

# LIVING OUT OUR STORIES

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# The Story of Clergy Health

- Not so good.
  - Higher rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and depression than peers in general population.
- Programs to Improve Health
  - Clergy Health Initiative at Duke Divinity School
  - Center for Wellness, General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits.
- General Strategies to Improve Health
  - Eat right, exercise, reduce stress

# A Second Story of Clergy Health

- We all know *what to do*, so why do we have difficulty doing what we know will improve health?
- The stories I tell myself: I am not good at self-care
- The stories we tell are powerful.
  - Stories shape our identity.
  - Stories influence our behavior.
  - Our stories are not fixed! We cannot revise the events of our lives, but we can revise the meanings we assign to events.

# Overview of The Week

- 1) I invite you to consider how your life story both shapes your identity and influences your practice of ministry.
- 2) Through the practice of Story Care, which includes close reading of our life stories, we can learn to identify and let go or revise stories that do not foster flourishing.
- 3) Through Re-Storying, we learn to reinterpret life stories that keep us stuck or lead to burnout.
- 4) Re-storying the concept of self-care.

# Story Shaped Lives



If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too must come to know my own story.”

Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By*

# The Stories We Are

- “It is not that life is like a story. On some basic level, it *is* a story— a *lifestory*.” (Randall and McKim, 2008, 5)
- Our **life story** is the “larger framework that provides a more or less, cohesive, thematic organization of the multiple stories we have lived in the past, are living in the present, or imagine we may live in the future. (Scheib, (2016), 6.)
- Our life stories develop over time, beginning in childhood and becoming more complex as we age.

# Exercise

- Think about a specific story you shared with someone yesterday or this morning: a snippet about a recent event, a move to a new church, something that happened on the way, a story about a child, or something that happened in the past year.
- Now reflect on how the story communicates something about your identity.
- What does this story reveal about any changes in your sense of self over the past year?

# Narrative Environments

- Narrative Environments are the contexts in which our life stories are formed:
  - Family, school, church, community, and the larger culture.



- Narrative environments are full of stories: oral and written, with myriad forms.
  - TV, media, letters, journals, novels,
  - Facebook posts, family legends.





# Narrative Environments

- Narrative environments also set the rules of storytelling: who can tell which stories, which stories are considered appropriate, whose voices are heard, and whose voices are silenced.



# A Story of Caregiving

- The outside-in story: 36 year-old married woman with two daughters, aged 15 and 14, is diagnosed with primary progressive Multiple Sclerosis.



# The Inside Out Story: Two Letters

You speak of the coldness of the table, two letters  
floating down a long tunnel  
M then S carried by the sound  
a doctor's voice naming  
mysterious symptoms.

I hold yellowed pages of my mother's words recovered  
among a box of miscellaneous memories.

I turn the page and find myself  
fourteen, trying to button your pajamas,  
you keep falling over,  
a round bottomed doll, you say  
we laugh.

I don't remember this sweet  
beginning, only ten years stumbling  
down that dim tunnel, coming out  
alone.

Scheib)

(Karen D.

# Intersection Of Stories

- Stories learned about care in my family:
  - Caring for another is a life and death matter
- Stories about care learned in church:
  - J.O.Y. Jesus first, others second, yourself third.
- Stories of Ministers: example of the hard working conference secretary praised by the Bishop.



# Exercise

- Reflect on your own experiences of giving and receiving care as a child. Jot down the first image or story that comes to you mind.
- What did you learn about caring for others and yourself from this experience?
- What do you find helpful or not about what you learned?
- Are the lessons you learned about care evident in your ministry?

# Story Care

- Caring for ourselves requires caring for the stories we are.
- Story Care can facilitate our psychological growth and growth in grace.
- The purpose of Story Care is to generate stories that promote growth in love of God, others, and self.

