The existential questions “who am I,” “why am I here,” and “how do I fit into the whole” are a part of what it means to be human and are at the heart of the Christian faith. These questions are also inherently narrative in nature—that is to say, these questions are impossible to answer in anything but a narrative way. Identity formation and narrative go hand in hand.

Answering these existential questions by providing a cohesive narrative is central to the missional task of the church. Each unchurched person who attends a local congregation begins, perhaps slowly at first, to understand that there is a grand narrative (a meta-narrative) of God’s actions in the world through the ages. God’s actions continue into the present as the individual comprehends God’s call for the individual to surrender his or her life to Christ and become not just a part of the kingdom of God as an abstract whole, but a part of a local community of faith.

The metanarrative of God’s actions (always noble) and human responses to it (both noble and ignoble) are commonly conveyed to the individual through the more specific narratives in the Bible (especially God’s actions in Christ), the saints of the Church universal and significant figures in that denomination’s formation, and even God’s actions in the journey of the particular local community of faith (“The Lord led us to plant this church in 1947 with 26 members and three acres.”). If one wished to examine the means of transmission of a faith community’s metanarrative to the individual, one would obviously examine sermons, catechisms, Bible study groups, and personal conversation. However, an under-examined means of metanarrative transmission is prayer. We intend to show in this essay how narrative prayer has been used effectively in both Scripture and liturgy to convey a sense of...
identity and build community among people of faith. We will further assert that publicly voiced narrative prayer can be a powerful means of establishing, maintaining, and enriching identity and community for contemporary people of faith. It is a tool modern leaders should not overlook.

**Narrative Prayer**

For our purposes, narrative is defined as a piece of discourse containing a character who acts and/or is acted upon, usually with some purpose to the whole.\(^1\) We thus employ the term "narrative prayer" in two primary ways. First, "narrative prayer" may be narrowly defined as a prayer which is, in the whole or in the most part, a narrative itself—i.e. a story transmitted as prayer. However, as prayers are generally not moments given to inventing completely new narratives, prayers employing narrative typically re-tell an already familiar story. As the story in its entirety is already familiar to the group, a small reference to the narrative, or a "narrative referent," is often employed during the prayer rather than a complete retelling. Consequently, while the term "narrative prayer" may more properly and narrowly reference a prayer which is itself a narrative in whole or in part, we will also use the term more broadly to describe those prayers which are not solely "narratives" but include significant narrative referents.\(^5\) These narrative referents are understood and completed (or "filled in") by participants in the worshipping community.\(^5\)

**Analysis of Exemplary Prayers: Biblical Prayer**

Perhaps the most explicitly narrative prayer in the entire Bible is found in Nehemiah 9:5-39. During the post-exilic period, the Hebrews returned from Babylon, rebuilt the wall of the city of Jerusalem, and reaffirmed the Book of the Law. The Hebrews then came together for a time of national repentance. While fasting, they confessed their sins and heard the Book of the Law read to them. Ezra the scribe then lifted up an extended prayer in which almost the entire history of Israel is recounted, making this prayer a true "narrative prayer" by the more narrow definition. The narrative referents employed in the prayer include references to creation, Abraham, the Exodus, the giving of the Law, provisions in the desert, the Canaan conquest, and the moral decline of the kingdom period.

Throughout this prayer we find a recurring contrast between the character of God (the primary actor) and the character of the people. For example:

You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. (verse 13 ff.)
But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. (verse 16 ff.)
You gave them kingdoms and nations (verse 22 ff.)
But they were disobedient and rebelled against you (verse 26 ff.)\(^8\)

The focus throughout this prayer is the identity and characterological fidelity of God and the just actions God has taken. When the people forsake God, He brings negative consequences upon them. When they turn from their sin, God grants mercy and brings good results to them. Just as the consistency of God's character is highlighted, so also the characterological identity of members of the faith community is exposed—they have a
tendency to be rebellious.9

We should also note the importance of local history (i.e. recent history) in Ezra's prayer. While much of the prayer is focused on Israel's more remote past (e.g., Abraham and the Exodus), the historical narrative presented in the prayer continues through the Babylonian exile, from which the Hebrews had just recently returned. In one verse we find referents to both the period prior to the exile and the seventy years of the exile itself.

For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples. (9:30)

The prayer continued by petitioning God to see their current situation and hardships. Thus the entire prayer narrated the history of the Hebrews right up to their present.

The significance of this reference to local history could be seen as more than a mere request for God to act on behalf of the faith community. In his writings on narrative, Fisher argued that narrative fidelity is the degree to which the story "rings true."10 From this perspective, bringing local history into the narrative, even seeing it as the "present" of the ongoing metanarrative, provided a means for the faith community of Israel to "make sense" of the tragic events of the immediate past.11 Thus the Babylonian exile was not a random occurrence, but rather an action allowed, if not directed, by a holy God toward an unholy people. Ezra declares in his prayer to God, "In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (Nehemiah 9:33).12

The transformation of identity is highlighted by the shift in pronoun usage. Ezra's prayer references primarily "they, them and their" throughout the portion of the prayer that narrates ancient history. However, when ancient history moves to local history in verse 32, Ezra shifts to a pronoun usage employing primarily "we, us and our." This grammatical shift may be seen as more than a mere semantic change from past to present. Instead, it points to a greater phenomenological shift and identity transformation. By verse 33, the Exile did not happen to "them," it happened to "us" since "we did wrong" (emphasis added).

We now turn our attention to several contemporary narrative prayers found in the liturgies of modern faith communities.

ANALYSIS OF EXEMPLARY PRAYERS: CONTEMPORARY LITURGICAL PRAYERS

Jewish Liturgy

The very first sentence of Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook reads, "In the liturgy of the synagogue the Jewish people has its spiritual autobiography"13 inferring that Gates of Prayer is (at least partially) self-consciously narrative in nature. Further, the concept of identity is found to play an important part in the collective acts of worship.14

As with the biblical prayers that have already been examined, Jewish liturgy is rich with narrative referents. For example, in an opening prayer for the Shabbat service (Sabbath), one may find:

God of the beginning, God of the end, God of all creatures, Lord of all generations:
You created us in Your image, capable of love and justice, that in creation's long unfolding we might be Your partners. You stretched out the heavens and ordered the earth, that fruits may grow into sweetness, men and women into goodness. You are our God!¹⁵

In this prayer, we find a clear referent to the creation account with the intention of highlighting the identity and character of God. This identity is not a distant abstraction, but rather is found in God's relational engagement to the people of faith, "You created us in Your image You are our God!"

Within these prayers, narrative referents can also reinforce the identity of the contemporary worshipper as one with the past as exemplified in the following prayer:

Our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, a heritage has come down to us along all the painful paths our people has traveled. Our God and God of our mothers, God of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, Deborah, Hannah, and Ruth, a heritage has come down to us.¹⁶

This prayer appeals to a sense of continuity of identity (a "heritage") and reinforces the larger metanarrative of the faith community. The worshipper stands as one in a long line of people who have been faithful to God. The prayer reminds the worshipper whom she or he is.

Of special note within Jewish worship is the services that are themselves commemorations of narratives. The festival of Pesach (Passover) commemorates the release of the Jews from slavery in Egypt as found in the book of Exodus. Purim commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people from the destructive plans of Haman as found in the book of Esther. In such contemporary services of worship, the faith community recalls the narrative through various means, including prayer. The narrative is not simply a recollection of history, but an event that may have present day effects.

Grant us, Lord, the vision to see and the courage to do Your will. Imbue our hearts with the fidelity of Mordecai and the devotion of Esther, that we may never swerve from the path of duty and loyalty to our heritage. Endow us with patience and strength, with purity of heart and unity of purpose, that we may continue to proclaim Your law of love and truth to the peoples of the earth, until all have learned that they are one, the children of the Eternal God. Amen.¹⁷

This prayer contains a narrative referent to the biblical story of Esther, but it does more than simply recount a story. The narrative referent lifts up a possibility or goal for present living.¹⁸ The petitioner has examined the lives of Mordecai and Esther and prays, in essence, "Make us like them!" Consequently, the focus of narrative identity is not only on the shared identity of persons in the narrative and in the contemporary faith community ("our heritage"), but also in whom the worshipper may become. It is in this sense that the narrative is not simply historical but autobiographical. The account is not an abstraction or neutral recollection of events. It answers not only the question, "Who am I?" but also "Who may I become?"
Christian Liturgy

The Eucharistic Prayer. No other prayer that is narrative in nature is more universal in Christian worship than the Eucharistic prayer that calls to remembrance and interprets the Last Supper of Christ. The supreme importance of this particular prayer to the life of the Christian faith community may be seen in a variety of ways. In the Roman Church, the same Eucharistic prayer was employed for 1,500 years and it was not until Vatican II that variation was incorporated.19 Furthermore, while a myriad of Protestant groups have formed since the Reformation, the use of some form of Eucharistic prayer is almost universal. Even modern “non-liturgical” churches often use some form of this prayer.

In examining a fairly representative Eucharistic prayer20 one may find numerous narrative referents with a particular focus on the establishment of the sacrament by Jesus on the night he was betrayed. This prayer demonstrates a sense in which the Eucharistic prayer serves as an encapsulation, or a distillation of the work of Jesus and hence the “gospel” message itself. In this way, it could clearly be seen as a “narrative prayer” in the more narrow sense. However, the Eucharistic prayer may also be considered the supreme “narrative referent” within Christendom. The narrative nature of this prayer, said on a quarterly, monthly, weekly, or even daily basis, perpetually reinforces the identity of the community in light of God’s identity and action. It is clear to those familiar with the entirety of the gospel that Jesus was declaring his identity as the sacrifice that would redeem humankind. The institution of this sacrament was an act that foreshadowed both his redemptive act and the future existence of a community of followers to preach the good news to others. This act names and shapes the community just as the community names God’s action in the world.

While Eucharistic prayers have been widely studied,21 we note them here to demonstrate the concepts of narrative identity and coherence. Few liturgical acts within the Christian faith community have historically done more to reinforce communal identity than the celebration of “The Lord’s Supper.” In this meal and the prayers that accompany it, the faith community reaffirms the character and gracious actions of God, and the continuing efficacious nature of that work to the present time. It also serves to bring coherence to the ongoing metanarrative of faith.

Roman Catholic Liturgy. Beyond the Eucharistic prayer, an examination of Roman Catholic liturgy yields a wealth of additional narrative elements in prayer. Ordinarily, one may observe that prayers in general and narrative referents in particular are often succinct. However, this brevity should be understood within the entire context of a liturgy that is often highly narrative in nature as may be seen in the manner the liturgical text contains thematic introductions to the worship experience and is structured around multiple biblical readings (often themselves narratives) as well as the celebration of the Eucharist. Each episode and referent is brief but not insignificant and together links ages past with members present.

A survey of Roman Catholic liturgy yields a further observation. While explicit narrative referents are somewhat less common in much of the general liturgy, they are more prominent in portions of the liturgy that celebrate certain holy days or saints. As to the former, we note similarly with our examination of Jewish liturgy (and the examination of the
Eucharistic prayer above) that narrative elements are more commonly used in moments of greater importance in worship.

Saints' days in particular are occasions where narrative plays a greater role in liturgy. At first glance, some of the narrative referents may seem overly brief. However, one should again understand such a referent in the context of the whole of the liturgy, much of which the worshipper will hold in his or her hand. Both the Missal and the Missalette often contain narrative material that is not officially part of the liturgy proper, but provides a context and serves a didactic purpose. Thus, when a narrative referent is encountered in the prayer, these nonliturgical words (in this sense, "non-enacted") provide a context for understanding.

One particular example of the prayers used on a feast day may be helpful. On the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul (held in June), the first Scripture reading is a narrative in which the Apostle Peter is released from prison through divine intervention. The second reading comes from the end of the Apostle Paul's life (2 Timothy) in which Paul asserted his faithfulness in the journey of faith. The gospel reading consists of the brief narrative in which Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ. Thus the feast day designation and the scripture readings provide a narrative context for the prayers. Among the various options for prayer, one may find the following two prayers:

> These men, conquering all human frailty, shed their blood and helped the Church to grow. By sharing the cup of the Lord's suffering, they became the friends of God.\(^{23}\)

> God our Father, today you give us the joy of celebrating the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul. Through them your Church first received the faith. Keep us true to their teaching.\(^{24}\)

In each of these brief prayers, we find referents consisting of a single sentence which call to mind the narratives of each of these faithful men. In addition, the second prayer is no mere remembering of past event, but is focused on a present reality, "Keep us true to their teaching." The narrative referent implicitly connotes a transcendent axiological effect in the lives of current believers. The narrative form is shown (even in this truncated manifestation) to be a natural means of conveying moral ideas and standards.\(^{25}\)

The text of The Liturgy of the Hours contains even more contextual information regarding saints, often in the form of complete narratives. For example, on March 7, the church remembers Saints Perpetua and Felicity, martyred for their faith in 203 AD. While the morning prayer only contains the brief line, "Father, your love gave the Saints Perpetua and Felicity courage to suffer cruel martyrdom. By their prayers, help us to grow in love of you,"\(^{26}\) the referent takes its meaning from the two-page narrative that precedes it. If William Kirkwood is correct about narrative lifting up new possibilities for living, then the narrative of these two faithful women has the potential to stir a cry within the reader, "Lord, make me like them."
APPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY FAITH COMMUNITIES

This analysis has demonstrated that public narrative prayer has offered an effective and biblically grounded speech act that has helped create community and shaped both corporate and individual identity by becoming an extension of the other typical means of conveying the metanarrative of faith. Further, such use of narrative often occurred at moments of great celebration or distress.37 We have also noted the relationship between narrative referents to ancient history and local history in providing coherence to the present. Whereas biblical narrative references are often references to local history, we note the lack of such references in contemporary liturgies. Clearly, as published texts, they may not be suited for such prayers. Therefore, it falls upon the members and leaders of contemporary communities to integrate such narrative references into their public prayers.38 These prayers can help connect “my story” to “our story” and “our story” to the “Old Old Story.”

If narrative prayer is to be a maximally effective instrument in the life of the contemporary church (for both the liturgical and the non-liturgical branches), then it would appear a tightrope, or a “narrow ridge”29 must be navigated between two extremes. This “narrow ridge of historicity” would attempt to balance between historical rigidity that makes only direct reference to the metanarrative through ancient referents on the one hand and a historical myopia that sees only the “here and now” while ignoring the rich tradition of the larger faith community on the other. This narrow ridge of historicity would seek to balance the integration of the metanarrative and local history—the sacred and the mundane—while also remaining rhetorically relevant by touching upon the exigencies of the moment (as opposed to an abstract prayer that does not appear to have much to do with the present event or situation at hand).30 This narrow ridge would be traversed when the “God of Moses” became the “God of Kimberly” as well. An effective integration of biblical pericope and/or church history narrative would help to frame and interpret the local story and the present event or occasion.

We offer the following explicit but fictitious example of narrative prayer for a Christian faith community. When baptizing a new convert named “Jane Smith,” the pastor might offer a baptismal prayer explicitly narrative in nature. Such a prayer could be written out as a “text,” but could also be delivered in a pre-planned “pseudo-extemporaneous” manner. Those pastors who begin to “think narratively” might even be able to deliver such prayer naturally in a true extemporaneous moment. The specific details could have come from the pastor’s pre-baptismal interview with Jane Smith, or Jane herself may have revealed them during a “testimony” time just before the baptism. The pastor might pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,
We gather together today to join with Jane Smith in celebrating your astounding grace. By your grace, you continually call people to yourself and give them new lives.
You called Abraham to pack up his family, leave his familiar surroundings and to follow you to the place you would give him—a place where you would set him apart and make him into a great community of faith.
Lord, we rejoice this day that you have also called Jane to leave the familiar
surroundings of a fallen world, to give her life to you, and to join her life with this community of faith at Covenant Church.

Lord, we give thanks for those who had a part in bringing Jane to faith: for Susan Johnson, for Don Williams, and for a godly grandmother who planted seeds of faith which we now this day recognize as having come to full bloom. And most of all for your Holy Spirit who called, and prompted, and knitted these lives together and who is with us now.

We also give thanks for the leaders of Covenant Church, who forty seven years ago had the vision to believe that this could be a place where people like Jane could find peace and salvation.

And now, gracious God, establish Jane in your most holy faith. Build her up in this community and bring us to true unity in you.

In Jesus’ name we pray,
Amen.

We see such a narrative prayer as a powerful aid in accomplishing many of the dynamics discovered in this analysis. This prayer highlights the identity of God and reinforces his present fidelity (God called Abraham thousands of years ago, and He is still calling people today). Second, it highlights Jane’s identity, especially as her identity has changed. The locus of the prayer is both in the sacred story (the metanarrative) as well as the mundane story of Jane’s life which is itself in the process of being transformed into a sacred story, both for Jane and the community of faith. The prayer also names the identity of the community of faith and its relationship to Jane, the new convert. We further note a possible transcendent quality to such a prayer in that if an unconverted person was present in the congregation, such a one might be enabled to see new possibilities for his or her own life. “If God can do it for Abraham, Jane’s grandmother, and Jane, then He can do it for me!” Additionally, the prayer lifts up a characterological coherence for the faith community itself in that the prayer, on behalf of the community, says in essence, “This is the kind of reception you can expect should anyone else wish to become a part of us.”

And finally, the organizational values of Covenant Church are exemplified in this prayer—scriptural fidelity, conversion, and unity in the faith community.

Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of narrative prayer would be diminished if the pastor referenced the building of the church or the traveling Abraham image too often in various narrative prayers. Clearly, creativity and a certain innovation in invention are required. But equally true, an imaginative and intentional worship leader may discover a powerful tool in using narrative prayer.

**Conclusion**

All persons in faith communities may be viewed as individuals on a narrative journey (a “pilgrimage”) in which identity is forged or transformed. Narrative elements in the faith community and its worship have the potential to provide the means to answer existential questions and to establish a coherent identity for the community itself as well as each individual. Differing faith communities, possibly even to the degree in which they intentionally employ explicit narrativity, are able to transfer and establish this identity in
varying degrees. While some formal liturgies (e.g. Jewish and Roman Catholic) may be seen as more self-consciously narrative in nature, many postmodern "non-liturgical" faith communities must seek alternative ways of intentionally employing narrative. We assert that narrative prayer can be one effective means (among others) by which such identity may be established and transferred in all worshipping traditions. Through narrative prayer, faith communities and individuals can better come to see their place as followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

NOTES


3. The relationship between narrativity and community was explored by Karen Rasmussen and Cindi Capaldi in "The Narratives of Alcoholic Anonymous: Dialectical 'Good Reasons'". Perspectives on Argumentation: Essays in Honor of Wayne Brockriede, Ed. Robert Trapp and Janice Schuetz (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1990), 243-257. They examined the role of narratives in Alcoholic's Anonymous (or "A. A."). Their research is particularly useful to the extent that A. A. has established itself as a community for recovery and healing. Certainly many faith communities can identify with such a mission. The authors contended that "A.A. narratives warrant recovery dialectically by embodying the archetype of rebirth within the context of a rhetorical ritual" (243). Their conclusion clearly articulated the value of narrative within this community and hinted at the way it may function in other settings as well. "Because I.A. narrative re-fuse pre- and post-recovery personae, they promote self acceptance by reaffirming the totality of an alcoholic's lived experience. Because they highlight an alcoholic's personal history against the backdrop of common experience and principle, they form a basis for positive identity. Because they embody paradox, they have the capacity to challenge dysfunctional views of the world while creating order out of confusion and thus building a more productive perspective on living. Hence, the power of the narratives flows from dialectical 'good reasons' that generate a perspective on self and reality, creating a newly sensible world within the context of a supportive community," (257, emphasis added)

4. See Polkinghome, 49 ff.
5. Narrative referents should be seen as distinct from narrative fragments because the notion of fragment suggests discontinuity and a discreteness among the fragments. The narrative referents, while not self-contained, are nevertheless part of a unified whole. Much in the way that the enthymeme is complete though incomplete, the narrative referent is completed by the listener with reference to the metanarrative of God's dealing with the community of faith as a whole (see Ray C. Penn, “Translating the Gospel to an Overstoriéd World,” Unpublished Doctorate of Ministry Project, Graduate Theological Foundation, Donaldson, IN, 1995).

6. Bormann’s work on fantasy theme offers another system that works well to explain the dynamics occurring. His discussion of the links in fantasy chain which provide a rhetorical vision is germane here as well. Even Fisher saw the productive link between Bormann’s work and his own while noting key differences: “From a narrative view, each of these concepts (fantasy themes and rhetorical visions) translates into dramatic stories constituting the fabric of social reality for those who compose them. They are, thus, rhetorical fictions, constructions of facts and faith having persuasive force, rather than fantasies” (64). See Ernest C. Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 58 (1972): 396-407.


9. These same observations may be made of Daniel’s narrative prayer (Daniel chapter 9) which is also happens to be a prayer of confession. Daniel’s prayer similarly highlights the faithful and just character of God as contrasted with the wicked character of the people (they are “covered with shame” Daniel 9:7).

10. Fisher, Ibid.

11. Alasdair McIntyre drew out implications for individual histories and identity, particularly for those under duress. He wrote, “When someone complains that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their isic1 life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a telos” (103). This insight presages the role of narrative in prayer which often occurs under situations of stress, loss and ambiguity. See Alasdair McIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of Human Life, and the Concept of Tradition” in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, Eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): 89-110.

12. Likewise, we see a positive example of narrative providing coherence to local history in 1 Kings. In Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:23-53), narrative is not so much present within the prayer itself as it forms the entire context for the prayer. Solomon’s narrative referents in his pre-prayer speech serve to highlight the fact that this dedication day is possible because of a faithful God who kept His promises. Those present at this ceremony are thus witnesses to God’s faithful actions. A New Testament example may be found in the narrative prayer offered up under duress as persecution began for the early Christians (Acts 4:24-30). This process of using narrative referents to bring coherence to local history, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Crites in “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, Ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): 65-88, allows the “sacred” and “mundane” to be in harmony. Mundane stories are simply those that are phenomenologically grounded and fairly easily articulated. The sacred stories are never able to be fully articulated, though “all a people’s mundane stories are implicit in its sacred story, and every mundane story takes on the soundings in the sacred story” (71). Thus, there can be a harmonic or resonating relationship between the mundane (that which we can articulate) and the sacred (that which we can not fully articulate but can know).

14. Nicholas Lash in "Ideology, Metaphor, and Analogy" in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, Eds. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): 113-137, characterized Jewish and Christian religious discourse as "not simply narrative but... more specifically, autobiographical. Whether the "audience" addressed is God (in acts of supplication and worship) or other people (in acts of witness), the [person of faith] is the teller of a tale, the narrator of a story which he tells as his story, as a story in which he acknowledges himself to be a participant" (120). One shortcoming in Lash's statement is the implication that audience is always singular. Many of the prayers offered in the Bible and contemporary liturgy have both God and humans as audience. Johann Metz, "A Short Apology of Narrative" in Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology, Ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989): 251-262, began to hint at this notion of multiple audience when he noted that there was a narrative dimension to the sacraments. "The sacramental sign can easily be characterized as a 'linguistic action' in which the unity of the story as an effective word and as practical effect is expressed in the same process" (254). Consequently, as applied to this project, prayer can be viewed as the opportunity to incorporate narrative elements or as signs of the narrative itself 'taking place' or being enacted; "We are a praying people."

15. Gates of Prayer, 221.
16. Ibid., 97
17. Ibid., 403.
21. For example, see Ryan, Ibid., and Dennis C. Smolarski, Eucharistia: A Study of the Eucharistic Prayer (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).
22. Liturgical texts used as aids to worship designed for the laity.
24. Ibid. 9.
25. John Meyer's examination of organizational values ("Tell Me a Story: Eliciting Organizational Values from Narratives," Communication Quarterly 43 (1995): 210-224) demonstrated that narratives probed more deeply into a culture than the more intentional aspects of the organization such as banners, architecture and the like. Another benefit of assessing narratives was that "clarifying the values stressed in a culture also enhances understanding of the motivations of members" (220) thus demonstrating the utility of narrative analysis to relate the individual and the collective. Other examples of identifying "values" include the work of Mark Tappan and Lyn Brown, "Stories Told and Lessons Learned: Toward a Narrative Approach to Moral Development and Moral Education," Harvard Educational Review 59, (1989): 182-205, who used the narrative accounts of children as a means of getting at the "moral experience" which involved both the events themselves and the moral processes that made sense of those events (186ff). Paul Vitz also examined the efficacy of narratives in moral development and concluded narrative might be more useful than propositional thinking and abstraction in facilitating moral development. See Paul Vitz, "The Use of Stories in Moral Development: New Psychological Reasons for an Old Education Method," American Psychologist 45 (1990): 709-720.
27. The contexts of these prayers are also consistent with Fisher's claim that narrative
discourse is invoked during the significant episodes of public moral argument (57). The prayers in the examples we examined are clearly public in nature and to a large extent moral; they often focus on the immorality of the community and the pure morality of God.

28. For example, The United Methodist Eucharistic liturgy “A Service of Word and Table III” (United Methodist Hymnal, 15) contains instructions for the celebrant to offer spontaneous prayers “appropriate to the occasion, remembering God’s acts of salvation” as part of the Eucharist service. To use the terms of this present discussion, such an instruction is an invitation to connect local history to metanarrative.

29. An image made famous by Martin Buber. For him the tension was between being true to self and being committed to others. See Martin Buber, I and Thou (1925) Trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1970).

30. Herbert Wichelns has argued that literature is often judged for how it deals with timeless themes, while rhetoric is judged for how it deals with timely themes and local exigencies. See Herbert A. Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” (1925) as found in Readings in Rhetorical Criticism.