

Effective Clergy Small Groups: Best Practices for Narrative Process Groups

Center for Transforming Engagement
at The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology

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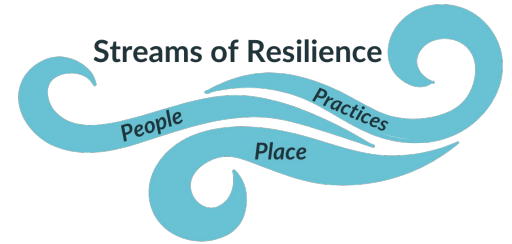
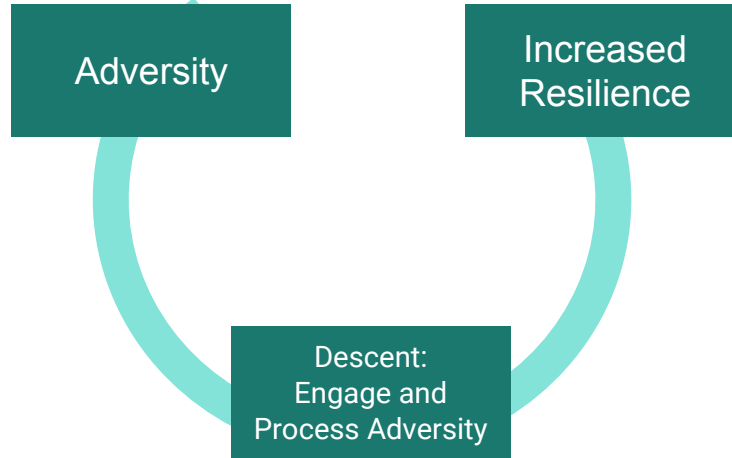


Resilient Leaders

Healthy Relational Style



Build Resilience



Narrative Process Groups (Circles)



6 People,
1 Facilitator

1 year



25 hours

Research Questions

1. What elements of narrative process groups contribute to the improvement of resilience?
2. Which elements of resilience are improved by narrative process groups among Christian leaders?

Narrative Process Group (Circles)

Identity: our own personal stories as they interact with the larger story of God in the world

Narrative process groups use stories from individuals' lives to increase their understanding of their relational style.

Relational style: Patterns of relating to God, self, and others. Often formed based on relationships and experiences in childhood



Breakout groups

- Introduce yourself--name, organization, and role.
- Discussion Questions
 - How have you seen unhealthy relationship styles (patterns in relating to self, God, and other) impact clergy well-being?
 - How have you incorporated narrative process (working with stories from the past and present) into your work with clergy or congregations? If you haven't used them, what possibilities do you see in doing so?



Results of qualitative study on Narrative Process Groups

Question 1: What elements of the Circles contribute to the improvement of resilience? These themes suggest best practices.

1. Convener Facilitation
2. “Being With” Stance
3. Story-Based
4. Commonality and Diversity
5. Structural Elements



Convener Facilitation

A model that balanced mutuality, attunement, and authority helped participants approach their own ministry with more authenticity and sustainability.

“I experienced [the convener] as more of a participant than as a facilitator – different than what I had seen [before], and I had to get okay with that. Once I figured that out, it was really unique to watch a facilitator also be a participant without losing any authority that she needed to retain to facilitate. It was safe for her to show up and be who she was in that group.”



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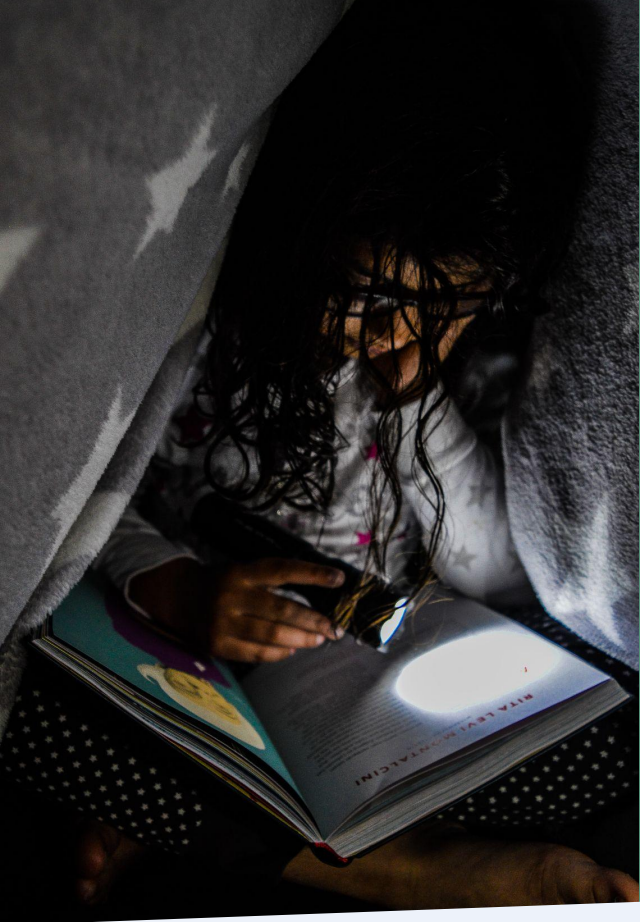
“Being-With” Stance

Guideline of “no fixing, no advising, no setting straight” led to participants feeling “heard,” “seen,” “held,” and “sat with.”

“There were a couple times when people were almost moved to tears by [other] people’s stories. You could tell people sat with you in it. After sharing your story and people sharing what they felt and what they heard, and you realizing ‘I am not alone. You are here with me holding my pain.’”



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Story Based

The type of stories were shared and how those stories were incorporated throughout the program were key to the growth of awareness of and new possibilities for relational style.

“What comes to mind [as being impactful] is all the story stuff, starting with the early childhood story and the experience I had of increasing my understanding- I knew somewhat why I ended up in the helping professions, but I didn’t know how deeply broken and wounded I was and how much that influenced why I ended up as a pastor. It was a rollercoaster of ‘Holy crap, I am super broken, no wonder I chose to be a pastor. I shouldn’t have done that [been a pastor]’ – but then seeing that partial brokenness led you in that direction, that direction was part of God’s plan of redemption for me and my story. ... So it was about re-finding hope. The narrative gave vision for life – not just vocationally but ‘Who am I becoming?’”

Commonality and Diversity

Groups that were formed around commonality in story themes but diversity of age, experience, career stage, ethnicity and cultural identity, sex, and denomination resulted in a non-competitive environment, feeling less alone, and vicarious learning.

“I would say it surprised me how quickly and deeply our very diverse group connected. I read everybody's profile and read as much as I could online about them (before the first Circle meeting). We confessed to each other later that we came in with some preconceived notions about each other. I came in prepared to be ‘the liberal,’ as I saw a fair amount of language that seemed conservative. The participant from [a conservative school] – I thought I would hate him. We laughed about that later.”



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Structural Elements

Time limits, dedicated time for silence, entering rituals, and structuring of content were named by participants as important for group effectiveness.

"[The structure gave] everyone an opportunity, space, time to share. Each person had a dedicated time, which, for many people who work in ministry, there isn't a whole lot of dedicated time to you and what you are working through."



Breakout groups

- Which of these elements of small groups (Facilitator Leadership, “Being With” Stance, Story-Based, Commonality and Diversity, Structural Elements) suggest best practices that might work in your context?
- How might you adapt one of these elements for use in your context?

Results of qualitative study on Narrative Process Groups

Question 2: Which elements of resilience are improved by Resilient Leaders Circles?

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Compassion
3. Leadership Skills
4. Relationships





Self-Awareness

Participants made connections between what had happened to them in the past and how they relate to people in their ministry now.

"It's a lot about becoming more aware, better informed about how I show up in interactions with others, whether one to one or group or large group leadership. Being more free to respond and less compelled to react in my typical ways."

Circle participant

Self-Compassion

- (1) Self-kindness
- (2) Common Humanity
- (3) Mindfulness

“ [The Circle group] helped me to have grace with myself. I told them how much pressure I put on myself and they would say ‘Have grace with yourself.’ That has helped me so much when things didn’t go according to plan. I would have been much more anxious and much less at peace with my circumstances – and trying to control everything.”



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Access the full report [Effective Small Groups for Pastors and Christian Leaders: Building Resilience Through Narrative Processing Circles](#)

[The Resilience Report](#)

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Q & A



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