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### Reclaiming the Role of Story in Worship

Jeff Barker

*Northwestern College*

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## Reclaiming the Role of Story in Worship

*Jeff Barker and the Northwestern College Drama Ministries Ensemble, Orange City, Iowa*

God's church is a storytelling church. This seminar is a rich collection of storytelling examples including Bible stories, Bible plays, testimonies, biography, and biographical drama.

The second half of the seminar is an hour-long dramatic telling of the book *Iowa Ethiopia*, the true story of missionary nurse, Arlene Schuiteman. Arlene is a member of First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa. She is 96 years old. The play, *Iowa Ethiopia*, is a composite of story forms from the Bible, Ethiopian history, church history (the ancient church, the evangelical church in Ethiopia, and the local church in Iowa), missions history, and the life history of one particular missionary.

*Iowa Ethiopia* starts where Barker's first play about Arlene Schuiteman, *Sioux Center Sudan*, ended. This sequel follows Schuiteman, a missionary nurse, from 1966 to 1977 as she helped open a "dresser school" in the city of Mettu, teaching wound care and other medical skills to Ethiopian health care workers. During those years, Schuiteman also witnessed a spiritual revival that swept through the country—a revival that touched her personally and resulted in surprising gifts of the Holy Spirit in her own life.

The team travels with a small collection of copies of both books that tell more complete versions of Schuiteman's life. The books are available upon request. (If you ask for one, you are invited but not required to make a donation toward the team's \$10 cost for each book.)

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The 2019/2020 touring ensemble from Northwestern College theatre is made up of the following students. Their roles in the play *Iowa Ethiopia* are indicated in parentheses).

Natalie Blackman – Colorado Springs, Colorado (Stage Manager)

Karsten Garwood – Colorado Springs, Colorado (Arlene)

Corrie Hayes – Fort Dodge, Iowa (Mrs. Lambie)

Karisa Meier – Badger, Iowa (Vandy)

Beka Stoscher – Erseka, Albandia (drummer)

Camila Wede – Worthington, Minnesota (Ma)

Kevin Griffiths – Milan, Illinois (Keis Gidada)

Jeremiah Mitchell – Oskaloosa, Iowa (Minister of the Interior)

Jackson Paganini – Aurora, Colorado (Mr. Russell)

To contact Jeff Barker

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<http://home.nwcsiowa.edu/barkerplays/>

## Resources from Jeff Barker (available on Amazon and elsewhere)

*The Storytelling Church: Adventures in Reclaiming the Role of Story in Worship* (Webber Institute Books, 2011)

A memoir of sorts—a collection of stories that demonstrate the many ways that story can play a vital role in our worship planning.

*Sioux Center Sudan: A Missionary Nurse's Journey*  
(Hendrickson Publishers, 2018)

In 2005, Jeff met Arlene Schuiteman, a missionary nurse who spent her career on the African continent. After years of growing friendship, Arlene gave Jeff her life's collection of journals and letters. After writing four plays about her work, Jeff began a trilogy of books. This is the first volume, a collection of stories about Arlene's time in the South Sudan.

*Iowa Ethiopia: A Missionary Nurse's Journey Continues*  
(Hendrickson Publishers, 2019)

In one of her Ethiopia journals, Arlene wrote "I would rather let the last drop of my blood be shed than with knowledge and will, inwardly or outwardly, become unfaithful or disobedient to You. Jesus, you have me completely, sweet friend of my soul." Here is the ongoing testimony of a saint of the church.

*Performing the Plays of the Bible: Seven Ancient Scripts and Our Journey to Return Them to the Stage* (co-authored with Thomas Boogaart) (upcoming from Webber Institute Books, 2020)

This volume represents nearly two decades of partnership between a theatre artist and a Hebrew scholar as they endeavor to shine a spotlight on the Bible's overlooked dramatic literature.

