

Title of Workshop: Messaging a New Way of Leadership: Re-Narrating the Gospel Story in Contemporary Context through Biblical Animation and Appreciative Inquiry

Paragraph: What is the issue?

In our globalized and politically fragmented world, even as humanity draws closer through instant communications and social technology, we experience increasing economic, cultural, and ideological divisions. The scandalous gap between the over-abundance of the wealthy and the privation of the poor expands. We, who are the beneficiaries of systems of privilege, power, and economic where-with-all, seem unable to comprehend the reality of those who benefit little or who are exploited by the same systems. Those of us who struggle in the margins desperately need to communicate such reality in a way their privileged neighbors might hear.

That we are too seldom unsettled by the contrasts and disconnection with one another should be unsettling for the community who calls itself the Body of Christ. Thus, we desperately need to empower and animate leadership who are committed to, as Pope Francis recently noted, “a culture of encounter.” Encountering one another across our many divisions, encountering the Christ who dwells within the margins, and encountering the gospel in a way toward contemporary communication and social change.

In this session we practice a re-reading of the biblical story, using an appreciative method and engaging the tools of descriptive engagement, contemporary contextualization, and bodily renarration in an adult education methodology. This process, developed by theologian Ched Myers, enables us to discover ourselves in the biblical story, meet one another across our cultural differences through the biblical narrative, and rebuild a broad and deep movement that invites all to participate in the Peaceable Kin-dom. We are able to dream of a new way of being, develop points of connection as do the actors in the scriptural setting, and then live into a new destiny of courage, connection, and encounter.

Through biblical animation, the Way of Jesus comes to life as participants journey with Jesus, not simply through reading the word, but through highly interactive experiential learning. Participants experience the lives of the biblical characters as the characters tell their own stories, bridging the gaps of time, history, and culture. In the process, we enter the story and life of Jesus and then, in recontextualizing the story, discover Jesus entering the story of our world.

The process of biblical animation seeks to build a process where the Word carries us into the world, not in an over-spiritualized and disconnected manner, but in a way where the Word and contemporary world intersect, creating a path for solidarity in the margins and a vision for God’s justice. Such engagement brings about new realities of discipleship, births fresh routes for communal life, and creates safe space where honest contemplative action can be realized – where we might finally see ourselves in truth and know that Jesus calls us to his Way of Love.

The basics of Biblical Animation through the appreciative process can be named in a few simple steps:

THE BASICS:

- Read the passage together.
- Identify characters, setting and plot. What are the scenes, in time and space?
- What’s the conflict or energy point and how is it resolved?

- What other scriptural stories connect to this scripture?
- How does this story relate to our culture? Where do we see the same social dynamics?
- (Remember—biblical writers showed Jesus’ life so we could learn how to see and act as He did. Jesus healed all, championed social outcasts, and said the last shall be first. If we’re not paying attention to our own social and economic dynamics as we read the bible, we may be “spiritualizing” the book—making it too “heavenly.”)

Though biblical animation may seem simple, it can have profound implications. As one pastor who has incorporated the process into his community of faith noted: The process (of biblical animation) was a marvelous experience for those who participated from our congregation. For many, it has been truly transformational and has provided a key piece for new direction in discipleship and outreach. Or as another practitioner recently noted, “This has changed the way I read scripture. It has changed the way I see the world.”

3-4 Resources/links:

<http://www.bcm-net.org/>

<http://nccumc.org/outreach/teaching-resource/biblical-animation/>

<http://passioninpartnership.net/>

Say to This Mountain: Mark’s Story of Discipleship. Ched Myers, Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Stuart Taylor, 1997. Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, NY, 10545-0308. ISBN 1-57075-100-5. Myers makes the bold claim that in the Chapter of Mark, scripture has transforming power as it intersects with our own life-stories and the broader story of the times in which we live. Carefully organized in reading units for easy study, each section has two parts: The "Text in Context" looks at the broad themes of scripture and "The Word in our World" draws out one common thread and reflects on it in light of contemporary situation.

UMW connection (which we can supply if needed)

2-3 concrete collective actions for follow up

- Introduce biblical animation into your congregational setting.
- Consider a contemporary issue in your context and ask the question, where do we see similar circumstance in scripture, how is it resolved, what are the actions of the biblical characters, what are the points of energy?
- Engage in a scriptural process where we use lots of leading questions and allow the narrative to lead folks in their answers (or in most cases, many more questions.) Your role is to help folks “see” the narrative being unveiled in their own context and gently guide them to new and liberating space. Radical love is always dangerous for it will always claim justice for the most vulnerable and it will do so through nonviolent action.

