

RANDALL CARR

Transforming Narratives:

Discovering God's Story for Effective Ministry

## INTRODUCTION

The life of a faith system<sup>1</sup> tells a story. The story begins at birth and documents the system's growth and, in some cases, death. Along the way, the narrative is comprised of momentous episodes responsible for shaping the identity of the congregation. Some scenes are celebrations replete with joy and excitement. Others are moments of heartache, leaving the faith community in tears and pain. Yet, the story is passed from generation to generation, inviting all to play a role as the story is created. As the story shifts, it becomes imperative for a faith system to examine the narrative in order to determine 1) God's direction for the future and 2) the effectiveness of ministry efforts to the faith system's immediate context(s). To assist church leaders, I developed a resource to engage a faith community's existing narrative while shifting attention to the future narrative. Through this exercise church leaders are led through a process to identify a dream, or "next chapter," to shape ministries for an immediate context. The methodology presented below blends various tools to enable church leaders to discover God's direction and own the story-writing process.

## VALUE OF NARRATIVE

Narratives play a vital role in the experience and communication of life situations. On the surface narratives are expressions of a particular life situation from an individual perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> "Faith community," "faith system," "church," and "congregation" are used interchangeably throughout this paper to denote an individual assembly of Jesus' followers.

However, peeling away the layers of this superficial connotation reveals more taking place in the crafting and telling of a narrative than merely recounting circumstances. The manner by which an individual expresses a narrative reveals details of deepest importance in the character's memory.<sup>2</sup> Narratives communicate meaning for a character's life situation though they require interpretation in order for their inherent value to be understood.<sup>3</sup> It is one thing to hear a story as it is retold and another to accurately hear the meaning communicated through an individual's narrative.<sup>4</sup>

These features also hold true of narratives crafted by faith communities. A congregation's life tells a story communicating the intricacies of the congregation's existence. A congregation's narrative serves as an expression of the participants' experiences. Listening for a congregation's narrative requires hearing the stories of participants in the faith community of the past and present.<sup>5</sup> These stories resonate in the conversations prior to and following the Sunday morning worship time. In addition, one may hear these stories in the practices and rituals that a

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<sup>2</sup> David Denborough, *Retelling the Stories of Our Lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw Inspiration and Transform Experience* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), 3, writes: "Who we are and what we do are influenced by the stories that we tell about ourselves. While we can't always change the stories that others have about us, we can influence the stories we tell about ourselves and those we care about."

<sup>3</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 93, points out, "We cannot escape particular standpoints, but we can compare and debate positions formulated from particular standpoints." According to Volf, narratives operate to shape one's understanding of life situations. This understanding is only according to one's interpretation from a particular perspective of a life situation.

<sup>4</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1997), 88, writes: "Narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist's interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society's refusals of visibility. We come to see how circumstances shape the lives of those who share with us some general goals and projects; and we see that circumstances shape not only people's possibilities for action, but also their aspirations and desires, hopes and fears."

<sup>5</sup> Listening is an ethnographic practice that requires the hearer pay careful attention to verbal and nonverbal cues from the speaker. The difficulty in this practice lies in the abilities of the hearer to focus solely on the story uttered from the speaker without clouding the story with personal interpretations and counsel. Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2008), 141, writes, "In order to hear the deeper stories, pastoral ethnographers must 'listen' with all their senses, for what is communicated in words, tone of voice, silences, gestures, and actions."

congregation observes. An examination of this type may reveal the congregation's culture<sup>6</sup> and disclose the foundation for a church's existence. "Founding personalities and early events create a kind of genetic inheritance and determine the way the congregation positions itself within its environment."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, a congregation's narrative is more than the mere communication of stories, but the expression of an overarching metanarrative composed of a church's heritage and history, for the sake of future generations.

At the center of a congregation's narrative is the tale of a relationship between the creator of the cosmos and the created. This relationship serves as the basis for the congregation's existence and invites the faith community into an even greater metanarrative—the story of God. The degree a faith community's narrative fits into the metanarrative of God's own movement establishes the congregation's faith foundation and provides a rationale for the nature of the congregation's existence. Narrative theology seeks to understand the relationship between individual narratives and God's action.

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

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 34, defines culture as "The complex of values, customs, beliefs, and practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group." This definition is part of a work by Terry Eagleton in which the author breaks down the presence of culture, even when people claim culture does not exist or has no influence on the system. Throughout this project culture is understood according to Eagleton's definition.

<sup>7</sup> Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003), 113. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 11, expand this thought through discussing the communicative power of stories for an individual's or community's culture. They write, "Telling stories or fashioning a narrative are not, at their root, just speech patterns but life patterns—not simply a way of talking to explain the world or communicate ourselves but a way of being in the world that, in turn, becomes the basis of our explanations and interpretations."

participants' lives. God's action within a congregation's narrative inevitably transforms the congregation's narrative to manifest God's metanarrative.

### Culture

The first focal point is concerned with the role a congregation's culture plays in bringing together God's metanarrative and the narrative of a congregation. A faith community's culture consists of the words and actions that reveal the foundations of a congregation's existence. The words used to communicate a congregation's narrative are powerful in revealing a faith community's narrative. Regarding the power of language, Paul Ricoeur wrote, "Whatever ultimately may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language, it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression." Narratives operate through story-telling to create a metalanguage. The metalanguage a congregation develops is used to express its understanding of the way God moves within the particular system. A faith community's adopted metalanguage applies specific definitions to common words (e.g., redemption, justification, etc.). As such, this language creates a barrier between those inside the community and those outside the community since it is used and understood best by insiders. The wall of separation can be removed, or at least reduced, when individuals from outside the faith community move to play a role in the congregation's narrative and in God's story.

In addition to language, a faith community's culture is informed by the actions of the congregation. "In our rituals, like our stories, we narrate our existence, that is to say, we individually and collectively express and create a vision of life."<sup>8</sup> The significance of rituals is found in the non-verbal expression of an inherent meaning to shape the reason behind

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 26.

performing a rite. Ray Browne describes a ritual's role: "Rituals and ceremonies are codifications and statements of attitudes. Ideas create rituals and rituals spawn ideas." The rituals responsible for shaping the attitude of a faith community are not dependent on the language of the culture. Instead, these rites have the ability to impact one's attitude through participation. Participation in certain rituals recounts a congregation's narrative as well as expresses the faith community's culture. Through language and rituals alike, God's metanarrative establishes a foundation upon which the congregation's culture of faith is based.

### Transformation

Another important way of characterizing the relationship between God's metanarrative and the narrative of a congregation focuses on the transformative power stories carry for developing a faith community. The relationship between God's story and a congregation's story is transformative in the sense of the faith community's development into the image of God. As a faith community discovers meaning through the retelling of God's story, a portrait of God's nature is revealed. Recognizing the image of God elucidates attributes of God's nature the congregation is called to imitate. A faith community's participation in God's story inevitably transforms the congregation's culture. "Ritual enactment not only expresses our alliance with a particular story or broader narrative, it also creates it." A faith community is transformed by actively participating in the congregation's narrative and placing it in God's metanarrative. As the faith community is transformed, the congregation's narrative assimilates into God's metanarrative. Transformation is a process that requires time and diligence on the part of the congregation. Through active participation over the course of time, a congregation's narrative is altered to manifest the image of God's metanarrative.

## METHODOLOGY

The process for discovering a faith community's future narrative blends Ethnographic Inquiry and Appreciative Inquiry with Paul Ricoeur's three phases of imitation. Through this process, church leaders are invited to discover God's presence and direction for the faith community's future narrative. To begin, church leaders are invited to participate in "narrative conversations."<sup>9</sup> The purpose of these conversations is to allow leaders to reflect on the faith community's existing story and retell it from individual perspectives. In order to direct these conversations, questions are devised according to Ethnographic Inquiry and Appreciative Inquiry.<sup>10</sup> The key to these techniques is to prompt conversation, rather than ask questions with simple, short answers.<sup>11</sup> The data collected from conversations is then separated according to Ricoeur's three moves toward imitation. These moves are included below and illustrate the process of a narrative's transformation. As faith leaders record data, the future narrative emerges.

Ethnographic Inquiry is a line of questioning that allows a researcher to walk alongside the research group in order to discover data.<sup>12</sup> It is a tool used to immerse oneself in a culture in order to understand the people of that culture. As a pastoral practice, Ethnographic Inquiry

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<sup>9</sup> These are often referred to as "interviews" and in which a researcher asks open-ended questions to illicit a participant to share information or a story. For more on this see Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (3d. ed.: Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008), 27-29.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon, "Assessing 'Good' Qualitative Research in the Work Psychology Field: A Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 84 (2011): 633-650, refer to this as "sensemaking," saying: "Sensemaking can be understood as the process through which people generate credible shared understandings of the situation they are in, and the ways they should exist and progress within those situations."

<sup>11</sup> For example, instead of asking, "Do you feel ministries in a congregation are having a positive impact?" consider asking, "What do you appreciate about the ministries the congregation participates?" The questions asked should prompt participants to share their thoughts, rather than simply seek an answer.

<sup>12</sup> Pete Ward highlights seven values of ethnography developed by Scott Jones and Sal Watt. Pete Ward, "Introduction," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (ed. Pete Ward; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 1-10, lists 1) participation, 2) immersion, 3) reflection, reflexivity, and representation, 4) thick description, 5) an active participative ethics, 6) empowerment, 7) understanding.

allows leaders to listen to the voice of the faith community they serve. Listening is essential for a faith community seeking to discover, or write, their future narrative. It enables leaders to remain true to the identity of the faith community. In addition, Ethnographic Inquiry invites church leaders to take ownership of the story-writing process.<sup>13</sup> Leaders taking ownership in the process is advantageous as it reduces resistance to the development of the future narrative.

Appreciative Inquiry is a line of questioning that focuses attention on the positive attributes of a faith community's narrative.<sup>14</sup> David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney provide the following definition for Appreciative Inquiry:

Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms . . . [Appreciative Inquiry] assumes that every organization and community has many untapped and rich accounts of the positive—what people talk about as past, present, and future capacities, or the positive core.<sup>15</sup>

Appreciative Inquiry invites church leaders to measure the congregation's effectiveness for advancing God's kingdom on earth. At the same time, this technique focuses on positive characteristics in order to dispel negative influences. The temptation is present for leaders to criticize or blame when questions of church effectiveness are raised. Appreciative Inquiry maintains a positive focus by emphasizing the positive attributes in a faith community, rather than the negative. Through Ethnographic Inquiry and Appreciative Inquiry, a foundation is laid

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 237, writes "Two dynamic activities are involved in this kind of 'writing': first, constructing one's lifeworld in a new way, using new themes, metaphors, and story lines; and second, actually living into these new themes and plot lines that were not previously imagined or tried."

<sup>14</sup> Mark Lou Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 23, writes, "By discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future."

<sup>15</sup> David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005), 8.

that enables the reconstruction of a congregation's existing narrative and the construction of the future narrative.

The transformation of a faith community's existing narrative to a future narrative is explained through the work of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur brings Aristotle's *Poetics* alongside Augustine's *Confessions* to discern the way a narrative arrives at a transformed image. The relationship between Aristotle and Augustine's writings reveals the impact of time on the development of a narrative in the creation of a plot (*muthos*).<sup>16</sup> From Ricoeur's writings, temporal conditions influence narratives to create identity of participants through a character's actions.<sup>17</sup> He points out:

Narrative identity is said to be a mark of power in that it has as its counterpart the temporal constitution of an identity, along with its dialogical constitution. Here we find the fragility of human affairs submitted to the double test of temporal distension and confrontation with the disturbing alterity of other human beings.<sup>18</sup>

Identity created through a narrative is the result of action in time communicated by narrative.

This is the underlying notion of Ricoeur's phases leading to imitation. This process is referred to as mimesis<sup>19</sup> and points to the moves from a point of action (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) through a point of mediation (mimesis<sub>2</sub>) to produce a transformed narrative (mimesis<sub>3</sub>). The progression through these phases reveals a seamless representation of a congregation's narrative being transformed to manifest the image of God.

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 236-42.

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

<sup>19</sup> Mimesis denotes the manner action is transformed into the image of something else. Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 62, writes: "For [Aristotle], mimesis must involve *making*: it is the specifically human activity of creating one thing to be like another thing. Mimesis is not the mere imitation, accidental or otherwise, of something, but the deliberate creation of something in order to represent something else." The understanding of mimesis Aristotle arrived at stood in contrast to the Platonic line of thought attributing mimesis to be an imitation of anything. The difference, though subtle, involves the presence of a plot or a conscious awareness of the developmental process responsible for creating the representation.

Mimesis<sub>1</sub>

Following Paul Ricoeur's process of narrative composition, a congregation's life exists in time and is communicated through narrative.<sup>20</sup> Both elements merge into a harmonious relationship resulting in the development of a plot.<sup>21</sup> Plot is the movement of a narrative toward transformation into a specified final image. Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is used to pinpoint moments of a narrative that appear void of an underlying plot.<sup>22</sup> Referred to as "prefiguration," mimesis<sub>1</sub> consists of a narrative's scenes in a temporal setting. This phase is filled with random and chaotic activity performed apart from a cohesive storyline, or plot. "Our lives are inchoate stories in the sense that all the raw ingredients of an identity narrative are already in place, awaiting the configuring influence of a plot."<sup>23</sup> Thomas Long expands this point:

We go through our daily existence, humming along at the level of mimesis<sub>1</sub>. We get dressed, fix the coffee, go to work, wave at a friend across the hall, turn on the computer, start the workday. It doesn't feel like a coherent narrative; it doesn't seem organized or profoundly meaningful.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 52, writes: "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."

<sup>21</sup> Ricoeur directs much of this discussion to Aristotle's *Poetics* as a means for understanding the poetic nature of an individual's life. Ricoeur points to plot as a structuring of events and the narrative sequence of the character's life. By fitting the differing elements into a narrative structure, a practical field emerges to establish reason behind the character's narrative. For more on this see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1.56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.57.

<sup>23</sup> Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 46. Long's comment includes practices on an individual level to express mimesis<sub>1</sub> in the actions a person carries out from day to day. The principle behind Long's statement is applicable on a larger scale to include the actions of a congregation. For instance, the random activities of a worship service would fit into mimesis<sub>1</sub>. A congregation sings songs, recites prayers, observes the Lord's Supper, and takes up a contribution. These practices, separated from an underlying plot, would seem random and mere rituals. As the conversation moves to mimesis<sub>2</sub> and a plot is revealed, the seemingly random acts of a congregation are understood according to the discovered meaning associated with the plot.

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

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

We can see the richness in the meaning of *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>. To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics.<sup>25</sup>

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

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

As the recognition of actions takes shape, the narrative moves from *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> to *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> in a natural progression toward imitation. Whereas *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> revealed random actions seemingly void of a recognizable plot, *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> handles the revelation of a hidden plot, providing reason behind the actions identified in *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>. Referred to as "configuration," *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> brings cohesion to the chaotic exercise of random actions. This move is accomplished as the seemingly random actions are configured to the underlying plot. Understanding the narrative's plot underlying the actions allows one to discern the purpose as to why these actions are performed. No longer are these scenes random occurrences taking place within a temporal setting. *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> marks the phase in which the underlying purpose is discerned and the narrative's plot brings

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<sup>25</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 64.

meaning to the narrative's scenes. This move from *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> through *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> is crucial in preparation for participants to be transformed into the manifestation of a specific image (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>).

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

The dynamism lies in the fact that a plot already exercises, within its own textual field, an integrating and, in this sense, a mediating function, which allows it to bring about, beyond this field, a mediation of a larger amplitude between the preunderstanding and . . . the postunderstanding of the order of action and its temporal features.<sup>26</sup>

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

*Mimesis*<sub>3</sub>

As the random actions of one's temporal existence discover meaning in the underlying plot, a narrative moves into *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>. Referred to as "refiguration," *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> describes a narrative's transformed action according to the underlying purpose. Temporal action is brought into association with a purpose for performing those actions in an applicable manner to reshape the narrative. Ricoeur points out, "*Mimesis*<sub>3</sub> marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality."<sup>27</sup> A narrative

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 71.

discovers its deepest value when it is allowed to impact participants by shaping their lives. Karl Simms writes, “If narrative did not have this referential function, its purpose would be lost, and we would not ‘understand’ it in any deep sense.”<sup>28</sup> A narrative’s significance is found exclusively in the manner it impacts the character’s life situation.

The move from mimesis<sub>1</sub> through mimesis<sub>2</sub> into mimesis<sub>3</sub> creates a process through which a narrative’s actions are transformed into the manifestation of a specific image. The seemingly random actions of everyday life are refigured into a different image by the development and discovery of a narrative’s plot. Thomas Long summarizes this process: “The prefigured world of the hearer is gathered up into the configured world of the story, and on the other side of the transaction emerges that which did not exist before the encounter: the world of the hearer refigured.”<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur’s three phases leading to imitation reveal the manner a narrative is transformed to imitate God’s metanarrative at work within this world.

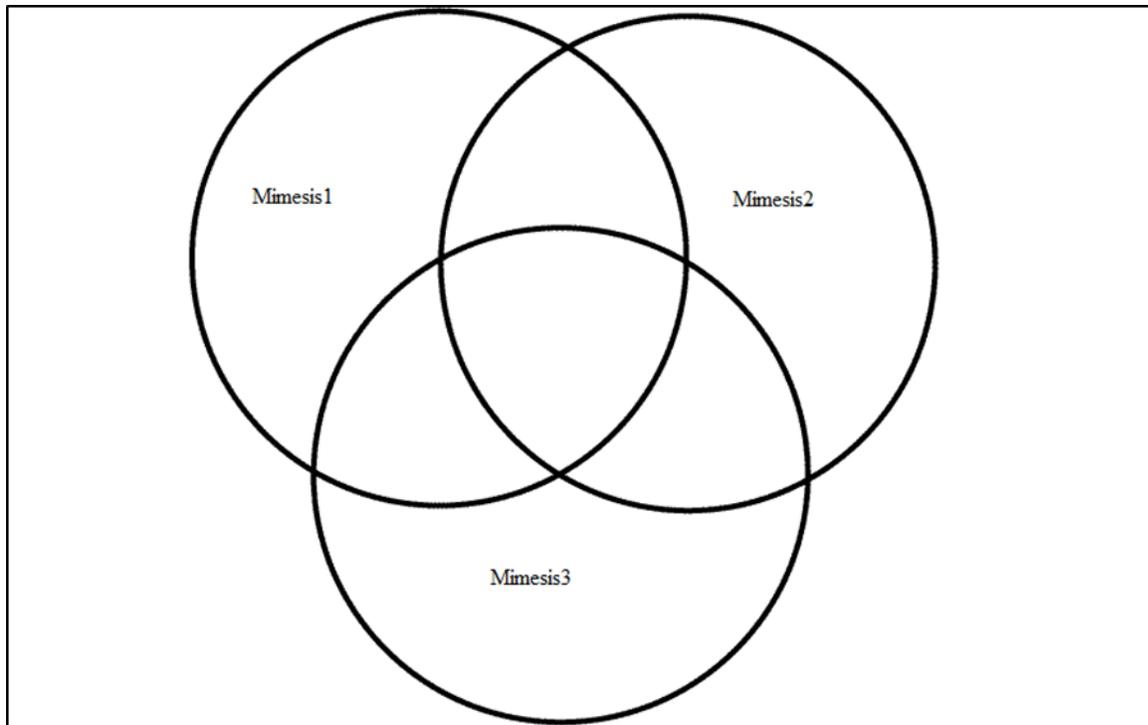
## DOCUMENTING RESEARCH DATA

Working from the narrative conversations to discover the faith community’s existing narrative to discovering the system’s future narrative may seem like a daunting task. To help visualize the methodology of this process, a Venn diagram is used to record data. The diagram’s basic design places Ricoeur’s moves of mimesis in three large circles.

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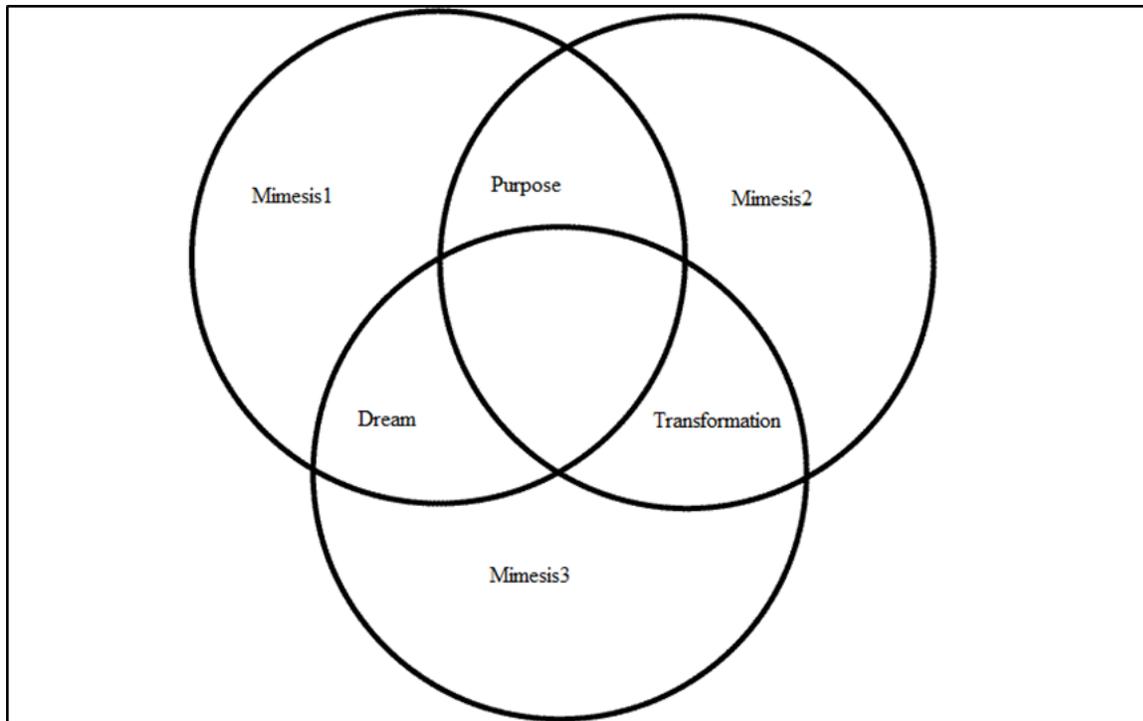
<sup>28</sup> Simms, *Paul Ricoeur*, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Long, *Preaching from Memory*, 48-49.



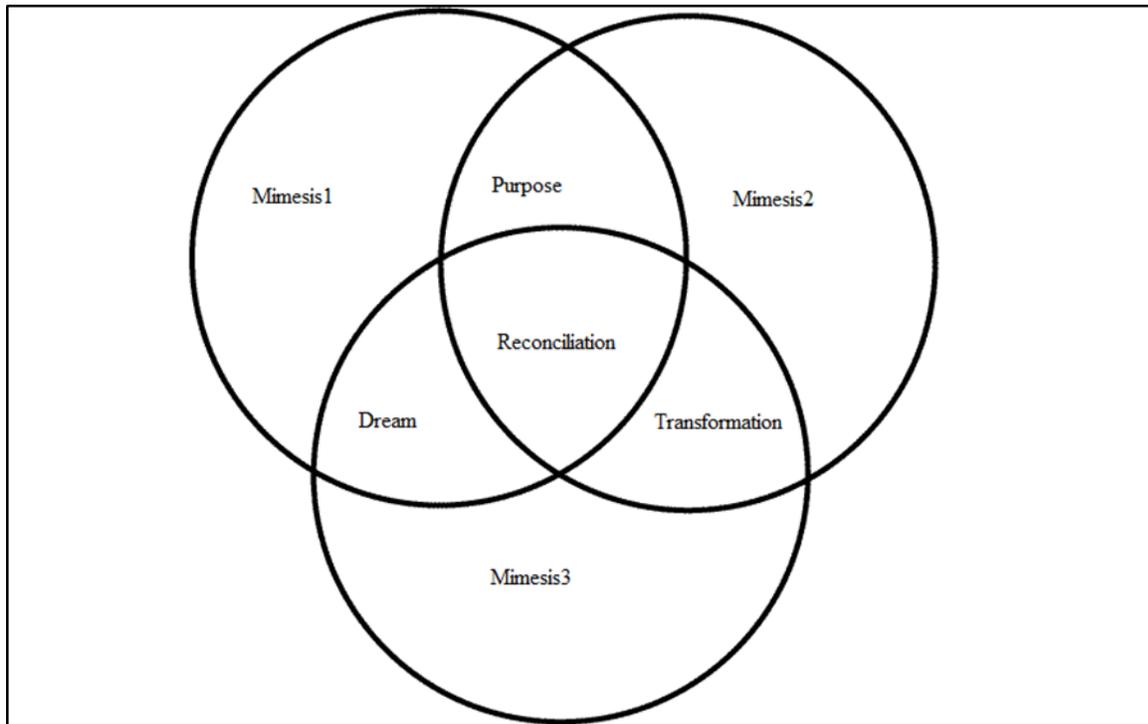
Mimesis<sub>1</sub> records data associated with the faith community's existing narrative. The guiding question for church leaders to answer is, "What is our story?" Mimesis<sub>2</sub> documents data resulting from God's presence/movement, as realized by church leaders. The question asked for this area is, "What is God doing?" Mimesis<sub>3</sub> records data highlighting the partnership between God and the faith community. The question for church leaders in this area is, "How does our story fit into what God is doing?" Using a Venn diagram allows church leaders to recognize the progression from the church's existing narrative to identifying God's presence/work around the congregation culminating in the community's desire to join God.

The next area of interest in the Venn diagram are transition points showing the overlap of Ricoeur's moves toward imitation. Each point is designated according to a particular function the faith community is left to discern. With this, the Venn diagram looks as follows.



A faith community's central purpose guides the movement of the congregation's narrative toward a specific destination. Recognizing the guiding purpose, church leaders are encouraged to answer, "How are we ministering?" The next transition point is Mimesis 2 to Mimesis 3, marked as "Transformation." This region invites leaders to identify how God is working within the faith community to minister in the surrounding context. The question for this transition is, "How has God equipped us?" The final area is designated, "Dream." The dream is the vision leaders come up with and present to faith community as the goal for the future narrative. The dream invites commitment and maintains the congregation's participation as the future narrative comes into being. At this point, the question becomes, "How can we minister?" The purpose, transformation, and dream combine to form a faith community's reason(s) for ministry, how God has equipped, and the commitment of the congregation to take God's kingdom into their immediate context.

The hub of the Venn diagram positions the central point where the faith community's narrative and God's metanarrative come together. This piece is marked "Reconciliation" and completes the illustration as follows.



The moves toward mimesis and the transition regions revolve around the theme of God reconciling creation. Reconciliation completes the transformation process and provides a rationale behind the development of a congregation's ministry efforts in a specific ministry context. In addition, reconciliation accounts for how God is moving within a congregation's ministry context and invites a faith community to visual sharing reconciliation with other people. Beyond these, reconciliation is the foundation for a faith community's existence and invites people to dream of a world where God's reconciliation is complete.

## CONCLUSION

The life of a faith system tells a narrative. The challenge for church leaders is to discover the relationship between the congregation's narrative and God's metanarrative. The methodology presented in this paper was developed to assist church leaders examine a congregation's existing narrative. Upon the completion of this examination, church leaders are equipped to recognize God's transforming power already working within the congregation's narrative, as well as discover the direction God is leading for the future narrative. It is imperative for faith community's to discern God's presence in the congregation's narrative as the foundation for identifying the purpose, transformation, and dream guiding the faith community into the future.

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