word *imago*: "Narrative therapy uses the word imago to describe the personas that dominate our life stories" (Malcolm and Ramsey 57). A mutual understanding of the word *imago* enriches the intersection of theology and therapy.

Shared use of the word *imago* means that in narrative therapy, a preferred core narrative that "assents to one's true self, a self that reflects the image of God" (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 76) is coauthored by pastor and parishioner. Paul's confession in Galatians 2:20 describes the perichoresis of the Trinity:

> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Seamands notes, "Of course, Paul is not saying that he has lost his personal identity. ... He is still Paul, and more truly Paul when Christ lives in him, ... a coinherence of Christ and the believer without coalescence or commingling" (*Ministry* 147). In the story of the Samaritan woman, her conversation with Christ "enabled her imago to stretch and change"; she was restored from being a shunned woman of her culture to "an exuberant agent who had something important to say to others" (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32). Put another way, "the perichoretic Trinity asks us to rethink our 'selves,' realizing that we are what we are in relationship with one another" (Bidwell 281). WNPC tell a story of the core narratives of the Samaritan woman and Paul transformed by God's coauthorship in order for the *imago Dei* to reflect the transformation of attaining entire sanctification and a preferred narrative of evangelists for Jesus.

Predestination of the transcendent *imago Dei* does not fit within Wesleyan theology and also fails to resonate with the values of narrative therapy, especially considering the importance of free choice in the process and outcome of treatment (Richert, "Self" 78). Freedom of choice means that individuals "steeped in evil behaviors may by the grace of God be transformed" (Headley 87). Indeed, Wesley continually held a firm belief that the *imago Dei* remains even in the worst people (Tracy 332). The "mystery of free will and the possibility of divine intervention existing side by side" (Strong 590) is a welcome intersection in WNPC.

Important in postmodern thought is the knowledge that the journey toward Christian perfection by the *imago Dei* is not actions based, but "the experience of *being* is deeper than the level of *doing*" (original emphasis; Harper 84). Individually, the "process of 'becoming'" views identity or being not as fixed, but multi-storied and fluid (Walther

and Carey 3-8). In a very real way, the journey to perfection allows people to live out the preferred stories of the individual while also finding identity through claiming the preferred stories as God's children. Wesley rejected the notion of static perfection or the idea that "one has arrived" (Collins 300; Harper 83), which is a similar idea put forth in narrative therapy: "It is never the size of the step that a person takes that counts, but its direction" (White and Epston 61).

The notion of both being in "process (on the way to perfection) and instantaneousness (entire sanctification itself) are also an important window on the tension between *possibility and actuality*" (original emphasis; Collins 295). Narrative therapy finds precisely the same tension between possibility and actuality in the relationship of present and preferred story. Lester writes, "Possibility is the component of the self that can develop only in the future. Achievement of authentic selfhood comes from maintaining equilibrium between these two aspects of self: actuality and possibility" (76). Thus, "the restoration of the *imago Dei* in its fullness and splendor" (Collins 313-14), is worth the preaching, worth the writing, and worth the counseling on the journey toward Christian perfection.

For narrative therapists and for Wesley, experience is the combination of feeling and interpretation (Runyon 152; Freedman and Combs 33). Narrative therapy similarly emphasizes experience: "Our postmodern age places a high premium on experience. Narrative therapy "privileges the particulars of lived experience...and the links between aspects of lived experience are the generators of meaning" (White and Epston 80). This process of "bearing witness" in the counseling relationship transforms the telling of a story into a lived experience (Russell and Carey 87)—a goal of narrative therapy—as

well as generates meaning from that experience (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 72). Wesley warns against the very little room for relying upon the experience of yesterday, but to journey on toward perfection (Harper 89). The challenge of not living in past experience naturally points pastoral counseling toward the future "because like all human experience hope is embedded in time" (Lester 59). WNPC takes a problem-saturated narrative and allows God, within the journey toward perfection, to change interpreted experience into a hope-filled future story. In these conversations, "pastoral theologians continue to identify not only the 'peak experiences' of those committed to transcendence, but also elements of maturing religious experience that address the lives of the majority of the faithful" (Bidwell 284). With a view toward coauthoring an individual's story in the future, practitioners of WNPC are able to assist the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification and Christian perfection.

Breaking "the hold of problem-saturated stories" and opening "a place for clients to articulate and strive toward preferred goals" (Lee 230), WNPC honor the discipline of narrative therapy as well as the transcendent soul. By providing a way to speak more clearly about our God-known self, our "Self-in-relationship-with-God", narrative therapy offers an opportunity to find meaning in life and liberates individuals to re-story according to important values, and grows in people an awareness of eternal reality (McMenamin 146, 148, 161). Most parishioners will resonate with the struggle for holiness entailed in a journey toward perfection because they do not mind experiencing a problem when they know the hope for solution, hope for redemption, hope for regeneration, and hope for salvation.

Common questions asked by Wesley about holiness to those in his spiritual care were the individual's soul, walk with God, and fellowship with the Son (Headley 138). Wesley encouraged the practice of renewing ourselves "from time to time, by closely examining the state of our souls, as if we had never done it before" (*Plain Account* 51). This desire to examine souls was not narcissistic; rather, it served to realize the self in relation to God and to take stock in the individual path in the journey toward perfection: "In this sense, introspection becomes a spiritual discipline and a path to transformation" (Headley 60). The goal of WNPC is examination of the state of souls, while coauthoring a future narrative preferred by the parishioner.

Reframing the parishioner's spiritual and moral problems, pastoral counseling changes individual perceptions of the events and circumstances that shape reality (Stone and Lester 263; Delkeskamp-Hayes 97). Pastoral counseling also offers more than just empathetic listening (Dinkins 31, 113): "Neglecting to speak of God, offering only uncritical warmth, is to give a stone rather than the Bread of Life" (Stone, "Word" 380). WNPC offer the very Bread of Life and "sanctifies the secular disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy" with the practice of a life in Christ (Delkeskamp-Hayes 104).

The Role of the Conversations

Caring relationships between pastor and parishioner offer God the opportunity to give grace in order to heal an individual with the possibility of becoming holy (Headley 125). This transformation is often more important than adhesion to one counseling method or another (Pembroke 19; Knight 61). In addition to spiritual formation through participation in bands and classes called Christian conferencing, communication from Wesley emphasized another variant—a one-on-one spiritual relationship called "twin

souls" (Tracy 328). Christian conference, or group fellowship, falls under Wesley's fifth instituted means of grace derived from his belief that "every Christian needed a small, intimate place to share the concerns of his or her life and to find commonality of experience and intensity of support" (Harper 74). Wesley believed in the power of renewing lives by examining souls (*Plain Account* 51), as well as the responsibility of the individual to be a cooperant in grace to "work out" salvation with "fear and trembling" ("Salvation" 487).

Christian conferencing is particularly important as the means of grace experienced by the pastor and parishioner during WNPC. Literature surveyed in narrative therapy and Wesleyan theology revealed *conversation* as a description of counseling sessions. Stone defines pastoral conversations as "a style of purposeful interaction with parishioners that can be used in the fifty-minute hour counseling session and in the unplanned chat about a problem occurring after a church meeting as well" ("Congregational Setting" 188). Burrell David Dinkins confesses that the movement from the use of the term *counseling* to *conversation* was not an easy one. However, the word accurately reflects the shift of modern counseling, from focusing on the counselor in a position of "objective observer with expert knowledge and skills" (30), to the relational process shared by pastor and parishioner, not to seek change, heal, or advise but to participate in a mutual process of coauthoring a hope-filled alternate story (15-16, 29-36). Dinkins also points out that Wesley used the term *conversation* in his "letters, sermons, and ciphered diary" (30).

Practitioners of narrative therapy also refer to the "therapeutic conversations" (Johnson and Sandage 2; Walther and Carey 3) as a shift in the therapist's role toward a more egalitarian process of therapeutic dialogue (Lee 221), offering a "conversation

map" (Johnson and Sandage 4; McMenamin 149). When relieved of the burden to be an expert counselor, pastors are able to initiate spiritual conversations with parishioners (Jankowski 75), resting on the promise of hope, the "cornerstone of pastoral conversation" (Stone and Lester 259), and thereby allowing parishioners to move into a hope-filled future narrative (Dinkins 32; Stone and Lester 264).

The Role of the Trinity

The model of the Trinity offers the counseling alliance an ideal pattern of relationships (Pembroke 18). Neil Pembroke accurately summarizes the notion of God being present as the nurturing third:

> As a central part of their action plan, narrative counselors sponsor a search for what I will call a "nurturing third" (they refer to a member of an audience or a team) who is able to support the re-authoring of the client's personal story. In the narrative approach, three parties play a role in the re-storying process: the counselor, the counselee, and the nurturing third. I find in this structure an image or mark of the triune God. (13-20)

Participating in the coauthoring of alternate stories are the pastor, parishioner, and the omnipresent Triune God. In this way, by focusing on Wesley's emphasis of the Great Commandment in Christian perfection, both pastor and parishioner are learning to love God and neighbor as self (Headley 92) within the therapeutic relationship.

A third participant in the counseling relationship is the Holy Spirit (Dinkins 35), bringing righteousness, creativity, and faith (Stokes 58; Stone, "Word" 381) to the conversation. Wesley beautifully described the role of the Holy Spirit in maturing an individual:

> God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God

> grows up, till he comes to the "full measure of the stature of Christ." ("New Birth" 340)

This continual breath of, and the soul's response to, the Holy Spirit is the goal of WNPC: pastor, parishioner, and Holy Spirit coauthoring an alternate hope-filled future story that brings the parishioner (and possibly the pastor) closer to Christian perfection.

The Role of the Relationship with God

Christian understanding of a relationship with God characterized by movement from simple knowledge (Khiok-khng 68) to security and love allows authentic growth toward Christian perfection to take place in the life of the believer (Harper 68). Transformation and renewal is the ultimate goal of religion (Headley 141) and of narrative therapy: transformation of a problem-saturated narrative into an alternate hope-filled future narrative. Conferencing offers pastor and parishioner an opportunity to witness God's desire for union and relationship, rather than separation, through God's personal presence communicating in the lives of individuals (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 73). A personal relationship with a trustworthy God and a belief that God is perfectly good can contribute to comfort and security with the knowledge that God is trustworthy in advocating for the future (Johnson 81; Lester 67). Trust in a future with God often allows individuals in the counseling relationship to respond freely to God's gift of transforming, perfecting love in Jesus Christ, seeing God face-to-face—a response Wesley reminds is also free (Harper 38).

The Role of the Parishioner

Equality between the laity and ordained clergy is an emphasis found continually within *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church,* stating, "The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another" (96). Because

both pastors and parishioners share in the same baptism, a Wesleyan understanding of the ministry of all Christians is that clergy are "set-apart ministers" (217). The understanding of equality as children of God, equality in the fall from grace leading to restoration through transformative grace, equality in baptism, and equality in calling to Christian ministry leads to an intentional use of language distinguishing the function of the participants in WNPC as that of pastor and parishioner. Terms such as therapist, counselor, client, and counselee, all describe both function and role but also describe power and hierarchy not found in narrative therapy (Admundson 177) or in Christianity's belief in the equality of all of God's children.

Positioned as the expert in his or her own life (Dinkins 35; Morgan 2; Schweitzer 637-38), narrative therapy believes each individual tells personal stories from unique contexts, circumstances, and points of view (Bruce 332). This personal agency of each parishioner views problems as separate from the individual who possesses skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments, unique knowledge, know-how, and abilities and who, in collaboration with others (Morgan 2; White 43, 103), can coauthor an alternate narrative. If characterization of Christian perfection is loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself, then a significant portion of the role of the parishioner is learning to love oneself, as does God. Love of self can be a very difficult part of the journey (Headley 96, 164) and is probably a significant reason parishioners seek counseling from a pastor. Pastoral counseling offers hope to the individual that the true created self as designed by God might be discovered and realized:

> Our true selves—the selves Jesus loves and accepts and gave his life for—are both strong and weak, gifted and broken. We must learn to accept ourselves as he accepts us, especially the weak and broken parts that our false self rejects." (Seamands, *Ministry* 135)

The work of accepting self as beloved by God (Strong 590) can be a struggle on the part of both the pastor (Seamands, *Ministry* 125) and the parishioner.

The process of self-acceptance and love of self leads to one of Wesley's most important ideas: God made humans to be happy on earth ("Spiritual Worship" 438-9; "On the Omnipresence" 533) through seeking happiness in relationship with the creator God. In the *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Wesley urges Christians to pursue God as he did:

> Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil." (1)

Parishioners have an "obligation to work, to improve the rich grace of the Most High" (Collins 203) within the coauthorship of narrative transformation because they are the experts of their own lives. In the postmodern culture, which favors the pursuit and struggle of individual happiness over all else, Wesley would respond by saying that God's design for humanity is happiness, and God's demand on humanity is holiness. (Outler and Heitzenrater Introduction, "Justification" 111; Wesley, "Way" 126).

Continual collaboration resulting from the decentered position of the pastor leads to the parishioner sharing in the responsibility for the WNPC. Pastors begin each conversation by asking parishioners about new ideas or thoughts pertaining to past conversations (Gaddis 11). Questions asked throughout the conversation ensure the experience is relevant and helpful (Denborough 32). Coauthorship continues by asking for the parishioner's perception of the conversation's outcome, as well as taking the opportunity to evaluate the usefulness of the conversation process, thus informing the

pastor's future effectiveness (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 348; Bonsmann 32; Stillman and Erbes "Two Languages" 87). Participation in interpreting the conversation process raises the parishioner's awareness of their contributions to the coauthorship and assists the pastor in other conversations (Redstone 1; Gaddis 2), building on the strengths of both the pastor and the parishioner.

The Role of the Pastor

Pastors in a parish setting can read theories on how to practice pastoral counseling, but WNPC provides "effective methods that will facilitate the doing of pastoral counseling in their real-world context" (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 181-196). Drawing on the legacy of Scripture (Strong 591), tradition, experience and reason, Wesley encouraged pastors to identify stages or progress made in the spiritual life in order to "guide followers into the next appropriate stages of spiritual development" (Ted Campbell 82). For Wesley, parishioners well-known by a pastor could lovingly offer honest reflections of spiritual malformations and pride-based ignorance (Clapper 113). This type of loving reflection, based on a Christian understanding of a life growing more and more like Christ, recognizes that the pastor's position is not neutral in attitudes, principles, beliefs, and values (Alexander, "Power" 81; Hayward 5).

Philosophically, postmodernism acknowledges that no counseling environment is valueneutral (Freedman and Combs 36). A therapist brings a unique narrative and values to the counseling relationship (Richert, "Stories"198), shaping the questions asked in order to coauthor an alternate story (Freedman and Combs 117; Dinkins 113). Pastors have the unique role of reminding parishioners of their sacred stories, or introducing them to a new interpretation of the Christian narrative in the hopes of transforming future

stories from despair to hope (Lester 92, 94). Even though characteristics such as conversational styles and listening are most likely a God-given or acquired vocational skill (Dinkins 31), most pastors do not counsel from a narrative perspective "because our formal education has been so saturated with modernity's emphasis upon linear thinking, formal logic, philosophy, and science..." (16). The new relationship between theology and narrative therapy holds many possibilities (Meteyard 93) to be explored in the ministry intervention.

While the pastor retains a prophetic voice partially through continually listening for, and amplifying, evidence of Christian perfection in the narrative of the parishioner, WNPC remain centered on the person (Stillman and Erbes "Two Languages" 84), believing parishioners are the primary interpreters of experience (Freedman and Combs 45). A parishioner's privileged role in the conversation frees the pastor and parishioner from the belief that the pastor, or the Bible has all the answers for every situation. This "collaborative therapeutic relationship" (Larner, "Family Therapy" 23-24) alleviates the burden of offering advice or opinions, even in the form of a question (Russell and Carey 78), or making assumptions about the meaning of the problem in the parishioner's life (White 40). Sharing in the responsibility of narrative transformation in a counseling setting can be a liberating experience: "Letting go of the need to have expert knowledge of causes, effects and answers to solve people's problems can create new sense of freedom and joy in counseling" (Dinkins 31). As the parishioner functions expertly within the conversation, the pastor is decentered (White 39; Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 74), and becomes a "fellow traveler" (Weingarten 12). The role of fellow

traveler in the Christian narrative empowers the pastor and parishioner to embark together on a journey toward Christian perfection.

Similar to secular mental health therapies, a pastor using WNPC seeks to develop unconditional positive regard (Pembroke 19), trust, support, kindness, integrity, respect, and warmth (Johnson and Sandage 4.). Empathy is also crucial to the pastor's attitude and listening skills (Pembroke 19; Johnson and Sandage 4; Seamands, *Ministry* 151; Dinkins 22; Stone, "Congregational Setting" 181-196). Listening empathically communicates God's love and concern for someone by setting aside one's own agenda and entering into the perceived experience of the parishioner (Seamands, *Ministry* 151). Early in the conversation, empathy develops into an intense interest in the story told (Dinkins 22). Acknowledging the parishioner's frame of reference (Seamands, *Ministry* 151) becomes essential for a pastor in order to reframe a negative view of events so that hope grows and positive change appears possible (Stone and Lester 264). A pastor seeks "to avoid judging, diagnosing, explaining, telling people what to do about their problems, or taking on the air of a professional counselor" (Dinkins 23) through this type of listening. Not a passive practice, the pastor retains a prophetic role in the conversation (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 181-196), speaking God's word into an alternate narrative.

Lack of order in conversations indicates the need for a pastor, outside of the problem's effects on the parishioner, to provide a framework for alternate understandings and actions (Russell and Carey 10). White wryly observes, "Narrative conversations are not 'disciplined.' They do not proceed in an orderly cookbook fashion, but are somewhat unruly" (250). The pastor becomes the "conversation architect" (Wallis, Burns, Capdevila "What Is Narrative Therapy" 493), acting as the "host of the flow of the

conversation" without agenda but as a representative of Christ to the parishioner (Dinkins 39).

As the architect/host of the conversation and a fellow traveler on the journey toward perfection, the pastor assumes a "not-knowing" stance or position. "A not-knowing stance is not an 'I don't know anything' position. Our knowledge is of the process of therapy..." (Freedman and Combs 44). Characterized by humility, tentativeness, and hesitancy in a collaborative, journalistic style of curiosity, this stance listens and questions the assumptions made about the conversation (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 74; Jankowski 73; Freedman and Combs 45; Dinkins 22, 33, 35, 52; Morgan 46). The not-knowing stance guards the pastor from imposing personal spirituality upon the parishioner and instead uses spirituality that is helpful to the parishioner (Jankowski 73). Accompanied by "deconstructive listening," the not-knowing stance seeks space for portions of a parishioner's narrative that have not yet been storied (Freedman and Combs 46, 118; Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 74).

Seeking to separate and define the presenting problem from the parishioner (White 40; Morgan 17, 33), the pastor asks questions that influence the creation of alternate narratives and produce a sense of agency (Dinkins 34; Lee 225). These questions elicit "unique outcomes" often lost in the presenting narrative, such as exceptional "moments, actions, thoughts, or stories" that contradict the problem-saturated story (Russell and Carey 22). The pastor assists in listening for solutions in the story and develops the alternate hope-filled future narrative (Dinkins 21) through a not-knowing stance, locating the problem outside of the parishioner, and deconstructive listening. The role of the pastor as facilitator of a conversation between the parishioner and God offers

room for the Holy Spirit to transform lives (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 76; Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32); thus, therapy become a means of grace (Headley 61).

Clear human boundaries define personal limits and maintain flexibility, offering substance to relationships by allowing them to grow (Parent 5-6). The pastor practicing WNPC holds the responsibility of establishing and maintaining the professional relationship (Dinkins 134; Parent 6) while in the midst of additional roles the pastor plays within the life of the parishioner. Participation in pastoral conversations dictates that the pastor forgo friendship defined by mutual sharing, "turning the counseling relationship into an opportunity to unburden his/her own soul" (Dinkins 136-37). Maintenance of spiritual mental health requires the pastor to seek friendship and accountability with individuals outside of the parish and maintain an active relationship with God (134). By representing the God "who is both with us and out in front of us calling, inviting, and even challenging us to move into this future" (Stone and Lester 268), a pastoral caregiver hosts the conversation in which a "more hopeful and future-oriented story" (Dinkins 21) is being coauthored with a fellow traveler on the journey toward perfection. For WNPC, individual responsibility means that a pastor is not expected to be the expert on a parishioner's life or ultimately held responsible for the choices that parishioner might make.

Maintenance of professional and relational boundaries on the part of the pastoral counselor within the conversation does not necessitate detachment (Strong 591). Instead, the pastoral conversation finds its example for relationship in the Trinity, whose affection and love causes each member to be "near and dear to each other. They delight in each other; theirs is a joyful intimacy" (Seamands, *Ministry* 59). Openness to the Holy Spirit

can cause a pastoral counselor to grow in love within the counseling alliance (Pembroke 18). However, practicing a Christian love does not mean the pastor achieves the impossible task of *liking* all people equally (Stokes 87-88): "Love is characterized by the opening up of possibility and the desire for what is potential in a loving relationship" (Lester 69). Parishioners are more interested in who pastors are within relationships (Seamands, *Ministry* 41), including a pastor who shows Christian love to the parishioner in a counseling setting in order to "foster a love of self that opens wide the gate for loving others" (Headley 165). Within the professional boundaries of the pastoral counselor is a responsible, relational love with the counseling goals of authoring alternate stories and progression toward Christian perfection (Strong 591; Headley 105). Wesley's belief in love fits well with the professional role of the pastoral counselor: Love calls for change and has corrective qualities (Harper 99; Runyon 228; Headley 102). For many, the relationship found within the pastoral conversation may tangibly authenticate the love of God in a real and powerful way: "'If thine heart be right, as mine with thy heart', then love me with a very tender affection..." (Wesley, "Catholic Spirit" 306). A Trinitarian model of love found within pastoral conversations is characteristic of the journey toward perfection.

The Role of the Community

Patterned after secular mental health professions, which lack a built-in community, pastoral counseling previously lost sight of the resources offered within a parish setting (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 190). In order to move past modernity's "rugged individualism," narrative therapy employs an outsider witness, believing that the social construction of the self occurs in relation to other people within the community

(White 166; Russell and Carey 36, 88). Caring little for solitary religion (Harper 105; Headley 145), relationships grounded within community resonates well with John Wesley: "When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other men" ("Upon Our Lord's Sermon" 196). Involving the greater community through actual or imagined participation within WNPC offers parishioners an opportunity to authenticate and bring to life the coauthored, preferred hope-filled future narrative (Russell and Carey 67).

Communal relationship among the Trinity offers a pattern of seeking persons within the life of the church who will support parishioners on the journey toward perfection (Pembroke 17; Stone, "Pastoral Counseling" 43). One of Wesley's strategies for renewal was to organize believers into groups known as bands or classes based on the belief that spiritual growth and change necessitates contact with the community of believers (Harper 135; Headley 124; Runyon 115; Clapper 113). The call of perfected Christian love of God, neighbor, and self, is a "radical *other-orientation*" (original emphasis; Harper 90). Designed by the Triune God, interpretive dialogue within the life of the church community measures the maturing of religious experience (Stokes 111; Runyon 127; Bidwell 281; Green 42). This multi-storied narrative of the church community provides support, healing, growth, identity, hope, relationship, transformation, and love for the parishioner (Headley 165, 128; Lester 95-98; Pembroke 17; Hall 180). Without individual Christians to tell the shared Christian narrative, the church community begins to die (Chilcote, "Wesleyan Tradition" 26, Dinkins 25).

> Put another way, the very good news of the gospel that is believed and embraced is not the narrative of an individual but that of the church, the

> body of Christ, whereby a personal story is graciously caught up in the larger story of salvation history. (Collins 237)

Recognizing that "there simply is no Christianity apart from the body of Christ, which is the church" (Smith 30), the pastor seeks ways in which to connect the parishioner with the church community during and after the participation in WNPC.

The Role of the Narrative and Stories

Communication of the Christian faith in narrative counseling often uses biblical narratives (Dinkins 14). However, debate over the process of communication, particularly in Christian counseling, is still in occurrence (Meteyard 103). A pastor must remain open to the ideas that a parishioner might have a better knowledge of Scripture than does the pastor and that pastor and parishioner might not share the same experience of Scripture. Additionally, use of the Bible within the therapeutic relationship must not support a hidden agenda on the part of the pastor or parishioner (Schweitzer 632; Alexander, "Narrative" 121). This communal understanding of Scripture on the parts of the pastor and parishioner can lead to a "profoundly curative and therapeutic" experience in which an individual feels God's love through Scripture (Johnson 78-88), perhaps for the first time.

Perception, interpretation, and individual experience receive privilege in postmodern thought: "Because the bulk of Scripture is narrative, it is worth inquiring into the sort of truth-claims made by the biblical narrative" (Green 47). Remembering that while the Bible was and is subject to all kinds of interpretations "does not mean that the interpretation cannot be true or good" (Smith 43-4, 53). Interpretation, however, cannot stand alone. Discernment may be found in the relationship with God: "[O]ur confidence rests not on objectivity, but rather on the convictional power of the Holy Spirit (which

isn't exactly objective); the loss of objectivity, then, does not entail a loss of kerygmatic boldness about the truth of the gospel" (51). Together, interpretation and discernment assist in coauthoring stories that reflect the continued creation of authentic individuals.

Scripture reveals a truth recently discovered by postmodernity: (1) Stories form identity (Bruce 323); (2) each person is created for, and exists in, a storied world (Smith 140; Johnson and Sandage 2-3); (3) stories give life direction (Dinkins 11, 14); (4) construction of stories make sense of experience (Adler and McAdams180); life is narrated in story form. Narratives and the reauthoring of those narratives occur simultaneously in the past, present, and future (Morgan 8-9). Shared with this temporal understanding of stories is the activity of God existing outside of time and, thus, active in the past, present, and future simultaneously. Stone and Lester write, "Our future is open in a new way because of the advent of the Christ. Even though the realm of God was activated in the past and here in the present, its completion is out in front of us, in the not-yet" (261). Parallels found between narrative therapy and Christianity are many, including the way in which the gospel narrates new stories in the lives of individuals (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32), and in the belief that God gives all people a sacred story that includes a future (Lester 93). Practitioners of WNPC care for stories in order to care for the parishioners sharing the stories (Dinkins 20), recognizing the sacred privilege of coauthoring sacred narratives with a parishioner and the Triune God.

Dominant stories that "do not sufficiently represent their lived experience" (White and Epston 14-15) may cause individuals to experience problem stories. When these problem-saturated narratives develop, a pastoral counselor can assist parishioners by asking questions about preferred stories (Walter and Carey 3). Through telling and

retelling preferred narratives, the conversation moves from focusing on the problem to the unique outcomes of a preferred story. In telling these preferred outcomes, "the evolution of lives and relationships occurs through the performance of such stories or narratives" (White and Epston 12). A prolific writer, Wesley left a written legacy by creating a preferred story in his own life:

> He was not a liar, but he had no scruples about spinning a story for the good of a cause. The *Journal* was written to defend his reputation and broadcast propaganda for Methodism, the first volume being published specifically in an attempt to clear his name from the scandal that followed him home from Georgia. Wesley had a powerful sense of his own rightness, and the *Journal* almost always presents him in a far better light than it does his opponents. (Tomkins 47)

Most individuals are familiar with the natural process of highlighting the good in a bad situation, leading to a preferred story told to self and others.

Secular mental health disciplines used by a pastor for relationship issues and biblical forms of counseling used for faith issues neglect to understand that for a Christian, *all issues are faith issues*. WNPC integrate stories from all around us, in Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason to "help people imagine who they are in relation to others, to society, and to the universe" (Bidwell 288). The Christian experiences self in the midst of multiple stories: "ours, our family's, our culture's (or subculture's), and one's ultimate story (that which explains how everyone got here and where everyone is heading)" (Johnson and Sandage 2-3). A Christian privileges the transformative story of God's presence in the world over other stories (Meteyard 106).

Problem-Saturated Narrative

Problem-saturated narratives result from sin: seeking something besides God (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 69) or self-love when a person's world revolves

around the individual instead of Christ (Stokes 82). Unproductive self-narratives, or the occurrence of a life event that resists incorporation into their preferred dominant narrative may prompt parishioners to seek counseling (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 70; Adler and McAdams 180). During such times, life narratives begin to take on a "problem-saturated description" (White and Epston 39; O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, and Schuman 480). A parishioner experiencing a "disruption in the flow of a person's core narrative" is vulnerable to despair due to the threat to the future story (Lester 45). Parishioners have likely been living with the problem for a long time (Freedman and Combs 70), perhaps have adopted the problem as an inseparable identity (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32), and often want to tell a story about the effects of the problem (Dinkins 20). The pastoral counselor first traces the history of the problem in order to see how the problem has changed with various levels of influence (Morgan 36) rather than viewing it as a fixture in the individual's life. By standing outside of the effects of the problem (Peers 22), the pastor emphasizes that the parishioner is not the problem but has a relationship with the problem (Freedman and Combs 66). Problems perpetuate in part due to belief systems, larger communities, dominant culture stories, beliefs, and principles (Morgan 45; Pembroke 17; Lester 39).

Language such as *problem-saturated* or *preferred narrative* would have been foreign to Wesley, but the concepts are ones with which he would resonate: "But these chains of darkness under which we groan do not only hold us in on every side, but they are within us, too; they enter into our soul; they pierce through its inmost substance" ("One Thing Needful" 35). Characterization by Wesley of the outward and inward effects of "chains of darkness" is similar to narrative therapy's belief that problems receive

narration within an individual life and within the culture. Wesley even created a "backslider band" for individuals stuck in problem-saturated stories and unable to stay on the path to perfection due to repetitive sin (Tracy 328). According to Wesley, one of the effects of sin in an individual's life is that it renders a person helpless to change, but Christian perfection allows individuals to face the struggles of life (Harper 26-27, 89). Providing the very essence of WNPC, prevenient grace offers an opportunity for the pastor and parishioner to take a problem-saturated narrative and, in the presence of Christian conferencing with the Holy Spirit, coauthor a hope-filled future narrative. Additionally, emphasis on prevenient grace allows a pastor to enter, without reserve, a therapeutic conversation with a non-Christian, believing God's prevenient grace is present within the Christian conference.

Externalization

Presenting problems prompt individuals to seek counseling when the belief forms that problems are "internal to their self or the selves of others—that they or others are in fact, the problem" (White 9). Pastors listen to the presenting narrative for ways in which the parishioner refers to the problem, modifying the descriptive language to objectify and locate the problem outside of the individual (White and Epston 38; Morgan 18; Freedman and Combs 59; Russell and Carey 3). The literature review offered consistently similar definitions of externalization:

> Externalising conversations involve naming the problem (as separate from the person), mapping the effects of the problem through various domains of a person's life, and also tracing the history of the problem in the person's life. This enables the problem to be placed into a story-line. It is instead something that has developed over time, a development that has been influenced by a range of factors. (Russell and Carey 34-35)

Externalization is not a technique or skill but an attitude, orientation, and shift in language (Morgan 17). Initial usage may feel and sound awkward; however, metaphor employed by externalization generates meaning not always available in literal language (Hayward 10). Externalizing conversations requires imagination on the parts of the parishioner and the pastor who often employs a type of questioning enquiry likened to investigative reporting (White 27-28; White and Epston 61). Externalization aids in the identification of habits on behalf of the parishioner that sustain the problem and offer numerous definitions and solutions to the problem (Russell and Carey 6-7), thereby offering parishioners access to a range of life experiences previously unexpressed (White 29).

Externalization can also help a parishioner fully realize the Wesleyan notion that sin remains but does not reign. Externalization allows parishioners the agency not to remain at the mercy of circumstantial and definitive temptations (Cook 55). Most importantly, these kinds of externalizing conversations shift some of the negative conclusions individuals reach about identity resulting from the influence of the problem (White 26). Wesley's belief that the "fundamental problem was human sinfulness" (Harper 21) resonates well with narrative therapy's externalization.

Jesus engaged in an externalizing conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, found in John's Gospel 4:1-26:

> Jesus addressed the Samaritan's difficulty with men—and thus identified and externalized her problem—this truth, did not, for him, define her identity. By the very act of speaking with her and teaching her, he honored her as a human being who was more than the negative label she had been given by society. (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32)

Jesus redeveloped the woman's story using her strengths and resources (White 38) and separated her from the dominant stories that had shaped her life and relationships (White and Epston 40-41).

Deconstruction. Jesus' externalizing conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well is also an example of deconstructive conversations. Taking place within externalizing conversations (Freedman and Combs 120), deconstruction helps people examine "taken for granted" truths (Morgan 46), allowing parishioners to view dominant stories from a different perspective (50). Deconstruction also allows parishioners to open up alternate stories that more accurately reflect preferred narratives (49). However, the idea of deconstructing can be of concern when participating in WNPC. The pastor must be sure not to "dismantle a person's faith in God" (McMillan 31) through questioning social influences. Although not advising from a Christian perspective, Freedman and Combs address this concern: "Although our intention is to deconstruct problematic narratives, no particular question is aimed at an entire narrative" (120). Viewed from Lester's pastoral theology and counseling perspective, deconstruction serves as a means to change the parishioner's story: "The term refers specifically to the process by which a therapist searches for a hole in the logical construction of a client's frame of reference as applied to a particular life situation or aspect of existence" (128). While the goal is not to end a person's faith, deconstruction instead uses God's grace to remove harmful definitions that keep children of God from finding true identity, examining those cultural and societal norms that have kept a parishioner from seeking God, holiness, or sanctification.

The problem is the problem. First presented by White and Epston, and the hallmark of narrative therapy, "[T]he problem becomes the problem, and then the person's relationship with the problem becomes the problem" (40; see also Santos Gonçalves, Matos 129-39; see also Dinkins 46; Peers 20; Blanton "Narrative Family Therapy" 70; Cook "History" 19). This simple notion of locating the problem outside the parishioner as something the individual has a relationship with echoes the Christian colloquialism, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Locating sin outside of the believer, "[a] mistake in judgment may possibly occasion a mistake in practice" (Wesley, *Plain Account* 19). Wesley did not view sinners only as victims but also as perpetrators (Collins 106). Narrative therapy shares this belief. White and Epston remind practitioners that externalization does not "separate persons from responsibility for the extent to which they participate in the survival of the problem" (65). Giving the problem a name during narrative therapy also externalizes the problem of sin (Dinkins 67; Freedman and Combs 203; Russell and Carey 6). Maintaining agency over the problem, naming acknowledges the parishioner's responsibility in, or relationship to, the problem (Dinkins 67). A pastoral counselor may even offer a possible name for the problem (Freedman and Combs 204) if the parishioner is struggling with the externalization process.

Questioning. Within the externalization conversation is a movement from "deconstructive *listening* to deconstructive *questioning*" (original emphasis; 56). WNPC use questioning early in any conversation regarding the problem (Freedman and Combs 142; White and Epston 42) in order to reauthor lives and relationships (White and Epston 17). Questions are used as interventions through which change can happen (Jankowski

73) to create new experiences (Freedman and Combs 113; Dinkins 49) or to clarify and expand the story (Dinkins 49).

Current literature reveals several consistent categories of questions asked by practitioners of narrative therapy. Questions can be used to understand past events and the arrival of the problem (Morgan 33-34), or they may be used to ask why a parishioner has lived with the effects of a problem (White 239). Relative influence questions ask a parishioner to rate from one to ten the power a problem holds in the past, present, or future narrative (Morgan 34). Landscape of identity questions ask a parishioner to reflect in new ways on identity in the presenting and alternate narrative, as well as the identity of others (Russell and Carey 26; White 100). Parishioners reflect upon the role they played in past, present, or future events in landscape of action questions (Russell and Carey 26; White 110). Meaning, or landscape of consciousness, questions ask parishioners to reflect on values and beliefs within the narrative (Freedman and Combs 98). Pastors might ask general questions about previous conversations in order to determine whether past conversations have generated any new experiences or reauthoring of alternate narratives (197). Pastors also ask questions in order to allow parishioners to collaborate, direct, and guide conversations (Morgan 3-4). Enquiries exploring the presence of God in parishioners' narratives are popular with pastoral counselors (Blanton, "Narrative Family Therapy" 70). Finally, future-oriented questions can coauthor a hope-filled future narrative (Dinkins 54). Formulating questions that communicate care, interest, and respect while emphasizing strengths and competencies over weaknesses and failures might prove difficult (49, 51). The case study protocol found in Appendix A provides a

list of questions generated from the literature review for pastors to use within the parish setting.

Questions in WNPC perpetuate the spirit of Wesley's practices as seen in his sermons, letters, and in the organization of Methodist bands and classes. Wesley ended sermons "with a typical litany of questions for self-examination" (Outler and Heitzenrater Introduction, "Law" 267) and used five starter questions in each band meeting reflecting on the parishioners' spiritual lives (Tracy 327). Anthony J. Headley comments on Wesley's use of questions in weekly conference meetings: "By shaping Christian interaction in such an intentional manner, Wesley provided ample opportunity for believers to experience spiritual progress" (128-29). Each question in WNPC is a step in a journey (Morgan 3), providing opportunities to experience Christian perfection.

Unique outcomes. Conversations searching for unique outcomes maintain the decentered participation of the therapist (White 220). Unique outcomes are also known as "exceptions," "sparkling events," "sparkling moments," or "innovative moments" (Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Mendes, Matos, Santos 497-509; Morgan 52; Santos, Gonçalves, and Matos 129-139; White 219, Freedman and Combs 67, 89; Russell and Carey 23). Exceptions can be defined as "out of phase" experiences, episodes, thoughts, feelings, openings, or instances not predicted by—or existing outside of—the influence of the problem-saturated narrative. These exceptions may be small, but they often significantly enrich a new narrative when the pastor assumes that sparkling moments do not exist in isolation (Morgan 55-57). Always present in the lives of individuals, unique outcomes are moments when the problem's invitation to negative behavior was partially or completely avoided (White 232; O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, and Schuman 480-81). Thorough,

persistent, and evaluative attention given to these moments (Pembroke 17; Morgan 59; White and Epston 16) invites the parishioner to attribute or ascribe meaning and agency to these unique outcomes in order for "rich or thick stories of self to be experienced" (Morgan 59; White and Epston 16; White 236; Walther and Carey 6). Expansion of the sparkling moment occurs when the parishioner recalls all the people, places, feelings, and thoughts associated with the moment (Pembroke 17). Potential effects of the sparkling moment include examining the parishioner's hopes of a life free from the problem and the opening of a door to an alternate story into future possibilities (White 236; White and Epston 60; Morgan 54). Wesley in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* urges believers "daily [to] 'go on from strength to strength; beholding' now, 'as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord'" (9). While the language of unique outcomes would be foreign to Wesley, the sentiment is the same: focusing on the positive in order to experience transformation into the image of God.

Past/Present/Future Narrative

Stories have a beginning, middle, and an end informed equally by future expectations and present interpretations of the past (White and Epston 10). Each individual existing in the present narrative is affected by a remembered past and an anticipated future (Lester 12): "[T]he present is always moving immediately into the past; and both the past and future are always available to be brought into the present" (Walther and Carey 6). Parishioners are a work of "self-in-progress," and identities are influenced not only by a remembered past self but also by a future projected self (Lester 13, 36).

Humanity's story firmly existing within the boundaries of the passage of time is in contrast to God's presence and salvific work existing outside of time. God's kingdom exists in the past, present, and future: For Wesley, Christians live with one foot in the "now" and one in the "future" (Harper 96-97). Especially true in the journey toward Christian perfection, the experience of an individual maturing in faith resides fully in the present with an "eye on the future" (Bidwell 285). This already/not yet experience can lead to an "undoneness of life," causing pastors to "recognize that human existence on this side of the second coming is fraught with imperfection, tragedy, and evil" (Stone, "Pastoral Counseling" 42).

God's salvific work is both instantaneous and gradual (Wesley, *Plain Account* 10; Khiok-khng 74), with Wesleyan Christians "working out their salvation with fear and trembling" in past, present, and future stories:

> We hear endless testimonies of people who were saved 'x' years ago. While Wesley would rejoice in this, he would go on to ask, 'But are you saved today, in this moment?' He would want to know if the experience of the past was still alive in the present." (Harper 50-51)

The Christian narrative offered is one of a hopeful future because of Jesus the Christ, whose work God activated in the past, is still available in the present, and reaches completion in the not-yet fulfillment of God's creation (Lester 23; Knight 64). Offered to a pastor is the task of helping the parishioner complete chapters from the past while exercising free will in the present to imagine a future story (Dinkins 89; Stone and Lester 260). Within the pastoral counseling relationship, a tangible experience of the process of sanctification occurs in a meaningful way:

> Here is where the dynamic of Wesleyan discipleship is seen. Through saving faith we appropriate the power of Christ to and for every dimension of our lives. He forgives the past, heals the present, and offers hope for the

> future. Consequently, reliance never ceases. In this way we can affirm with the saints of the ages, "I have been saved, I am being saved, and I shall be saved." (Harper 49-50).

Narrative therapy and Wesleyan theology share the already/not-yet dimension in both the doctrine of salvation and in the process of coauthoring an alternate hope-filled future story. This tension is a witness to the mystery of relationship, despite humanity's firm existence within time and God's existence outside of time.

CoAuthor/Reauthor

Reauthoring assumes that multi-storied individuals are continually authoring and editing life stories into narratives with preferred outcome and meaning (Russell and Carey 25, 38). The process of reauthoring may be nonlinear and slow, may experience a reoccurrence of dominant problems, and may continue outside of the pastoral conversation (Richert, "Stories" 190; White 54; Russell and Carey 38-39).

Triune God, pastor, and parishioner participate as coauthors in the transformation of the presenting problem into a preferred narrative. Coauthoring continually flows "between the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness" (Freedman and Combs 99) in the creation of a new story with new meaning from the old narrative (Dinkins 22). Wesley wrote often about this type of reciprocal relationship between God and the children of God. He believed that because God first works in the individual he or she is able to work out his or her own salvation ("Own Salvation" 490-1) and God continues to "act upon the soul when the soul re-acts upon God" ("Great Privilege" 191). The relationship with God is the key to the coauthoring process (Cook and Alexander, "History" 12), which involves an alternate story cultivating "new imagoes for ourselves" (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32). Offered to individuals is the free will choice of allowing

God, the Author of all motion in the universe (Wesley, "Spiritual Worship" 434), to coauthor an alternate story restoring the *imago* of the children of God.

Change, from a narrative perspective, must take place in a person's core story. Pastoral caregivers represent a community committed to the hope that all individuals can become a new creation (Lester 127) and receive the opportunity to reauthor past, present, and future narratives with the Holy Spirit, in terms of God's promise (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32). Transforming the core inner narrative through grace into a preferred narrative also transforms outward behaviors, placing an individual within the world, and begetting grace in others, leading to more transformation (Headley 17, 129). God's holy love and grace transforms through "a genuine healing process, a real *therapeia psuches*" (Collins 254) similar to the change found during secular mental health counseling sessions often used by Holy Spirit to produce "significant changes in client's lives" (Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Mendes, Matos, Santos, "Tracking novelties" 497).

Alternate Narrative

Construction of an alternate story begins even in the initial stages of pastoral conversations (Freedman and Combs 197). The pastor is always listening for strengths and competencies detailed in unique outcomes within the parishioner's story (Alexander, "Narrative" 115; White and Epston 127). Unique outcomes that are significant to the parishioner are explored using questions about the effects of the problem, allowing the emergence of numerous alternate stories (Morgan 41, 50, 69). The grand Christian narrative affects the stance of the pastor who listens for the movement of God in the alternate story, undaunted by a problem-saturated story and resting in the hope of an ever-present and transforming God (Alexander, "Narrative" 118). Unique moments told

by the parishioner to the pastor offer the possibility of being developed into a strong alternate story (Pembroke 17), and even during the telling and retelling of these exceptions to the problem-saturated story, the parishioner's view of self already begins to change (Richert, "Self" 93).

Acting as a witness to the "thickening" alternate story, the pastor assists the parishioner in coauthoring a "rich description" of unique moments, as remaining connected with the new story can prove difficult (Morgan 15, 74). WNPC begin with enquiries and summaries into the previous conversations, allowing aspects of the alternate story to be retold, gain meaning, and thicken (Freedman and Combs 197). The identification of supportive family, friends, coworkers, or church members who may be present or absent from the session aid in support of the alternate story (Pembroke 17; Morgan 74). Thickening the alternate story often entails the pastor and parishioner identifying other preferred events or stories and construction of meaning around the unique outcomes or preferred stories (Morgan 14; Freedman and Combs 100).

Alternate story finds personification in the life of Jesus: "Indeed the Greatest Story is an alternate story. The story of a child born in a stable in an oppressed nation, his parents fleeing into exile to save his life. Core to the Christian faith is the theme of life-death-life. He is the God of the Alternate Story" (Alexander, "Narrative" 117-121). The ministry of God in the lives of people provides a radically different alternate future narrative that is "located within the much larger story of the Trinitarian God" (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32). These alternate narratives, once named, provide a framework for developing the future narrative God has in mind for each parishioner (Morgan 72). WNPC uses the alternate story to facilitate the transformational work of God's Holy

Spirit (Cook and Alexander, "History" 21), leading to "a vast inward change; a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole manner of our existence" (Wesley, "Great Privilege" 184-85). Parishioners living more and more in the transformational alternate narrative often decide to end WNPC (Freedman and Combs 142-43), indicating a forward movement in the journey toward Christian perfection.

Hope-Filled Future Narrative

Stone and Lester trace the history of future story and hope in their pastoral theology work. In the past, mental health professions, including pastoral care and counseling, have focused largely on the past and present narratives of the individuals seeking help. The advent of narrative therapy brought about an interest into how future projections, including hope, might influence present narratives. Pastoral relationships naturally establish the centrality of hope early on due to the spiritual nature of conversations. This not-yet dimension powerfully shapes the past and present narratives of individuals (259-69; Lester 22, 24).

"Landscape of action questions project the preferred storyline into the future" (Russell and Carey 29). WNPC quickly begins to ask questions or make predictions about the hope-filled future narrative (White and Epston 94; Dinkins 34; Stone and Lester 262). Core narratives, informed partly by future stories, are important to the self-in-process or ongoing identity (Lester 6, 36). Problems may arise when a parishioner experiences a crisis or tragedy that interrupts the anticipated future narrative, perceives shame and guilt in a narrative, or gives up a dysfunctional future narrative (Lester 43, 51, 68, 120, 126). These disruptions may lead parishioners to experience hopelessness or despair in the present (93, 151), often resulting in the development of a problem-saturated story.

Future narratives may be placed on a continuum between hope and despair, and pastors have a responsibility to learn what future projections the parishioner possesses (Stone and Lester 264; Lester 106). Pastors invite parishioners to imagine stories about the reauthoring of the presenting problem in the future, composing narratives that focus more on hope than despair (Stone and Lester 266; Lester 110). Taking place within narrative structures, the hoping process develops "future stories that express our anticipations of the future and, therefore, our hope" (Lester 63). Reauthoring a present narrative looking toward hope resonates with the transformation often found in scripture.

Paul describes the transformation of a problem-saturated narrative into a hope-filled future narrative in Romans 5:3: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope." Authentic narratives are rooted in reality, offering functional stories full of possibilities due to the belief in a trustworthy God who is calling us into the not-yet of an open-ended future (Lester 62, 85-86, 89 Stone and Lester 261). In his sermon, "The Marks of the New Birth," Wesley listed hope as the "second scriptural mark of those born of God" (177). He also anticipated an open-ended future in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

> One ground of many of these mistakes is, the taking every fresh, strong application of any of these scriptures to the heart, to be a gift of a new kind; not knowing that several of these scriptures are not fulfilled yet; that most of the others are fulfilled when we are justified; the rest, the moment we are sanctified. It remains only to experience them in higher degrees. This is all we have to expect. (44)

For Wesley, hope might be rooted in the past and acted out in the present, but energy received for full assurance is from the future glory (Collins 140; Lester 15). Similarly, the journey toward perfection is not bound to a destination in this life (Harper 91; Lester 61).

The promise of eternal life with a creating God (Stokes 118) means that the destination of the hope-filled future narrative is in the promise of perfected future glory (Lester 61, Harper 91).

Letters

Letter writing, featured prominently in Scripture and early Christian traditions, is curiously absent as an intervention in Christian psychotherapy (Blanton, "Introducing Letter Writing" 77), and as a source of data collection in researching the mental health professions (Polkinghorne, "Language" 141). Wesley used letters to apply his theology to life and offer spiritual guidance (Tracy 328). From its inception, narrative therapy has employed letter writing as an extension of the traditional counseling practice of offering clients tasks to complete between sessions in order to facilitate change (Blanton "Introducing Letter Writing" 78; Morgan 103). Pastors have traditionally written letters to parishioners as a means of care. Societal changes in communication such as e-mails, texts, and social media cause letters to be a rarity, increasing the power attributed to a letter following a pastoral conversation. Participation in narrative pastoral conversations prompted Dinkins to observe his own experience with writing letters to parishioners:

> One of the most powerful ways to increase the effectiveness of the narrative conversation is to write letters, or short notes, to counselees after a meeting. I wish I had discovered this many years earlier. Even though writing them takes extra time, these letters are great time-savers. (117)

Letters make a strong statement and tend to continue the coauthoring process (Dinkins 126; Freedman and Combs 208). In a pastoral conversation, a letter places the focus on the coauthored conversation between the client and God, which takes place with and without the pastor (Blanton, "Introducing Letter Writing" 80).

Ethical considerations of letter writing include addressing issues of confidentiality by asking for verbal and written permission to send a letter (Morgan 101-02; Blanton, "Introducing Letter Writing" 80). Ensuring protection of the confidential relationship, the pastor informs the parishioner that usage of general instead of specific language, using the name of the problem designated in conversations by the pastor and parishioner, and that the contents of the letter will be based on the pastor's conversation notes (77-86; Dinkins 119). Anticipation builds for the parishioner's receipt of and reaction to the letter. The pastor asks questions in order to deter "the hallstand drawer phenomenon," in which a carefully crafted letter remains unopened or read once and forgotten about (Fox 28). Letters are often written during the conversation or directly afterward using notes (Blanton, "Introducing Letter Writing" 80; Freedman and Combs 209-10) and after every conversation, or to summarize a number of conversations (Tomm *Narrative Means* ix; White and Epston 155; Freedman and Combs 212). Conversational letters may become a substitute for case records, contain the coauthored story, and automatically become a "shared property" of participants (Fox 28; White and Epston 126). Speculative, respectful, true to the tone of the relationship, letters reflect the personality of the writer, render meaning to a lived experience via narrative, and explore future alternate endings (Blanton, "Introducing Letter" Writing 80; White and Epston 125; Dinkins 118).

Pastoral Conversation Notes

Writing conversation notes helps the pastor to keep track of any transformation in the coauthored narrative and aids in the composition of letters to the parishioner. The pastor begins by asking the parishioner's permission to take notes, explaining that recorded words are found within the conversation, are interpretive rather than evaluative,

are reflections or observations made in a narrative fashion, and are shared in ownership by both pastor and parishioner (Morgan 96; Freedman and Combs 209). Between conversations, the pastor is responsible for keeping conversation notes in a protected location (Parent 15-16). A common note-taking technique in narrative therapy is the recording of the problem-saturated narrative in externalized language on the left side of the page and of any unique outcomes and developing alternate hope-filled future narratives on the right side of the page (Freedman and Combs 206, 209). Freedman and Combs write, "The 'permanent record' comprised by our notes on people's projects can become a sacred text that enshrines a person's preferred story, making it canonical and 'real'" (207). Narrative therapy echoes the Christian tradition of generating sacred worth and meaning through a written oral history, benefitting both pastor and parishioner.

Research Design

Surveying relevant and pertinent literature, the design of the methodology considered both the type of research as well as the narrative philosophies of the project. As a result, the project attempts to offer the parishioner a voice in the research through member checking. The spirit of co-researchers permeated the research project, enriching the findings as pastor and parishioner coauthored hope-filled future stories.

Methodology

The design of the research project entailed a qualitative multiple case study methodology. The literature review revealed poorly defined and articulated "methodology" and "methods" in a number of qualitative studies (Faulkner, Klock, and Gale 71). In order to clearly define the methodology of this qualitative research project, a detailed explanation is offered in the methodology chapter, case study protocol, and

appendices: "[T]he task of articulating and clarifying the features and methods of our studies, of showing how the work is done and what problems become accessible to the study" (Mishler 423). Representing a departure from modernist therapeutic research, the inclusion of the parishioner's interpretation of WNPC as coauthor/coresearcher of therapy knowledge ensures a shared understanding of truth within the meaning-making process of the research project (Denborough 32; Gaddis 5). The research project protects the anonymity of volunteer parishioners while still offering the story of their lives:

> Good outcome research must give a thicker description of clients lives, to use the narrative phrase, so that its applicability (or lack thereof) to a diverse range of clients and problems can be made visible and gaps can be more clearly identified for future work. (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 365)

Qualitative case study research, particularly of the narrative disciplines, allows the observer/researcher to record observations and reflections during and after the data collection in order to understand the experience better (Polkinghorne, "Language" 138) as well as to report transparently the subjective assumptions and conclusions within the data analysis and findings of the research project (Gaddis 7).

Qualitative Research

Prior to the 1990s, the physical and natural sciences reflected a domination of modernist thought in quantitative research commonly conducted in the mental health professions (Roy-Chowdhury 65; Faulkner, Klock, and Gale 73). Narrative and social constructionist epistemologies led to a greater inclusion of qualitative methodological research, nearly doubling the articles published in journals from the 1980s to 1990s (De Haerne 1-12; Faulkner, Klock, and Gale 73). The use of narrative as well as qualitative research is relatively young in the mental health professions, leading to the opportunity

for a richness of understanding and explanation from multiple perspectives (Smith and Sparkes 186; Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 268). Qualitative research is practiced in a variety of disciplines (Morrow 250), and "collection can take many forms, including interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, and video recordings and transcriptions of everyday language" (Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 265). This variety indicates qualitative research will not reflect the level of standardization found in experimental research (Hoshmand 178-86). Lack of standardization leads to a need for carefully planned qualitative research designs with clearly articulated methodology, methods, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and implications (Faulkner, Klock, and Gale 73).

Significantly different from quantitative research, a qualitative researcher's sample is smaller due to the desire to understand a specified experience or phenomenon within participants possessing characteristics defined by the research project (Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 261; Polkinghorne, "Language" 140). Participant sampling is always purposeful and based on the criteria fulfilling the research questions. More important than participation in large numbers are sampling procedures, quality of findings, collection procedures regarding depth and length of interview data, and variety of evidence (Morrow 255).

Therapeutic research surveyed "varied greatly in the number of sessions analyzed" (Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 264), but more than one semi-structured interview is preferred to produce rich data for analysis (261-74; Polkinghorne, "Language" 141). Pastoral counseling theorists recognize the short-term nature of parish counseling, which is generally between five to ten sessions, addressing parishioner's problems in a limited number of sessions (Stone, "Congregational Setting" 181-96). The short-term nature of

pastoral counseling balanced with the desire for the collection of rich data provided the six-conversation design for the research project.

Qualitative researchers answer the questions of validity and reliability by using a variety of procedures, including asking: "For whom is it valid and reliable and for what purpose?" (Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 266) However, determining the validity of research occurs through more than just procedures (266). Credibility grows within the qualitative research project through various means, including prolonged engagement with participants, observations during data collection, expert reviews, and member checks (Morrow 252). Quantitative research might base its evaluation on the number of participants or interviews. In contrast, qualitative research evaluates based on the purpose and methodology within the design of the project (Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 264).

Narrative postmodern thinking informs the practice of qualitative research (Polkinghorne, "Practice" 392-6), resulting in a relational shift to research practices (De Haerne 1-12) and welcoming the rise of the researcher and therapist being the same person, grounded in a "real-life clinical practice" (Tootell 58; Larner, "Family Therapy" 28). Qualitative research allows for subjectivity on the part of the researcher who discloses perspective, positions, assumptions, biases, observations, and hypotheses (Gehart, Ratliff, Lyle 267; Morrow 259-60, Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 364; Hoshmand 178-86).

Quantitative research produces "findings" from "subjects" being "studied" by a "professional" or "expert" (Gaddis 2; DeHaene 1-12). Postmodern qualitative methodology abandons the hierarchical neutral research position for that of a conversational approach with positions described as consultants, coresearchers, or

coparticipants involved in the coproduction and the coconstruction of meaning from the data (Crocket et al. 61-66; Warne and McAndrew 503-9; Gaddis 2; Denborough 33; Morrow 253). Congruent with narrative therapy's decentered position of the therapist, narrative qualitative research promotes inclusion of the parishioners' experience, views, accounts, and stories of conversational therapies (Gaddis 5-6; Tootell 58). Balancing the power and narration of the story between the researcher and participants broadens the primary relational responsibility from that of the researcher accountable solely to academia to inclusion of the experience of the participant in the research project (Warne and McAndrew 503-9; De Haene 5). Qualitative research accounts for the impact of the researcher on the research project but also allows room for the researcher to share how the research project personally transformed the researcher (Warne and McAndrew 503-9; Tootell 58; DeHaene, 1-12; Crocket et al. 61-6).

Student researchers writing a narrative qualitative research dissertation gain the "unique opportunity to describe the study without concern for length" (Morrow 257). Instead of a list of techniques or procedures generalizable to every setting, readers receive an experience implemented in a particular setting in order to expand the repertoire of possible actions within a particular setting (Polkinghorne "Practice" 392-96). A modern scientific mind-set assumed the explanation or solution of anything through research (Seamands, *Ministry* 101-02). The mystery of the Triune God finds a home in postmodern qualitative narrative research, which seeks to relate interpretation of experience. Christian worldview in postmodern conversation occurs only when Christians work within the boundaries and standards of secular mental health professions and

research methodology to discern and explain values and goals that are beneficial to many cultural perspectives (Daalen 229-39).

Prolific writing abounds regarding narrative therapy, but currently very little research supports the effectiveness of narrative therapeutic sessions or conversations, increasing the need to study narrative processes through coconstructed meaning (Avdi and Georgaca 407-19; Etchison and Kleist 61-6). Diane R. Gehart, Dan A. Ratliff, and Randall R. Lyle found a significant amount of unpublished research, perhaps because researchers felt a lack of worthiness for publication (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 363-364). WNPC use qualitative narrative research not solely to prove effectiveness, but also to tell the unique story of mysterious transformation when parishioners encounter the Trinitarian God.

Qualitative Limitations

Research into narrative therapy is new with few studies in existence exploring the effectiveness of the discipline within the mental health professions, perhaps the result of a disconnect between narrative values and the continuing prevalence of positivist "evidence-based research" (Wallis, Burns, and Capdevila, "What is Narrative Therapy" 486-97). One common criticism of outcome-based research is the lack of generalizability (Pote, Stratton, Cottrell, Shapiro, and Boston, 238). Small sample sizes, composition of the sample without concern for representativeness, lack of statistical analyses, leads to a lack of generalizability for qualitative data in the conventional sense: "Presentation of the research may not imply findings generalized to other populations or settings" (Morrow 252). The social constructionist approach of postmodern narrative research designs lacks standardized rules for assessing validity, leaving the assessments subjective an aspect

quantitative research seeks to eliminate (Mishler 418). Widely practiced and theorized, narrative approaches prove difficult to replicate or to capture in practical manuals due to its underlying social constructionist philosophies (Larner, "Family Therapy" 20).

Methodologies all possess limitations and strengths. Qualitative research finds its strengths in the areas not covered by quantitative research including building theory and interpreting experience. Researchers do well to choose appropriate methodologies for the design and purpose of specific projects.

Outcome and Effectiveness

Demand for effective, evidence-based mental health therapies by government, insurance companies, and even academia can limit avenues to learn, provide, or receive narrative therapy (Thomas Campbell 123-9; Stillman and Erbes "Two Languages" 78). While mental health professionals empirically agree about what works in therapy, defining research-based outcomes and effectiveness has proven problematic (Larner "Critical-Practitioner Model" 37; Pote, Stratton, Cottrell, Shapiro, and Boston, 238-39; Stone, "Pastoral Counseling" 37). Difficult to define, positive outcomes in therapy tend to be based on the perception of practitioner and client: "Outcome was defined as a change, self-or therapist-reported, in symptoms or problems. Effectiveness was defined as an outcome that reported improvement in symptoms or functioning, whether assessed by the researcher(s), therapist(s), or client(s)" (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 364). While a wide range of levels or types of evidence creates the perception of effective outcomes in therapy, additional research showing therapeutic change outside of a laboratory setting is needed (339-371). Outcome and effectiveness could increase when mental health professionals receive training not just in technique but also in interpersonal

relationships with clients (Larner, "Critical-Practitioner" 38). Research into mental health professions could reveal a tendency to give responsibility for "successful" treatments to the practitioner and "failing" treatments to a resistant client (Redstone 1). In order to understand what leads to successful outcomes in therapy, research needs multiple methodologies (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt, 341).

Multi-Case Study

Case studies are a variant of qualitative research (Mishler 416) existing in tension: "The case study is probably the most discounted and also the most widely employed research methodology" (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 352). Offering the opportunity to examine the narratives told by individuals in order to make meaning of life experiences (Sensing 150), case studies are narrative in form and content: "Defined as a narrative account of an individual case eliciting information on the client, presenting problem, intervention, and outcome" (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 353). Superior case studies provide sufficient client demographics, conduct follow-ups, and include both the client and researcher perspective on case outcome, thus moving theory into practice (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt 363).

Robert K. Yin details information on designing superior case studies. Yin first advocates a multiple-case design as analogous to conducting multiple experiments on related topics (54, 60). After selecting a multiple-case study design, creation of a protocol is essential to increase reliability by guiding the researcher to conduct consistent research methodologies (79). Like Donald E. Polkinghorne, Yin advocates for more than just one interview as an important source of information (106-07). Adhering to postmodern philosophies, I became a participant-observer, assuming a variety of roles and

participating in the events being studied (111). Case studies prove to be the hardest form of research for a variety of reasons, including absence of routine procedures (67), data collection being more complex than other methodologies (124), and analysis being especially difficult due to poorly defined techniques (126).

Analysis

Rather than analyzing individuals or groups, the unit of analysis in qualitative research is experience (Polkingorne, "Language" 137-45). Analyzing and reflecting on the daily experiences of an individual's story leads narrative researchers to "discover the spiritual dimensions of human experiences as the narratives of our experiences offer us sources of meaning and purpose" (Bruce 327). Data analysis is a complex process, requiring immersion of the case study database through multiple readings to code and identify themes (Morrow 250-60; Gehart, Ratliff, and Lyle 265). Possibilities of data analysis include coding for externalization, unique outcomes, personal agency, and helpful or unhelpful aspects of therapy (O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, and Schuman 483). Reviewing various means of analysis, Evrinomy Avdi and Eugenie Georgaca identify theme analysis, which looks for ways in which core and subordinate themes develop within and across conversations (407-19). They also cite the Narrative Process Coding System developed by Angus, Levitt, and Hardtke, discerning three processes: (1) External narrative sequences describe events; (2) internal narrative sequences describe subjective feelings, sensations, and reactions; and (3) reflexive narrative sequences describe issues of meaning. Avdi and Georgaca conclude by commenting on the newness of analyzing narratives without exploration of usefulness (407-19). Individual cases analyzed separately, as well as the results of multiple cases "can and should be the focus

of a summary report" (Yin 56). A postanalysis conversation allows parishioners to review the narrative and offer additional insights into the research process and findings (Tootell 54-60; Bruce 326). Analysis of data in narrative research is not about generalized broad truths applicable to all, but eliciting local truth from individuals' constructed lives (Stillman and Erbes "Two Languages" 77).

Further Areas of Research

Creation of a treatment manual for WNPC for use by pastors in the parish setting is the next logical step following the dissertation research project. However, such manuals cannot replace experience and are particularly difficult to write because of the minimal structure found in narrative therapy with a decentered approach to conversation (Pote, Stratton, Cottrell, Shapiro, and Boston, 240; Larner, "Critical-Practitioner Model" 38; Stillman and Erbes 74-88). While creating the *Narrative Therapy Trauma Manual: A Principle-Based Approach*, Stillman and Erbes desired to offer a manual that was flexible for therapists, while still meeting the standards of "objective evidence" and giving a voice to the experience of participants ("Two Languages" 74-88). A similar manual for WNPC would be a welcome resource in a pastor's library.

Creativity is a wonderful aspect of narrative therapy. However, for the scope of this research project, many popular practices could not be included. Alice Morgan offers a variety of techniques employed by several sources in the literature review. Any of the following would provide additional areas of interesting research in WNPC: rituals (114), (definitional) celebrations (111), consulting outside consultants (116), certificates (91), declarations (89), outsider-witnesses (121), therapeutic documents (85), and pictures (98). Additionally, further research into the role of externalizing conversations

(O'Connor, Meakes, Pickering, and Schuman 493), participant surveys that explore therapy outcome (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt, 348), and research into why and how therapy works (Larner "Family Therapy" 23-24), could provide rich data.

Qualitative inquiry is moving away from solely using modernity's postpositivist research methodologies following a prescribed, traditional language and format (Morrow 250-60). However, researchers are largely required to "'fit' one's research into the traditional postpositivist standards of institutional review boards, doctoral committees, or journal review boards" (Morrow 255). The language and methodology of this dissertation research attempted to walk the line between the prescribed structure of the dissertation and postmodern narrative qualitative methodologies. Stephen Gaddis accurately sums up the dilemma:

> I immersed myself into the world of meaning-making mostly through my own reading in narrative therapy. I was required in my training program, however, to learn about and practice traditional research methods. It was clear there were significant distinctions in these two traditions. (4)

How well that negotiation occurred in this particular project is for the reader to discern.

Summary

Evident in all aspects of today's culture is the rise of postmodernity. Sadly lacking is the church's response. The church overlooks commonalities with postmodernity because of the ambiguity found in the philosophies (Smith 19, 22) and a prominent identification with secular humanism. Wesley's spiritual descendants should realize his welcome of the opportunity offered by postmodernity: "Within the Christian community, much has been said about the evolution from modernity to postmodernity. Although some topics would be foreign to John Wesley, he would be right at home in talking about a time of transition" (Harper 143). Indeed, the Methodist movement was born because

Wesley provided a voice when the Anglican Church had lost relevance among popular culture. Postmodernity offers a unique opportunity to tell about the difference God has made in the life of the church and in the lives of individuals. These stories are everywhere, constructed telling upon telling, interpretation upon interpretation, being added to the grand Christian narrative that was, and is, and is to come.

Through the embracing of unique narratives, traditions, cultures, and values as equally important within the culture, postmodernism calls the church to be the church (Smith 117): "The postmodern church will be a witness to its contemporary generation by being a peculiar people oriented to a coming kingdom through the practice and languages of a living tradition" (135). Either the church can mourn for a time when Christianity was the supposed ruling religion of the day and time in the United States of America, or it can acknowledge a new opportunity within the culture since "different beliefs are appropriate to different social systems and cultures. These beliefs are inherent in the narratives we use to link the past, present, and futures or our very particular lives" (Bidwell 282). The peculiarity of the Christian witness inherently draws people to the transformative message of a redeeming God in the world. God offers the church the opportunity to provide a language of meaning and purpose to the world.

Practitioners of WNPC will do well to remember Wesley's heart, his all-pervasive theology of grace, which provides ways to engage a postmodern culture (Knight 66):

> Every wise man therefore will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love with a single question. "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" (Wesley, "Catholic Spirit" 302)

Wesley calls all Christians to live after the example of Christ, who treated all cultures and differing points of view with respect. A respectful stance toward differing views that allowed Jesus to present the message of salvation to the rich young ruler who heard the message and, in turn, chose not to follow Christ (Matt.19:16-22). Blessed with the task to present the message, the priesthood of all believers remembers that God gives each individual the free will to respond to the message of salvation or ultimately not to respond. Postmodernity and Wesley remind the church not to "limit the gospel to any particular cause or concern" (Harper 149):

> We are called to serve the present age precisely because it is the only age in which we have the opportunity to live. In a very real sense, the only kind of Christian we can be is a "contemporary Christian."... [I]t means taking a constructive approach, using the building blocks given us by our past and arranging them in ways that speak to the world today. (150).

Christianity cannot live in isolation from the culture, longing for previous ages. Like Wesley, pastors still have the wonderful opportunity to speak the message of a God who can transform a problem-saturated narrative into a hope-filled future narrative in the lives of parishioners. The very same God found within the narrative of Scripture, who transformed lives yesterday, transforms lives still today, and who promises transformation in the stories of tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

New interest in postmodern culture and thought has led to counseling methodologies that share central ideas in common with the Christian faith. Separated by several centuries, White and Epston's narrative therapy and Wesley's theology share a goal of personal transformation in the context of community. In the information age, finding a preferred mental health professional requires only an Internet search engine. Despite ease of accessibility, many parishioners still choose to share their problems with pastors. Parishioners seek counseling from pastors because they represent Christ, are empathetic listeners already familiar with the parishioners' stories, desire the best for parishioners, and typically charge no fees for counseling. However, pastors often refer parishioners seeking pastoral counseling to mental health professionals because they perceive a lack of counseling skills, are uncomfortable with the postmodern counseling methodologies trending in pastoral theology, or simply lack time.

Thus, the problem of the dissertation was arriving at the intersection of narrative therapy and Wesley's theology, particularly Christian perfection, to create WNPC for parish ministry. Discerning whether WNPC served a pastor in coauthoring a parishioner's problem-saturated narrative into an alternate hope-filled future narrative, while going on toward perfection, the design and implementation of the ministry intervention created such an opportunity. The dual purpose of the research was to develop WNPC and to evaluate the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement

toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

Three research questions guided the evaluation of the pastor and parishioners' experience during six WNPC in the parish setting.

Research Question #1

What evidence of change is there, if any, when comparing the hope-filled future narratives coauthored by parishioners and pastor during WNPC with the parishioners' problem-saturated narratives prepared for the intake conversation?

Research question #1 established the presenting problem prior to the intake conversation, as found in the Written Problem-Saturated Narrative, and highlighted changes in the narrative resulting from the ministry intervention when compared to the future story narrative (FSN) written after the fifth conversation. Also evaluated was evidence of Christian perfection in the parishioner's future story. This research question required the comparison of the WPSN brought to the first conversation with the WFN brought to the sixth conversation to determine the parishioner's perspective of an alternate story. The pastoral conversation notes, from the pastor's interpretation, serves as continuing data collection for this research question. conversation transcripts offered a shared interpretation of an alternate coauthored hope-filled future story.

Research Question #2

After the third conversation, in what ways did the pastoral counselor narrative letter facilitate coauthoring of the parishioners' alternate hope-filled future narratives?

A shared practice of Wesley and narrative therapists to encourage hope-filled future narratives through letters informs the development of the second research question. The pastor wrote the pastoral counselor narrative letter to the parishioner based on the information provided in the pastoral conversation notes (PCN). Appendixes C and D respectively contain the PCN and PCNL. Conducting analysis of the data for research question #2 involved analyzing CT for positive indicators of change after the parishioner received the PCNL. In addition, comparing the WPSN to the WFN, found in Appendix E, determined whether the PCNL aided in coauthoring an alternate future narrative.

Research Question #3

What changes, if any, did participation in the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations facilitate in the parishioners' narratives, and, additionally, in the journey toward Christian perfection?

The third research question encompassed the entire ministry intervention and used all of the instrumentation created to collect data for research. Special focus on the CT served to determine what seemed particularly helpful for both the parishioner and the pastor during WNPC.

Population and Participants

Members or regular worship attendees of Ovilla United Methodist Church, referred to as parishioners, populated the ministry intervention. Located in the Central Texas Conference of the United Methodist denomination, parishioners of Ovilla UMC are typically white, middle to upper-middle class. With a steady growth in membership and worship participation, members agree in the lordship of Jesus Christ with an emphasis on evangelism through local and global missions.

Announcements specified the criteria and screened for intervening variables: parishioners must be over the age of 18, must not currently be participating in any form of counseling, and must not currently be taking any psychiatric medications that serve to alter mood. Accordingly, announcements set the expectations of project participation by specifying that WNPC would take place at Ovilla United Methodist Church for one-hour sessions over six consecutive weeks in the fall of 2013. In order to participate in the ministry intervention, up to six parishioners meeting all qualifications for the ministry intervention identified themselves to me via phone or e-mail.

Design of the Study

Research methodology using a qualitative multi-case research design for the ministry intervention was a logical choice. This multiple case study design produced a wide variety of data for analysis, evaluating the effectiveness of six one-hour WNPC between up to six parishioners and myself. The ministry intervention began with a preparatory phase, which included multimedia announcements asking for volunteers, the approval of appropriate church committees for the congregation's participation in the ministry intervention, and an expert review of the case study protocol. Following the preparatory phase, participation in WNPC comprised the data collection phase. Data analysis was the final phase of the research project, concluding with my interpretation of the data in order to answer the research questions.

Instrumentation

Mental health disciplines and practitioners highly value the individuality of the client as well as the creative ability of the practitioner. Creating a rigid outline of six weeks of therapeutic conversations would prove futile for most practitioners. A strict

counseling regime would not maintain the spirit of the discipline, particularly for narrative therapy's practice of coauthoring. Serving as a guide, the case study protocol offers a variety of the types of questions used to construct a WNPC that the pastor and parishioner build according to the shared process of coauthoring. Much like a teacher preparing a lesson plan, or a preacher preparing a sermon, the outline of conversations provides a plan allowing for flexibility in the direction of the conversation, as determined by the pastor and parishioner.

Five instruments developed for the research project collected data. The WPSN, a WFN, a PCNL, PCN, and CT comprised the instrumentation used during the six WNPC. True to narrative theory and research, the instrumentation focused on the pastor and parishioners as coresearchers in the ministry intervention. The interpretation of the researcher is often the sole factor in evaluating the effectiveness of counseling. Thus, the instrumentation developed seeks to reflect the experience of the pastor/researcher and the parishioner in data collection and analysis.

WNPC began with a WPSN. After qualified parishioners self-identified for in the ministry intervention, they received a series of broad prompts aiding in the production of the WPSN. The parishioner read the WPSN to me during the intake session in order to introduce the presenting problem.

After each WNPC, I wrote the PCN. Narrative therapy suggests session notes be written in the form of a letter, and unlike other forms of counseling therapies, the PCN are reflections about the conversation that may be seen by the parishioner upon request. These PCN informed the content I wrote in the third instrument.

Mailed to the parishioner after the third conversation, the PCNL summarized narrative change from my perspective. The PCNL is positive in nature and allowed me to reflect on the problem-saturated narrative, reflect on my conclusions about how the problem might affect the parishioner, and discuss how the story is changing into a hope-filled future narrative. Following the lead of Wesley and narrative therapists, this letter greatly contributed to the WNPC.

Parishioners wrote the WFN at the conclusion of the fifth conversation. Offering the parishioner similar broad prompts given prior to the first session, the parishioner wrote the WFN at home during the week between the fifth and sixth conversations. The hope of the ministry intervention was that the WFN would illustrate the transformed story coauthored by the pastor and parishioner over the previous five weeks of WNPC.

Finally, I produced CT from audio recordings made during each individual session. Writing the CT each week helped me accurately transcribe conversations from the audio recordings. Analyzed at the conclusion of the six-week data collection phase, the CT provided another way to evaluate the effectiveness of WNPC.

Variables

Six sessions of WNPC defined the independent variable for the research project. The case study protocol found in Appendix A contains a series of questions based on my educational background, experience as a parish pastor, and review of current literature. Using the questions found in the case study protocol as a directional guide, I entered into WNPC with up to six self-selected parishioners. While narrative therapy relies on the creative use of language by the therapist and the client, I created generic questions for the protocol. In WNPC, a pastor will serve as a conversation architect, constructing

conversations with a parishioner using words and phrases that are meaningful for each unique presenting problem and coauthored alternate narrative.

Two dependent variables were possible in the ministry intervention. Facilitation of a hope-filled future narrative due to participation in WNPC was the first variable. A second variable was the parishioner's movement toward Christian perfection, entire sanctification, or holiness. Ideally, the parishioner would experience both coauthoring of an alternative future narrative *and* movement toward Christian perfection resulting from participation in six WNPC.

Possible intervening variables informed the design of the project. One intervening variable was absence from a session. If a parishioner missed a session, I made contact by phone the following day to schedule a make-up session. While the first intake conversation specified the unique nature of pastoral counseling, a parishioner's current perceptions or expectations of counseling were also intervening variables.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Descriptions of trustworthiness and authenticity instead of reliability and validity accurately reflect the narrative influence upon the qualitative design within the ministry intervention. Prior to the data collection phase of WNPC, I conducted an expert review. Members of Ovilla United Methodist Church composed a Research Reflection Team (RRT), who reflected the population of the congregation but did not participate in the data collection. Possessing unique skills and knowledge, members of the RRT were also representative of individuals who might self-select to be a part of the ministry intervention. The RRT included a licensed professional counselor (LPC), a stay-at-home wife and mother with a master's degree in family studies, a retired lawyer with a history

of military service, an Obstetrics/Gynecologist , and Ovilla United Methodist Church's lead pastor (in the effort of full disclosure, the lead pastor is also my spouse). Also serving as an expert reviewer was the mentor for this research project and professor of counseling at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Tony Headley.

Each expert reviewer received an e-mail asking for participation in the review process. It also included an attachment explaining included the research project's abstract, problem, purpose, and questions, and a case study protocol comprised of numbered questions used by the pastor to coauthor presenting problems into alternate narratives during WNPC. Appendix F offers an example of the e-mail sent with the attachments. Also included in the attachment was an expert review instrument, found in Appendix G, asking whether or not the protocol questions aligned with the problem, purpose, and research questions, which questions could be used in sessions, and if any questions should be eliminated or added. Meeting one week after receiving the e-mail, the RRT conducted the expert review through discussion. Incorporating additional suggestions from Dr. Headley's e-mailed expert review, I prepared for the data collection phase.

Multiple interpretations of the conversations, or methodological triangulation, produced during the data collection phase raised the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collection and subsequent analysis (Morrow 256). The WPSN and WFN provide an interpretation of the conversations from the parishioner's perspective. Providing an interpretation of the conversations from my perspective are the PCN and the PCNL. CT provide a verbatim of the conversations and offer a view of both the parishioner's and my perspectives within the counseling session.

Member checking ensured authenticity in the data analysis phase and kept with the spirit of collaboration in narrative therapy and narrative research. After analyzing the data, I scheduled an appointment with the parishioners via their preferred method of communication, requesting a meeting in order to read together the preliminary draft of the findings as written in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. This meeting offered the participant an opportunity to reflect on the analysis of data by changing, omitting, or adding to their portion of the case study. We discussed any questions, comments, or suggestions made by the parishioner and reached a mutually satisfactory agreement regarding information and interpretations included in the data analysis. During these meetings, parishioners gained a new role of coresearcher in the ministry intervention, ensuring the parishioners' interpretation of WNPC in the research project. Member checking serves to authenticate the reliability of the research project, ensuring the data analysis maintained the same spirit of coauthorship used in the data collection phase.

Maintenance of internal authenticity entailed my collecting data in a consistent and conscientious manner. Specifications in data collection, the case study protocol, and the material found in the appendixes point to a qualitative multi-case study methodology and allow for replication in another parish setting with different pastors and parishioners. Developing and following a case study protocol increased the trustworthiness of the case study. The development of a separate database from the case study report also increased the reliability of the research project. Instrumentation generated and saved on a personal computer also received inclusion in the database, particularly the CT but also the PCN and PCNL. Converting the WPSN and WFN to PDF documents allowed for saving these instruments in the case study database, returning originals to the parishioners. A thumb

drive dedicated to the research project, and accessible only by me, contained the case study database. God-given uniqueness given to each individual and narrative leads to less reliability than that of a quantitative methodology. Offering a rich description of the data analysis allows the reader to determine the external authenticity, discerning whether the ministry intervention is transferable to another unique parish setting.

Data Collection

Asbury Theological Seminary approved the research project through a committee, which included a representative from the Doctor of Ministry office, Dr. Tony Headley, who was also the mentor for the research project, as well as the internal reader, Dr. Anne Gatobu. Upon approval, I sent out the expert review materials found in Appendixes F and G and scheduled a meeting for one week later with the Research Reflection Team. After incorporating all viable and applicable suggestions from the expert reviews into the case study protocol and following approval from appropriate church committees, data collection began.

Presentations about the ministry intervention to the governing committees of Ovilla United Methodist Church began the approval process for the research project. Each presentation concluded when I requested permission for the research project. The *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2012, offers instruction for the operation of the Administrative Council:

> It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life. It shall envision, plan, implement, and annually evaluate the mission and ministry of the church. (178)

In the early fall of 2013, a meeting was set with members of the Administrative Council. Membership of the administrative council is composed of the chairperson of the council,

all chairs of committees and ministries, several at-large representatives, and the pastor of the church (179-80). Using the brief informational material found in Appendix H, I made a short presentation about WNPC, and answered any questions about the ministry intervention. Members of the administrative council unanimously and enthusiastically voted to offer the intervention as a ministry opportunity for parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Upon approval from the administrative council for the ministry intervention, I next sought approval for use of the building from the church trustees. The *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* charges the following responsibility: "[T]he board of trustees shall have the supervision, oversight, and care of all real property owned by the local church and of all property and equipment acquired directly by the local church..." (745). Each trustee member heard a presentation about the ministry intervention accompanied by brief informational material previously given to the Administrative Council (see Appendix H). Following the distribution of materials and the presentation, I answered any questions asked by members of the church trustees. After satisfactorily answering questions, I requested the use of two rooms for the purposes of the ministry intervention.

Sunday school room one was my first request, to be used as a waiting room in order to protect the anonymity of participants. Located in the adult education annex behind the fellowship hall and current sanctuary, this classroom possesses a single entrance from a back parking lot, increasing the parishioner's maintenance of anonymity.

Another classroom served as the space in which the WNPC took place. I requested the use of the young adult Sunday school room because it is located in the

fellowship hall, with the entrance only a short walk through the shared parking lot from Sunday school room one. Privacy, ambiance, and comfort were other factors in selecting this room for the conversations. Recently renovated with modern couches and soothing wall colors, the room provides an intimate setting with sufficient tables for audio recording, drinks, or taking notes. A chair for the pastor, visible through a small window in the door of the room, provided accountability and assurance from any allegations of impropriety. Outside the sight line of the window, a chair in the corner of the room protected the parishioners' anonymity.

Unanimously approving the use of these two Sunday school rooms for the research project, the board of trustees thereby endorsed the use of the church for the ministry intervention. After gaining approval for use of the rooms, I contacted the church's administrative assistant to reserve the rooms for six consecutive weeks in the fall of 2013. Upon completion of the data analysis, I scheduled the same two Sunday school rooms for member checking by the parishioner and me. The administrative assistant reserved the rooms in writing on the church's calendar and notified the proper person to adjust the temperature appropriately during the conversations. Requesting the omission of the room reservations from published calendars in church bulletins and newsletters added another method of protecting the anonymity of parishioners.

Approval from appropriate committees and reservations of space led to the announcements of the ministry intervention on the following Sunday at Ovilla United Methodist Church. Communication with the congregation regarding the need for qualified participants occurred using a multimedia approach. Notifying parishioners about the ministry intervention, I made verbal announcements during the 8:30 a.m. and

11 a.m. Sunday morning worship services. Appendix I contains the script for the Sunday morning worship verbal announcement. Sunday morning worship guides contained bulletin inserts detailing the ministry intervention, and Appendix J offers the insert template. Before and after Sunday morning worship, a PowerPoint slide detailing the ministry intervention was included in the midst of other church announcements via wall projection. An example of the PowerPoint slide of the projected announcement is in Appendix K. Using the church's automated phone messaging system, I sent a message asking for qualified participants on the Monday following the beginning of the Sunday morning announcements. The script for the phone message is in Appendix L. Communicating the research project's need for parishioners, an article appeared in the church's monthly e-newsletter. A copy of the article is in Appendix M. Six parishioners volunteered to be a part of the ministry project, concluding all weekly and monthly announcements.

First verifying the individual was above the age of 18, was not currently in any other form of counseling, and was not currently on any psychiatric medication, I accepted six volunteers. Self-selected parishioners formed a sample representing the demographics of the congregation. I gave each volunteer parishioner an introductory welcome letter, which included the prompts for writing the WPSN. Additionally, I requested the parishioner's preferred method of communication for scheduling sessions. The parishioner information sheet found in Appendix N lists the parishioner communication options, including phone call, e-mail, or text. Next, we scheduled appointments to enter into WNPC. Scheduling conversations an hour and fifteen minutes apart allowed me to write the PCN at the conclusion of each session.

Initial greetings began the first conversation followed by my reading aloud the Pastor/Parishioner Informed Consent Covenant (see Appendix Q). Participation was indicated by both individuals signing the covenant, with the parishioner choosing a pseudonym for the purposes of case study reporting. Next, I transitioned the conversation by listening to the parishioner read the previously prepared WPSN aloud. I asked clarifying questions similar to those in the protocol until both pastor and parishioner believed they had a shared understanding of the presenting problem. Fifteen minutes before the conversation ended, I began to ask questions regarding what the parishioner hoped to gain from participating in WNPC, as well as how the parishioner hoped that the WPSN might change in the future. The conversation ended with a prayer.

Conversation two began when I enquired with the parishioner about new or lingering thoughts from the intake session. Externalizing and deconstructing the parishioner's problem and the effects of the problem in the life of the parishioner continued in the second conversation. The questions used for externalization and deconstruction were based on the questions found in the protocol, but the language was customized to fit the parishioner's unique narrative. Again, the conversation ended with a prayer.

Similar to the prior conversations, the third week began when I asked if the parishioner had a desire to discuss new thoughts regarding previous sessions. Externalization and deconstruction of the problem-saturated narrative continued while also looking for exceptions: experiences in which the problem did not exert as much influence over the parishioner. Using questions found in the protocol, we began the process of building upon those exceptions to coauthor an alternate narrative with the

parishioner. Before closing the session with a prayer, I asked for permission to write a letter to the parishioner in the following week.

In the days between conversations three and four, I reviewed the PCN from each of the previous sessions. Using the literature review, I determined guidelines for writing narrative letters and created a broad outline for writing letters in the spirit of WNPC. After reviewing the outline for PCNL in the protocol, Appendix A, I wrote each parishioner a PCN and mailed it to the designated address by Wednesday of the third week.

Following the pattern established in previous sessions, I opened the fourth session conversation by asking the parishioner for any new ideas, or about the PCNL received during the week. After the initial opening, we began to enhance the description of the coauthored future narrative using appropriate examples of questions found in the case study protocol. Prayer closed the session.

Again, I introduced the fifth session by asking if the parishioner had any lingering or new thoughts from the previous week before moving into the continuation of coauthoring the future narrative. In particular, I asked questions about how people in the parishioner's life might react to this new future narrative and whether or not the parishioner had experienced any new behaviors, growth, or change due to participating in WNPC. Before closing the fifth conversation, the parishioner received a new set of writing prompts. Participation in five WNPC offered the parishioner the opportunity to write the alternate future narrative from the current perspective. Reminding the parishioner to bring the WFN to the sixth and final session, a prayer closed the session.

Opening the final WNPC, the parishioner read the WFN. I asked questions about the two narratives, focusing on any differences found in the comparison between the WFN and the WPSN. In order to understand the parishioner's perceived future narrative, I also asked questions about ways in which the WFN may change in the future. Using the appropriate questions in the case study protocol, we spent the final fifteen minutes of the sixth session talking about the parishioner's experience and interpretation of WNPC. Thanking the parishioner for participating in the ministry intervention and closing with a prayer, the final conversation concluded.

Collection of data concluded with the sixth conversation, and I moved into the data analysis phase. When a thorough analysis of the data was completed, I began to write the case study report. Upon completion of the working draft of the case study report, I reserved the same Sunday school rooms used in the data collection phase and invited each parishioner to view the working draft. We reviewed the working draft together, focusing solely on the portions applicable to that particular parishioner in an effort to protect anonymity. After each parishioner had individually reviewed the working draft, incorporation of the necessary changes from the working draft into a final draft.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the collected data began by using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti to code for repeating words, phrases, and generalized themes within the WNPC. I analyzed the data looking for patterns that explained how, when, or why change occurred in a parishioner's story. Additionally, I compared each individual case with the others, looking for a thread of similarity among all the cases.

Before beginning formal analysis, I read all of the material in the case study database on different days in order to gain fresh perspective and insight. This time served to familiarize myself with the material, allowing me to move from the role of pastoral counselor and to the role of researcher. Familiarized again with the content of the data, I analyzed each individual instrument in the case study database for themes, categories, and patterns. This exploratory analysis of theme building began a search for similarities within each individual case. By comparing the six cases, I began to discern any similarly emerging themes.

Comparison of the WPSN and the WFN prompted me to look for change between the narratives. I paid close attention to positive reauthoring of the parishioner's narrative when analyzing the data. Noting any changes in the parishioner's relationship with God due to The parishioner's CT indicated any change in relationship with God resulting from participation in WNPC. This first analysis served to answer research questions #1 and #3.

The PCNL contained the data pertaining to research question #2, which I read to begin analysis. While the letter was still fresh in the my mind, I analyzed the WFN and CT to determine whether the parishioner mentioned the PCNL in any sessions. Additionally, I examined the instrumentation, looking for any indication from the parishioner that the narrative had due to receiving the PCNL.

Data analysis of all five instruments within the case study database searched for conversational elements or questions that elicited change within the parishioner's narrative. I also examined all instrumentation for the parishioner's interpretation of anything resembling movement toward Christian perfection, sanctification, or holiness.

This final step of analysis on the single case level attempted to answer research question #3.

Self-selection of volunteers informed the analysis of the data collected. I assumed that volunteer participants were motivated to coauthor a problem-saturated narrative into a coauthored hope-filled future narrative, which might not always be true of pastoral counseling occurring outside of a research project. Volunteer participants who were regular church attenders may have already been familiar with Wesleyan theology and had a desire to grow closer to God. Additionally, parishioners who chose to be a part of the ministry intervention may have self-selected because the pastor's wife designed and implemented the research project. Parishioners may have possessed a positive regard for me, more easily progressing WNPC. My personal narrative, biographical information, relationship to the congregation, and style of pastoral counseling played a role in the collection, interpretation, and analysis of the data.

Styled in narrative form, I wrote each individual case study report. Upon writing the analysis of the individual cases, I scheduled final meetings with each parishioner. At the meeting, we evaluated the coauthored alternative narrative for accuracy. Modification of perceived discrepancies in the analysis occurred in a mutually agreeable manner for the parishioner and me. As a final step in the individual case study analysis, I made the appropriate changes to the individual narratives. After analyzing all of the data from the cases and comparing individual narratives, I then compared all of the cases with one another, analyzing any consistencies or inconsistencies. A final narrative analysis detailed the similarities and differences within the individual case studies as well as any theoretical implications for the research project.

Ethical Procedures

Individuals within the congregation of Ovilla United Methodist Church and their openness in sharing sacred stories were at the heart of the ministry intervention. This willingness to share what might be painful, embarrassing, or shameful stories means that this research project entered into sacred space within the lives of individuals. Due to the sensitive nature of the research project, I gave careful thought regarding the best way to protect participants in the ministry intervention.

Possibly withholding a beneficial ministry from parishioners in the event of more than six qualified self-selected volunteers was a concern of the research project. I offered parishioners volunteering after the six participant limit was met a business card to an LPC accepting referrals from Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Announcements made in the church detailing the ministry intervention assured interested participants of two things: maintenance of confidentiality throughout participation in WNPC no receipt of fees for services rendered from the parishioner. Unlike secular mental health professions, in pastoral counseling pastor and parishioner maintain a relationship within church and community settings outside of confidential conversations. I made every effort to engage with the participating parishioners in church and community settings as normally as possible without giving indication that the parishioner was one of the volunteers for the ministry intervention.

While not a member, I adhered to the American Association of Pastoral Counselors Code of Ethics, found in Appendix O, making one exception regarding the maintenance of records. In keeping with the standards of Asbury Theological Seminary's best practices in doctoral research, after successfully defending the dissertation research,

I destroyed the case study database using an online shredding program, thereby permanently erasing the data. During the first intake conversation, I informed parishioners that instrumentation would be destroyed, ensuring confidentiality after the publication of the dissertation.

Assurance of anonymity during the ministry intervention occurred at the intake conversation when I read the pastor/parishioner informed consent covenant. This covenant, found in Appendix Q, covers anonymity, voluntary participation, and correspondence. The covenant also details the pastor's legal, moral, and ethical responsibility to report any perceived immediate threat to harm self or others to the proper authorities. Additionally, parishioners selected a pseudonym for the reporting of the data analysis, and I changed identifying details of the parishioner's problem in reporting of data.

Rev. Lee Trigg also signed an informed consent form, found in Appendix R, before beginning the interview regarding his experience of using narrative therapy within the local church. First, Trigg agreed to have our interview recorded and our conversation used for the dissertation project, resulting in my transcribing the interview. Then, I sent a copy of the transcript and a draft of the first chapter of the dissertation to Rev. Trigg to check for accuracy and offer his approval via e-mail. Finally, Trigg responded positively to the transcript and the dissertation draft via e-mail on 30 January, 2013.

Ethical procedures implemented during the ministry intervention were subject to review by the Research Reflection Team. The RRT considered each element of the ministry intervention, including ways in which the research project would benefit the church and the parishioners through proper procedures. Ensuring a safe physical,

spiritual, and ethical environment offered opportunity for the Holy Spirit to coauthor alternate hope-filled narratives with the parishioner and me. The research project owes a great deal to the members of the Research Reflection Team, whose primary goal was guiding the ministry intervention while maintaining my best interests as well as those of the parishioners and the congregation of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

Leadership of local congregations can be a tough endeavor for ministers who face a variety of issues. Among the problems a parish pastor might encounter is the perceived lack of ability to provide quality pastoral counseling for parishioners, as well as a lack of time. Additionally, pastoral counseling at the seminary level frequently combines secular techniques, prayer, and perhaps some Scripture. Thus, the focal problem of this ministry intervention was the construction of an intersection between narrative therapy and Wesley's theology with a particular emphasis upon Christian perfection. Creation of this uniquely named intersection, WNPC, combines accessible secular counseling techniques with accessible pastoral theology and fulfills the purpose of the parish research project using a case study design methodology.

WNPC offer ministers, particularly within the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, the opportunity to become a conversation architect by building a framework for theological thinking during pastoral counseling conversations. The dual purpose of the research was to develop WNPC and to evaluate the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Participants

Announcements using various methods of communication began on Sunday morning through Ovilla United Methodist Church and ended on Wednesday of the same week due to the prompt response of more volunteers than allowed by the research design.

Nine parishioners from Ovilla United Methodist Church responded to announcements regarding the ministry intervention via phone call, text, or e-mail. The order in which parishioners volunteered determined their participation in the research project. First to volunteer were three male and three female participants. However, one male parishioner experienced a sharp decline in physical health before the intervention started, forcing him regrettably to withdraw from participating in WNPC. Thus, four women and two men, ranging in age between 50 and 70, comprise the case study (see Table 4.1). Interested volunteers ineligible to participate due to the limitation of the research project design received a referral to the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) endorsed by the pastor of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Table 4.1. Age of Parishioners by Decade (N=6)

Gender	Age Range n	
	50-60	60-70
Female	1	3
Male	0	2

Each parishioner chose a pseudonym upon signing the pastor/parishioner informed consent covenant. The parishioners completed all six WNPC, as well as the member-checking process. A strength of the research project design was the employment of member or participant checking, in which parishioners were given the opportunity to read, and possibly amend, individual case study reports before they were reviewed by the Research Reflection Team, editors, dissertation mentor, and internal reader. Member-checking was implemented to promote the spirit of coresearch between pastoral

counselor and parishioner. However, for case study reporting, a restraint of the design is the limited ability to share specific or unique details of individual narratives. Particularly because of the member-checking phase, revealing specific details about the parishioners as individuals would serve to identify the participants to each other within the midsize congregation, as well as within the small-town community.

Although succinctly offering specific details in the form of a table or graph is not possible in order to protect the identity of the parishioners, several commonalities among the participating parishioners influence the narration of the findings. None of the participants belonged to an ethnic minority. Parishioners had all graduated from high school or the equivalent. At least two participants possessed an undergraduate or graduate degree. All of the parishioners had entered into marriage at least once. Three people were married at the time of the intervention, and three were single. Divorce was also a common thread within the narratives. Two parishioners had experienced divorce once, while three had been divorced multiple times. Only one person had experienced marriage but not divorce. Alcoholism or addiction issues on the part of a spouse, or former spouse, were a component within at least three of the narratives. Each parishioner had between one and three children, and several had been, or currently were, stepparents. Half of the participants fondly mentioned their grandchildren. Two parishioners had experienced both the death of a spouse as well as the death of a child. Another common theme throughout the narratives was employment; all of the parishioners had worked outside of the home at one time or another. Several were contemplating retirement within a few years, and two were already retired.

Completion of the conversations moved the research project from the data collection to the data analysis phase. Thirty-six transcripts produced from audio recordings of the conversations comprise the raw data. Identification of reoccurring themes within each transcript led to the development of codes used for the purpose of analysis. Based loosely on elements of narrative therapy, pastoral counseling, and Wesleyan theology, these ten codes also pertained to the research questions. A theme surfaced when four parishioners, unprompted by questioning and independent of one another other, expressed a desire to experience a greater level of God's peace within in their lives. Recurring themes within the transcripts led to the creation of codes. The appropriate coding of transcripts produced tables. Cells within each table indicate the number of times a particular code occurred within the conversations of the parishioners.

Four segments contain the research findings. First is each parishioner's participation in the WNPC via a table as well as a narrative case study summary. Results found in the tables throughout the chapter represent the number of times a particular code occurred during a conversation. Next, the second section presents the three research questions that guided the research project. The third section contains additional findings from the ministry intervention. Finally, a brief summary of the project's major findings closes the chapter.

Case Study—Elizabeth

Obsessive thoughts about previous romantic relationships prompted a strong desire within Elizabeth to "be okay" in her relationship with Jesus Christ. Elizabeth and I have done things socially outside of our participation in church, and she had sought pastoral counseling from me about a year ago. Recognition of the multilayered pastoral

relationship, often present when counseling parishioners, led Elizabeth to share her initial apprehension upon volunteering for WNPC. However, maintenance of appropriate boundaries at crucial times quickly set her mind at ease. Our conversations progressed with the benefit of an easy shorthand.

Elements of Elizabeth's narrative began to change quite quickly, even during the first conversation. Toward the end of the second conversation, Elizabeth was talking about her practice of listening for God to speak to her in order to discern the ways that God was leading her. At that time, I felt a strong prompting by the Holy Spirit to ask Elizabeth the question, "What if God is maybe, not trying to speak to you as much as he's wanting you to know, 'I just want to be with you. And you are okay.'" Elizabeth responded with, "You are going to make me cry." As we both sat in the silence of the moment, we felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in a real and powerful way. In our last session, Elizabeth reflected that the week following a spiritual high, feeling that God had walked in that room to speak to her.

Continuing conversations mostly discussed the practice of being okay in the Lord and spending at least one minute each day quietly just being with God. Week three brought another powerful experience during this quiet time when Elizabeth pictured herself sitting at the feet of God with her head on his lap, letting God care for her. This image of God's loving care was another Holy Spirit moment for Elizabeth.

Not every week brought about such profound experiences in Elizabeth's story or even rapid narrative changes. Some days, she was unable to spend even one minute with God. Some weeks she came in and said she had not really thought about conversations from the previous weeks. Apathy for her job never lessened throughout the six

conversations even though Elizabeth made several behavioral attempts to change that part of her story. However, she did experience a lessening of the obsessive thoughts that prompted her volunteering for the project. When such thoughts entered her mind, she was able to "bounce them out" quickly. Another church member expressed to Elizabeth feelings of unworthiness as a child of God, and she entered into a conversation, pointing out all the ways in which all people are worthy of God's unconditional love. By the end of their conversation, she realized once again that she was worthy as well. In our last conversation, Elizabeth stated her skepticism of the level of change that could take place in six weeks, but closed by saying, "I feel like we've done a lot." (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Conversation Codes by Week—Elizabeth

Conversation Codes	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
Changes in behavior	3	7	11	25	14	7
Changes in perception of story	3	6	5	17	11	7
Changes in relationship with God	0	9	9	8	7	7
Experience of WNPC	0	0	1	3	2	6
Externalization	2	1	0	8	3	4
Free from problem	7	3	6	23	3	11
Future narrative	11	11	7	18	10	10
Hope	2	2	0	10	0	0
PCNL	0	0	0	3	0	0
Peace	6	3	1	3	0	1
Problem-saturated narrative	14	3	0	7	6	1

Case Study—Gregory

Even though he was skeptical, Gregory volunteered to participate in WNPC. A betrayal several decades ago by a clergy person as well as the experience of a prolonged loss of freedom informed, but did not dominate, Gregory's narrative. Upon a nudging from God, "Gregory, you can trust this person," he volunteered for the project. Gregory knew "that it was what I needed right then, at that moment, ... for me to start looking at my life in a different way, different things, where I'm going." Believing in God's perfect timing, he welcomed the opportunity to respond upon hearing the WNPC announcement.

Perceiving that he had always been an angry man, Gregory's presenting problem was a desire for a better relationship with Christ with an accurate assessment that anger contributed to his lack of relationship with Christ. Initial conversations were somewhat of a struggle as we attempted to coauthor past, present, and future narratives of Gregory's anger into something more positive.

Five days prior to our fourth conversation, a police officer stopped Gregory for a nonworking tail light, unnecessarily harassing a cooperative Gregory. He was still angry about the situation during our conversation almost a week later. I asked if Gregory thought the officer was still thinking about him five days later, and we decided probably not. Anger served to keep Gregory tied to the very person from whom he wanted to be free, a common theme throughout the majority of his life.

After the conversation ended, he left for a camping trip with only his dog. God worked in powerful ways on that camping trip, allowing Gregory to witness God's perfection in nature, experiencing Christian fellowship with fellow campers at surrounding campsites, and renewing Bible study and prayer times. An introspective

thinker, Gregory also pondered our conversation about the police officer. "I said, 'Gosh.' I said, 'She's right.' You know? I said, 'Why should I take this guy home with me every day and let him beat me up over and over and over again?'"

Following the camping trip, changes in behavior and perception began to happen for Gregory. He no longer awoke with an expectation that he would find anger on a daily basis. Instead, Gregory began to feel compassion toward a former romantic partner. Bible study and prayer time increased. Passionate about a particular ministry, he made steps in order to pursue that calling. Having previously experienced secular counseling, Gregory reflected on our time together: "[Y]ou didn't coach, you didn't coerce, it was more of an exchange than anything else. And ... I felt comfortable with that." Gregory also thought that six weeks was probably not enough time to deal with all his issues , and we agreed to the possibility of further conversations after completion of the research as determined by the design of the study (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Conversation Codes by Week—Gregory

Conversation Codes	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
Changes in behavior	0	4	2	4	11	4
Changes in perception of story	0	3	3	5	11	5
Changes in relationship with God	3	1	0	3	5	4
Experience of WNPC	0	2	1	1	5	8
Externalization	0	1	1	3	1	1
Free from problem	1	3	0	3	9	6
Future narrative	6	5	3	3	4	5
Hope	1	0	0	0	0	0
PCNL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peace	2	1	0	2	1	2
Problem-saturated narrative	11	9	3	6	2	1

Case Study—Laura

Presenting a lack of communication as problematic, Laura yearned for something more within her marriage. As the conversations progressed over the weeks, Laura also expressed a deep desire for grandchildren, even though that anticipated future story might never actualize within her life. When asked what prompted her to volunteer for the project, Laura responded that she had an interest in research and that , she thought she ought to get to know me better and had long desired to know me more.

Laura's motivation for participation prompted a relationship negotiated and defined by clear pastoral counseling boundaries sought solely to reauthor her present and future story through focusing on communication in her marriage, as well as the role grandchildren may or may not play in her life. During prior counseling years before, Laura had grown to appreciate the secular model of evaluation and prescriptive homework, expressing a desire for a similar model from our time together. One of the benefits of viewing parishioners as coresearchers within the ministry intervention was the ability to discuss the narrative therapy model and my role as a conversation architect. Because I had also studied solution-focused or brief counseling, and due to the close relationship between that and narrative therapy, I made a concerted effort to offer Laura tasks at the end of each conversation that would facilitate the process of restorying her present narrative into a future narrative filled with hope.

A deeper understanding of Laura's willingness to carry out homework assignments led to changes of behavior and perception within her story. Her biggest homework assignment was sharing with her husband how much she deeply values his commitment to her child from a previous marriage. Additionally, Laura began to notice

anew her husband offering compliments, and she became intentional again at showing appreciation toward her husband in new ways. A God-given gift is Laura's commitment to children in need. Unable to take the place of biological grandchildren, she did have a shift in perception that a grandmother-like influence and relationship with the children God places in her life could be very fulfilling. Laura also talked about all of the ways in which her husband has influenced who she is, and a realization grew that this influence was due to a level of emotional connectedness within the relationship.

When asked to reflect upon her experience in WNPC, Laura responded, "I don't want to say this, because I don't want to, ... I don't want to hurt your feelings. ... I don't know that a whole lot of things have changed." Similarly, Laura's final written narrative acknowledged the need to summon up courage to tell her husband about the desire for deeper levels of communication within their relationship. However, she remained uncertain of his reaction or his ability to connect on a deeper level. Choosing instead "not to upset the applecart," Laura acknowledged her life was very good.

Table 4.4. Conversation Codes by Week—Laura

Conversation Codes	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
Changes in behavior	0	6	3	3	3	1
Changes in perception of story	0	0	1	4	0	4
Changes in relationship with God	0	0	0	0	0	1
Experience of WNPC	0	4	0	2	1	7
Externalization	0	0	0	0	0	0
Free from problem	0	0	0	0	0	1
Future narrative	5	3	2	2	3	3
Hope	0	0	0	0	0	1
PCNL	0	0	0	1	0	0
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problem-saturated narrative	9	7	8	7	1	3

Case Study—Mary

Several decades ago, Mary instantly lost a child who was just beginning her adult life. Through a series of unfortunate events, the people in Mary's life did not allow her to grieve appropriately for the loss of that child. Mary reminisced about driving to a Christian bookstore in order to find some material dealing with grief. While there, the assisting clerk asked kind questions that led to Mary sobbing in the stranger's arms, the first time anyone had allowed her to experience her profound sadness.

Repressed grief had done nasty things to Mary in the years since. She went through cycles in which she was badgered and nagged by thoughts, particularly at night, questioning her parenting of the child who died. These cycles would come and go throughout the years. Mary had been in the midst of a rather bad cycle, lasting over a year, upon hearing the announcement about a need for volunteers for WNPC.

As Mary read her story during our first conversation, I knew any good pastor would not ask narrative questions for the purpose of a research project that would lead to a degree. Mary deserved, after all these years, a safe space to grieve the loss of her child. She needed to grieve the parenting mistakes, to grieve not buying the formal dress, to grieve not doing more to stop her child from events leading up to her death, to grieve the wedding and grandchildren that never would be, to grieve lost girl talk, to grieve woman-to-woman talk, to grieve the first wrinkle and the first gray hair. As she was leaving, Mary said, "Do you really think that this thing that you're doing is not sent by God? And, maybe it is sent for me"? Such powerful words set the tone for our time together.

Mary came to the second conversation a bit embarrassed about the depth of her grief. However, during the week between conversations, Mary had performed an act that

was significant to her. Taking a favorite picture of her deceased child, Mary placed it in a frame and hung it on a wall dedicated to family photos. The smiling picture of her child served as a reminder that she was an excellent mother and that her daughter had loved her very much. Those were the thoughts she would choose to hold onto, thoughts from God and not the badgering, nagging thoughts from the devil.

Building on that act, our conversations expanded her past, present, and future story to include that she was, and is, an excellent mother who had done the best she could with the tools she had. Mary chose to reach out to her living family with acts of loving-kindness to make their lives easier.

> "The pain of the loss...is still there. But, the raw slashing...and your emotions gushing out...is not bad, maybe? Maybe I laid all of my misery and sadness at the cross. And, only then can...if I lay it at the cross, can God turn it into something beautiful."

The transformation at the foot of the cross was partially due to participation in WNPC.

Table 4.5. Conversation Codes by Week—Mary

Conversation Codes	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
Changes in behavior	6	10	16	8	1	9
Changes in perception of story	10	9	16	9	0	14
Changes in relationship with God	6	0	5	3	0	10
Experience of WNPC	0	0	0	1	0	2
Externalization	0	0	2	1	0	6
Free from problem	12	10	14	5	1	13
Future narrative	11	8	2	1	0	9
Hope	13	8	1	1	0	2
PCNL	0	0	0	3	0	0
Peace	3	0	2	0	0	5
Problem-saturated narrative	13	8	6	2	0	9

Case Study—Missy

Unexpectedly, Missy's husband of many years died over a year ago, leaving Missy with a lot of anger and blame toward her husband and the careless decisions that led to his death. Expressing surprise during the first conversation that Missy volunteered for WNPC, I shared with her my perception that she had grieved appropriately for her husband and had moved on accordingly. Missy had indeed moved on with many aspects of her life, and her faith in God was unwavering. Several times, she emphasized that she never blamed God for the loss of her husband.

However, Missy was still very angry with her husband and wanted to understand the decisions he made leading up to his death. Narrative questions attempting to reimagine Missy's anger, the forgiveness process, or understanding of her husband's decisions often prompted Missy to respond teasingly, "I don't know, Christie. If I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't be here." We would chuckle together, and I would move on to some different types of questions.

Anger's presence within her story was keeping Missy from what she really desired, which was God's peace. Throughout our conversations, a continuum developed from anger to peace as we talked about ways the anger kept her from God's peace. Weeks following found changes in Missy's behavior, and perception. Significant changes in Missy's behavior and perception of her story occurred during weeks two through four, and Missy was excited to share those changes in the conversations. First, Missy received a phone call from a relative who is also a pastor of a United Methodist congregation. Upon relating participation in this research project, the pastor told Missy that she would never be able to understand the decisions her husband made that led to his death. Missy

also picked up a small book on grief that talked about creating a new normal when moving forward with life after loss. Lastly, Missy began to apply for employment opportunities that had previously been present only as part of her future story but fulfilled her desire to help others in situations similar to her own.

Together, we coauthored a past, present, and future story around the new normal, including seeking out the support and company of friends and neighbors regarding household decisions, travel, church events, and companionship. In our final conversation, Missy stated that she had accepted that she would never understand her husband's decisions that led to his death. Writing her new normal included an ongoing sadness surrounding the anticipated future story she and her husband are now unable to write. A previous experience of secular counseling was one in which she was asked, "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Expressing her appreciation for WNPC, Missy valued the suggestions we created together, the exchange of ideas, and questions that (frustratingly) helped her to think about her future (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Conversation Codes by Week—Missy

Conversation Codes	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6
Changes in behavior	1	5	1	10	12	10
Changes in perception of story	3	3	7	11	14	15
Changes in relationship with God	1	4	7	4	1	1
Experience of WNPC	0	1	1	2	7	14
Externalization	9	8	3	3	3	8
Free from problem	1	13	2	11	17	11
Future narrative	8	15	7	10	15	14
Hope	0	1	1	2	13	7
PCNL	0	0	0	1	0	0
Peace	6	9	3	3	1	3
Problem-saturated narrative	8	7	2	2	2	5

Case Study—Tag

Tag volunteered for participation in WNPC for a variety of reasons. His presenting problem-saturated narrative detailed a commitment to his wife and their children and grandchildren and a commitment to faith and involvement in the local congregation of Ovilla United Methodist Church. Frequently, Tag had to choose between pursuing jobs that he believed fulfilled his calling and passion to serve Christ or accepting employment that was not exciting or a calling but paid the bills. These decisions resulted in approaching the age of the societal-prescribed norms for retirement without being able financially to retire. Friends, colleagues, peers, and church members were beginning to embark upon the traditional societal trappings of retirement: RVs, lake cabins, travel, and inquiries when Tag and his wife would follow the same path. A question developed for Tag regarding the legacy he would leave behind for his wife, his children, and his grandchildren.

We began to coauthor a definition of retirement and legacy true to the unique narrative of Tag and his wife. Crucial to the process of restorying was hearing Tag's stories about the impact of his father and grandfather on his life. While Tag's father died when he was a young man, his grandfather left a traditional job at retirement age to begin a new job from a home workshop. As the conversations continued, he began to realize that the trappings of traditional retirement—RVs, lake cabins, sitting around doing nothing—held little appeal for Tag and his wife. Even when he told a narrative of hypothetically winning the lottery, he never mentioned quitting his job.

Similar to redefining retirement, Tag worried about his lack of ability to leave a financial legacy to his children and grandchildren. As he eagerly shared stories about his

family, the legacy Tag was leaving his children and grandchildren began to emerge: a good marriage, a strong work ethic, and an entrepreneurial spirit. When I observed at the end of every narrative that without Tag's role in these stories such changes might not have occurred, Tag would reply, "Well, I never thought about it that way before". Tag was then was quick to relate stories about individuals, pastors, and churches whose narratives have all changed because of an encounter with Tag.

Our final conversation revealed that Tag had changed his story from being one in which he pitied himself to one in which he was at a crossroads. During the six weeks, Tag stopped wondering if roads belonging to others should be his path and instead recognized that his path might be a crossroads, but that it was *his* crossroads. Not knowing what to expect, Tag revealed, "Because, I've just ... never had any friends that I could talk openly about, that I could trust in conversations." Tag concluded shared that one of his primary reasons for volunteering was also a desire to help me in my research project.

Table 4.7. Conversation Codes by Week—Tag

Conversation Codes	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Changes in behavior	0	0	2	2	3	1
Changes in perception of story	0	3	8	6	10	9
Changes in relationship with God	0	0	0	1	2	4
Experience of WNPC	2	0	2	4	4	8
Externalization	2	1	3	1	1	6
Free from problem	0	0	0	2	6	5
Future narrative	1	1	4	4	5	7
Hope	0	1	0	0	2	5
PCNL	0	0	0	1	0	0
Peace	0	0	0	0	0	0
Problem-saturated narrative	5	5	4	0	1	3

Research Question #1

Informing the design of the research was the desire to determine whether pastoral counseling that incorporates a secular model with a Christian theological viewpoint would make a difference in the lives of parishioners. Thus, the first research question asked: What evidence of change is there, if any, when comparing the hope-filled future narratives coauthored by parishioners and pastor during WNPC with the parishioners' problem-saturated narratives prepared for the intake conversation?"

Table 4.8 shows that at least five of the narratives presented by parishioners offer evidence of change from a problem-saturated story into some form of a hope-filled future narrative. Laura had the fewest occurrences of future narrative throughout the conversations, and she self-identified as experiencing no significant change in narrative. Similar to Laura, Tag also had a lower number of occurrences of future narrative throughout the conversations. However, he reported participation in WNPC as being helpful.

Table 4.8. Research Question #1 by Parishioner

Narrative	Elizabeth	Gregory	Laura	Mary	Missy	Tag
Problem-Saturated	31	32	35	38	26	18
Future	67	26	18	31	69	22

Table 4.9 indicates a decline in parishioners mentioning the problem-saturated narratives from week one through week five. A slight uptick in week six is due to the nature of the reflection process, in which we discussed the problem that prompted the willingness to volunteer for the project. Conversely, future narrative remains a code that

occurs each week, with a slight rise during the reflection process used in the final conversation.

One notable finding is that while the occurrences in which parishioners mention problem-saturated stories declines from week one to week five, week six lacked a complete absence of the presenting problems from the conversations. Discussion of future stories occurs consistently in weeks one and two, lessens in week three, is consistently mentioned in weeks four and five, and is higher in the week six reflection process.

Table 4.9. Research Question #1 by Week

Narrative	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Problem-saturated	60	39	23	24	12	22
Future	42	43	25	38	37	48

Research Question #2

Literature reviewed in the fields of pastoral counseling, narrative therapy, and Wesleyan theology brought to the forefront many prominent practitioners within those disciplines who regularly wrote letters to church members, clients, or brothers and sisters in the faith. Research question #2 developed in light of the pertinent literature: After the third conversation, in what ways did the pastoral counselor narrative letter facilitate coauthoring of the parishioners' alternate hope-filled future narratives? The design of the second research question began with the hypothesis that a letter following the third pastoral conversation would facilitate change within a parishioner's narrative.

Unfortunately, the data itself did not show any change in the case studies of parishioners, despite a rich interdisciplinary belief in, and tradition of, letter writing. Only nine mentions by the six participants regarding the letter occurred as seen in Table 4.10. Out of the six parishioners, only five even mentioned receiving the letter. Four made comments such as, "I got your letter. It was very nice, an accurate summary of our conversations. You offered some nice questions to think about at the end. Thank you." Of the five, only Mary mentioned it as a new understanding of her narrative.

Table 4.10. Research Question #2 by Parishioner

Parishioner	Pastoral Counselor Narrative Letter Mentioned n
Elizabeth	3
Gregory	0
Laura	1
Mary	3
Missy	1
Tag	1

Results again indicate the little impact presented by the PCNL in affecting change within any of the parishioners' narratives when looking at the findings of Research Question #2 by week as shown in Table 4.11. After the third week of conversations, parishioners received a letter in the mail. Weeks 1, 2, and 3, therefore, have no occurrences of the letter. However, had the letters made a significant impact on the parishioners, occurrences in weeks five or six would have resulted in the participants further incorporating the impact of the letter into a changed narrative. Finally, as we reflected upon our shared experience of WNPC, none of the parishioners mentioned

having received the letter during the conversations that occurred in week 6, indicating that it was not significant to their experience.

Table 4.11. Research Question #2 by Week

Week	Pastoral Counselor Narrative Letter Mentioned n
Week 1	0
Week 2	0
Week 3	0
Week 4	9
Week 5	0
Week 6	0

Research Question #3

Possibly the hardest query to answer objectively, the third research question attempts to evaluate whether or not participation in the research project made a difference in the personal and spiritual lives of participating parishioners: What changes, if any, did participation in the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations facilitate in the parishioners' narratives, and additionally, in the journey toward Christian perfection?

According to Table 4.12, the four parishioners who responded to the ministry intervention due to personal reasons (Elizabeth, Gregory, Mary, and Missy) showed evidence of the greatest behavioral changes. The two parishioners who had mentioned behavioral changes within their conversations fewer times than had their counterparts also indicated that their participation was due to a desire to get to know me better, a general interest in research, or a wish to assist me in obtaining my degree.

Most individual narratives, including those of the participating parishioners, possess some unchangeable aspects. Some of the volunteer parishioners were dealing

with unchangeable facts within their narratives, such as the fact that spouses and children will not come back to life and the reality that past decisions contributing to divorces or retirement planning are very likely irreversible. When faced with finality within narratives, individuals may choose to change their perceptions by participating in the process of restorying.

Changes in perception of story, the code seen in Table 4.12, lists occurrences when parishioners indicated they understood their problem-saturated narratives differently than they had prior to their participation in WNPC. The previous dichotomy between self/other-motivation that was present in changes in behavior did not occur. Tag mentioned, "I'd never thought of it that way," many times during his participation in WNPC and indicated that participation had really helped him gain a new understanding of his past, present, and future narrative.

Table 4.12. Research Question #3 WNPC by Parishioner

Topic	Elizabeth	Gregory	Laura	Mary	Missy	Tag
Changes in behavior	67	25	16	50	39	8
Changes in perception of story	49	27	9	58	53	36
Experience of WNPC	12	17	14	3	25	20

Looking at the conversations by week shows a significant increase in both changes in behavior and changes in perception of story until week four. From weeks four to five, both codes experience a slight drop of occurrences in the conversations. Week six shows a continual downward trend in changes in behavior and a slight upward trend in changes of perception of story. Similarly, the reflection process may have also helped

parishioners think more about how they viewed their stories differently when comparing week six to week one, contributing to the slight rise in occurrences.

Coding any mention of the meaning or effect due to the parishioners' participation in WNPC as Experience of WNPC, the findings indicate a dramatic rise. During weeks one through five, Table 4.13 shows a steady increase of occurrence with a slight decrease in week three. The week six conversation, which included a reflection process, indicates a significant change in parishioners mentioning their participation in the ministry intervention.

Table 4.13. Research Question #3 WNPC by Week

Topic	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Changes in behavior	10	32	35	52	44	32
Changes in perception of story	16	24	40	52	46	54
Experience of WNPC	2	7	5	13	19	45

Parishioners attending a congregation that claims Wesley as its spiritual father may not have received teachings on the subject of Christian perfection. Therefore, terms such as *perfection* or *sanctification* may be unfamiliar to most parishioners, even though they may be narrating their own personal journey toward holiness. Introduction of phrases such as *Christian perfection* during conversations often prompted parishioners to smile and nod, but no one grasped the idea as being a major chapter in a new narrative. However, parishioners were readily able to coauthor alternate stories when asked questions regarding elements of Christian perfection, similar to those found in the Case Study Protocol located in Appendix A.

Table 4.14 illustrates that even though a parishioner might not be able to formulate a sentence using Wesleyan theological terms when depicting the sanctification process, the data indicates that all parishioners discussed some type of spiritual change within the conversations. Parishioners mentioned changes in their relationship with God that, by definition, would move an individual closer to Christian perfection.

Four parishioners who volunteered for the project due to their own personal problems experienced more of a change in their relationship with God than did the two who volunteered, in part, for reasons pertaining to me. These parishioners, aided in discernment from the Holy Spirit, should further evaluate their personal progress toward Christian perfection. After all, particularly difficult in the analysis of data is my responsibility to perceive the parishioners' process of sanctification and apply appropriate coding. Perhaps the parishioners' journey toward Christian perfection is best described in the participants' own words. Mary described growing in love of self and understanding the love God had for her by saying, "Through prayer, I now know the haunting thoughts and dreams were not from God, but the devil that wanted to rob me of the love and peace in my heart. ... I know that God loves me, and that he wants all that's good for me." Elizabeth furthered her journey of Christian perfection by praying for a former spouse when she felt angry with him, specifically that he would experience God as his Heavenly Father. When asked how she saw God moving in her journey from anger and unforgiveness to peace and joy, Missy responded, "Well, I mean, I know he's always there with me. And, I mean, ... he's responsible for moving me that way. I am responsible for acting upon it. But, I think he gives me the tools to move forward." Gregory had not formally studied the doctrine of Christian perfection, but when he

reflected on the experience of writing his plan (Gregory did not like the use of the word *story* during our conversations) a second time, he used associated language, such as "experiencing a tempered affectation":

> It was, ... It was easier now than it was the first time. I think the ... reason why it was easier is that ... the first time I looked at the questions, ... all I had was chaos. 'Cause when you're dealing with anger and frustration, and bitterness, and all the other assundry [sic] things that were going on, ... and, I'm not saying they're not going on, ... I'm just saying that they have been tempered, and, they've gotten a lot easier to deal with.

Gregory began to experience moving toward Christian perfection for the first time during WNPC, even if he did not use the precise theological terminology.

Table 4.14. Research Question #3 Christian Perfection by Parishioner

Parishioner	Changes in Relationship with God n
Elizabeth	40
Gregory	16
Laura	1
Mary	24
Missy	18
Tag	7

Unlike changes in behavior or changes in perception of story, the code Changes in relationship with God did not trend continually upward or downward. Seeming to peak in week three, changes in relationship with God showed a slight increase during the conversation in week six, most likely due to the process of reflecting on our shared experience of WNPC. The inability to discern a pattern from week to week is wonderfully expressive of the role of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life, as well as the

movement toward Christian perfection. Finding a weekly trend or pattern would have been quite predictable, a trait not commonly found in the process of sanctification.

Table 4.15. Research Question #3 Christian Perfection by Week

Week	Christian Perfection by Week n
Week 1	10
Week 2	14
Week 3	21
Week 4	19
Week 5	15
Week 6	27

Additional Findings

Analysis of the data revealed two narrative therapy techniques commonly employed in the conversations. Tables 4.16 and 4.17, show the occurrences of externalization within the sessions, as well as those times the parishioners expressed being free from the presenting problem. Similarly, findings showed a higher occurrence of narrative therapy techniques used to guide the conversation by the four parishioners who volunteered for participation because of their own personal problems, compared to the two parishioners prompted to volunteer due to other reasons. The findings offered no discernable pattern or trend when examining the codes by week as seen in Table 4.17.

Table 4.16. Narrative Therapy Elements by Parishioner

Element	Elizabeth	Gregory	Laura	Mary	Missy	Tag
Externalization	18	7	0	9	34	14

Free from problem	53	22	1	55	55	13

Table 4.17. Narrative Therapy Elements by Week

Element	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Externalization	13	11	9	16	8	25
Free from problem	21	29	22	44	36	47

Expecting to find hopeful speech about problem-saturated stories, encouragingly all six parishioners had at least one occurrence of a hope-filled story during the six conversations. An unanticipated result was that four of the parishioners mentioned a desire to experience God's peace in greater ways. Again, the four parishioners who mentioned seeking God's peace were those more motivated to change some aspect of their story for personal reasons. Table 4.19 demonstrates that other than an exception in week three, occurrences of a hope-filled story were consistently present. With the exception of week three, peace appears to descend from week to week. This descent could be that because of their participation in WNPC, these parishioners felt more peace.

Table 4.18. Hope and Peace by Parishioner

Topic	Elizabeth	Gregory	Laura	Mary	Missy	Tag
Hope	14	1	1	25	24	8
Peace	14	8	0	10	25	0

Table 4.19. Hope and Peace by Week

Topic	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Hope	16	12	2	13	15	15
Peace	17	13	6	8	2	11

Summary of Major Findings

Summarizing the research project offers insight into hypothesized outcomes as well as some surprising findings:

- Co-authoring parishioners' narratives—WNPC can serve to coauthor parishioners' narratives when parishioners seek pastoral counseling because they are experiencing problem-saturated narratives and because of a perceived personal need.
- Pastoral letters—While they are a nice thing to receive, pastoral letters do not serve to restory an individual's narrative in any significant way.
- Change in behavior and perception of story—When individuals seek pastoral counseling because they are experiencing problem-saturated narratives, changes in behavior and perceptions of stories can occur through WNPC.
- Narrative therapy elements—Techniques used in Narrative Therapy such as externalization, amplifying times when an individual is free from the problem, future narrative, and hope, are all useful tools for pastoral conversations.
- Peace—An unexpected finding in the research was the number of parishioners who mentioned, without prompting, the desire for peace in their lives.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Friend, colleague, and pastor Rev. Lee Trigg accurately illustrated the dilemma faced by many parish pastors. Seminary courses require only a cursory knowledge of secular counseling techniques and a basic understanding of the broad discipline of pastoral care and counseling. When approached for counseling, the lack of connection often causes pastors to feel inadequate or ill equipped to facilitate change in a parishioner's life. Congregations offer pastors a built-in base of people, causing Worthington to note that pastors conduct a great deal of counseling, perhaps more than all of the mental health professionals combined (424). This knowledge leaves no room for a pastor to wonder *if* a parishioner will seek counseling; instead, ministers must anticipate *when* a parishioner will ask, "May I come in and talk with you about something?" The dilemma that typically follows concerns the type and quality of counseling provided by the pastor. Faced with such issues, or those similar in sentiment, many pastors provide basic empathetic listening that includes prayer, advice, and some Scripture, or they will often refer the parishioner to another mental health professional. WNPC create an accessible intersection of pastoral counseling, narrative therapy, and Wesleyan theology as an answer to the dilemma pastors face in parish ministry.

Creation of such an intersection would prove to be simply just another ideal if left unevaluated as a practical tool for the use of pastors in the trenches of daily ministry. This carefully designed research project has undertaken just such an evaluation. The project involved a thorough review of the literature, an evaluation of the effectiveness of

WNPC in the transformation of problem-saturated stories, as well as movement toward Christian perfection within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Coauthoring Parishioners' Narratives

As a pastoral counseling researcher, my background better prepared me for the six weeks of conversations with the six volunteer parishioners. My undergraduate psychology degree with a minor in religion focused primarily on humanistic counseling and included two practical internships. An MDiv with a concentration in pastoral care and counseling included two semesters of advanced supervised pastoral counseling at Texas Christian University's Pastoral Counseling Center under the supervision of Drs. Andy Lester, Howard Stone, and Duane Bidwell. In addition, during my matriculation at Brite Divinity School, two relevant awards were conferred upon me by the Pastoral Care and Counseling Department: a Pastoral Care & Counseling Book Award, and the Pat & Annie Maniscalco Pastoral Counseling Award. During my fifteen years of ministry as a parish pastor, I also had the opportunity to offer pastoral counseling in numerous formal and informal ways. Before beginning WNPC with the volunteer parishioners for this project, I conducted a thorough reading of literature pertaining to narrative therapy, pastoral counseling, Wesleyan theology, and research design. Additionally, the Research Reflection Team formed at Ovilla United Methodist Church allowed me to talk through and anticipate what the six weeks of conversations might entail.

Despite my academic and experiential training, I still felt very rusty during my first round of conversations. Twelve years had passed since I had received any pastoral counseling training in a formal academic setting in which the individual makes an

appointment, talks for fifty minutes, makes an appointment to return the next week, and then leaves. Formal appointments of that nature are rare in a parish setting. Additionally, I am not currently serving a parish but am appointed to family leave in order to raise two preschool-aged children. My husband currently serves as the lead pastor of Ovilla United Methodist Church, offering another layer of unique circumstances for the ministry intervention. Finally, fear of being inadequate, not knowing what to say, or failing to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit as the third person in the conversation were all very real concerns for me prior to the first week of WNPC. Reflection upon these fears served as a reminder of what parish pastors, regardless of their level of training, face when asked by parishioners for counseling.

Graciously, the model created in WNPC did prove to be easily accessible to me in a number of ways. Lester writes about the sacred narrative, which contains the symbol of the cross, offering a reminder that God is present in the lives of people (87). These words helped me to remember what I tell my young children when they are scared: "God is on your side." In addition to the faith and assurance summoned through that remembrance, I found great freedom and was reminded that the parishioners possessed unique knowledge about their problems (Stone, "Pastoral Counseling 31-45); therefore, I did not need to place myself in an expert position (Dinkins 31; Wallis, Burns, Capdevila, "Q Methodology" 186). The prudential means of grace offered through reason and experience while dependent upon the Holy Spirit (Collins 266) became real for me as the pastoral researcher, as well as for several of the parishioners. Indeed, I removed myself from the need to be the expert and allowed the Holy Spirit to be the third person in the midst of the conversations (Dinkins 35). Another surprise occurred during the

progression through the weeks of counseling. Slowly, the realization grew that I could not over-function in the conversations, or in the lives of the individuals. Instead, I became a "fellow traveler" (Weingarten 12) with parishioners as we began the process of transforming a problem-saturated story into a hope-filled future narrative. Five remaining weeks of conversation resulted in collaboration, cooperation, and the coauthorship of new narratives, and I experienced the freedom and joy in counseling mentioned by Dr. Dinkins (31).

Clarity developed during the second and subsequent conversations that the levels of ownership varied among the six volunteer parishioners within each of their own individual stories. Providing guidance for our time together with questions, I even tried to keep some focused on the task by saying, "I'm going to ask you again to reflect upon the question I asked." When pushed, parishioners would sometimes pull in a different direction. I then truly began to understand my role as a "conversation architect" (Wallis, Burns, and Capdevila, "Narrative Therapy" 486-97). Architects can provide the design, framework, best practices, and ideas. However, owners/builders may choose to finish the framework in any way, sometimes even leaving the framework broken or unfinished. Parishioners who volunteered solely because they had a problem with which they truly needed help were also the ones who wanted my role as a conversation architect to be more prominent. The two parishioners who volunteered for a variety of different reasons did not express a great desire for my help as the conversation architect.

Perhaps every pastor, counselor, mental health professional, and even layperson who has ever encountered someone in the midst of a problem has had the frustrating experience of hearing the problem, often repeatedly, and then having no reception of or

response to any offered possible solution. Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations reminded me of my pastoral counseling internship at Texas Christian University with Lester. Each week all of the interns played a portion of video from a counseling session with which we needed help or wanted to have evaluated. I remember playing a video of a particular client who stumped me week after week. Lester, after watching the video, turned to me and said, "Ah, ... You got a, 'Yes, but-er.'" He went on to say that while obviously not a clinical term, from time to time pastors and counselors have someone seeking help who is unable to assimilate change into the core narrative for a variety of reasons. Scripture offers stories of Jesus offering people change, healing, or instruction only to have people barter with him over the types of healing offered, reject the offered way of new life, or simply to fall away from valid teaching. The coauthorship role within a parishioner's narrative offers a pastor the opportunity to acknowledge that even the best secular or pastoral counselors, and even Christ himself, encounter people who know they want changed narratives but for some reason are unable to restory their lives. Wesley's belief in free will and personal accountability for transformation indicates that individuals seeking pastoral counseling may choose not to change, and are ultimately responsible for their own daily expression and state of tempers, affections, and passions (Headley 47, 73, 80, 82, 153,155, 159; Collins 38-39). From a narrative perspective, when a pastor encounters such a parishioner, great freedom is found in allowing the individual to be the expert in his or her own story. A pastor might be able to offer alternative narratives, but the pastor does not write the story alone.

Conversely, every pastor, counselor, mental health professional, and layperson has encountered someone in the midst of a problem, and has had the deeply satisfying

experience of watching that individual make core changes to the problem-saturated narrative because of something said during the conversation. Perhaps it was a Holy Spirit moment, a God-incidence, an epiphany, or even co-authoring a hope-filled future narrative. My experience of WNPC was graciously filled with many of these little moments. Parishioners allowed me to ask questions, make observations, share a personal story, ponder how God saw each individual, celebrate, mourn, laugh, cry, and listen. When I finished the third week of conversations, frustrated and wondering about my sufficiency in the intervention, the Holy Spirit responded by showing up in a mighty way during the fourth week. Even months later, during the phase of participant checking, several parishioners told stories of their lives since the conversations had ended and specifically reported changes in behaviors or perceptions of stories as a result of their participation in the project. Indeed, the most important finding of the project was the understanding that WNPC did indeed make a difference within the core narratives of participating parishioners.

Understandably, many of the problem-saturated stories presented in the first conversation may never completely disappear from parishioners' conversations, as was anticipated prior to the analysis of data. Several parishioners, for example, had coauthored a problem-saturated narrative that existed within a coauthored hope-filled future narrative. For someone such as Mary, who was grieving the loss of a child, some level of problem-saturated narrative may always be evident. As conversations focused more on a hope-filled future narrative, references to the problem decreased but were still present. Such findings suggest that problem-saturated stories may always be a part of the

parishioner's core narrative, although occurring less prominently where the future narrative is coauthored.

True to the instruction of Wesley, who taught Christians to live with one foot in the "now" and one in the "future" (Harper 96-97), this finding indicates that the present narratives of parishioners are storied by a remembered past and an anticipated future (Lester 12). Reminiscent of the grand Christian narrative in which Christ dies in order to bring new life, the problem-saturated story within a future narrative suggests that some things have to die in order to receive new life. When telling the Christian narrative, the hardest part of the story—that of the death of Christ—is important. However, the darkness of Good Friday always brightens in the light of Easter Sunday. Similarly, when parishioners share their stories, elements of the presenting problem might still be present in the core narrative, but because of participation in WNPC, the light of a hope-filled future shines on the transforming story.

Pastoral Letters

Prompted by the literature review to incorporate the writing of a letter to the parishioners (Blanton, "Introducing Letter Writing" 77; Morgan 103; Dinkins 126; Freedman and Combs 208), I held high hopes for the hypothesis informing Research Question #2. Wesley wrote letters. White and Epston wrote letters. Stone and Lester drilled into all students at Brite Divinity School the importance of writing pastoral care and counseling letters to parishioners in order to commemorate the highs and lows of life. Christian Scripture, as well, contains wonderfully joyous letters such as Philippians, or the letter of instruction from the apostle Paul found in 1 Timothy.

Dinkins' believes that letters may take extra time; however, they can be great time savers due to a perceived increased effectiveness within a narrative conversation. This belief helped me to form an anticipated future story regarding the fourth conversation (117). After the receipt of the letter, I had imagined that our remaining time together would center on new revelations and changes in individual narratives. Scripture, tradition, and reason all supported this anticipated future narrative. Experience wrote a very different actualized story. While the parishioners expressed polite appreciation upon receiving such a well-crafted letter, analyzed data offered no proof that such a letter facilitated any type of narrative change.

Probably due to the rich interdisciplinary tradition in support of narrative letter writing, I will continue to write parishioners letters when appropriate. Certain circumstances may warrant a letter after a formal or informal conversation. Such occasions might include amplification of a unique outcome in order to further a hope-filled future story, discussion of a question or thought that developed after the conversation that might provoke a change in behavior or perception, or encouragement after a particularly difficult conversation. Of course, letters written to mark the death of a loved one, birth of a baby, marriage, baptism, start of a new career, or the end of a career are appropriate and appreciated by parishioners. With the advent of electronic and social media, postmodern communication has changed drastically. I believe most parishioners will always politely appreciate a handwritten letter from their ministers. Pastors also know well the intangible, immeasurable benefits when providing that level of care. However, the findings from this research project involving six parishioners surprisingly did not show any measurable change in narrative due to their receipt of well-crafted

letters. Therefore, pastors choosing to send a letter after a conversation must understand the difference between appreciation and transformation and adjust expectations accordingly. The findings from this research project indicate that letters are beneficial to pastoral care but not to pastoral counseling.

Changes in Behavior and Perception of Story

Two of the volunteer parishioners for WNPC were seeking help for events that occurred over thirty years ago. Particularly telling in the results pertaining to these parishioners is that both experienced significant changes in behavior, as well as perceptions of their narrative, due to participation in the research project. Other participants also experienced changes in behavior and their perceptions of their stories. One parishioner even acknowledged what needed to change, but chose instead to maintain the present story because it was easier to live peacefully rather than be fulfilled.

While playing a role in coauthoring a parishioner's narrative, a pastor simply cannot make changes in the parishioner's life. The "not-knowing stance" employed by narrative therapy offers the pastor a decentered position in which the pastor's role is to be mindful of the process of therapy (Freedman and Combs 44). The pastor remains a fellow traveler, a conversation architect, and an observer while helping the parishioner discover God's possibilities (Peers 20). For those parishioners who are open to the work of the Holy Spirit and to the model used in narrative therapy, transformation can take place as the *imago* is renewed (Wesley, *Plain Account* 9).

Narratives of the parishioners, if they had not chosen to participate in WNPC, might be very different. Some, of their own accord, may have incorporated new behaviors into problem-saturated narratives or may have gained some new perspective

that would have allowed them to rewrite a portion of a troublesome story. Others may have sought counseling elsewhere. A few may have continued to live with the problem-saturated narrative and accompanying behaviors and perceptions that steal a hope-filled narrative line by line, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter, book by book.

However, for the parishioners hoping for change, those desperate for transformation, those desiring to see the very face of God, a hope-filled future narrative began to emerge. Therefore, motivation also seemed to play a factor in changes in behavior or perception of story. The findings suggest that changes in behavior occurred in greater instances when participants were self-motivated rather than other motivated. Parishioners who volunteered because of truly personal problem-saturated narratives experienced greater levels of change in behavior and perception than did those who volunteered due to an altruistic desire to help in or experience a research project. WNPC build upon the tradition of Wesley's Christian conferencing, in which two or more gather to convey grace through faith and practice and to experience personal counsel and correspondence (Harper 92-93). As Jesus instructed his disciples, where two or three are gathered, God is with them (Matt. 18:20). Parishioners who experienced this change in narrative also experienced God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

Christian perfection. A majority of the parishioners volunteering for WNPC reported a positive change in their personal relationship with God, indicating movement toward Christian perfection. Wesley defined sanctification as being renewed in the image of God and a perfect Christian as one who loves God with all his or her heart, mind, and soul (*Plain Account* 14). Motivated to volunteer for WNPC because of problems within their own lives, four of the parishioners were ultimately seeking an alternate story in

order to cultivate new *imagoes* (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32). Christian perfection as a doctrine developed due to Wesley's study of Scripture (Headley 26). Unsurprisingly, as both Elizabeth and Gregory began to pursue Bible study again, Wesley's belief that the Bible shapes and informs the life sought by the individual became evident within our conversations. Growing love of self and neighbor through seeking relations is another marker of Christian perfection (Headley 146), and Missy grew exponentially in this area as she often talked about the support of her community as she wrote her new normal. After experiencing despair due to a disruption in the flow of her core narrative because of the death of her daughter (Lester 45), Mary began to grow in love of self as we coauthored a past, present, and future narrative that included the revelation that she really was an excellent mother. Throughout the conversations, each individual began to accept personal responsibility for their daily expression of tempers, affections, and passions, in order to experience holy transformation (Headley 80, 82, 153, 159). The coauthored hope-filled future stories were an opportunity to recognize the mark of God within each parishioner, and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, offer a glimpse of transformed new *imagoes* (Malcolm and Ramsey 23-32; Runyon 84, 166).

Narrative Therapy Elements

Any number of academic books, journal articles, and continuing education events teaching narrative therapy support the ease of accessibility of the elements of this field for pastors. Practitioners of narrative therapy have also done an excellent job of maintaining Web sites with easy-to-read topical entries regarding various aspects of the discipline, as well as how-to books written for a general audience. This commitment to narrative therapy's accessibility and readability lends itself to pastors, most of whom

have already practiced empathetic listening and curious questioning. Particularly easy to utilize during the ministry intervention were the techniques of externalization, amplification of instances when the parishioner is free from the problem, focus on future narrative, and hope.

Both secular and pastoral practitioners of narrative therapy encourage questions pertaining to the possibilities in a hope-filled future story, even during the intake session, when a problem-saturated narrative was still in the process of being storied (White and Epston 94; Dinkins 34; Stone and Lester 262). For example, during a session in this case study, Elizabeth stated that she thought my question about what she would be doing a year from now if free from the problem was odd. However, it started her thinking, and in the end, she mentioned that future story-ing was one of the most helpful elements about our conversations. Similarly, Missy mentioned not being able to see down the road five or ten years, but between our conversations, she started thinking about different possibilities.

Externalization proved particularly helpful for parishioners who were dealing with anger. Not a technique or skill, but a shift in language (Morgan 17), externalization allowed the parishioner to realize fully the Wesleyan notion that sin remains, but does not reign (Wesley, "On Sin" 366; "Marks" 175). Instead of affirming that Gregory had always been an angry person as he had asserted, I began to ask, "What has the anger robbed from your life?" Similarly, for Missy, placing the anger on a continuum with God's peace at the opposite end was a helpful tool for our conversations. Continually reminding parishioners that anger is an emotion and that all emotions are God-given allowed us to recognize the role that anger was playing in their stories. Experiencing the

anger was perhaps beyond their control and may always occur. Understanding their relationship to the anger, however, is something they can control, meaning that it no longer has to reign in their lives.

When parishioners mentioned changes in behavior or perception that left them free from symptoms of the problem for a short time, I would ask questions about how they felt to be relieved of the problem, what did they do differently, and how they would spend their time if free from the problem. These unique outcomes, exceptions, sparkling events, or innovative moments were present in most of the stories told by parishioners (Gonçalves, Ribeiro, Mendes, Matos, Santos, 497; Morgan 52; Santos, Gonçalves, and Matos 131; White 219; Freedman and Combs 67, 89; Russell and Carey 23). By acting amazed that they had defeated the problem for a short period and thus amplifying the magnitude of the times they were free from the problem, the parishioners often produced a few chuckles and further reduced the power of the problem in their lives.

Counseling research defines a positive outcome and effectiveness as a change in symptom or problem as reported or assessed by the researcher, therapist, or client (Addison, Sandberg, Corby, Roila, and Platt, 342). When asked to compare the power of the problem before beginning WNPC to the power the problem held during weeks four or five of the conversations, many parishioners reported more instances of being free from the problem. Experiencing such freedom from the problem allowed parishioners to imagine the future, to experience even higher levels of freedom from anger, nagging thoughts, grief, obsessive thoughts, or pity parties.

Narrative therapy tools such as these support the contemporary popular theology precept of loving the sinner but hating the sin. Jesus never placed the label of *sinner* on

someone who was seeking his redemption. Instead, he saw people—people who could change. The philosophies, principles, and techniques used in the narrative therapy model that were found helpful during pastoral counseling and theological thinking suggests that an interdisciplinary model such as WNPC can greatly benefit the parish setting.

Peace

Unable to recall any significant mention of peace in the literature review, I first began to notice four parishioners mentioning a greater desire to experience God's peace around week two of the conversations. When asked what the presenting problem-saturated narrative robbed from them, at some point within the six-week period all four replied, "God's peace." Then, I began to listen very carefully for ways to amplify those instances in the narratives when a parishioner had experienced God's peace. The questions that arose from my listening efforts regarding narrative changes in perception or behavior began to usher peace into each story. Throughout the WNPC, several parishioners quoted Scripture pertaining to peace as prayers upon which they had begun to meditate. While reading the Bible, some came across a Scripture about peace and felt confirmed that they were on the right track.

I was looking for elements of hope within the narratives of this study, particularly because of Lester's emphasis. While parishioners were hopeful about their future-stories, they were much more interested in seeking peace in the present narrative. Perhaps the search for God's peace and the previous unexpected finding that problem-saturated stories were still present within the hope-filled future narratives during the coauthoring process are connected. The grand narrative of Christianity demonstrates that believers in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ possess a hope-filled core narrative. Hope in an

assurance that authors new and perfect *imagoes* in the final future story when the kingdom of God receives full realization on earth. However, that hope-filled, perfected future narrative does not change an individual's desire for peace in a present problem-saturated story. As God grants the peace that passes all understanding in the present narrative, the parishioner is able to let go of unwritten anticipated stories, allowing hope to grow within the coauthored future narrative.

Certainly, not every parishioner is seeking God's peace in life. The presence of peace within these conversations serves as a good reminder that narrative therapy does allow for surprises, allows room for the Holy Spirit, and allows the parishioner to determine what is important rather than a pastor dictating what the individual should be seeking in relationship with God. Parishioners seeking peace within their stories were a reminder that my role in WNPC was that of a conversation architect, a fellow traveler in the journey toward a new story as well as the journey toward sanctification.

Implications of the Findings

The design of the ministry intervention focused on change in the narrative of parishioners at Ovilla United Methodist Church; however, the research project was not solely for the benefit of parishioners. Since parishioners desire a specific point of view when they seek counseling through a church setting, pastors with that knowledge will thus find particular significance in this study. Oftentimes, pastors possess high standards for preparation of sermons, worship planning, administering the sacraments, ordering the church, and so on. Similarly, this ministry intervention seeks to raise the standards of clergy when counseling parishioners, offering parish pastors the hope of being able to coauthor alternative narratives with parishioners who will inevitably seek counseling.

Because all problems are spiritual problems, coauthoring hope-filled future narratives may also serve to move the parishioner toward Christian perfection. Lacking technical counseling jargon and the need to label parishioners with a clinical mental health diagnosis, narrative therapy is a quick and easy model for pastors to incorporate into a pastoral counseling model. Discovering that participation in WNPC does indeed change behavior, perception, and relationship with God and offers evidence of coauthoring a problem-saturated story into a more hope-filled future narrative. WNPC creates a useful interdisciplinary intersection of narrative therapy, pastoral counseling, and theological thinking. It also builds upon the pastor's own academic learning, natural abilities, and acquired skills that can be employed when a parishioner is seeking counseling.

Limitations of the Study

Small-numbered case study designs are limited due to lack of generalizability to the rest of the population. Postmodernism philosophically acknowledges that the counseling environment is not value neutral (Freedman and Combs 36). Lack of a value-neutral environment would limit the exact duplication of this study by another pastoral counselor who might share a majority of my values but who also may differ in a few. An additional limitation of the study is the core narrative I brought to the counseling relationship (Richert, "Stories" 198). My academic and experiential training, values, perspective, and story all serve to shape uniquely the questions that I asked in order to coauthor an alternate story (Freedman and Combs 117; Dinkins 113). Other researchers trying to replicate the study may not use the same questions or techniques, thus possibly producing different results. WNPC retains the prophetic voice of the pastor while remaining centered on the parishioner (Stillman and Erbes "Two Languages" 84) as the

primary interpreter of experience (Freedman and Combs 45). This individual-centered model of pastoral counseling is another limitation of the study, as each parishioner also brings a unique narrative, value, perspective, and experience to the conversation. Different pastoral counselors and parishioners would bring completely different narratives with different levels of investment, as well as different alternate stories.

Coresearch and participant/member checking within the methodology designed for the research project are congruent with narrative therapy and include the spirit of equality between the pastor and parishioner. Member checking, in this study in particular, limited the interpretation of data. Had the methodology not included this aspect, I would have written case study reports and analysis of the data from a much more evaluative perspective. I might have shared more in the individual case study reports about my personal thoughts, feelings, or perceptions about the parishioners' progress, or lack thereof. Because I knew each parishioner would read the case study report before anyone else, I made every attempt not to write each summary from an evaluative perspective and instead tried to write out of our shared experience of WNPC. As a result, the six case study reports were included with only one minor revision and received approval from each parishioner as an accurate narrative of our time together. The suspension of psychological evaluation, therefore, offered the opportunity to share the burden and joy of the research project with the volunteer parishioners.

One limitation of the study not anticipated during the design phase was how to measure tangibly any movement toward Christian perfection. For this research project, the interpretation of findings regarding Christian perfection occurred in narrative form by searching transcripts for the parishioner's own words regarding changes in the

participant's relationship with God. Future studies pertaining to Christian perfection, sanctification, or growth in holiness might use a questionnaire, a scale, or specific interview questions prior to the beginning of data collection with a similar method employed following the intervention.

Recommendations

Contemporary churches are busy places. I selected a room within the church to have the conversations because of the comfort and intimacy it provided, as well as in order to comply with safe practices in secular and pastoral counseling. However, the room selected was accessible only through the fellowship hall. People often walked in and out of the fellowship hall while the conversations were taking place. Meetings took place in the fellowship hall. Meals for youth occurred in the fellowship hall. Women's Fellowship meets in the fellowship hall. Serious consideration for the activities surrounding the selected room in order to provide greater protection of the anonymity of the participants would well serve any replication of the research project.

Six weeks, chosen for the design of the study, often defines short-term counseling. It also provides a sufficient period in which to measure change. However, I do not believe that pastors who practice WNPC will believe it necessary to meet with parishioners for six full weeks. Pastoral counseling in today's church must be fluid. I envision pastors using the model of WNPC if parishioners are seen for one hour and never again or when providing a framework to continue a previous conversation anytime a parishioner desires. A pastor might keep brief notes about the conversation in a secure location. Regardless of the amount of time that has passed, experience suggests that parishioners will expect pastors to remember the unique details of the presenting problem

during any subsequent conversations. Letters written would be solely for the purpose of pastoral care.

Further areas of research for a doctor of ministry student may include the design, implementation, analysis, and successful defense of a dissertation research project using only postmodern qualitative research terminology and methodology. Particular next steps for WNPC could be teaching its philosophies, beliefs, ideas, and techniques to those pastors who desire a model for providing excellent care to parishioners. Possibilities include a workshop that teaches the basic concepts of WNPC, a reference manual, or even a textbook. Future areas of research for any pastoral counselor might be in the area of parishioners searching for God's peace. In contemporary society, in which people never unplug, never slow down, and seldom listen, I wonder if finding God's peace will become even more elusive for the coming generations. Perhaps someone in the next generation of pastoral counselors will find a passion in writing about peace the way Lester found passion in writing about hope or the way I found passion in creating WNPC.

Postscript

This dissertation began approximately twenty years ago in an undergraduate class entitled "Psychology and Religion" at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. My counseling psychology professor and mentor, Dr. Douglas Hooker, and United Methodist minister and professor of religion, Dr. Farley Snell, taught this small—even by the standards of Southwestern—class. Each week about eight people met to discuss psychology and religion. I think that class was the first time I understood that the two disciplines are not mutually exclusive. Hooker and Snell were doing something very interesting: taking a secular discipline and highlighting how God can use everything for

good. At Southwestern, I also learned Rogerian counseling techniques and completed internships putting those techniques into practice. I am not sure this dissertation would have ever been written without Hooker and Snell.

Seminary began on the campus of Texas Christian University in 1998. Like all students matriculating at Brite Divinity School at the time, I received a scholarship of 80 percent tuition, regardless of denomination. Although less academically challenging for me than my time at Southwestern, the Brite seminary did possess one of the best pastoral counseling programs in the nation. During Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling, the class corporately engaged in role-playing about a parishioner seeking counseling from a pastor. Everyone called out questions for the pastor to ask the parishioner. At the end of the class, Lester pulled me aside and asked many types of questions about my undergraduate counseling experience. He encouraged me to add a concentration in pastoral care and counseling to my MDiv. Within the concentration, I had three wonderful pastoral counseling professors: Stone, Lester, and Bidwell. For the first time, I encountered narrative therapy and began to realize that seminaries were using primarily secular texts to teach pastors about parish counseling. Similar to my experience with Hooker and Snell at Southwestern, I am not sure this dissertation would have ever occurred if Lester had not have taken an interest in me.

Graduating, serving the local church, pursuing vocational interests in the disciplines of preaching, evangelism, and church growth, and then getting married did not allow me to retain many skills in pastoral counseling. I entered into Asbury Theological Seminary in 2004 with the hopes of obtaining a DMin in the family ministries track under the teaching of the wonderful Dr. Don Joy. An elective class taught by Dinkins in

narrative therapy brought to light the parallel paths in my life, those of counseling psychology and religion, and caused me to wonder if the two might intersect. Without that class and Dinkins, I am not sure this dissertation would have even been written.

Attempts to marry narrative therapy and theology proved too broad and led to two—yes, two—fairly good dissertation project proposals that were never finished. Changing church pastorates and the addition of two children to our family once again derailed the dissertation writing process, and I was moved to the inactive students list. However, the dissertation was always a nagging in my brain and in my heart. When our younger son was a year old, I was awakened by God in the middle of the night and given this idea: narrative therapy and Christian perfection. Never having been awakened in the middle of the night by God before with any kind of message, I placed a call to Dr. Milton Lowe the next day. Encouraged to try for a third time at a dissertation, he also offered much guidance while emphasizing that time was no longer on my side to finish the dissertation. Headley and Gatobu soon came on board as the mentor and internal reader, respectively. Without direction and encouragement from them, I am not sure I would have written this dissertation. Without God awakening me up in the middle of the night, I am not sure I would have written this dissertation. Without Lowe, I know I would not have *finished* this dissertation.

At the beginning of the literature review, I found myself returning to who and what I already knew. Reading everything Lester had ever written that I could find, I noticed both Lester and Dinkins highlighted some key elements in the direction I wanted to go within the dissertation. Finding a definite gap in the research of pastoral counseling, but more importantly, also finding a gap in practical ministry applications for pastoral

counseling. In 1995, Lester wrote of the need to "create a body of literature on pastoral theological understandings of hope (clinical case material, theoretical concepts, and personal experience) that will inform our ministry and the ministry of those who follow" (8). Almost twenty years later, my narrative pastoral counseling professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, discussed the dilemma of teaching narrative therapy to pastors without the benefit of a text written from a Christian perspective (Dinkins ix). This dissertation attempts to add to the language of Christian pastoral counseling and particularly to narrative therapy while keeping in mind ordination to word and sacrament, even though "pastoral care has had difficulty recognizing its relationship to ministry itself—especially one of word and sacrament" (Stone, "Word of God" 369-90). Ordination to word and sacraments includes pastoral counseling. WNPC in particular strives to proclaim the good news of transformation of an individual story and breaks the very bread of life giving hope.

On 25 July, 2013, Trigg asked me to participate in a panel discussion at the Central Texas Annual Conference Local Pastors Licensing School. The topic of the panel was pastoral care and counseling. In the midst of the conversation, I was able to share some of my perspectives of WNPC and narrative therapy. Trigg told the local pastors about our interview and a discussion that followed. After our initial interview, he went home and reread some narrative therapy material through a new interpretation. He told the local pastors, "I'm sold." This dissertation project desires a similar persuasion of other pastors with the hope that more pastors will decide to use WNPC in the parish setting.

Unbeknownst to me, the process of writing this dissertation began at my beloved Southwestern University and ended twenty years later at my now beloved Asbury Theological Seminary. Perhaps the process of writing this dissertation illustrates Christian perfection at work in my life. Through God's prevenient grace, I encountered all the people, tools, and texts that I needed beginning in 1993. Through God's justifying grace I received salvation in the process time and time again. Through God's sanctifying grace, I am done. This dissertation is not perfect; however, I do believe it is perfected. Thus ends the story of this dissertation. At least, the part of the story I have chosen to share.

However, one part of the story remains untold, and it deserves telling. Without this past story informing my present and future narratives, I am not sure I would be who or where I am today. Without these two people whom I have never met, I am not sure this dissertation would have ever been written.

Charles Wesley, noted hymn writer, Anglican priest, and cofounder in the Methodist movement with his brother John, summed up the argument of the dissertation in 1738. Another fascinating dissertation would be an examination of the letters, sermons, and journals of Wesley in order to study the transformation of his core narrative through the preferred stories that he communicated throughout his life. A welcome addition to such research would be the inclusion of other's interpretation of Wesley's core narrative through surviving historical documents, including the support his brother, Charles, gave to Wesley's theological narrative through hymns.

Before the advent of narrative therapy and its unique language, he wrote about God taking a problem-saturated narrative and coauthoring that life into one with a hope-filled future:

> And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood!
> Died he for me? who caused his pain! For me? who him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
> Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
>
> 'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies! Who can explore his strange design?
> In vain the firstborn seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine.
> 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore; let angel minds inquire no more.
> 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore; let angel minds inquire no more.
>
> He left his Father's throne above (so free, so infinite his grace!),
> emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.
> 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!
> 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!
>
> Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;
> thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
> my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
> My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
>
> No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
> alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine,
> bold I approach th' eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own.
> Bold I approach th' eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

At best, practitioners of WNPC seek to let parishioners know the chains are gone. They have been set free, and the future story is one in which all approach boldly the throne of Christ. Would that Wesleyan Christians might sing this hymn every Sunday, until we grasped the salvation message.

APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

A. Introduction to the Case Study and Purpose of the Protocol

1. The dissertation **problem** has a dual purpose: to develop the intersection of narrative therapy and John Wesley's theology, particularly Christian perfection (hereby entitled Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations) for parish ministry and to implement and evaluate Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations.

2. The **purpose** of the research was to evaluate the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations, in the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

3. **Research Questions**
    a. **Research Question #1:** What evidence of change is there, if any, when comparing the hope-filled future narrative coauthored by parishioner and pastor during Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations with the parishioners' problem-saturated narratives prepared for the intake conversation?
    b. **Research Question #2:** After the third conversation, in what ways did the Pastoral counselor narrative letter facilitate coauthoring of the parishioners' alternate hope-filled future narratives?
    c. **Research Question #3:** What changes did participation in the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations facilitate in the parishioners' narratives, and additionally, in the journey toward Christian perfection?

B. Data Collection Procedures
1. Ovilla United Methodist Church in Ovilla, Texas will serve as the location to collect data.
    a. Approval for data collection given by the Administrative Council.
    b. Approval for building usage given by the Board of Trustees

2. Six weekly conversations with up to six self-selected parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church will provide the data.

3. Data will be collected using semi-structured conversations with the researcher acting in a participant/observer role as pastor/researcher.
    a. Conversations will be one hour in duration and will take place over six consecutive weeks.

   b. Pastor/Researcher will schedule conversations fifteen minutes apart in order to write the Pastoral Conversation Notes.
   c. Pastor/Researcher will follow up one time with parishioners who fail to attend a conversation.
4. Data collected, including paper copies of the pastor/parishioner informed consent covenant, WPSN, WFN, all MP3 audio recordings, and a thumb drive containing all electronic data make up the case study database. A locked file box in a location known only by the researcher housed the case study database.
   a. Physical shredding of the case study database occurred upon successfully defending the dissertation research.
   b. Electronic shredding of the case study database occurred upon successfully defending the dissertation research.

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations Questions

Narrative therapy and derivatives of this type of counseling, including Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations, rely on a creative use of language. For example, the pastor and parishioner often name a presenting problem as part of the externalization process. Use of generic terms such as "the problem" *in the case study protocol allows pastor and parishioner to coauthor an alternate narrative using protocol questions modified for the parishioner's unique story. Additionally, the protocol contains more questions than could possibly be asked in only six conversations. The pastor is the architect of the conversation, asking questions appropriate to the conversation. The protocol questions serve as the blueprint for the conversation, allowing the pastor and parishioner to coauthor appropriate to their unique conversation. During the literature review, the researcher maintained a list of commonly asked questions in narrative therapy and pastoral counseling. Basing the majority of the protocol questions on that list, the researcher created additional questions. A protocol questions works cited references the literature used to create questions used in Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations. Although there is overlap in the content, a loose categorization follows.*

Problem Questions

- How does the problem affect your life?
- How does the problem affect your relationships?
- How does the problem affect how you feel about yourself?
- How does the problem affect the people in your life?
- What name would you give this problem?
- What tricks does the problem play in your life? In the lives of others?
- How does the problem operate in your life? In the lives of others?
- What are the problem's intentions in your life? In the lives of others?
- What are the problem's beliefs or ideas about your life? About the lives of others?
- What are the problem's plans for your life? For the lives of those around you?
- What does the problem like? What does the problem dislike?
- What rules does the problem have for your life? In the lives of others?
- What purpose does the problem have in your life? In the lives of others?
- What desires does the problem have for your life? About the lives of others?
- What dreams does the problem have about your life? About others' lives?
- Who are the people who support the problem or seem to be playing for the same team as the problem?
- What are the problem's deceits or lies?
- When did you first notice the problem? How long ago did you first notice the problem?
- What was your life like before the problem?
- When is the problem at its strongest in your life?
- When is the problem at its weakest in your life?
- How much control does the problem have in your life now? A week ago? A month ago? A year ago?

- How has the problem affected your energy level? Social life?
- How does the problem get in the way of making the changes you'd like to see?
- How does the problem affect your relationship with God? Your relationship with your church?
- Is the problem with you all the time? What percent of the time is the problem not present? How many hours of the day is the problem present? Not present?
- Do you replay the story of the problem as if there were something unfinished? Do you tell others often about your unfinished past with the problem?

Landscape of Action Questions

- Where were you when you were able to resist the problem? To take that next step?
- How long were you able to resist the problem or take a next step?
- What was happening just before you resisted the problem or took a next step?
- What was happening just after you resisted the problem or took a next step?
- How did you prepare yourself to resist the problem or take a next step?
- When you resisted the problem, or took a next step, were you alone or with someone?
- What did _____ say when you told him/her you had resisted the problem or taken a next step?
- What was the first time you resisted the problem or took a next step?
- What were you thinking about when you resisted the problem or took a next step?
- What was the turning point for the way you resisted the problem or took a next step?
- Do you find yourself compelled to return to past stories or problems?
- How are you holding onto hostile or hurt feelings because of the problem in your life?
- Are you so full of a past story that you are not able to enjoy the present?

Landscape of Identity Questions

- Does the problem ever have you doing and saying things against your values or judgement?
- When did you begin to believe this understanding of yourself?
- What story can you tell about an experience that played a role in forming this picture you have about yourself?
- When you review your past, what was important to you back then?
- What other stories in your life show this idea of what is important to you?
- In what ways do you view yourself as a child of God? As a parent? Child? Spouse? Sibling?
- What are your relationships like with your spouse? Children? Parents? Coorkers? Church members?
- What does that say about your relationship with that person?
- What personal values is this based on? What personal value does this display?
- When the problem began, how would you describe your relationship at that time?
- What skills or abilities went into doing this at this point in your life?

- What skills or abilities did it take for you to do this?
- When you took this step, what were you intending for your life? What was God intending for your life?
- What do you think that says about what you want for your life?
- What is important for your life?
- What does this step say about what you were planning? What does it say about the plans God has for your life?
- What does it say about you as a person that you were able to do this? What would God say about you as a person that you were able to do this?
- Can you help me understand more about what that says you believe in or value? How does that belief or value adhere to your Christian faith? How does that belief or value match with what God values?
- Where did you learn this way of thinking about relationships?
- What models in your life offered these sorts of attitudes?
- How did the problem so easily coach you into believing that?
- How does all of this fit with the person you would like to be? With the person God is creating you to become?
- How is it with your soul?

Deconstructing Questions

- How has the problem led you into conclusions about your relationship?
- How has the problem led you into certain behaviors in the situation you describe?
- How does the problem encourage certain feelings?
- Does the problem get in the way of developing preferred relationships?
- What attitudes justify your described behaviors?

Community/Outsider Perspective Questions

- Who in your life also holds that opinion of you? Who in your life doesn't support this picture of yourself? Who in your life is more important?
- Who would be the least surprised that you did this? What would he or she say?
- Who else would know that you stand for that particular quality or value?
- Who nurtures your faith?
- What would your support system say about the problem?
- How does the problem affect your relationship with others?
- What is it like for you to hear others saying those things?
- Who played a part in helping you live this way?
- Who will be the first to notice you conquered the problem? How will this affect him or her?
- How long will it take in this new way of being before others take notice?
- Who in our church has faced this sort of problem? What might they say to you about it?

Alternate Story/Unique Outcome Questions

- Can you tell me a story to help me understand how you took this step forward?
- What in your life has prepared you for this step?
- If you took these next steps, how does that affect the picture you have of yourself?
- How will these next steps affect your life in a week? In a month? In a year? In five years?
- Are these activities, developments, outcomes okay with you? How do you feel about these activities, developments, outcomes?
- Is this development in the story a positive or negative one? Somewhere in between? Neutral?
- Why is/isn't this okay for you?
- Why do you feel this way about this development? What stand are you taking about this development?
- How have you managed to stop the problem from getting worse?
- What is different during the times in your life when the problem is not affecting you?
- What story can you tell about a time you resisted the problem?
- How would you increase your time free from the problem?
- How do you feel in the times you are free from the problem?
- What made all these changes possible?
- How is this unique outcome a common occurrence in your life?
- Who in your past would be least surprised that you were able to make this next step?
- When are there times when the problem tries to gain control, but you were able to resist?
- When are you free from the problem, even for a few minutes?
- Is that something you would like more or less of in your life?

Hopeful Future Questions

- How are you creating satisfying stories about your future?
- What are your next steps?
- How were you able to hold onto hope considering all you've been through?
- Of all the people you've known, who would be the least surprised to find out you held onto hope?'
- Who have been the people in your life who have taught you about holding onto hope in difficult situations? Why did that person choose to share that hopeful lesson with you? What does it say about you? How will you honor that lesson in the future?
- What have others seen in the way you handled this situation that showed them you were still hopeful?
- Are there instances in your situation that validated your hopeful stance throughout this difficult problem?
- What is a story when you acted as if you had hopes for a better life? What sorts of things were you doing in the past story when you had hopes of a better life?
- How long will you live your life according to these values and beliefs?

- What do you imagine will happen if you keep doing in the future what you've done in the past?
- What do you anticipate if things do not change with the problem? What will you do then?
- Tell me about your future: what do you think things will be like for you in a week? In a month? In a year?
- How will you know that you have conquered the problem?
- What will others say when you have conquered the problem?
- What will your victory over the problem tell others about you?
- If you wrote me a letter in a year and it was filled with good news about your life, what would it say?
- If your life was made into a movie with a happy ending, could you tell me about that ending?
- Next year if I read a story about you in the paper because something wonderful had happened to you, what would it be?
- How will you be different when you....?
- Where does _____ fit into that picture?
- How will you spend your time when your problem is gone? What will life be like for you?
- How will your future change when your anticipated event takes place?
- How will you know when the problem is no longer a concern for you?
- When the problem is resolved in your relationship, how will your relationship look different a year from now?
- How do you picture your relationship when the problem is no longer disturbing the relationship?
- How do you want your life to be different one month from now? Six months from now? Be concrete, realistic, and specific.
- Suppose you awakened tomorrow and your problem was miraculously gone. What would be the first thing different you noticed? How will your life be different? How will the people in your life be different? How will you act, feel, think, differently? Where will you live? What will you be doing? What would be necessary to make that miracle a reality in your life? Have parts of this miracle already started to happen? How can you use these miraculous parts to conquer the rest of the problem?
- The problem seems to be robbing you of a hopeful future. How can we prevent the problem from robbing you?
- What do you think life will be like for you in five years?
- How will you maintain the problemless future?

Christian Perfection/Sanctification/Holiness Questions

- How has your faith in God affected your life? Affected the life of the problem?
- Has there ever been a time that your faith was a source of strength in your life?
- Has there ever been a time when your faith made a difference in the way you viewed a problem?
- Has it ever been helpful to talk with other people about the struggles in your relationship with God?
- Has it ever been helpful to talk with other people about their relationship with God?
- Has there ever been a time when your faith helped you to change your reaction to the problem?
- Have you asked yourself what God is calling you to do in this situation?
- If Jesus miraculously solved your problem, how would you know the problem was gone? What would you be doing differently? How would you think differently? How would it change your understanding of God? How would your friends and family know the miracle had taken place? What stories would you tell about the miracle? How would we all say that you had changed?
- Do any of the stories in the Bible relate to your problem?
- What prayers have you been praying? How long have you been praying about this problem? Have there been any answers?
- How will you know when your prayers are answered?
- How are others praying for you?
- As a pastor, how may I pray for you?
- Does your story remind you of anyone in the Bible?
- What were you taught about the nature of God? Is your understanding of the nature of God the same or different than what you were taught?
- What evidence have you seen of God's amazing grace in your life?
- How is God calling you to resist the effects of sin in your life?
- How is God active and present in the midst of the problem?
- How is God actively calling you to live in relationship to the problem?
- What aspects of the problem is God calling you to give up in order to be more like Christ?
- How do you hear God's voice during this time in your life?
- How is the Holy Spirit at work in your life?
- What does it mean to you to experience God in your life?
- What is God saying to you about the kind of person God planned for you to become?
- Have you experienced the forgiveness of sins in your life?
- Have you experienced God's peace in your life?
- Does inward or outward sin have power in your life?
- What are the elements in your life from which the Holy Spirit is moving you away?
- What song or hymn resonates with your story?
- Do you mind if I share a bible story or a scripture with you?
- Who do you talk with about your spiritual life and concerns?

- What spiritual failures have you experienced since our last meeting?
- What spiritual successes have you experienced since our last meeting?
- What temptations have you battled with this week?
- What temptations have you overcome this week?
- Where do you feel the most vulnerable to temptation?
- Where do you feel the least vulnerable to temptation?
- What temptations were you delivered from this week? How did you win that victory?
- What has the Lord revealed about your heart and life that needs revision?
- What does pursuing holiness mean to you? How do you pursue holiness in your life?
- What is the ruling principle of your soul? Is it the love of God? Is it the fear/worship of God?
- How would your story be different if you had evidence of heaven/God/Jesus/Holy Spirit in your heart and life?
- How is God's kingdom being realized in your life?
- If God's kingdom were fulfilled in your life, how would you know?
- Have you sinned because you were not choosing the grace of God?
- Have you neglected an opportunity from God?
- In what ways is your heart right with God?
- Is God the center of your soul? Is God the sum of all your desires?
- Are you pursuing the will of God in your life?
- Is your heart right with your neighbor?
- Do you go about your day in the spirit of the world or in the Spirit of Christ?
- Will you remain stubbornly tied to your own way or will you yield to God's will?
- What barriers are keeping you from experiencing the love of God? How can you remove those barriers?

Questions Related to the Conversation Process

- Did you have any lingering thoughts from our last conversation?
- Did you have any new ideas after our last conversation?
- How is our conversation going for you?
- Should we keep pursuing this story, or are you more interested in something else?
- Is this what you would like to talk about?

Questions about Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations

- What was the most helpful thing for you about our conversations?
- What was the least helpful thing for you about our conversations?
- What did you value about our relationship?
- What image, symbol, word, or phrase might describe our conversations?
- How did our time together to further your relationship with God?
- In what ways are you more aware of the work of God in your life?
- What are your thoughts about your future story?
- What do you wish there was more of during our time together?

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Counseling

Letter Outline

Narrative therapy, John Wesley, and parish pastors employ letter writing as a way of showing care. Letters are positive in nature, building upon the strengths of the parishioner as noted by the pastor, allowing the unique language of the Wesleyan narrative pastoral conversations to show through. The letters are speculative, tentative, and often start with wondering statements on behalf of the pastor. Letters do not offer identifying details but continue the narrative practice of using the name designated by the parishioner throughout the letter. Humor displayed in conversations is also welcome in a letter. The literature review informed ideas for narrative letter writing, specified in the protocol questions works cited.

1. The pastor opens with main ideas emerging from previous three conversations.

2. The pastor reflects on conversations about the problem and the parishioner's relationship to the problem.

3. The pastor offers some of the parishioner's unique outcomes in relationship to the problem.

4. The pastor focuses on the hope-filled future narrative currently coauthored in the conversations.

5. The pastor offers some insight into possible ways God might be working in the life of the parishioner.

6. The pastor closes the letter with some positive ways the pastor experiences the parishioner, looking forward to seeing the parishioner at the next conversation.

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APPENDIX B

WRITTEN PROBLEM-SATURATED NARRATIVE

The following questions will help you write a story about the problem causing you to volunteer to participate in Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. Feel free to answer each question as you wish.

1. What problem caused you to volunteers for pastoral counseling?

2. In what ways has this problem affected your life?

3. In what ways has this problem affected the lives of people around you?

4. In what ways are you and the people in your lives free from the effects of this problem?

5. Where is God in the midst of the problem?

6. In what ways has this problem affected your relationship with God or your view of God?

7. In what ways have you felt the leading or working of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this problem?

8. What would you name this problem?

9. In what ways do you see this problem affecting your future?

10. What do you hope is different after your six weeks of conversations with a pastor?

**Now, using the ten questions you just answered,
write a story describing your problem.
You may be as brief or as long as you wish.
This is YOUR story:**

Don't forget to bring YOUR STORY to the first conversation.

APPENDIX C

PASTORAL CONVERSATION NOTES

Parishioner's Pseudonym:_____

Date_____ Time:_____ Conversation #:_____

PROBLEM-SATURATED NARRATIVE

UNIQUE OUTCOMES FUTURE NARRATIVE

PASTOR'S REFLECTIONS/OBSERVATIONS:

APPENDIX D

PASTORAL COUNSELOR NARRATIVE LETTER

Date:_____

Dear

Through Christ's Love,

Rev. Christie Robbins
2 Corinthians 5:17

APPENDIX E

WRITTEN FUTURE NARRATIVE

The following questions will help you write a story about the problem after participating in Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. Feel free to answer each question as you wish.

1. What problem caused you to volunteer for pastoral counseling?

2. In what ways has this problem affected your life after participating in pastoral conversations?

3. In what ways has the problem affected the lives of people around you after participating in pastoral conversations?

4. In what ways are you and the people in your lives ever free from the effects of this problem?

5. Where is God in the midst of the problem?

6. In what ways has this problem affected your relationship with God or your view of God?

7. In what ways have you felt the leading or working of the Holy Spirit in the midst of this problem?

8. What would you name this problem?

9. In what ways do you see this problem affecting your future?

10. In what ways is your approach to this problem different after your six weeks of conversations with a pastor?

**Now, using the ten questions you just answered,
write a story describing your problem.
You may be as brief or as long as you wish.
This is YOUR story:**

Now, write YOUR FUTURE STORY:

Don't forget to bring YOUR STORY to the final conversation.

APPENDIX F

EXPERT REVIEW E-MAIL LETTER

Dear Research Reflection Team/Dr. Headley,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the expert review of the case study protocol. Attached to this e-mail you will find the abstract for the dissertation project, the protocol itself, as well as the Expert Review Instrument. Although you are already familiar with the research project, I would like to remind you that the purpose of the expert review is to ensure that the case study protocol aligns with the problem, purpose, and research questions of the ministry intervention. For easy reference, you can find all of those elements in the beginning of the protocol.

I estimate it will take between 1-2 hours to review the Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations questions and fill out the attached Expert Review Intstrument. In order to incorporate these reviews into the data collection phase of the project, I will need your review soon. For the Research Reflection Team, the review will need to be completed BEFORE our monthly meeting, per our usual routine we will meet in Sunday School Room #2 on Wednesday September 25 from 4:30-5:30 PM. Because our Wednesday night meal will take place at 5:30, I will not provide pizza. Childcare provided. For Dr. Headley, if I might have your review by October 1 in order to incorporate your input. I look forward to your review of the case study protocol.

Through Christ's Love,

Rev. Christie Robbins
2 Corinthians 5:17

APPENDIX G

EXPERT REVIEW INSTRUMENT

When reviewing the case study protocol, please keep these questions before you. You may write your answers or comments here or on the protocol itself.

1. Which questions in the protocol struck you as the most helpful for a parishioner?

2. Which questions might seem difficult for a parishioner to understand?

3. Would different phrasing improve any of the questions?

4. Were there questions that particularly demonstrated the intersection of narrative therapy and Wesleyan theology?

5. Are there any questions you would add that are representative of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations?

6. Do the questions align with the problem, purpose, and research questions of the dissertation?

7. Would another pastor be able to use the questions in a pastoral counseling setting?

8. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments not covered in the expert review about the protocol?

APPENDIX H

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL AND TRUSTEES PRESENTATION

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations:

CO-AUTHORING THE PARISHIONER'S STORY THROUGH

WESLEYAN THEOLOGY, NARRATIVE THERAPY, AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

A ministry intervention research project
for the fulfillment of a
Doctor of Ministry
from Asbury Theological Seminary
Rev. Christie Robbins

PROBLEM:

creating

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral
Conversations

at the intersection of

Narrative Therapy
&
John Wesley's
doctrine of Christian perfection

for the use of pastors in a parish setting

6 self-selected parishioners
6 consecutive weeks

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

To evaluate the effectiveness of

Wesleyan
Narrative Pastoral
Conversations

with the parishioners of

Ovilla
United Methodist Church

RQ 1: What evidence of change is there, if any, when comparing the co-authored hope-filled future narrative written after the fifth conversation with the parishioner's problem-saturated narrative prepared for the intake conversation?

RQ 2: After the third conversation, in what ways did the Pastoral Counselor Narrative Letter continue in co-authoring the parishioner's alternate hope-filled future narrative?

RQ 3: During the sixth conversation, what elements of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations did the pastor and parishioner agree elicited change in the parishioner's narrative or further Christian perfection?

Theological Framework & Literature Review Categories and Themes

John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection

Narrative Therapy

Intersection of narrative therapy & Christian perfection

How does the intersection develop questions for narrative therapy using Christian perfection?

Qualitative Multiple Case Research Design

Participants
Research Design
& Anticipated Findings

6 self-selected parishioners from Ovilla UMC

6 weeks Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations

Qualitative Multiple Case Study Research Design

Anticipated Findings:
Parishioners embraced an alternate hope-filled future narrative, experiencing movement toward Christian perfection.

APPENDIX I

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP VERBAL ANNOUNCEMENT

What's your story? God has given each one of us a unique story, filled with unique people and situations. From time to time our stories develop some drama, life throws us a curve ball, and we find that the story we are living is not the story we *want* to be living. We begin to wonder if the story we are living matches the story *God* has for our lives. If you are currently in the midst of a story that feels like it might be better with a little bit of editing, you might be a good candidate for my research project.

Christie Robbins is currently a student at Asbury Theological Seminary pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree in Family Ministries. She is in need of up to six volunteers who might want a pastor to help them rewrite a problem chapter in their story into a new, hope-filled chapter. If you are over the age of 18, not currently involved in any type of counseling with a mental health professional, not currently on any psychiatric medication, and are experiencing a problem that you would like to talk to a pastor about, you are a good candidate for this research project. Volunteers meeting the criteria would commit to six individual one hour sessions of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations on consecutive weeks at Ovilla United Methodist Church. Taking every step to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, these pastoral conversations are free and designed to take a problem story, rewrite it, and hopefully move you closer to God in the process. Christie only has the capacity to accept six volunteers, so if you are interested, please give her a call, text, or e-mail at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxx@xxxxxx.com.

APPENDIX J

SUNDAY MORNING BULLETIN INSERT

What's Your Story?

If your God-given story is experiencing some drama
don't save it for your mama!

Tell it to Rev. Christie Robbins, who would like to help rewrite the problem chapter in your life into a hope-filled chapter. Six volunteers needed who are over the age of 18, not currently in any type of counseling, and not currently on any kind of psychiatric medication for six weeks of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. Qualified volunteers would meet individually with Christie for one hour over six consecutive weeks. Conversations are free and confidential. Interested? Call or e-mail Rev. Christie Robbins at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xxxx.com.

APPENDIX K

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP PROJECTED ANNOUNCEMENT

Wesleyan Narrative
Pastoral Conversations

What's YOUR story?
Life gotcha down?
Wondering where God is
in the midst of your story?
Wish you could write a new chapter,
but need some help?

Up to 6 volunteers needed:
Must be over the age of 18
Must not currently be in counseling
Must be free from psychiatric drugs

6 consecutive weeks starting soon
One hour each session
Free & confidential

Why save the drama for your mama?
Contact Rev. Christie Robbins
xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxx@xxxx.com

APPENDIX L

AUTOMATED PHONE MESSAGE SCRIPT

What's your story? God has given each one of us a unique story, but from time to time, we find that the story we *are* living is not the story we *want* to be living. We begin to wonder if our story matches the one God has for our lives. If you are currently in the midst of a story that feels like it might be better with a little bit of editing, you might be a good candidate for my research project.

Volunteers must be over the age of 18, not currently involved in any type of counseling with a mental health professional, and not currently on any psychiatric medication. Candidates for the research project are experiencing a problem that you would like to talk to a pastor about. Volunteers would commit to six individual one hour sessions of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations on consecutive weeks at Ovilla United Methodist Church. These pastoral conversations are free and confidential, and designed to take a problem story, rewrite it, and move you closer to God in the process. I can only accept up to six volunteers, so if you are interested, please contact Rev. Christie Robbins by phone call, text, or e-mail at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxx@xxxx.com.

APPENDIX M

E-NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations

What's Your Story?

What's your story? God has given each one of us a unique story, filled with unique people and situations. From time to time, our stories develop some drama, life throws us a curve ball, and we find that the story we are living is not the story we want to be living. We begin to wonder if our story matches the one God has for our lives. If you are currently in the midst of a story that feels like it might be better with a little bit of editing, you might be a good candidate for a research project taking place at Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Join Rev. Christie Robbins in a research project for her doctoral dissertation toward completion of a Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Christie has a degree in psychology with a minor in religion, and a Master's of Divinity degree with a concentration in pastoral care and counseling. With over fifteen years in professional ministry, Christie has experience counseling with parishioners, and has a strong desire to help people experience God in the midst of their problems.

So, if you have a problem right now and are over the age of 18, not currently participating in any form of counseling or currently on any psychiatric medication, you might consider being a part of Christie's research project: Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. These conversations will take place individually for one hour over six consecutive weeks at Ovilla United Methodist Church. The research project is limited to six volunteers. Conversations are completely confidential and completely free. If you would like more information, or if you would like to volunteer, please contact Christie Robbins at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxx@xxxx.com.

APPENDIX N

PARISHIONER INFORMATION

Please fill out the following information and return it to me before October 1.

Name:_____

Age:_____

Address:_____

City:_____

Zip Code:_____

Phone Number:_____

E-mail Address:_____

What is your preferred method of communication for scheduling conversations?

_____

Are you able to meet on Sundays?

Able to meet on Sundays:_____ preferred time:_____

If not, please indicate several days and times during the week that you would be available to meet:_____

May I mail you a letter halfway through our conversations?

_____

Dear Volunteer,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research project entitled Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations, a ministry intervention at Ovilla United Methodist Church. I will be contacting you in the coming days using your preferred method of communication to schedule a time to begin our conversations. To protect your confidentiality and anonymity as well as keeping with the research procedures determined for this project, please keep electronic communications reserved for scheduling appointments and logistical concerns. I look forward to talking about your problems within the times designated for conversations.

Please arrive at Ovilla United Methodist Church fifteen minutes before your scheduled conversation, but not more than fifteen minutes, in order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the other volunteers in this project. Sunday School Room one in the adult education annex is our designated waiting room. (The Adult education annex is a red brick building located directly behind the kitchen of the fellowship hall.) Please feel free to wait in that room until I greet you there and escort you to the room designated for our scheduled conversation.

In this e-mail attachment, you will find a set of ten questions to help me understand the problem that prompted you to volunteer for these conversations. Please answer the questions, and write a brief story using the questions. Bring your story with you to our first conversation. I look forward to hearing your story and helping you re-author a new hope-filled chapter.

Thank you again for volunteering for this research project. I am praying for you and our time together. I am looking forward to hearing how God has been at work in your life and discovering how God is currently at work in your life.

Through Christ's Love,

Rev. Christie Robbins
2 Corinthians 5:17

APPENDIX O

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PASTORAL COUNSELORS[1] CODE OF ETHICS

(Amended April 2010)

PRINCIPLE I - PROLOGUE

1 The AAPC Code of Ethics may be reproduced only after contacting the AAPC Association Office to insure that the most current copy of the Code can be provided.

2 The use of "member", "we", "us", and "our" refers to and is binding upon all levels of individual and institutional membership and affiliation of AAPC.

PRINCIPLE I—PROLOGUE

As members[2] of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, we are respectful of the various theologies, traditions, and values of our faith communities and committed to the dignity and worth of each individual. We are dedicated to advancing the welfare of those who seek our assistance and to the maintenance of high standards of professional conduct and competence. As pastoral counselors and pastoral counseling students we are accountable for our work regardless of our professional functions, the settings in which we work, or the populations which we serve. This accountability is expressed in our conduct of relationships with clients, colleagues, students, our faith communities, and through the acceptance and practice of the principles and procedures of this Code of Ethics. The Code articulates standards that the Association will use to determine whether pastoral counselors have engaged in unethical conduct. In subscribing to this Code, pastoral counselors are required to be knowledgeable of these standards, cooperate with association procedures for responding to complaints of ethical misconduct, participate in AAPC adjudication proceedings, and abide by any AAPC disciplinary rulings or sanctions. The Ethics Code is not intended to be a basis of civil liability. Whether a pastoral counselor has violated the Ethics Code standards does not by itself determine whether the pastoral counselor is legally liable in a court action, whether a contract is enforceable, or whether other legal consequences occur.
We are committed:

A. To affirm the importance of being both spiritually grounded and psychologically informed.

B. To maintain responsible association with the faith group with which we identify and in which we may have ecclesiastical standing.

C. To avoid discriminating against or refusing employment, educational opportunity or professional assistance to anyone on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, health status, age, disabilities or national origin; provided that nothing

[1] Used with permission from the AAPC, obtained 7/10/2013 via email.

herein shall limit a member or center from utilizing religious requirements or exercising a religious preference in employment decisions.

D. As members of AAPC we recognize our responsibility to stay current with research that affects our understanding of clinical issues and the conduct of our practice. We agree at all levels of membership to continuing education and professional growth including supervision, consultation, and active participation in the meetings and affairs of the Association.

E. To seek out and engage in collegial relationships, recognizing that isolation can lead to a loss of perspective and judgment.

F. To manage our personal lives in a healthful fashion and to seek appropriate assistance for our own personal problems or conflicts

G. To assess/evaluate, diagnose or provide treatment only for those problems or issues that are within the reasonable boundaries of our competence.

H. To establish and maintain appropriate professional relationship boundaries. We will make every effort to be transparent with congregations and other public constituencies about the boundaries we hold.

I. To remain abreast of and to comply with appropriate regulatory statute that governs our pastoral counseling activities. "**Should clients be in a different state than the pastoral counselor, we will comply with regulatory statutes in that state as well.**" Whenever the AAPC Code differs with legal mandates, pastoral counseling licensure laws, or with ecclesiastical policies, the more stringent of the two applies.

J. To promote racial justice and develop multicultural competence as part of our practice.

PRINCIPLE II—PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

In all professional matters members of AAPC maintain practices that protect the public and advance the profession.

A. We use our knowledge and professional associations for the benefit of the people we serve and not to secure unfair personal advantage.

B. We clearly represent our level of membership and limit our practice to that level. Publication of practice or agency material clearly explains the levels of membership that apply to individuals.

C. Fees and financial arrangements, as with all contractual matters, are always discussed without hesitation or equivocation at the onset and are established in a straightforward, professional manner.

D. We are prepared to render service to individuals and communities in crisis without regard to financial remuneration when necessary.

E. We neither receive nor pay a commission for referral of a client.

F. We conduct our practice, agency, regional and association fiscal affairs with due regard to recognized business and accounting procedures. We respect the prerogatives and obligations of the institutions, agencies, or organizations by whom we are employed or with which we associate.

G. Upon the transfer of a pastoral counseling practice or the sale of real, personal, tangible or intangible property or assets used in such practice, the privacy and well being of the client shall be of primary concern.

a. Client names and records shall be excluded from the transfer or sale.

b. Any fees paid shall be for services rendered, consultation, equipment, real estate, and the name and logo of the counseling agency.

c. We provide recent and current clients information regarding the closing or transferring of our practice and assure the confidentiality of their records.

H. We are careful to represent facts truthfully to clients, referral sources, and third party payers regarding credentials and services rendered. We shall correct any misrepresentation of our professional qualifications or affiliations.

I. We do not malign other professionals, nor do we plagiarize or otherwise present, distribute, or publish another's work as our own.

PRINCIPLE III—CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

It is the responsibility of members of AAPC to maintain relationships with clients on a professional basis. We take all reasonable steps to avoid harming our clients and to safeguard the welfare of those with whom we work.

A. We do not abandon or neglect clients. We make reasonable efforts to ensure continuity of services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as unavailability, relocation, illness, or disability. If we are unwilling for appropriate reasons, to provide professional help or continue a professional relationship, every reasonable effort is made to arrange for continuation of treatment with another professional. Prior to leaving an agency or practice we complete all files and paper work is documented and signed.

B. We make only realistic statements regarding the pastoral counseling process and its outcome. We inform our clients of the purpose of the counseling, risks related to counseling, possible limits to the services because of third party payer limits, reasonable alternatives, clients rights to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent. We take reasonable steps to make sure the client understands the counseling process and has the opportunity to ask questions.

C. We show sensitive regard for the moral, social, and religious values and beliefs of clients and communities. We avoid imposing our beliefs on others, although we may express them when appropriate in the pastoral counseling process.

D. Counseling relationships are continued only so long as it is reasonably clear that the clients are benefiting from the relationship.

E. We recognize the trust placed in and unique power of the therapeutic relationship. While acknowledging the complexity of some pastoral relationships, we avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. We avoid those dual or multiple relationships with clients which could impair our professional judgment, compromise the integrity of the treatment, and/or use the relationship for our own gain. A multiple relationship occurs when a pastoral counselor is in a professional role with a person and 1) at the same time is in another role with the same person, 2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the pastoral counselor has the professional relationship, or 3) promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, particularly within congregations or in family or couples counseling, we take reasonable steps to protect the clients and are responsible for setting clear and appropriate boundaries.

F. We do not engage in harassment, abusive words or actions, or exploitative coercion of clients or former clients.

G. All forms of sexual behavior or harassment with clients are unethical, even when a client invites or consents to such behavior or involvement. Sexual behavior is defined as, but not limited to, all forms of overt and covert seductive speech, gestures, written communication, and behavior as well as physical contact of a sexual nature; harassment is defined as but not limited to, repeated comments, gestures, written communication, or physical contacts of a sexual nature.

H. We recognize that the therapist/client relationship involves a power imbalance, the residual effects of which are operative following the termination of the therapy relationship. Therefore, all sexual behavior or harassment as defined in Principle III G, with former clients is unethical.

Interactive long-distance counseling delivery, when the client resides in one location and the pastoral counselor in another, may be utilized to supplement but not to completely replace face-to-face therapy. We take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client understands the limits of long-distance therapy, the computer application, what it is used for, and its possible effects.

PRINCIPLE IV—CONFIDENTIALITY

As members of AAPC we respect the integrity and protect the welfare of all persons with whom we are working and have an obligation to safeguard information about them that has

been obtained in the course of the counseling process. We have a responsibility to know and understand civil laws and administrative rules that govern confidentiality requirements of our profession in the setting of our work.

A. All records kept on a client are stored under lock and key and are disposed of in a manner that assures security and confidentiality. Records should be maintained for the number of years required appropriate government regulatory statues.

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B. We take reasonable steps to ensure that documentation in records is accurate and reflects the services provided. Such documentation is intended to facilitate provision of services later by other professionals, meet institutional requirements, ensure accuracy of billing and payments, and ensure compliance with law.

C. We recognize that confidentiality belongs to the client. We treat all communications from clients with professional confidence and take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium. These precautions include an awareness of the limited confidentiality guarantees of electronics communication.

D. Except in those situations where the identity of the client is necessary to the understanding of the case, we use only the first names of our clients when engaged in supervision or consultation. It is our responsibility to convey the importance of confidentiality to the supervisor/consultant; this is particularly important when the supervision is shared by other professionals, as in a supervisory group.

E. We do not disclose client confidences to anyone, except: as mandated by law; to prevent a clear and immediate danger to someone; in the course of a civil, criminal or disciplinary action arising from the counseling where the pastoral counselor is a defendant; for purposes of supervision or consultation; or by previously obtained written permission. In cases involving more than one person (as client) written permission must be obtained from all legally accountable persons who have been present during the counseling before any disclosure can be made.

F. We disclose confidential information for appropriate reasons only with valid written consent from the client or a person legally authorized to consent on behalf of a client. We obtain informed written consent of clients before audio and/or video tape recording or permitting third party observation of their sessions.

G. We do not use these standards of confidentiality to avoid intervention when it is necessary, e.g., when there is evidence of abuse of minors, the elderly, the disabled, the physically or mentally incompetent.

H. When current or former clients are referred to in a publication, while teaching or in a public presentation, their identity is thoroughly disguised.

I. We as members of AAPC agree that as an express condition of our membership in the Association, Association ethics communications, files, investigative reports, and related records are strictly confidential and waive their right to use same in a court of law to advance any claim against another member. Any member seeking such records for such

purpose shall be subject to disciplinary action for attempting to violate the confidentiality requirements of the organization. This policy is intended to promote pastoral and confessional communications without legal consequences and to protect potential privacy and confidentiality interests of third parties.

PRINCIPLE V—SUPERVISEE, STUDENT & EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

As members of AAPC we have an ethical concern for the integrity and welfare of our supervisees, students and employees. These relationships are maintained on a professional and confidential basis. We recognize our influential position with regard to both current and former supervisees, students and employees, and avoid exploiting their trust and dependency. We make every effort to avoid dual relationships with such persons that could impair our judgment or increase the risk of personal and/or financial exploitation.

A. We do not engage in ongoing counseling relationships with current supervisees, students and employees.

B. We do not engage in sexual or other harassment of supervisees, students, employees, research subjects or colleagues.

C. All forms of sexual behavior, as defined in Principle III.G, with our supervisees, students, research subjects and employees (except in employee situations involving domestic partners) are unethical.

D. We advise our students, supervisees, and employees against offering or engaging in, or holding themselves out as competent to engage in, professional services beyond their training, level of experience and competence.

E. Supervisors have a responsibility to provide timely and fair evaluations of their supervisees and employees.

F. We do not harass or dismiss an employee who has acted in a reasonable, responsible and ethical manner to protect, or intervene on behalf of, a client or other member of the public or another employee.

G. To protect the public, employers and supervisors who have dismissed employees and supervisees for ethical cause must report that fact as part of any official report of service or enrollment in a pastoral counseling center or training program.

H. We are sensitive to the requirements of an organization with which we are affiliated or for whom we are working. In case of conflict with the Code of Ethics and the organization, we clarify the nature of the conflict, make known our commitment to the Code of Ethics, and to the extent feasible, resolve the conflict in a way that permits adherence to the Code.

PRINCIPLE VI—INTERPROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As members of AAPC we relate to and cooperate with other professional persons in our community and beyond. We are part of a network of health care professionals and are expected to develop and maintain interdisciplinary and interprofessional relationships.

A. We do not offer ongoing clinical services to persons currently receiving treatment from another professional without prior knowledge of and in consultation with the other professional, with the clients' informed consent. Soliciting such clients is unethical.

B. We exercise care and interprofessional courtesy when approached for services by persons who claim or appear to have inappropriately terminated treatment with another professional.

PRINCIPLE VII—ADVERTISING

Any advertising by or for a member of AAPC, including announcements, public statements and promotional activities, is undertaken with the purpose of helping the public make informed judgments and choices.

A. We do not misrepresent our professional qualifications, affiliations and functions, or falsely imply sponsorship or certification by any organization.

B. We may use the following information to describe ourselves and the services we provide: name; highest relevant academic degree earned from an accredited institution; date, type and level of certification or licensure; AAPC membership level, clearly stated; address and telephone number; office hours; a brief review of services offered, e.g., individual, couple and group counseling; fee information; languages spoken; and policy regarding third party payments. Additional relevant information may be provided if it is legitimate, reasonable, free of deception and not otherwise prohibited by these principles. We may not use the initials "AAPC" after our names in the manner of an academic degree.

C. Announcements and brochures promoting our services describe them with accuracy and dignity, devoid of all claims or evaluation. We may send them to professional persons, religious institutions and other agencies, but to prospective individual clients only in response to inquiries.

D. We do not make public statements which contain any of the following:

1. A false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or unfair statement.

2. A misrepresentation of fact or a statement likely to mislead or deceive because in context it makes only a partial disclosure of relevant facts.

3. A testimonial from a client regarding the quality of services or products.

4. A statement intended or likely to create false or unjustified expectations of favorable results.

5. A statement implying unusual, unique, or one-of-a-kind abilities, including misrepresentation through sensationalism, exaggeration or superficiality.

6. A statement intended or likely to exploit a client's fears, anxieties or emotions.

7. A statement concerning the comparative desirability of offered services.

8. A statement of direct solicitation of individual clients.

A. We do not compensate in any way a representative of the press, radio, television or other communication medium for the purpose of professional publicity and news items. A paid advertisement must be identified as such, unless it is contextually apparent that it is a paid advertisement. We are responsible for the content of such advertisement. Any advertisement to the public by radio or television is to be pre-recorded, approved by us and a recording of the actual transmission retained in our possession.

B. Advertisements, web postings or announcements by us of workshops, clinics, seminars, growth groups or similar services or endeavors, are to give a clear statement of purpose and a clear description of the experiences to be provided. The education, training and experience of the provider(s) involved are to be appropriately specified.

PRINCIPLE VIII—RESEARCH

A. Pastoral Counselors who are conducting research are responsible for assuring informed consent for all human subjects. Research participants must be informed about:

1. Purpose and sponsorship of the research, expected duration, expected procedures, and the manner and scope of reporting on the findings of the research.
2. Their right to withdraw from participation at any time.
3. Any consequences of withdrawing from a research project.
4. Any discomfort or adverse effects of research procedures that would influence a subject's willingness to participate.
5. Any benefits from participating in a research project.
6. A contact person for questions about the project or participant's rights.

B. Pastoral Counselors take appropriate measures to protect research subjects who may also be receiving pastoral counseling services in schools, agencies, private practices, or churches in which research is conducted.
This includes:

1. Taking steps to protect client/participants from any adverse consequences of declining or withdrawing a study.
2. Taking steps to assure clients are not exploited by research-related dual relationships.
3. Assuring that therapeutic services are not compromised by research procedures or goals.
4. To the extent that services may be compromised by participation in research, investigators seek the ethical advice of qualified professionals not directly involved in the investigation and observe safeguards to protect the rights of research participants.

C. Pastoral Counselors guarantee confidentiality of information obtained from a research participant unless confidentiality is waived in writing. When it is possible that information might be recognized by others (including family members) researchers disclose a plan for protecting confidentiality as part of informed consent.

1. Pastoral Counselors consider the effects of research procedures on communities in which it takes place, and take adequate precautions to protect the integrity of these communities.
2. Pastoral Counselors comply with Federal standards and local institutional review procedures governing human subject research. When AAPC is a principal investigator, the Judicial Ethics Panel of AAPC will act as a review board to ensure compliance.
3. Pastoral Counselors are truthful in reporting research results. Pastoral Counselors:

a. Do not plagiarize by presenting another's work or data as one's own;
b. Assure that research results are not presented or published in a deceptive or manipulative manner;
c. Pastoral counselors do not withhold their research data, methods of analysis, or procedures from other qualified researchers who in good faith wish to replicate or validate research results, to the extent that confidentiality of research subjects can be guaranteed.

PRINCIPLE IX—PROCEDURES

A. The Association will develop and maintain a set of procedures for receiving, investigating and adjudicating complaints of ethical misconduct against a member.

1. AAPC will direct the Executive Director and his/her staff in the association office to receive complaints.
2. AAPC will establish and maintain a Judicial Ethics Panel to investigate and adjudicate complaints.

B. AAPC will take complaints of ethical misconduct with the utmost seriousness and will exercise appropriate care and diligence in responding both to the complainant and the member.

Please Note: The AAPC Code of Ethics and the Ethics Committee Procedures were separated by action of the AAPC membership on April 17, 1993. The Board of Directors is now authorized to modify ethics committee procedures without further action by the membership. Members should note that the substantive rule from the Code of ethics to be applied to an alleged violation will continue to be determined by the date of the alleged violation and not the date the complaint is received. However, as a result of the action taken, the current procedures in effect will be followed for all complaints brought after April 17, 1993, regardless of the date of alleged violation.

9504A Lee Highway | Fairfax, VA 22031-2303 | info@aapc.org | 703-385-6967 | Fax: 703-352-7725

APPENDIX P

BEST PRACTICES FOR AAPC MEMBERS IN RELATION TO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Endorsed by the Judicial Ethics Panel of AAPC

Based on the work of Sarah M. Rieth, DMin

The cultural explosion in the use of social media and electronic communication has created both opportunities and challenges for pastoral counselors in how we interact with clients. These challenges, while appearing to be about technology, are actually about ethics, policy, clinical practice, clinical judgment, and clinical outcomes. Issues of therapeutic boundaries, confidentiality, dual relationships, informed consent, and laws of the state in which a pastoral counselor practices areembedded in making ethical and clinically sound judgments about using various modes of electronic communication in our practices.

The purpose of this document is to name current best practices for pastoral counselors in using social media and electronic communication in our practices. This document is to be used as a supplement to the AAPC Code of Ethics and in no way is to supplant the Code.

1. LEGAL ISSUES

a. Be aware of, and practice within, the spirit and letter of the laws of the state in which you practice.
b. Work only with clients who reside in the state(s) in which you are licensed or certified to practice.
c. Consult annually with your state licensing or certifying board to learn if there are new guidelines or laws regulating the use of electronic communication, social media, and online mental health interventions.
d. Check annually with your malpractice insurance carrier to see what limits exist for using electronic means of communication and providing therapy.

2. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

a. Electronic data transfer via fax, e-mail, and other modes of electronic communication is not completely secure.
b. Protect all electronic methods for communication, billing, recordkeeping and other aspects of client care. Use industry-standard encryption technologies.
c. Ensure that electronic data storage and communications are privacy-protected consistent with all applicable law.
d. Apply privacy settings consistent with all clients and across all platforms.
e. Use privacy screens on monitors and other electronic devices that may be seen by others.
f. Be mindful of security hazards in using wireless devices and alert clients when using them.
g. Take extra care to protect the security of portable devices used to work with client data.
h. When disposing of computers and other information storage devices, utilize the services of a skilled, ethical technical expert for wiping out the hard drive.
i. Destroy recordings when they are no longer needed, as long as destruction does not conflict with any legal and/or ethical obligations.

3. INFORMED CONSENT

a. Develop and provide at the start of therapy for all clients a professional disclosure statement that includes a policy on the use of social media and electronic communication within your practice. Include in this document a policy about e-mail response times. A sample electronic communication policy is appended to this document.
b. Make your professional disclosure statement accessible to potential clients, students, supervisees, employees and board members.
c. Have clients sign off on this policy after ensuring that they understand the policy and risks associated with using electronic communication with you.
d. Be clear in this professional disclosure statement that you are not available to respond to clinical emergencies via e-mail, text messaging, and other electronic means of communication.

4. ELECTRONIC THERAPY (E-THERAPY)

a. Prior to engaging in providing pastoral counseling services via any electronic means ensure that you are compliant with all relevant laws for the delivery of the services.
b. Prior to engaging in providing e-therapy, determine that this means is appropriate for each client, taking into consideration the client's intellectual, emotional and physical needs.
c. Inform clients of the potential risks and benefits associated with e-therapy.
d. Ensure the security of the communication medium prior to engaging in e-therapy.
e. Do not commence e-therapy until after you have had appropriate education, training, or supervised experience using the relevant technology.

5. E-MAIL

a. Because e-mail cannot be considered confidential it is best that you not receive by electronic means journal writings, forwarded e-mails, photographs, and other personal material from clients.
b. Use e-mail with clients only for establishing appointments, and then only as a supplement to, and not a replacement for, telephonic communication.
c. Include on every e-mail with clients a statement that clearly states that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when communicating electronically with you.
d. Double-check recipient list before pressing send.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA

a. Create separate private and professional profiles and networking sites.
b. Do not "friend" your clients. Let clients know in your professional disclosure statement that you will not respond to requests from them to be "friends," "linked in," etc.
c. Assume that everything you post online can be read by your clients.

7. TEXT MESSAGES

a. Exercise extreme caution in using text messaging as a means of communicating with clients. Text messaging cannot be considered confidential communication and should only be used when therapeutically necessary.
b. Parents of minor clients should be informed at the beginning of treatment how you utilize social network platforms.
c. Remind clients with whom you use text messaging that it is not an effective means of reaching you in an emergency.

d. If a client sends you a text message after business hours and it is not an emergency, do not respond until the next morning.

8. TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

a. The pace and disembodied nature of electronic communication heighten the risk of increased emotional reactivity, inaccurate inferences and inappropriate responses within the therapeutic relationship.
b. Beware of making exceptions when considering altering personal and professional electronic boundaries with clients.

9. PROFESSIONAL WILL

a. When preparing a professional will and/or closing a practice:
Name your professional will executor and one or two backup persons for contacting clients and dealing with matters related to your office, key, security, records, and billing. Make certain that these persons have your usernames and passwords to access professional records and accounts.
b. Ensure each client's right to privacy when making arrangements for notification of your death and/or incapacitation.
c. Determine who will maintain, retain, and dispose of your records according to legal requirements.

10. OTHER

a. Google yourself regularly to learn what kind of information outside of your control is available about you online.
b. The use of electronic technology is not a substitute for human judgment. When in doubt about what to do, consult a clinical supervisor, your own psychotherapist, your state licensing board or ethics review panel, the AAPC Code of Ethics and/or the AAPC Judicial Ethics Panel.

Sample

Policy on Electronic Communication and Social Media

Contacting Me Between Appointments

The best way to contact me is by telephone. This includes clinical emergencies. You may call at any time and leave me a message on my confidential voice mail (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

E-Mail

I prefer to use e-mail only to arrange or modify appointments. If you send me an e-mail regarding an appointment and do not hear from me within 24 hours, please call and leave me a voice message on my telephone line.

Please do not e-mail me content related to your therapy sessions, as e-mail is neither completely secure nor confidential.

E-mail, text messaging, and other forms of electronic communication are not effective means for communicating with me in a clinical emergency.

Any e-mails I receive from you and any responses I send to you become part of your client file.

Social Media

I am committed to maintaining proper boundaries that include, but are not limited to, protecting the privacy and confidentiality of our therapeutic relationship. Therefore I do not accept "friend" or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site.

Please do not attempt to contact me by using text messages and messaging on sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Linked In. It is my practice not to respond to such contacts from clients.

APPENDIX Q

PASTOR/PARISHIONER INFORMED CONSENT COVENANT

Introduction: My name is Rev. Christie Robbins, I am a United Methodist minister and currently a student at Asbury Theological Seminary conducting research for a Doctor of Ministry dissertation project. I have many years of experience with pastoral counseling in a local church, as well as undergraduate and graduate degrees in the fields of psychology, pastoral care and counseling, and religion, I am not licensed as a professional in a secular mental health field. For the purposes of this research project, I am operating under the American Association of Pastoral Counselor code of ethics, although I am not a member. If you are interested in having a copy of that code of ethics, I will gladly provide you with one.

Purpose: The purpose of the research was to evaluate the Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations in the effectiveness of transforming a problem-saturated story, as well movement toward Christian perfection, within the core narrative of parishioners of Ovilla United Methodist Church.

Procedure: Participation in the research project entails six sessions of pastoral counseling. Data collection and analysis is audio recordings and written transcriptions of each Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversation. I will be the only one with access to the audio recordings, and I will be conducting the written transcription of the recordings. An established case study database on my personal computer and a thumb drive contains the transcripts. Keeping all paper copies of this informed consent covenant and any documents generated from our conversations locked file box ensures anonymity. Upon receiving the doctor of ministry degree, shredding virtually all electronic files and

manually shredding of paper documents generated from the research project protects the parishioner's privacy.

Time Required: Participation in the research project will be six one-hour conversations over consecutive weeks. After I complete a working draft of the case study report, I will schedule an additional meeting so you may check the report for accuracy.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this dissertation project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the conversations at any time.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. However, it is possible that you will feel distress in the course of this conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly so we might discover ways to effectively deal with your discomfort.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy your participation in the research project. The intention of the study is to benefit both pastors and parishioners by using narrative therapy through the interpretation of Wesleyan theology.

Communication: In keeping with the AAPC best practices for electronic communication, I acknowledge that electronic data like fax, e-mail, and texting are not secure methods of communication. I will take extra care to protect the security of all electronic devices used during the research project. I will not to talk about your problem via electronic mediums including e-mail, text, or social media sites because it can compromise your anonymity. I prefer to use electronic mediums for establishing and maintaining appointments only. During the time of the research project, I will not accept

any friend requests on social media sites. After obtaining the Doctor of Ministry degree, I would accept a request of that nature if you so choose. If we are already friends on a social media site, I will not discuss any nature of our conversations via posts or private messaging.

I would like to follow up with you if you miss a meeting via your preferred method of communication indicated in the information sheet you filled out before this session. As a part of the conversations, I would like to send you a handwritten letter.

If I may communicate with you during this process, please initial here: _____.

If I may send you a handwritten letter to the physical address you provided, please initial here: _____

Anonymity: I will be the only person present for the conversations, the only person listening to the audio, and the only person with access to any documentation generated by the research project. You will choose a pseudonym—a made up name—for use in the written dissertation and any other publications or workshops. Changing the specific details of your story protects anonymity. Please do not discuss your participation in this research project with anyone else. Due to the unique nature of pastoral counseling, we will see each other outside of the confidential pastoral counseling setting during the six weeks of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations. When we encounter each other in social settings, I will greet you as I would any other member of Ovilla United Methodist Church. If outside the designated time for pastoral conversations, it is best if we not discuss your problem in order to maintain your anonymity.

Please write your chosen pseudonym here: _____.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality regarding all conversations and your participation in this research project maintained. In compliance with Texas law, the AAPC Code of Ethics, and the United Methodist Church's ethical procedures, I am required to disclose to the proper legal authorities in order to prevent a clear and immediate danger to self or others.

Sharing the Results: The research project employs a case study format, writing each individual's Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations in a narrative form for analysis. Using your chosen pseudonym and thoroughly disguising your identity allows sharing the results of this case study without risking your anonymity and confidentiality in the dissertation as well as any other publications or workshops.

Before You Sign: By signing below, you are agreeing to audiotaped sessions of Wesleyan Narrative Pastoral Conversations for this dissertation study and full participation in the dissertation research project. Upon agreeing to participate in this dissertation project, you will receive a copy of this signed document.

Participant's Signature:_____ **Date:**_____

Print Name:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____ **Date:**_____

Print Name:_____

APPENDIX R

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Interview with Lee Trigg

9 January 2013

Introduction: My name is Christie Robbins, and I am a student at Asbury Theological Seminary conducting research for a Doctor of M[2]inistry dissertation project.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study the practice of pastoral counseling at Ovilla United Methodist Church. I am trying to learn more about Narrative Therapy or Narrative Pastoral Counseling informed by John Wesley's theology of Christian perfection.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked several questions in an oral interview that will take place at Central United Methodist Church in Waco, Texas. I will make an audio MP3 recording of the interview that will be transcribed into a written record of the interview.

Time Required: The interview will take approximately 10-20 minutes of your time.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this dissertation project is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the interview at any time.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of this conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

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[2] Source: Adapted from Sensing 235.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit both pastors and parishioners by utilizing Narrative Therapy through a lens of Wesleyan theology.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: You may choose for your name to be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to the audio. When I write the transcript, you will have a choice for me to utilize a pseudonym-made up name-chosen by you, or you may specify in writing that you wish to be identified by your legal name. I will, for the purposes of this interview and dissertation, not identify the name of the seminary you attended or the professor from whom you took pastoral counseling or any other counseling classes. I will send the written transcript of this interview to you via email for final approval before my dissertation project is submitted for approval.

If you wish to choose your own pseudonym for the dissertation, please indicate the first name you would like me to use for you here:_____.

If you are comfortable having your real name used in the dissertation and any subsequent publications, you may sign here:_____.

Sharing the Results: The dissertation research project will be a series of pastoral counseling sessions with parishioners from Ovilla United Methodist Church, utilizing Narrative Therapy as informed by John Wesley's theology of Christian perfection. This interview will be used for an introduction to the purpose and the problem in chapter one

of that dissertation project, and will be submitted to applicable persons and committees in the pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Publications/Workshops: Portions of the interview might be referred to in other written publications including, but not limited to, journal articles or textbooks. Portions of the interview might be referred to in live settings, including, but not limited to, sharing findings with Ovilla United Methodist Church and other workshop settings. In this event, I will continue to use your signed selection from above.

Before You Sign: By signing below, you are agreeing to an audiotaped interview for this dissertation study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this dissertation project, a copy of this document will be given to you.

Participant's Signature:_____ **Date:**_____

Print Name:_____

Researcher's Signature:_____ **Date:**_____

Print Name:_____

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