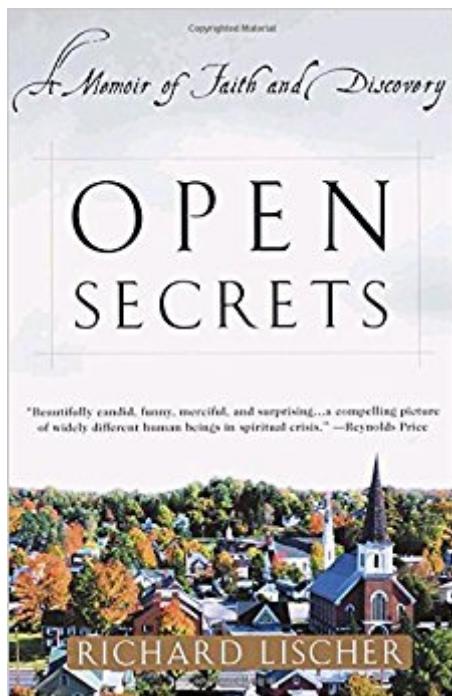


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Open Secrets: A Memoir Of Faith And Discovery



Synopsis

In the tradition of Garrison Keillor, Open Secrets captures the friendships, rivalries, and rumors of small-town life by chronicling the lives of the citizens of a small Midwestern community through the eyes of a young minister. Fresh out of divinity school and bursting with enthusiasm, Richard Lischer found himself assigned to a small conservative church in an economically depressed town in southern Illinois. It's an awkward marriage at best--a young man with a Ph.D. in theology, full of ideas and ambitions, determined to improve his parish and bring it into the twenty-first century, and a community that is "as tightly sealed as a jar of home-canned pickles." In Open Secrets, Lischer tells not only his own story but also the story of New Cana and its inhabitants. With charm, openness, and humor, Lischer brings to life the clash of cultures and personalities that marks his pastoral tenure, including his own doubts, as well as those of his parishioners, that a twenty-eight-year-old suburban-raised liberal can deal with the troubled marriages, alcoholism, teen sex, inadequate farm subsidies, and other concerns of the conservative, tightly knit community. But the inhabitants of New Cana--lovable, deeply flawed, imperfect people who stick together--open their arms to him in their own way, and the result is a colorful, poignant comedy of small-town life and all it has to offer.

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Customer Reviews

"[Lischer's] portraits are masterfully drawn. Not only does he write beautifully, but he also tells the unvarnished truth about both tragedy and redemption in a Christian community." --Publishers Weekly "This is a beautiful book--beautifully conceived,

beautifully executed, and rare in the beauty of its pastoral and theological sensibilities.â€¢

--Richard John Newhaus, First Things

In the tradition of Garrison Keillor, "Open Secrets captures the friendships, rivalries, and rumors of small-town life by chronicling the lives of the citizens of a small Midwestern community through the eyes of a young minister. Fresh out of divinity school and bursting with enthusiasm, Richard Lischer found himself assigned to a small conservative church in an economically depressed town in southern Illinois. It's an awkward marriage at best--a young man with a Ph.D. in theology, full of ideas and ambitions, determined to improve his parish and bring it into the twenty-first century, and a community that is "as tightly sealed as a jar of home-canned pickles." In "Open Secrets, Lischer tells not only his own story but also the story of New Cana and its inhabitants. With charm, openness, and humor, Lischer brings to life the clash of cultures and personalities that marks his pastoral tenure, including his own doubts, as well as those of his parishioners, that a twenty-eight-year-old suburban-raised liberal can deal with the troubled marriages, alcoholism, teen sex, inadequate farm subsidies, and other concerns of the conservative, tightly knit community. But the inhabitants of New Cana--lovable, deeply flawed, imperfect people who stick together--open their arms to him in their own way, and the result is a colorful, poignant comedy of small-town life and all it has to offer.

This should be mandatory reading for all those studying to be in ministry. Set in southern Illinois (where I grew up!!!), Lischer, recently graduated from divinity school, gets a church. Through his description, we learn a great deal about:1) A new leader coming into an unknown culture - how do you navigate getting known, learning a contextual history, and ultimately earning the right to be heard.2) Cultural variances and expectations - Lischer's cultural biases and expectations were not in sync with the culture in the southern Illinois town.3) Respect and dignity for those with differing socio-economic, education, and sensibilities for daily life.4) Each person has wisdom gained from their lived experience. Formal education is not the only way to know or learn. I confess, this was not an easy read due to my personal connections to southern Illinois. Brownell (1958) wrote a wonderful description of southern Illinois and how it's a different place. As with any context, you can't just pop in and think you understand it and quite frankly those from a more urban area who pop into the region thinking this is a piece of cake would be well served to check their biases and assumptions for the possibility that they perceive rural people as backward, simple, uneducated, and unsophisticated. Shoot, there I go ranting and raving (big grin).As one who designs academic

programs, Lischer emboldened my commitment that beyond content mastery, there needs to be an emphasis on personal leadership development, culture, communication, and navigating that first job or ministry. It's not as easy as we think, Lisher's book gives us a wonderful peek into the challenges and strengths of his first church. An aside: I was talking with a person at a church in southern Illinois who was interviewing a possible pastor from Washington DC who was coming in to preach the next Sunday. I said - where did this person grow up. Oh, Washington DC. I said, you will not hire this person and he won't accept the job. Why the person asked? I said, a person who grew up in DC unless they have some exposure and some natural passion for rural areas is not going to leave DC to come to a town of 8000 people in a rural setting. Plus, I would lay odds that the congregation won't like him almost instantly. This is an aspect of leadership - cultural and value fit must be present. Brownell, B. (1958). *The other Illinois*. New York, NY: Duell, Sloan and Pearce.

This story of one minister's experiences in congregational ministry probably parallels other ministers' beginnings as it does mine. Aspirations, hopes, dreams, plans, and misperceptions meet reality head-on, and we are all richer for the experience. Joy, tears, success, failure--the very stuff of life, are portrayed in this compelling, sometimes funny, sometimes heart-wrenching narrative of one person, sharing his life, his family, and his faith with a congregation and with the readers. I strongly recommend it, especially for anyone considering or beginning or living the life of a minister.

There was little doubt that this book would be enjoyable. The book accounts the ministry of Richard to a small community of New Cana. It was a small town on the Mississippi River. He recounts his experiences there in this small community. It was a cultural crossover for him. He finished his PH.D program and accepted the call to this congregation. During his time with the congregation, the people loved him, rebelled against him, and in their own way made him feel welcome. Personally, I loved his stories, because in his stories, I was the main character. These are great lines "The Poet-Preacher John Donne said 'I date my life from my ministry.' There is more to life than ministry, but I knew as soon as we pulled out of the driveway that I had needed Cana more than Cana ever needed me. I do make sense of my life from that ministry."

Every bit as entertaining and enjoyable, touching and heartwarming, humorous and engaging, rich and real as Garrison Keillor's beloved Midwestern tales ÅfÅ¢ Å–Å• and all the more compelling (especially for anyone active in ministry and/or church life) because they are constantly centered on the spiritual life and its everyday implications.

Every pastor's family member and every church member will find this book to be right on the content. A must read!

With engaging wit and warm insight Richard Lischer allows us to sneak a peak behind his first pastorate from Lutheran Seminary. Being unfamiliar with Lutheranism I was awed by the profundity of belief and the rich relationships into the community that he entered. He entered as a virgin and left as a lover of his people that God graciously allowed him to pastor. Take the time to read this book and enter heartache, grace, empathy, communion and fellowship of the deepest level. Experience the privilege of a new way of seeing people.

Gil Rendle mentioned this as a "fun read" at a recent workshop when speaking of how gossip impacts a congregation. Lischer captures the vulnerabilities that are exposed in a first call. I laughed and cried as he invited me into a familiar story. I am not sure the book would be as appealing to the non ordained.

If you are entering pastoral ministry in any context, this is a must read.

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