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# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*



## Arts & Orality Part 2: Equipping for Ministry

**Logan • Hall-Heimbecker • Rajendran • Harris • Sanha  
Bauson • Goffe • Schrag • Hollingsworth • Negrão  
Saurman • Neeley • Scheuermann • Rowe • Reggy  
Bowman • Stahl**

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## **Cover Photo**

A group of women who are part of a choir react with delight as they hear a story told by pastor Elasi, in their mother tongue—Nyanga.

## **Additional Photos**

All photos not otherwise credited have been contributed by members of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE).

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,  
and establish the work of our hands upon us;  
yes, establish the work of our hands!

Psalm 90:17 (ESV)

One generation shall commend your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:4 (ESV)

# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement is welcomed.

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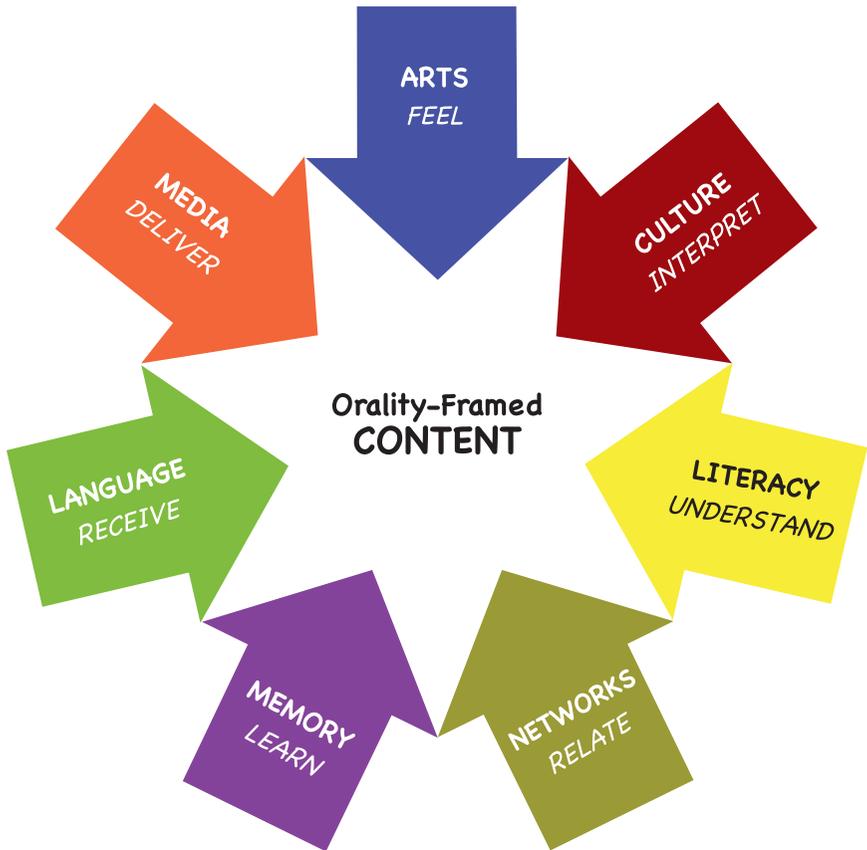
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# The Seven Disciplines of Orality



*Courtesy of Dr. Chuck Madinger who leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.*



**ION**

INTERNATIONAL ORALITY NETWORK

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# Co-Editors' Note

*Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge*

## Orality and the Arts in the Early Church

The multi-faceted nature of communication, specifically orality, continues to surprise and delight us. One specific area inviting further exploration is that of the relationship between *orality* and *the arts* in the growth of the Early Church.

For many coming from cultures heavily influenced by print-based communication paradigms, consideration of orality and the arts among the Early Church feels counter-intuitive.<sup>1</sup> Often in light of the Reformation and the subsequent Evangelical emphasis on the sacred text of scripture, it becomes easy to project a printed mindset back onto previous generations' experience with God's word. This mentality ends up reflecting, usually unintentionally, a form of communication snobbery. But for us to better understand the relationship of orality, the arts and contemporary mission praxis, we need to better understand that orality and artistic expression—specifically creative elements like oral performance—would have been central to the Early Church's communication practice.<sup>2</sup>

For example an argument can be made that many of the New Testament writings were either transcripts collected from oral performances or they were composed orally through dictation and then written down but for the purpose of being orally performed.<sup>3</sup> Therefore most of the Early Church (some argue as much as 95 percent) experienced the scriptures not by reading but through oral performance.<sup>4</sup> Is oral performance exactly what Paul had in mind when he recommended that the churches of Colosse and Laodicea were to “read” each other's letters “in the church”?<sup>5</sup> These “readings” would have been both an *oral* and an *artistic* communication experience involving a text but also a performer, the audience, and a shared communal space. Therefore while more needs to be investigated, our own interest in the interrelationships between oral, artistic, and textual discourse seems to have clear biblical precedent.

In the Spring 2016 edition of the *Orality Journal*, volume one in a two-part series on *Orality and the Arts*, we focused our attention on exploring the power of artistic expression for capturing and transforming people's lives. This first volume sought to demonstrate how twenty-first century Christians are allowing the arts, whether henna, dance, or visual art to "orally" speak, visualizing what are so often invisible spiritual realities. We saw that culturally adapted artistic expressions, many oral in nature, are creating liminal spaces—spiritual thresholds, through which people can encounter new understandings of salvation and restoration available through Jesus Christ.

While having established the power of the arts for transformation in volume one, the reality remains that many practitioners today need equipping for contemporary communication challenges. How does one integrate the arts, a strong commitment to the biblical text, worship of the Triune God and contextual mission praxis among oral-preferenced communicators? This Autumn 2016 edition of the *Orality Journal* provides a continuation of volume one, seeking to address this broader practical question from a variety of different perspectives.

The International Orality Network (ION) deeply appreciates the hard work of International Council for Ethnodoxologists (ICE) in their bringing together yet again a tremendous cache of resources, this time for *equipping* people for adopting and adapting the arts into their own ministry contexts. Like many first-century audiences, ICE recognizes many people today still prefer oral methodologies, even if they have been impacted by print. Communication practices like silent encounters with the biblical text or mono-tonal readings are limited in ways that can impact today's audiences. Therefore for those who are only tentatively experimenting with the arts for the first time or for those who are fully convinced of their transformative impact, these articles provide catalytic ideas as well as the practical nuts and bolts for equipping those interested in incorporating artistic expression into their own oral communication practices.

From its origins, Christianity has seen orality and the arts as integral for communication. Like the Early Church, we desire that people from

every tribe, tongue, people and nation will be able to hear, receive, believe and obey the good news of Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Spirit give us creativity and courage as we seek to follow the early Christians' example in communicating Jesus Christ in today's world.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "William Cappedge".

William Cappedge

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<sup>1</sup>David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part I,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 36, no. 3 (2006): 118–34; David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part II,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 36, no. 4 (2006): 164–84.

<sup>2</sup>For another helpful introduction to communication practices in first-century Christianity, see P.J.J. Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, Biblical Performance Criticism (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies--Part I,” 118.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 4:16

# Note from Guest Editors

*Katie Hoogerheide and James R. Krabill*

*Katie Hoogerheide serves as associate director of the Center for Excellence in World Arts in Dallas, Texas. The overseas experiences particularly influencing her work include time spent living, working, and traveling in Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa. In addition, she draws from work and graduate studies in organ performance, ethnoarts, linguistics, and pedagogy. A member of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists, she also works as associate editor for the Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith.*

*James R. Krabill served from 1978–1996 as a Mennonite mission worker teaching Bible and church history in oral culture settings among African-initiated churches in West Africa. Currently serving as Senior Executive for Global Ministries with the Mennonite Mission Network, Krabill has authored or edited various works, including Music in the Life of the African Church (with Roberta King and others, 2008) and Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook (2013).*

And the things you have heard me say in the  
presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable  
people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Tim. 2:2 NIV

**R**esilience! All of us who invest energy into people or projects like to see our work prosper. We love to see individuals, communities, and initiatives grow in strength and in their ability to weather times of hardship. When the cause involves the Kingdom of God, our hearts burn even hotter with the desire to see the gospel message not just firmly rooted, but also thriving within cultures around the world.

*How can we encourage such resilience in the communities we serve? How can we support others in pursuing peace, justice, and God himself?* The International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE) once again joins with the International Orality Network (ION) in seeking wisdom on these and similar questions. Earlier this year, ICE guest edited a first volume on arts and orality for the Orality Journal, where we explored just how significantly the arts impact communication.<sup>1</sup> In this second volume, we

pursue questions of longevity and durability by sharing current practices in equipping people to invigorate their ministries with the arts.

Drawing from her research on an oral storytelling genre, Robin Harris proposes two keys for promoting resilience in arts traditions: (1) ongoing *innovation* and (2) provision for *transmission*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, two of our top priorities include encouraging the creation of local arts and empowering others to carry out and pass on best practices for engaging the arts in ministry. The articles in this volume specifically highlight both of these intentions.

Whether you seek equipping for ministry for yourself or for others, we trust you will find a wealth of inspiration, ideas, and resources within these pages. Accompany Cornelius as he prepares artists for an oral arts festival in India (Bowman, “Celebrating the Word”). Get your creative juices flowing with practical ideas for integrating storytelling, songs, paintings, sculptures, drama, and other visuals into preaching (Scheuermann). Find out how participating in “Arts for a Better Future” can energize your ministry, no matter what your involvement with the arts (Schrag). Listen to Jeremias’ story and learn how he uses the arts to support the church in Guinea-Bissau (Sanha & Bauson). Join in a rich exploration of the mentoring relationship (Hall-Heimbecker).

Effective equipping for ministry involves a wide variety of facets. Logan and Hall-Heimbecker emphasize RELATING to those with whom we work, and, most importantly, to the One who gives us the strength and grace to invest in the Kingdom in the first place. We placed these articles first because establishing respectful and mutual relationships is the starting point for any work we do. In a similar vein, Rajendran & Harris, Sanha & Bauson, and Goffe & Harris highlight the importance of DIALOGUING, which includes listening to the stories, thoughts, and dreams of others. Schrag, Hollingsworth & Negrão, and Saurman present helpful tools and tips in the articles on TRAINING. Neeley, Scheuermann, and Rowe provide suggestions for INTEGRATING the arts into the fabric of community life. Reggy, Stahl, and both of Bowman’s articles share on-the-ground accounts of IMPLEMENTING the arts in orality ministries—equipping in action.

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Cross-cultural work often comes fraught with tensions surrounding respect, perceived authority, control, power, and colonialism. Some months ago, a woman from a non-majority country expressed to us her frustration that the missionaries “first told us that we couldn’t use our arts, and now they tell us we should.” What a reproof! Logan provides a much-needed balance to this hegemonic posture with her thoughts on the art of silence. We are also glad to include a wide range of global voices in this volume. Our authors were born on five of the six populated continents, and they have also worked on five of the six. In addition to these direct voices, Stahl brings us a wealth of reported perspectives from an increasingly influential group of women in South Asia.

Read these contributions, study their main points, learn from new perspectives. Perhaps your next workshop could benefit from Hollingsworth & Negrão’s highly practical set of considerations for organization. Perhaps Rowe’s suggestions for creatively sharing scripture will infuse your next worship service with new life. Reggy’s account may inspire you to enrich scripture memory in your own context with the arts. Neeley’s ideas may increase your confidence in commissioning new artistic works. Saurman’s worship wheel may enhance your future discussions with others on the breadth of applications of their local arts in worship. Perhaps you never thought of the concept of “bringing our real selves” into worship (Goffe & Harris) or considered learning how to use the arts to help people recover from trauma (Rajendran & Harris).

Whatever your situation, we pray this volume will increase resilience in your ministry by sparking creativity (innovation) and by providing resources for engaging the arts with others (transmission). As in our first volume, we encourage you to maximize the influence of the people within the community you serve, whether that community represents your own culture or another. We repeat here the closing section of Bowman’s article (“Scripture Alive”), a paragraph that we believe encapsulates the collective desire of both ICE and ION:

I believe our greatest challenge is not how to train and equip, but to believe. We must recognize with complete and unwavering faith that those with whom we work in the field are more than capable of

doing anything they set their minds to. When they are inspired and fulfilled by their own God-given, culturally relevant talents, they will take that same vision to their peers, and this momentous progress toward indigenous, creative worship in the worldwide church will be unstoppable.

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<sup>1</sup>View this first volume at [orality.net/library/journals/volume-5-number-1/](http://orality.net/library/journals/volume-5-number-1/).

<sup>2</sup>Read more about Harris' research and ideas on resilience in her book about the death and rebirth of the Siberian oral epic tradition, *olonkho* (University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

## Women Bible Storytellers in South Asia

*Janet Stahl*

*Janet Stahl has been an oral Bible storytelling coordinator for The Seed Company since 2007, helping partners in PNG, Ethiopia, East Asia, and South Asia carry out Bible storytelling programs. She has an MA in Bilingual Multi-cultural Education from the School for International Training. She and her husband worked in Vanuatu for fifteen years helping language communities develop literacy and scripture engagement materials and programs. They also designed a program for training mother-tongue translators in the Pacific.*

### The Esther Project

In April 2014, The Seed Company partnered with a South Asian mission agency and local churches in an experimental Bible storytelling project in which all of the staff and all of the participants were South Asian women. Six teams of four to five women, representing six

different languages, met together for six two-week story crafting workshops and five three-day extra training sessions. In that time, they identified the discourse features, typical gestures, intonation, and other communication characteristics of their local storytelling genres, then crafted,



checked, and revised thirty-eight Bible stories, most of which had not yet been translated into their languages.

They have further enriched the stories by acting them out through skits and by adding laments and songs of personal response.

In between the weeks of workshops and training sessions, the women storytellers carried out a variety of ministries using these Bible stories. Conservatively estimated, over 2,500 people heard numerous Bible stories, many for the very first time. A significant number of those people also learned to tell the stories and continue to share them with neighbors and other people they meet throughout the day. The following article includes snapshots taken from the reports of the South Asian women staff and storytellers who are involved in the project, as well as testimonies from their husbands, pastors, and other people whose lives have been transformed by the storytelling ministry.<sup>1</sup>

### **The People Groups and the Esther Storytellers**

In this part of South Asia, women are marginalized. Their government reports that more than 65% of women suffer from anemia and other diseases related

to malnutrition and lack of access to good health care. Generally attended only by an older female relative while giving birth, few women go to hospitals for deliveries, resulting in a high death rate and many physical complications. Girls are forced to sleep outside during their monthly cycle. The statistics regarding sexual abuse of girls and women are shocking, and the practice of families disowning widows is common.

Most girls stop attending school at a very early age because it is not safe for them to leave their homes to travel to and from school. Society supports the abandoning of wives who do not give birth to boys. All of these factors lead to large numbers of destitute and depressed women, rejected by the community, who consider suicide their only option.

In addition to facing challenges of gender bias, the Esther women storytellers also face regular persecution for their Christian faith. In fact, one of the women had to be hospitalized after enduring a beating by people in her neighborhood for telling the Bible stories. Only two of the Esther storytellers grew up in Christian families, and the majority of them, while married to Christian men, are estranged from

their extended families because of their Christian faith.

Dr. Mary Varghese, a South Asian partner who advised us in the Esther project design, remarked that women in this part of the world live miserable lives. They do not smile, and even more sadly, they do not cry. Instead, they assume that this terrible lot in life is their destiny, and they accept it with vacant stares. At the ceremony marking the completion of the project, during which the women used local materials, drama, and other arts to enhance their presentation of the creation story, Dr. Varghese noted the changed countenances and confident, purposeful carriage of the Esther storytellers and the women from their small groups. Likewise, a leading pastor commented that the Esther project was vitally important. When asked for evidence, he replied, “Women in [our area] do not smile. Look—the Esther storytellers are smiling.”

### **The Impact of the Bible Storytelling**

*Transformation in the Lives of the Storytellers*

**Dignity and Purpose.** A number of women reported that they used to accompany their pastor husbands to evangelism events, only to sit quietly in the back. One woman confessed

that, before joining the Esther project, she was never interested in what her husband did as a pastor. After joining the Esther project, several women reported that their husbands were pleased with their storytelling and were even giving them opportunities to present the Bible stories during the visitations and events.

During the project-completion ceremony, several respected pastors shared that their churches have come alive as the result of the women’s storytelling, and one husband declared that his wife’s ministry was more effective than his own.

All of the women have gained the reputation in their region as storytellers with a powerful message. One woman remarked that nobody in her immediate neighborhood even knew her name, but now she is known as the ‘storyteller’ and is being called on almost daily to share a Bible story and pray for somebody.

### **Increased Spiritual Discipline.**

The oldest member of the Esther storytellers shared that her pastor constantly urged his congregation to memorize the Bible, since they never knew when their Bibles would be taken from them. She was never successful at memorizing the Bible, but now that she has learned to tell

many of the Bible stories her team crafted, she shares them regularly.

Another woman reported that she tried to read her Bible, but she never understood what she read. Once she started internalizing the Bible stories and telling them to others, she not only understood the stories, but she was able to find lessons for her life. Several women shared similar testimonies.

#### **Increased Faith and Wisdom.**

During the first crafting workshop, the women learned to tell the story of Elijah and the widow (1 Kings 17). One of the women shared that she was always fearful of everything—that they would not have enough to eat; that they would lack money to arrange their daughters' marriages; or that a church member's family would carry out their death threats against her husband, the pastor.

Telling the story of Elijah and the widow helped her to understand that God cares for her, and that she should trust him. As she has trusted him and told the Bible stories, God has blessed their church and their ministry, and she is now able to share food with the poor from their abundance. On a similar note, another storyteller confessed

that she always complained to her husband that he did not provide enough for his family. She, too, learned to trust God through telling this story and has stopped arguing with her husband.

Most of the women had very little Bible knowledge when they started the Esther project, and there was a concern that they would not know how to respond to people's questions and requests. The women have shown amazing wisdom in handling extreme challenges. One woman realized in telling the story from Mark 5 (Jesus healing Jairus' daughter) that Jesus, despite being mocked by the crowd, carried on with his ministry and healed the small girl.

In a similar way, this woman has experienced much mocking and persecution from her neighbors, yet she was able to put it all aside when one of her greatest mockers asked her to pray for his very sick daughter. Following Jesus' example, she immediately prayed without any hesitation, and the daughter has become a believer.

#### *Transformation in the Families of the Storytellers*

**Husband and Wives—Learning to be Partners.** "I love the Esther project. I now have peace in my household," the husband of an

Esther storyteller shared. Another husband reported that the biggest change in his family life as a result of the Esther project is that he and his wife made a commitment to stop lying to each other, something which they used to do routinely.

At the start of the Esther project, some of the husbands protested that their wives would not be home to cook and make the tea during the weeks of the story-crafting workshops. In contrast, by the end of the two-year project, the majority of husbands and family members freely shared how their lives and ministries had been blessed by the Bible storytelling. Even more importantly, they expressed their commitment to help the women carry on with their work.

#### **Mother-in-law and Daughters-in-law—Finding Good Role Models.**

One of the starkest transformations occurred as the women learned to tell the story of Ruth. Although the staff chose the Book of Ruth for the message that God takes care of widows, it was the relationship between Naomi and Ruth that had the most impact on the Esther storytellers. They were amazed that a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law could care for each other, and that God could bless them together. One of the Esther storytellers

immediately went to reconcile with her mother-in-law. Others reported similar responses when they shared the story with their families.

One of the Esther storytellers reported that her neighbors constantly needed to call the police to come separate the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, who were a danger to each other. When news circulated regarding the story of Ruth, the storyteller was invited to come share the story with the two women, and she was able to influence a more harmonious relationship between the two.

#### **Children—Shaping the Next Generation.**

All of the women with children have taught them to tell the Bible stories, and some of the adult children have formed their own storytelling groups. Some of the younger children, as young as 4 and 5 years old, are also learning to tell the stories. One young daughter, 9 years old, learned to tell the entire Book of Ruth as well as the stories of Jesus' birth. She teaches her schoolmates, who come from traditions of other majority religions, to act out the stories and then organizes them to come to church and present the dramas.

One woman with three school-age daughters has taught them

the stories. On her way to school, one of her daughters witnessed an older man fall off his bicycle. Seeing that nobody came to his assistance, she went to the man, gave him her handkerchief, and helped him sit up. Then, she persuaded another bystander to call for a rickshaw to take the man for medical help.

A group of people watching the storyteller's daughter asked her where she had learned to do what she had done. She explained that her parents told her Bible stories and the stories taught them how to live and show compassion. She arrived at school late and had to report to the headmaster. He asked why she was late, and she told him what had happened, including the part about learning from Bible stories. Instead of punishing her, he blessed her. Many of the Esther storytellers have seen similar impact in their children's lives.

*Transformation in the Church  
Communities of the  
Storytellers*

**Revitalizing and  
Growing the Church.**

Both Esther women and their pastors gave testimonies of how their church community has come alive and has grown as a result of

the Bible storytelling. As news has spread, some of the women have had opportunities to travel long distances to tell the stories, often resulting in new churches being planted. One husband proudly shared that he has performed eighty baptisms since his wife began her storytelling ministry.

All of the Esther storytellers meet regularly with at least five groups to share Bible stories and pray for each other. Some of the women meet with as many as twenty or twenty-five groups! The Esther women mentor other women to lead the weekly sessions. When asked what they learned from hearing the Bible stories, group members frequently responded that they now know Jesus has the power to heal, and that he cares for them. And, they ask to hear more stories.

**Equipping Many to Share the Good News.** When visiting one Esther storyteller's home area, the staff



joined a small meeting among a group of very poor villagers. When asked if they could tell a Bible story, several of the small group members stood up and told different stories. This ability is typical of the groups that the Esther women have mentored.

Even more remarkably, in this group one woman shared the vision of making sure that everyone in their village heard the Bible stories—she had a plan for going from house to house to tell the stories.

*Transformation in the Neighborhoods of the Storytellers*  
**Bringing Healing and Peace.**  
 “Who will minister to these poor people? They have nobody to tell their pain to, but now they hear the Bible stories and are receiving peace and healing.” Each of the Esther storytellers have testimonies of people who have asked, after hearing the Bible stories, for prayer for healing from a physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual problem. Many of them report that they saw healings take place. Women who were barren for years became pregnant and gave birth to healthy babies. One young man who had stopped talking or eating for weeks, maybe months, was restored to normal health after prayer and hearing the Bible stories. Families

have chosen to give up idols and making sacrifices to local gods, choosing instead to commit their houses and time to worship God.

### **Building Unity among Religious Groups.**

Through the storytelling, we can communicate with people who are not Christian. Before we didn’t have a relationship with [these] people, but now we have relationships. Before the people [of the other major religions] were afraid of us because we are Christian. Now we know how to talk with them about Jesus and how to start ministering. And our relationships are close now. – Esther woman

The Esther woman who shared these comments lives among people of two other major religions who typically fear and persecute Christians; however, these stories, told in the local style, have opened opportunities to share with neighbors and people in neighboring villages. Some of her listeners have even learned to tell the Bible stories themselves. As the in-country staff members who supervise the Esther storytellers between the workshops observed, Before, the people would not invite any Christian into their home, but now that the

storytellers are ministering to them, they invite them in to drink tea. Before they would not let a Christian pray for them, but now they ask for prayer.

Several women reported that they share stories with children in groups of twenty-five, fifty, and more than one hundred. Often, the groups are a mixture of children representing three different major religious groups. Despite living in families who are antagonistic toward Christians, many of these children end up creating opportunities for the Esther storytellers to share with their relatives.

## Conclusion

I have now had the privilege of working with these Esther storytellers for two years, and I have seen their commitment to sharing the Bible stories grow, even in the face of incredible opposition. I have seen them blossom in using their local arts to enrich the stories. When asked if they will continue even after the project is completed, they all responded with a resounding “Yes!” When I asked them why, several of the women said that they want to have the love of Jesus that Mary Magdalene displayed at Jesus’ tomb—she did not give up, and Jesus blessed her.

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<sup>1</sup>Although sensitivity requires that we not give names, we would like to acknowledge the South Asian woman who supervised the teams and served as translation consultant for the project. Two other local women made the follow-up visits to the Esther women and small groups, during which time they collected most of the interviews quoted in this article. The pictures in this article were taken by Jim Stahl; used with permission.

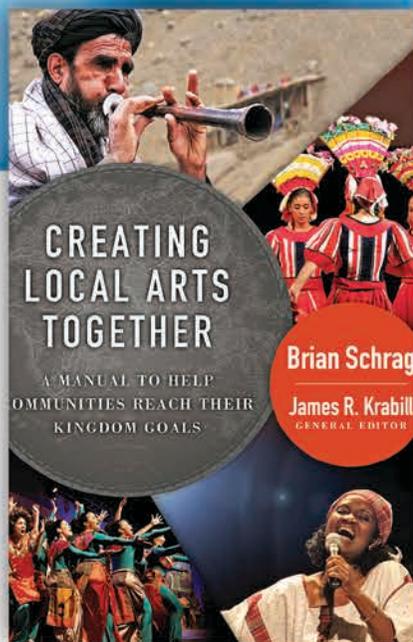




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