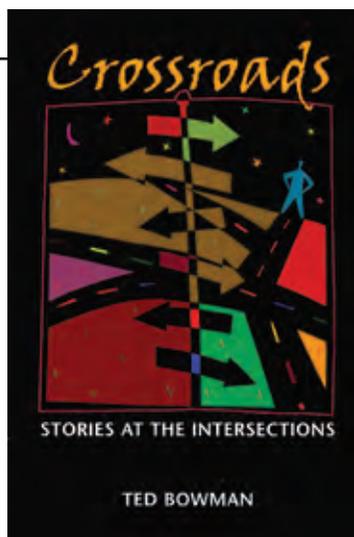




MORAVIAN REFLECTIONS

Crossroads: Stories at the Intersections *highlights the power and spirit of stories*



“When learning to drive, my parents urged me to be especially alert when going through intersections. “Slow down, look both ways and be alert” were advisory words I heard often before and after I began to drive. Little did I know then that my parents were giving me a life lesson, not just driver advice. As I have aged, I have become convinced that it is in life’s crossroads — life and death, sickness and health, youth to aging, grief and hope, caregiver to care-receiver, school to work, belief and doubt, or from innocence to loss of innocence — that one needs to slow down, look both ways, and be alert.” — from the preface of Crossroads: Stories at the Intersections.

Moravian funeral practices often include what is called a memoir . It is the caring and careful weaving by the minister of the personal story of the deceased person as it intersected with the faith story of that same person.

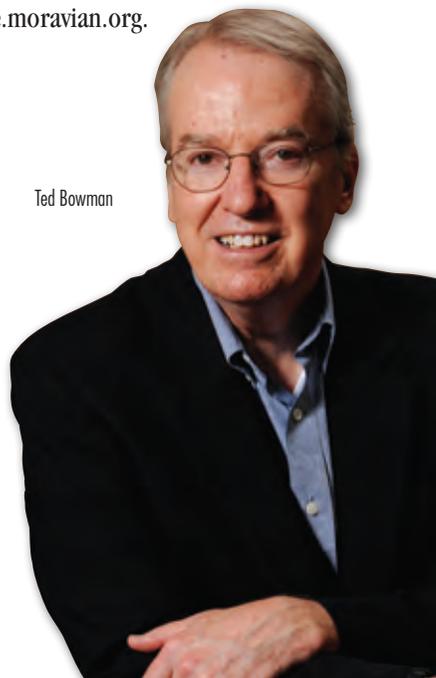
I was reminded of that tradition when Dean na Hollenbach, then director of the Interprovincial Board of Communication, contacted me in 2005 to ask if I would be interested in writing what she described as a meditation or reflection book for the denomination. If

accepted for publication, I knew the volume would reflect the importance of storytelling throughout lives, from birth to death and after death. My proposal was accepted and the

(continued on next page)

Ted Bowman is author of Crossroads: Stories at the Intersection. Crossroads is available from the Interprovincial Board of Communication. Contact IBOC at 1.800.732.0591, ext. 38 or <http://store.moravian.org>.

Ted Bowman



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book, *Crossroads*, was published in 2008.

Consider these two perspectives featured in *Crossroads: Stories at the Intersections*:

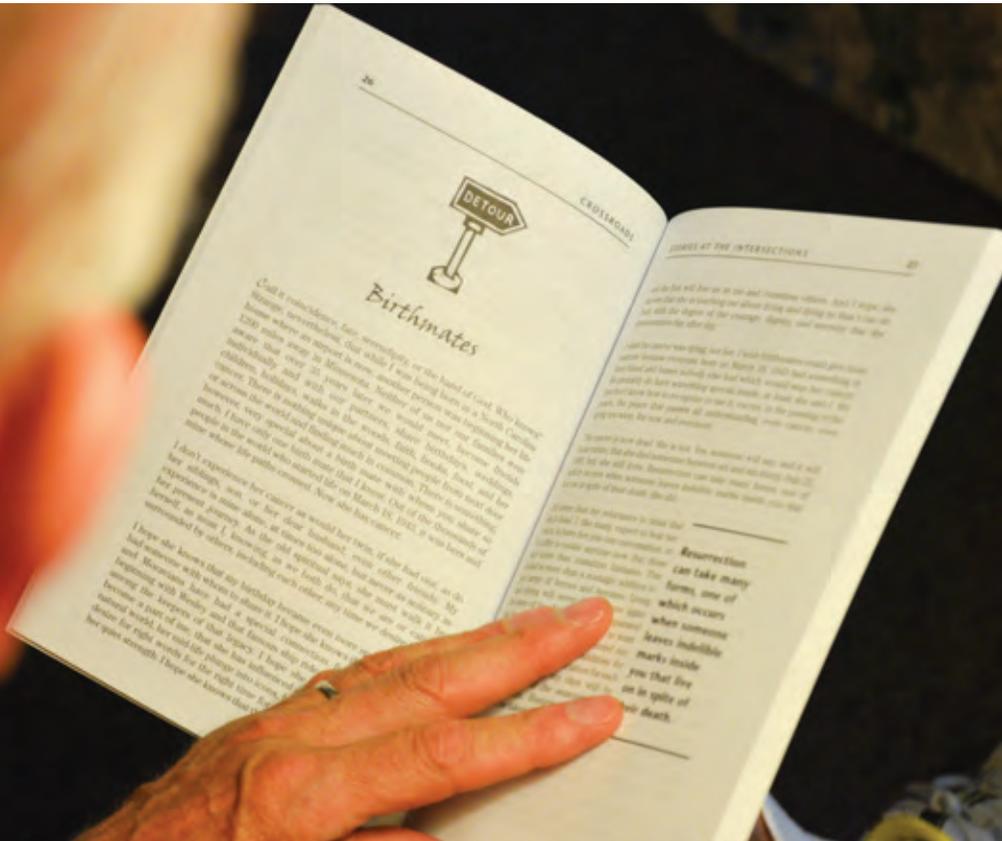
“The very act of storytelling, of arranging memory and invention according to the structure of the narrative, is by definition holy. We tell stories because we love to entertain and hope to edify. We tell stories because they fill the silence death imposes. We tell stories because they save us.” From author James Carroll, quoted in *Notre Dame Magazine* in 2001.

“Nightmares awakened a young boy in the middle of the night. He cried out for his mother who quickly joined him at his bedside. He said, ‘I’m afraid, Mommy.’ She hugged him and assured him that he need not be afraid, for not only was she going to be sleeping one

room away, but God was right by his side also. ‘Well I know God’s here,’ insisted the boy ‘but tonight I guess I just needed somebody with skin on.’” From author Jeffrey Zurheide, author of *When Faith is Tested*.

Telling and hearing stories aid us in addressing the intersections of life and drawing meaning from what has happened. Telling stories is holy, Carroll asserts; I concur.

This account from Zurheide is a story of embodiment, a story of the importance of “personal” faith. Scared, the boy yearned not



for proof but for presence. I often hear similar stories when persons are facing a major medical situation. Sounds to me like the beginning of the old spiritual, “Were you there when...?”

The quote from James Carroll might be a description of discernment. Telling and hearing stories aid us in addressing the intersections of life and drawing meaning from what has happened. Telling stories is holy, Carroll asserts; I concur.

Uses of the Book

My hope in writing *Crossroads* was that whether in a solitary manner or in study groups, retreats or workshops, the book could serve as a prompt for personal, familial and congregational reflections about the intersections of faith and personal stories. Stories lead to stories. Frederick Buechner, a noted American author and theologian, asserted in his memoir, *Telling Secrets*, “My story is important not because it is mine, God knows, but because if I tell it anything like right, the chances are you will recognize that in many ways it is also yours. Maybe nothing is more important than that we keep track, you and I, of these stories of who we are and where we have come from and the people we have met along the way.”

Crossroads is organized to encourage writing or reflections. Brief segments are followed by spaces or prompts for personal writing/reflection or group writing and subsequent discussion. Nostalgia, life review, or long-overlooked memories often emerge. My experience of a wide range of congregations over the years is there is a hunger for going deeper in faith by getting to know more how other members in the church live faithfully. Further, too often I’ve heard quizzical com-

ments after funerals as worshippers wondered if the minister really knew the person that died.

If that was the case, it implies that there was little sharing of personal and faith stories in the congregation of the living. Hence, I include stories and poems that I have written, along with those found in published poetry and memoir as an invitation for faith and relationship formation and growth.

One more example from a section on prayer: in *A Prayer for Children*, author Ina Hughes wrote a challenging prayer that moves from one stanza to another with children on different sides of “the fence.”

“We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday, who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food... And we pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime, who will eat anything, who have never seen a dentist...”

Following that quote is this invitation for reflection and sharing: How do you pray for those different than you? How do you pray for enemies? My experience of Ina Hughes’ prayer is that it is much more specific than many prayers I hear in churches. It moved me closer to my enemies and those I know from a distance. Write about your prayer patterns. Or better, pray now.

This prayer prompted a crossroads in my own prayer practices. Before encountering Hughes’ prayer, the circles of people included in my confessional, thankful or petition prayers were members of a narrow intersection of the families of God. More often now, I see beyond that limited map, as important as it is.

It is my prayer that you too can expand horizons through books like *Crossroads: Stories at the Intersections*. ■