

CHAPTER FIVE: ATTEMPTS TOWARDS INTEGRATION FOR THE FUTURE

My co-researchers in this research not only told their stories, their present, past and developmental future stories, but also accounted for some aspects of the lives of remarried families in terms of their own experiences. Both their stories revealed practical common ideas which consistently and coherently emerged during the conversations. My co-researchers also proposed that these ideas be disseminated to remarried families with a view to “spreading the news” (Freedman & Combs 1996:237) in order to help other families and their children to enhance their lives. Based on their practical ideas and true to their points of view on remarried families and their children, I will introduce co-constructed knowledge as a proposal for an alternative perspective on a pastoral theology on remarried families’ households and pastoral care.

As stated in Chapter Two, the aims of this research were the following:

- to provide a space and time for adolescents from remarried families to tell their present, past and future stories, thereby reconstructing their past stories and amplifying their present and future stories by implementing a pastoral narrative approach; and
- to bring the outcomes of their told stories (local knowledge) to their community and the academic world.

In fulfilling these aims, all the participants in this research would benefit from our conversations and would make significant contributions towards the research process. In doing so, my co-researchers added their wish for this research to

these aims of the researcher - a desire for other remarried families to gain practical ideas for their own circumstances.

To assist other children in remarried families to gain new perspectives from our sharing of our stories in order to enhance their own lives, we have a practical proposal. My one co-researcher said: “I think our focus should be on any other child who has problems, like, with my stepdad and stuff because you must make a book, then they may read the book...then, they say, ‘Ok, this is what he did...I will try that example... then, let them save themselves of what they are doing.”

Also, we wanted to share our own perspectives on what it means to live in a remarried family with other people and to present our voices to our parents. Dripping said: “We are not different of other people’s lives so tell them who we are and how we live...(little sigh)...If somebody like us...hears from us...no... any ways we want to help them with our experience.”

In line with the above, we would like to attempt to integrate our knowledge with other voices relevant to the life of remarried families and their children. Through this effort we attempted to establish an alternative perspective on adolescents in remarried families and their parents so as to build better “remarriage-households”. Presented in this chapter, all emerging practical ideas, and unique aspects from my co-researchers were filtered through their own interpretation. I simply organized their own work and arranged it accordingly.

5.1 PROPOSALS FOR PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR REMARRIED FAMILIES EMERGING FROM OUR STORYTELLING

As I listened to the narrations of my co-researchers, I was aware of their concerns and the critical life themes which emerged from their stories. Although each of them had articulated her or his unique experience and method of enhancing her or his life, they also consistently revealed some common practical ideas which account for their successful remarried family lives. In order for themselves and other remarried families to develop multi-life options, my co-researchers and I formed an opinion on a way in which the common themes were practical and applicable in the routine of family lives. When I present the common themes, I use the first person voice “we” instead of the third person voice “they”, because my story is part of their stories as well.

5.1.1 The first proposal to remarried families: responsive conversation, rather than reactive conversation

5.1.1.1 Reactive/responsive conversation

One of the key ideas that we became aware of in our research is that the family system does not create the problem, but rather, that it is produced through conversation with other members of the family (Hoffman 1990:5-6). During our conversation, I realized in my co-researchers’ contexts that there were at least two kinds of conversational attitudes: “reactive conversation” and “responsive conversation”.

First of all, I call “reactive conversation” conversations which are closer to “speaking in one side”, “hearing” and “shallow listening” than “talking with” “listening for” and “listening in depth”. This conversation is to react immediately to the words of the speaker or the listener without considering meaning and the feeling of the speaker’s utterance or the listener’s attention, although the utterance carries simultaneously both its meaning and its content. This reactive conversation may produce a side-effect in a particular conversation. Every utterance has its own intentions in terms of saying or achieving something, and it is also shaped by the previous utterance, by things “already-spoken-about” (Riikonen & Smith 1997:84).

For instance, a child cries out when about to go to the school: “Mom, where are my socks?” Then, the mother’s reply in terms of “reactive listening” is this: “You don’t have eyes?” The content of his utterance is the fact that the socks are lost, but, his actual meaning is “Please help me, I cannot find them.” The reactive listening of the mother affects her, so that she is unable to understand the real meaning of the child’s utterance. Also, it immediately influences her following utterance towards her child. Riikonen and Smith (1997:108) point out the importance of the manner of listening, in that “the very nature of the person with whom we speak is partly constructed through the manner of our listening”.

- *Responsive conversation*

Therefore, it is suggested that our manner of conversation be “responsive conversation”. Responsive conversation is to interact sincerely to the reason

why the speaker talks or how the listener understands. It is to find out, as Dripping calls it, “the reason behind the reason”. According to Shotter (1996:51), for instance, listening must be responsive, “in that listeners must be preparing themselves to respond to what they are hearing”. Bakhtin (1986:68) characterizes this listening as an “active attitude”.

In the case of Dripping, her stepfather showed his responsive conversation as a good example. She said: “When I do something wrong, and I feel bad about it, I don’t wanna tell my mom ‘cause she won’t understand. She won’t, can’t understand why...she’ll just tell me to get over it. But xxx [her stepfather] will try to talk it through with me and find out **the reason behind the reason.**” Whereas her mother’s reactive conversation rendered her unable to talk with her mother, her stepfather’s responsive conversation stimulated her to “talk a lot of things” and to “enjoy spending time with xxx”.

- *The meaning of responsive talking and listening*

Therefore, we believe that a significant life skill demanded in the life of a remarried family is to facilitate responsive conversation as a form of good communication. In addition to responsive conversation, responsive talking and listening are not a mere conversation, but reveal a desire to get to know each other better, an essential part of building intimacy, and a way of stepparental care and help. Light (my co-researcher) said: “I’ve lived with him [stepfather] just for a year, **I just need to talk** to him, trust him ...**I just have to talk** to him ” (my emphases). Also, Dripping (the other co-

researcher) shared that she “told a lot of things...he just listened to me and I just talked and talked....I enjoy spending time with xxx [stepfather]. He really helps me with a lot of stuff”.

In our understanding of our family life, responsive talking and listening as such are a signature of a way of building intimacy, including acceptance, and a means of good communication between steprelations. According to a practical theologian, Pieterse (1990:236), communication is concerned with a member’s existence in the family. Talking and listening underpin relations with others in daily routine (Shotter 1996:4), such as children’s self-esteem, a feeling of acceptance and family happiness. Furthermore, talking and listening as a means of creating intimacy means spending time with children and their stepparents. Weingarten (1997:75), a narrative therapist, thinks that through this time family members can talk about relationships that can be taken as the measure of intimacy.

For instance, a report shows the importance of spending time - the more time a stepparent spends with the stepchild, the more positively she or he perceives the child (Cohen & Fowers 2004:56). One researcher reports that communication between children and their parents has a great influence on children’s positive self-esteem (Berg 2003:84). Even if it takes place in a negative or hostile manner, children feel better than in the face of absolute disinterest by the parent(s) (Berg 2003:84). Another report is that communication also affects marital happiness, possibly more strongly than

any other marital component (Beaudry et al. 2004:98), which has, needless to say, a great impact on the life of children.

- *As joint action*

Responsive talking and listening are a mode of “joint action” (Fogel 1991:6), rather than just individual’s activities. Through the process of this joint action people’s internalization occurs in their development (Shotter 1996:46). One of my co-researchers evidently experienced that lack of talking with his biological father, which had a negative impact on him, leading him to go through a self-destructive pattern. He did not live under any illusion about his father nor did he have any fantastical expectation from him, but he simply longed for his acceptance, for one that would listen to him.

On the other hand, talking with his mother made him happy, feeling that his mother was “there”. It is his mother’s care that mattered, because in his conversation with her they were responsive to each other. Also, through the form of our responsive conversation, collaborative conversation (Anderson & Goolishian 1992) took place in the interview. Light not only emancipated himself from his emotional attachment to his biological father, whose disinterest in him was a cause of his smoking. Furthermore, he determined to stop smoking and forgive himself and his father. For him, the meaning of talking and listening was mutual acceptance, care and intimacy.

In the case of Dripping (my other co-researcher), it can be said that her

relationship with her stepfather is a conversational relationship. Responsive talking and listening was a crucial means of building their intimacy from the very beginning of their relationship. According to Paperno (1998:249), one of the indispensable stages in a remarried family is getting closer to the stage of “aware time”. The main feature of this type of encounter in the early stages is to concentrate on awareness tasks and to get to know one another and learn about insiders and outsiders in the family. It brings about some skills and attitudes that enable family members to achieve family developmental tasks more smoothly. Through responsive talking and listening, Dripping and her stepfather have interwoven parent-child-intimacy. By means of responsive conversation, they have lived in “storying cultures” to construct their lives (Paré 1995:12).

In conclusion, the matters of parental acceptance, building intimacy and stepparental care did not require philosophical or intricate theories, but the practice of “responsive talking” and “responsive listening for”. This practice has influenced us toward personal internalization and simultaneously to work for family happiness. Consequently, we cannot help but emphasize mutual responsive conversation as “joint action”.

- *Method of facilitating responsive talking and listening: “Just talk and tell a lot of things”*

We know that to sound words in responsive talking and to be attentive to these words in responsive listening, rather than reactive listening, sounds

easy, but in the practice of daily lives, is not so easy. However, we simplified this practice in the way that we try to “just talk” (Light’s words) and “tell a lot of things” (Dripping’s words), even though we may not get an adequate response from parents. The intention of Light’s “just talk” yielded fruit in that he could forgive the indifferent attitude of his biological father without any conditions. He said: “I have to phone him, tell him ‘I have forgiven’ and then ...towards EMINEN [a popular singer group] laying the devil.” We have enough space in our hearts to offer forgiveness. It is our understanding of forgiveness that to forgive is to lend a room in our hearts to the recipient. It does not matter whether or not the recipient responds to the forgiver. Also, Light tried to approach his stepfather, whom he described in a metaphor of powerful water, to build intimacy through his remark, “just talk”.

In the case of Dripping, via her method of talking, “tell[ing] a lot of things”, her stepfather could get closer to her. Through it, she made him feel warmly towards her and they enjoy spending time with each other. Thanks to her method “tell[ing] a lot of things”, her stepfather could adjust to his parental role in helping her and advising her.

- *Second method of facilitating responsive conversation: questioning*

Through the interviews with my co-researchers, I have fully experienced the value of questioning in conducting our responsive conversation. Questioning in itself carries across an attitude of responsive conversation. Questioning is heuristic in nature, for it enables us to find our own strengths and

possibilities, in my research experience. Thus, I would like to suggest “questioning, talking and listening” because questioning is very effective for teenagers to find their own ways and to see optimal ways. My co-researchers shared their experiences concerning my questioning interviews when we evaluated our project as a whole. Due to my questioning, they could reflect on what they told me in our conversation and they were even surprised in that they could see their strengths more discursively than they had initially thought possible.

Questioning is a form of responsive talking and listening that is not passive (Riikonen & Smith 1997:110), but active. Morgan (1999:203) clarifies that questions “are informed by particular ways of thinking”. In other words, questioning is an active thinking to open wide thinking. Kotzé *et al.* (2002:146) thinks of questionings as actions that generate new possibilities. In continual questioning, according to Riikonen and Smith (1997:111), “the listener is offering alternative descriptions to the other person, and each alternative description will imply different ways of relating to their experience, different possible stances and different ways of shaping their experience.”

Hence we suggest “questioning responsive talking” and “questioning responsive listening”. These require responsive listening rather than reactive listening, because the listener should be responsive. In questioning conversation, we experienced that the boundary between a researcher and the researched became vague, but that the collaborative relationship in the

research was more concrete. Through this practice, we could achieve more positive and preferred stories by our own answering. In a similar way, we believe that questioning conversation can be applicable to a stepchild-stepparent relationship and can help build intimacy. It may be more helpful for the upbringing of stepchildren than merely giving them advice in a one-sided way. In short, “unconditional talking” and “listening for” are an essential means of building step-relationships.

5.1.2 Second proposal for remarried families: an alternative concept of step-intimacy

The second proposal is the issue of intimate relationships between stepchildren and their parents. A proposal for an alternative view on the meaning of “a healthy intimacy” is that it is a relationship on the basis of the approval of each one’s differences⁶. In other words, to build intimacy does not mean only moving closer to each other, but rather, acknowledging differences from each other. An individual needs to retain his or her differences in the remarried family in order to establish greater intimacy with other family members who are aware of and acknowledge their own differences. In Patton and Childs’s (1988:51, 191) term, the word “difference” is alternatively used with a sense of individuation and self-identity in order for the relationship to be a healthy one.

Fisher and Strichker (1982:xi) summarize that there are two approaches, seeing intimacy as “self-disclosure” or “the production of an interaction’....Each one is

⁶ This idea came up with J. Müller when I consulted with him on 4 August 2005.

able to touch something meaningful in the other, whether at a conscious, behavioural level or an unconscious and inferential level”. Through “self-disclosure”, the “self differences” are revealed to be understood and “the production of an interaction” through this disclosure can be achieved as intimacy. The Latin term, *intimus* is intimacy, which refers to meaning “inner” or “inmost”. In a dictionary definition, intimacy is “inmost, most inward: essential...2. most private or personal...3, closely acquainted or associated; very familiar...4, resulting from careful study or investigation (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*).

In a narrative approach, a person’s differences (Müller’s word, “story”) including that person’s characteristics, experiences and events, are constructed with others’ differences (stories) (Müller 1999). Müller (1999:s.p.) explains the above notion with the good metaphor of a Russian doll. He says: “Each of us has a series of ‘little dolls’ within us...a person not only has ‘little dolls’ within him or her, but that simultaneously you are engaged in constructing the next ‘little dolls’...we are very aware that this is an ongoing process which is aimed at the future.”

In these references, to build a healthy intimacy with another person is not merely to get to be closer but, according to Sexton and Sexton (1982:1), to comprehend his or her inmost and inner reality by accessing each other in accordance with each other’s differences. Accordingly, maintaining each one’s differences can establish a healthy intimacy.

Establishing this kind of intimacy between members in the remarried family is a critical issue for them. As we shared earlier, the intimacy experienced with our biological parents and stepfathers was also a task of our remarried family life. We have striven to achieve it in various ways.

Dripping illustrated herself as a good example in her storytelling. She tried to be nice and polite to her biological father's wife, who has not yet lived with her, though she felt her stepmother's coldness towards her. Her being polite is a way of acknowledging the other's differences. Her being nice towards her stepmother is a method of building a healthy intimacy against coldness.

As far as she was concerned, with regard to her stepfather who is living with her, firstly, she built a healthy intimacy with him even before her mother married him. Secondly, she became like a little girl and talked a lot to him: "I just talked and talked...sitting on his leg, like a little girl. I mean teenagers don't do that but I did." Thirdly, she showed her heart to him with "chocolate to say happy father's day". The response to that from him was that "he started crying...he cried so much about me".

This healthy intimacy is significant for the development of a healthy personality (Sexton & Sexton 1982:12). Wilner (1982:24) states that intimacy is a mode of communication which infers a quality of being in which something is being conveyed. As we see in the case of Dripping, to build healthy intimacy with her stepfather, she facilitated not only responsive talking and listening but also

touch, gesture, action and writing. These are methods through which people share what is meaningful to them (Weingarten 1997:179).

In her case, by applying these methods, Dripping could create mutual sharing with her stepfather. In turn, this mutual sharing created a healthy intimacy. Weingarten (1997:180) points out that mothers (all parents) have to be able to let themselves share stories of who they really feel themselves to be, rather than just believe that being a good parent is created by being selfless and maintaining a position of authority in every situation. In other words, sharing stories without considering one's position in the family is critical for a genuine intimacy, as Dripping's stepfather did. This is at the heart of the matter of a healthy intimacy in step relationships, as well as maintaining each other's differences.

5.1.3 Third proposal for remarried families: personal growth

The last proposal is the matter of personal growth. While examining these unique experiences, we were not entirely overwhelmed by the aftermath of the broken-hearted situation and embarked on a journey towards new circumstances, in spite of the fact that each of us was somehow or other in turmoil. We have manipulated the broken-hearted situation towards our own personal growth.

My co-researcher Light's developmental story was this: "However, I am busy renovating my old house and building a new future house...I'm just looking at

my future instead of staying in the past...He[God] just umm...always confirms [to] me that He gives me talents and I must use them and He gave me a gift, and that I must use it". The other co-researcher, Dripping, testified: "I don't think I've ever really been in a bad situation, as a result of the divorce, ...I mean, it affects me, probably...but not so much...Pain [as a result of parental divorce] is good because pain is a form of love, because pain is a form of impetus for being mature.... It adds to experience...I don't think you should be 'hung up' on stuff that's happened to you and hold on to it because that makes you sad and depressed, but I think you should turn it into something beautiful and just say 'tough life'." We know that, according to Dripping, "we cannot change our parents [divorce] but we can change ourselves".

5.1.3.1 *Through pain*

Qualitative research has demonstrated that even though the divorce experience is a great cause of personal insecurity, it also provides a catalyst for personal growth (Schneller & Arditti 2004:1). Another research report on the sources of the strengths of adolescents shows that a primary source of personal growth comes from an experience of hardship (Steen *et al.* 2003:10). The formula that the divorce experience yields pain, which in turn causes a pattern of self-destruction, is subverted by Schneller and Arditti (2004:8), who argue that such a view is just a received meaning, a socially constructed interpretation. Dallos (1997:170) supports this view that feelings (including painful experiences) can be known as socially constructed and are bound up with the meta-narratives

and conventions of a culture which go through interpretive social processes. In other words, there is enough room for an alternative view of our experienced pain and hardship derived from divorce and new circumstances.

Briefly, when we create an alternative interpretation of a painful experience to turn it into “a form of love and an impetus for being mature” (Dripping), we can take advantage of it so as to grow towards “renovating my old house and building my new future house” (Light). One of our interviewees (one schoolteacher) was supportive of our view, saying that “the structure of the remarried family by nature gives opportunity to its children to cultivate more diversely their identities and personalities. Therein, they can cultivate their leadership and life survival skills because they have to enhance how to adapt to the two structures of their family”.

5.1.3.2 *Through maternal wisdom*

I do not want to simply continue a discussion on divorce, but it is indispensable to introduce how my co-researchers overcame this situation, because one of their purposes in sharing their stories is to help remarried family members. Although parental divorce has caused my co-researchers to undergo many painful experiences, in their contexts, their biological mothers have been the greatest role players for them to triumph over this pain. Their mothers were sometimes mentors, friends and conversational partners.

Light remembered that it was his mother who held the “tremendous side of sweetness in his life”. She has been always around him. Whenever he needed help, she was always there. His “mom’s being there” means his mother’s being a mentor who can give her opinion and wisdom to him. He said: “Yeah, let me say, my mom is bright” He likes talking with her when she is not busy: “...mom’s attention is very important for me because I need her opinion, umm...I don’t know in English... ‘wysheid’ [wisdom] .”

In the case of Dripping, her mother was her closest friend and regarded her as a co-decision maker. She shared the story: “...we sleep together....because [we] want to be together. Like friends...We enjoyed bath together...we could be just mass, no one cared, we were very casual, comfortable, knotty style...Well, she had dates but she wouldn’t get married if I didn’t like the person...she would introduce them to me, and ask me what I think about them.” From her case, we can draw the inspiration that we could not prevent our parents’ divorce, but we can participate in having a say about our parents’ remarriage, which would enable us to adjust to a new situation. Also, owing to this participation, we assume that our building intimacy with a new member of our family may be easy. Dripping’s case provides good evidence of this.

It is not necessary to firmly state that the mother’s role is the most important or that it is more significant than any other role in the family for the growth of children in a remarried family, because, from the narrative approach, every case should be contextually. In the case of my co-researchers, their mothers took

over the most significant role in the growth of their children. Some research confirms the importance of this, indicating that, compared to fathers, mothers tend to have better communication skills and feel more emotionally close to their children, and this greatly affects adolescents' self esteem (Berg 2003:84). A similar report illustrates that sole-custody mothers did not feel more burdened, but rather, experienced greater custody satisfaction, despite parenting fatigue (Arditti & Madden-Derdich 1997:42). According to my co-researchers, their mothers' efforts resulted in their children's personal growth.

In summary, in a narrative paradigm, the remarkable features of and emphasis on personal storytelling is crucial to an understanding of the storytellers' world and life experiences. Through storytelling, we can also highlight common themes which are relevant to other people's daily practices. We shared these themes not only to present our views and voices to our community, but also in order to help remarried family members.

We value unconditional talking and responsive listening as a means of good communication with a view to building intimacy and parent-child acceptance. Also, we want to advise adolescents in remarried families on their experiencing life in a remarried family and the heart-breaking situation of a divorce. Their pain is dependent upon how they internalize it, whether they allow it to destroy them or if they enable themselves to be matured through it. We triumph over it, thanks to the great efforts of our mothers. They have been mentors and friends, and even respected us as decision-makers for a great part of their lives. Their

effort, wisdom and attitude towards us should be considered as a maternal application in the life of remarried families. “There is no natural system in which they [remarried families] can grow” (Blow & Daniel 2002:96).

5.2 PROPOSAL FOR AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON PASTORAL THEOLOGY FOR REMARRIED FAMILIES

True to a pastoral narrative paradigm, we proposed an alternative perspective of pastoral theology on remarried families and their children. A number of studies have accounted for issues raised in the lives of remarried families and their children. In general, their focus was mostly structural, psychological or quantitative data as analytical bases. To account for remarried families and their children, they have attempted to conceptualize or categorize the vivid life experiences of remarried family members. Because of their nature, these studies have failed to capture the practical wisdom (praxis) and local knowledge practised every day. A pastoral narrative account relies on active life stories such as those revealed during this research, since the told stories enable the audience to capture certain knowledge(s) of a palpable and convincing praxis.

5.2.1 Alternative perspective on remarried family households

As indicated earlier, in Chapters One and Three, a host of theorists and practitioners on the remarried family have conceptualized the family label or categorized it, using certain criteria, into certain forms. As a result, they found themselves in the impasse of “writing about ‘the families [remarried families]

with no name' or to be more accurate, the families with no widely agreed on name" (Ganong & Coleman 1994:1). Therefore, the first step to re-account for a remarried family household is, according to Müller (s.a. :100), that "we should stop applying special names to such post-divorce families", including remarried families. Instead of naming them, we, my co-researchers and I, want to present a contextual description of a remarried family household in referring to our two specific contexts, as follows.

- The current family is the family my co-researchers live with.
- The ex-family is my co-researchers' biological families who do not live with them now.
- The left/right, and front/back columns as a whole bolster the current family life.

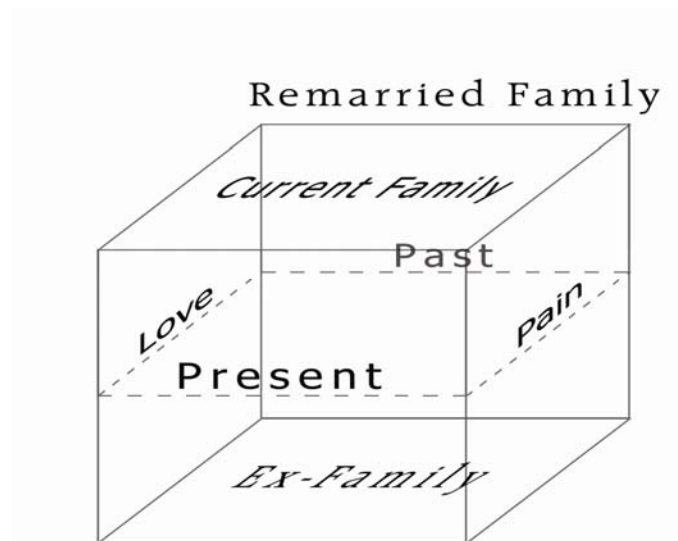


Figure 5.1: The co-researchers' households as presented in this research.

The daily lives of the current families of my co-researchers consist of the four columns which maintain the stories of ex-family and which make the families

stronger in that through them we, remarried families, have grown as we saw in Chapter Three. The present story and future story of our current families are healthily developing in keeping in touch with members of our ex-family in a positive manner. That means that the past story constructed with our ex-families and their present stories are crucial resources for developing the present and future story of our current families (Müller 1999).

For us, love and pain, and the present and the past, cannot be separated from constructing our healthy preferred future stories. The four elements serve as resources of our growth and of connecting us to two households, our current household and our ex-family household. The two households exist in the everyday lives of my co-researchers, visiting and revisiting them. In the case of Light, superficially, his ex-household has nothing to do with his current household in the present. Yet, in his memory, his ex-household still manifests itself and it is influential in the present and for his future story. In his memory, he is busy visiting and revisiting his ex-family household.

In conclusion, adolescents in a remarried family have two households, supported by the four columns of love, pain, the present and the past. They manipulate these columns to develop their future stories. In addition, the attempt to put a label on their current household circumstances is indeed unnecessary. The endeavour to name such households is semantics on the part of experts in the academic field, without any benefit to the family. Consequently, a pastoral theology must deal with the meaning of the existence of the

remarried family and how to care for this family.

5.2.2 A pastoral perspective on remarried families

As clearly stated in the Bible, remarriage is not strange in the community of Christian believers and cannot be excluded as a subject in and from the context of pastoral theology. Müller (2004a:s.p.) asserts, “Practical theology is only possible as contextual practical theology. Practical theology cannot function in general. It is always local, concrete and specific.” In this respect and for the purposes of this study, the context of pastoral theology, which is intimately connected with practical theology, is the story of Light and Dripping as members of a remarried family, who were once regarded as lost.

Often pastors and pastoral practitioners take action “only on fragmentary and even distorted perceptions of what the story contains” (Gerkin 1991:16) within their received religious context. In order to avoid the above phenomenon, the perspective of pastoral theology on remarried families should rest on a functional view and family life (Patton & Childs 1988:189), rather than a received religious context. Thus, the task of this study here should be, as Gerkin (1991:59) illuminates, that a pastoral caregiver has the responsibility to facilitate the maintenance and further development of the person’s spiritual or faith story and to facilitate the growth and creative development of particular life stories.

5.2.2.1 Supportive family

A supportive family enthusiastically implements “responsive conversation” to support its individuals’ differences in order for such intimacy to grow. In the light of pastoral theology, this study has to deal with the specific needs of human beings (Gerkin 1997:85) and that includes persons’ relationships (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:33). These needs can be supplemented by the supportive family’s adopting “responsive conversation”, “intimacy” built with differences, and “personal growth”.

Needless to say, members of a remarried family need a new relationship for life after facing heart-breaking situations. Some researchers have found that the main reasons of remarriage are financial security, help in raising children, a response to social pressure, a response to legal threats regarding the custody of children, relief from loneliness, the need for a regular sexual partner, pregnancy, the need to have someone to take care of, the need to be taken care of, and love, a desire for companionship, shared interests and liking the partner (Ganong & Coleman 1994:49). These reasons reveal how much a divorced person suffers from being solitary. An option for solving this human need is remarriage. Indeed, the sum total of remarriage, like all unions, is the issue of choice.

Accordingly, for the foremost reason of God’s consent to remarriage, the fulfilling of personal needs (Ellisen 1977: 71; Müller s.a.:109), marriage was envisioned and ordained by God to fulfil many personal needs of a spiritual, physical, psychological and social nature. People cannot be fulfilled in solitary

living and without a helper (Genesis 2:18). That does not mean that a couple is able to complete each other, but that they need each other to fulfil their needs through their gifts toward Christlikeness. A remarried family is a form of marriage which is supportive. Cornes (1993:289) believes that this type of marriage is recognized by God. In Him there are no “foolish” marriages. In this situation, care for the ordinary lives of church members is an essential part of church ministry (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:33).

Indeed, the Bible allows remarriage that is chosen and whose life is dependent on its members' choices, one which requires responsibility in such circumstances to establish the body of Christ. Consequently, the care of the pastoral theology has to be supportive and socially constructive by promoting reciprocal interaction between the pastoral carer and the receiver (Sevenhuijsen 1998:147).

5.2.2.2 As an institution containing children

Of all of those victimized by the turmoil surrounding divorce, the foremost vulnerable members in the family are unquestionably the children. A remarried family as a supportive family can be an alternative primary institution for children who have lost the first family institution (Cornes 1993:316; Gerkin 1997: 202). In terms of the fulfilling of family needs, the harmful impact of a marriage breakup is broader than the couple itself. Particularly the children of divorced parents who are often quite innocent suffer from a lack of the appropriate institutional support of their parents. The effects of such a disaster infuse the

child's life in one way or another. In order to raise children according to God's will (Deuteronomy 6, Ezra 7: 25, 1 Timothy 4: 11), God charges parents to take on their educational mandate in a household.

Arditti and Madden-Derdich (1997:41) report that, in general, childcare from either a (step-) father and a (step-) mother is more effective and instructive than from a single parent. Andrews et al. (2004:616) found that effective upbringing of children depends on the (step-) father's co-operation in parenting decisions and taking responsibility for financial support. Also, the above research reports that children who experience regular religious activities through their parents' involvement with them have fewer social problems (Andrews et al. 2004: 617).

In the cases of my co-researchers, they felt that their current family life was more helpful for them to grow in terms of their personality and spirituality. Although Light was a little bit sceptical, he also thought that if he was not "happy with him [stepfather], but [he was better than nothing...He sent me to a proper school [his current school], he is helping me to develop my talents like guitar lessons and dancing and stuff." Dripping's satisfaction about her stepfather was this: "He really helps me with a lot of stuff. He gives me good advice 'cause he's very wise."

In summary, biblically and theologically, the foremost principle is the concept of "the relationship of brother and sister in Christ" prior to the relationship of a marriage. That means that marriage types are not a decisive issue to be a

member of the body of Christ. To build the body of Christ, pastoral care encourages remarried family members to be supportive of one another and instructive in the upbringing of children. Also, fulfilling personal needs and family needs is considered a basic biblical and pastoral practice principle. A remarried family as an institution has definite spiritual effects. The last principle implemented in this study is the fact that remarriage constitutes a new life which is regarded in the same light as the first married life. It is not to be lived with guilt and regrets, but to be accepted as a new experience in the grace of God.

Conclusively, I adopt the therapist, Carter's words, in the sense that for a pastoral carer the first underlying principle is focusing on the new life with the new family, and not to "making up for" past mistakes or complaints. That does not mean that the focus is on undoing, redoing or ignoring the past, but that the focus is on having experiences in their family (Carter & McGoldrick 1999:425).

5.2.3 Other grains: "heart eyes", the law and remarried families, student files

5.2.3.1 Seeing the "step-relationship" through "heart eyes"

The negative connotations of the prefix "step-" have a long history. These connotations have intruded into our daily lives and our concept about step-relationships. Needless to say, my co-researchers and I are also somewhat caught up in these discourses.

Light's story, for instance, evidently showed the above phenomenon. He

described his stepfather as “dark”. His perception about him did not come from what his stepfather did to him but rather from how he compared his stepfather and his biological father. He said: “I’m not actually angry at him [stepfather], but angry at myself because I can’t really accept him because of my other father [biological father].” On the other hand, he reminded us of what his stepfather has done for him: “He sent me to a proper school [his current school]...he was helping us like, he is helping me to develop my talents like guitar lessons and dancing and stuff...He’s still kind to her [his mother]...He doesn’t have to do [it] but he does.”

- *A lens of heart eyes*

However, he finally took his negative preconception of the prefix “step-” away from his perception. Instead, we got to an alternative lens to see step-parenthood as it is. We call the alternative lens “heart eyes”. To re-account for the step-relationship we would wear “heart eyes”. Incidentally, this concept appeared when I talked with his older brother, as described in Chapter Three. His brother said: “He [Light] has to see our father [stepfather] through his heart towards us, not in terms of blood...but he [stepfather] has done a lot for him.” The key point is “through [his] heart”. I tried to understand its meaning and to interpret it with my co-researchers as we sat together and discussed it. As a result, we got to a conclusion that “through...heart” means “through deed(s) in love”.

Hill’s (2002:467) book introduces an interesting movement concerning the prefix

‘step-’ as stigmatizing taking place in France:

In all these ways, stepmothers today face a situation so different from the past that perhaps we shouldn't even use the same term. In fact, the French have dropped the old, pejorative term for stepmother, *marâtre*, and replaced it with *belle-mère*, literally 'fine' or 'beautiful' mother, a term which also means 'mother-in-law'. French scholars of the family lament the absence of a prefix, such as 'step,' with which to precisely label relationships brought about by remarriage. But the *belles-mères* of France may be fortunate that, unlike their Anglo-American counterparts, they no longer have to bear the stigma of an outmoded archaic term.

Briefly, we suggest that to see the step relationship, we have a lens which is not coloured by biases or cultural myths. That is a lens of "heart eyes". We think that the step-relational identity is dependent upon how a stepfamily member sees other members in the family and what lens she or he has. We argue that a lens of "blood eyes" which contrasts with a lens of "heart eyes" is narrower than a lens of "heart eyes". The latter is far wider than the former. Therefore, we believe that this lens can enable us to see our stepparents as *belle*-parents.

5.2.3.2 *The law and remarried families*

- *The law*

It is a reality that even though remarried parents have no enforceable responsibilities to their new stepchildren in the strict sense, many of them willingly shoulder children as their responsibility and yet they cannot find

their identity as parents in the law. Under the law, typically, in a remarried family, the stepparent is a person married to the parent of an illegitimate child. She or he is acknowledged solely by the legal act of marriage and not by the terms of any bond to the stepchildren (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman 1987:217). Thus, an unmarried person who has taken on a long-term parental role, such as a cohabiter, is not recognized as a stepparent by the law. By contrast, people married to non-custodial parents are classified as stepparents although they have no relationship with the children.

A. C. Jones (2003: 232) summarizes his assumption on the harmful effects on children in the remarried family:

...this lack of legal recognition may undermine role expectations of the stepparent, who in turn may abdicate family responsibilities. Similar to students from whom teachers expect little and who give up trying, some stepparents also may give up, perceiving their role to be superfluous...The 'silence' of the law on step relationships puts children at risk in two major ways. The first is economic because there are few legal safeguards to ensure that children who reside with stepparents are adequately supported during the marriage...The second is emotional because current laws afford few means of protecting and nurturing attachment bonds that may develop between stepparents and children.

In the case of Light, let me repeat his saying again: "He sent me to a proper

school [his current school]...he was helping us like...helping me to develop my talents like guitar lessons and dancing...He doesn't have to do [it] but he does." Although his stepfather has offered great care for him, he may not maintain any legal status and authority even consent legally to a school activity. This case is evidenced by the stepfather of Dripping. She commented: "His wife died...She left her two children who were not his own. He got so attached to them ...[but] the boys' father took the boys away from him. And then he was totally broken. For two years...he was so depressed."

We could not conclude in our conversations what it is that would be better for children if the above case would happen to us. Yet, one thing we agreed was that our stepparents have to have a legal right in the upbringing of children, at least when living together; such as consent on a school report card, any emergency, and for discipline. The law of South Africa should support stepparental roles and regulate them in some way as some other countries do.

5.2.3.3 The personal file at the school

We assumed that the school's personal student file could affect teachers and school personnel's opinions and preconceptions on their students coming from a remarried family or a divorced family. They can see the demographics through the personal student file which, at the beginning of the first school term, has to be filled in, including the section regarding family status. My co-researchers were not overly concerned about whether their family status would be uncovered or not, but some students, rather than students living in a biological

family, may not want this information to be revealed. Moreover, it can create prejudice in school life. Furthermore, to fill in the column on family status has no real advantage for either the students or the school personnel. We discussed this matter with the teachers I interviewed. In the discussion, we insisted that it might create prejudice and we asked for what purposes the school asks for and what benefits accrue to the school from this information. They had not thought of it in that way, but the teachers did not have reasonable answers either. Thus, we insist that revealing family status is not necessary for caring for students in the school. The marital status of parents should be disregarded.

5.3 CLOSING RESEARCH

5.3.1 Evaluation from all the participants

On 23 May 2005 my co-researchers and I sat together and evaluated our research as a whole. To do this we did not have any norm, and conversed freely. I am going to introduce their evaluation in point form.

5.3.1.1 Dripping

- Having a casual conversation over lunch at McDonalds before starting the interview created a comfortable environment.
- Our goals were clearly influential on both other adolescents and us in rethinking our family and life.
- Questionings helped me (Dripping) understand myself in that I could see

other facets of my life and characters.

- Imaginative work has made me (Dripping) think of a lot of different options about my life.
- Making my (Dripping) imagery name for the future was odd at first, because I did not fully understand what the interviewer was talking about. Also, I felt this work seemed to fix myself in a cage; I (Dripping) always accentuated this, saying “I am who I am”.
- Group meetings were interesting in that many perspectives on me appeared which yielded positive results.

5.3.1.2 *Light*

- In a word, the interview was cool and gave me (Light) a special experience.
- Offering me (Light) a ride to go home after the interview helped my parents to feel I was safe.
- The interview place (a quiet house) was good for us to feel cozy.
- It stimulated me (Light) to live fully in my life today and not in the past.
- Questioning helped me (Light) “open a lot of doors”.
- Making my (Light) imagery name was the most difficult one because naming on an invisible world (future) was technically difficult.

5.3.1.3 *My assistant*

- I felt that Dripping was implosive whereas Light was explosive.
- Dripping seemed to like to be listened to. As interviewing went by, she

engaged in animated conversation.

- I felt that Light marred the atmosphere of the group meetings by making jokes, trying to draw attention from other peers that I as a member of the group meeting did not agree with.
- The lack of explanation about the purpose of making imagery names degraded a part of this research.
- I benefited from understanding adolescents in a more in-depth way.

5.3.2 The researcher's remarks

In this evaluation, I gained mostly positive responses, but the process of creating imagery names was marked as lacking an adequate explanation.

5.3.2.1 Goal achievement

We satisfied my goal as set out at the outset of this project and my co-researchers' goals were fully achieved. The first evidence of goal achievement was the testimony of my co-researchers' satisfaction about their participation. Secondly, their parents were impressed when they participated in our party which was organized at the completion of our journey as a celebration of a metaphor of a new journey for the future. During the party they shared their impressions with one another and hugged their stepchildren. Lastly, I was inspired by all the participants. As a result, my conversation style with my own children was challenged and changed.

5.3.2.2 *The matter of contribution*

Individually, each of us internalized what we have experienced through our conversations and developed it towards our open-ended future. We shared our local knowledge with people around us in a manner that showed we wanted to help them to flourish in life, rather than that we initially believed that our constructed knowledge would be representative of adolescents in remarried families and applicable to everyone. Politically, we have a voice in our community: we are presented prejudicially in the personal student file in the column on family status, and there is the custodial issue in re-marital law in South Africa.

5.3.2.3 *The matter of subjective integrity*

First of all, this research dealt with subjective experiences derived from two characters, Light and Dripping, rather than objectives or data collection. In order to interpret personal narratives, I have been true to social constructionism, as presented in Chapters Four and Five. In doing so, I have looked at questions on social discourses, including the findings of existing research on the lives of remarried families. Also, I got feedback from the storytellers as to how I had listened to their stories. In conducting conversations with my co-researchers, I followed a metaphor of Fiction Writing research as the methodological process: the ABDCE process as introduced in Chapter Three. In our conversations, the heart of pastoral care emerged. Without the joy of empathy with my co-researchers, my genuine understanding would not have been possible, as

Müller (1999) said. A pastoral imaginative approach has effectively worked, for instance, in interpreting told stories, in colouring one's self and in naming one's future stories.

In the light of a pastoral narrative research perspective, a participatory and collaborative stance was adopted in this research. Thus, in practice, I enthusiastically participated in the storytelling of my co-researchers during our conversations. For instance, I shared my story with Light when he was troubled by his biological father and I empathized with his story. Also, I was sincerely concerned, in an interview, about his smoking habit (refer to the transcript in Chapter Three).

With regard to the issue of disempowerment from “my position” in research, I firstly, practised a “not-knowing” stance. Also, I endeavoured to reduce the age gap between my co-researchers and me in ways such as having casual conversations over lunch before every meeting and using the words “my little friend” in my research letter. Another way was that I asked about their goals in this research, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and discussed our programmes. For instance, Dripping suggested the party, and so we organized one. The last way of disempowerment of the “expert view” was to facilitate evaluation from the view of the researched.

5.3.3 Research experience

5.3.3.1 *Critical self-reflection*

I thought during the journey of this research that critical self-reflection was vital. The first reason was that this research had to do with the subjective experiences of my co-researchers. I might distort their told stories to create impressive words in the name of academic competence. Especially, when I was about to work on my thesis, this temptation struck me. I experienced a growing movement in the research field, knowing that research is a matter of ethical issues rather than of mere “scientific” concern. To overcome the temptation of using of “academese”, I had to have a dialogue with myself all the time. I had to remind myself to maintain pastoral ethics and pray for it. I had to be alert moment by moment and not fall into that temptation. Also, I always submitted my transcript to my reflection team to have it criticized.

5.3.3.2 *Cultural blindness*

As I mentioned earlier, I had to change my topic. Before I heard of the unsuccessful result of the principal’s effort, I thought unrelentingly that white South African remarried families had a more open mindset about their stories than Koreans did. Therefore, I assumed that I would be able to find my interviewees easily among white congregations, but I was imposing my cultural ignorance on them. In the process of finding South African participants for my project, I experienced that in both the cases of the white and that of the Korean remarried families I tried to contact, they have been unwilling to share their stories.

Another cultural experience was the co-researchers' attitude towards me. When I lived in North America for years, I was never called "sir" by children, they just called me by my name. I felt that the culture of my co-researchers compelled them to show respect to an adult, which is similar to behaviour in Korea. Therefore, I did not feel odd, but I felt that it was hard to reduce the gap between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Lastly, there was a great difference regarding the main motivation of the co-researchers' parents' remarriages, which was not culturally compared between South Africa and Korea in this research. This was not really examined but simply used as a multiplicity of voices based on my experience of Korean culture and through my own experience concerning my remarriage. I felt that in terms of Korean decorum, the main concern was the "upbringing of children" in the family. In the case of the parents of my co-researchers, the main reason for remarriage was "togetherness with a partner for life", which might make a more stable basis for remarried family life than that of Korean remarriages.

5.3.3.3 *Barriers*

As expected, the language barrier between my co-researchers and me was not really a major concern for this research. They did not treat me as a "funny man" who is yellow (Korean like the Chinese actor-comedian, Jackie Chan) and whose spoken English was "very funny". The above fact was enough to let my co-researchers feel odd. However, I felt that our mood was one of mutual

respect. The biggest barrier I struggled with was making appointments with my co-researchers and members of my reflection team, organizing my reflection group and conducting this group. I realized that it was a reality that the priorities of their daily activity were very different from mine. Secondly, as to organizing a reflection team, my social interaction was very narrow, so, to find members and to ask for their participation was a source of great stress for me as a foreigner in South Africa. However, my beloved friends, the two teachers I interviewed, and my supervisor, have encouraged and given me great help.

5.3.3.4 *Pastoral compassion*

During the interviews I faced two main difficulties. First of all, I struggled to draw the line between being a researcher and being a pastor while I was listening to them, especially Light. I knew that if I had too much empathy with him, this research might be affected. Thus, I asked the advice of my supervisor, Julian Müller. His advice is set out below:

It also seems as if you are struggling to keep your role as therapist and role as researcher apart. The fact that you are open about it is a sign of subjective integrity and I would urge you to also write openly about this confusion in your mind when you report on the research in your thesis. To be drawn into a story to such an extent that you have empathy and find yourself crying is not a bad thing for a researcher. With the narrative approach we do not believe in objective distance as if that gives you a better position as researcher. On the contrary, we believe

that you have to be subjective, but always work towards subjective integrity, instead of subjectivism. In the latter case you are subjective, but unaware of it, while in the case of subjective integrity there is an awareness of one's own subjectivity. Let this awareness and honesty become the strength of this approach, because it enables you to, at least, reflect on your own subjectivity.

True to his advice I always had a dialogue with myself about whether I was overly subjective or too objective. Yet, with regard to Light and our interviewing process, I got frustrated at first, since, according to the narrative research perspective, my research should be beneficial to the researched, but in my view that did not occur in Light's daily life. I did not know whether or not I was aware of his inner movement. The reason I was frustrated was his lack of participation in this project. He seemed not to be interested in it. For instance, he did not often keep our appointments. Thus, I asked him several times whether he wanted to carry on our interviews. However, he then always replied that he wanted to continue. In fact, he contributed plenty to this research by sharing his story and presenting his ideas.

Secondly, I confused the line between confidentiality and sharing with what I listened to the storytellers. One day I had a chat with Light's older brother concerning the relationship his brother and his stepfather. He required me to meet his parents and to tell the story I had heard from his brother. He thought that first his parents had the right to hear his brother's story and my meeting to

tell the story would help their family if I shared. My supervisor recommended me to continue listening to my co-researcher. However, his parents received the outcomes of our research at the party. Additionally, although I received a consent form from the parents and sufficiently explained what we would do, parental wariness prevailed over curiosity. One day Dripping asked me to call her mother and report to her what we did, because she was wary of what things I asked her daughter. Therefore, a member of my reflection team, who is also the principal of her school, called all the parents and reported.

5.3.3.5 *Personal growth*

This research is also of great importance for my family and me in that it has influenced me to bring a change into my parenting style. My parenting style was not very different from that of the parents of my co-researchers. However, during the interview, I realized that questioning was an effective tool to converse with adolescents. As a result of my changed style, my son, who was involved in our group meeting as well, dramatically changed from his rebellion in his school and at home. He willingly approached me, having a conversation with both his stepmother and me. His change, in turn, brought comfort into our family.

5.4 CLOSING STORIES

We want to close our storytelling. We hope that you as a reader can find some inspiration and wisdom through our storytelling, and are thus able to help yourself to enhance your life. As you have already read our future stories, let us

close with these, each of which is the beginning of a next story in the future.

5.4.1 Light for the future

“I am Light because it brings not fear; in the dark people are scared, but light shines people’s way. Therefore, I am Light, I will shine for people.

I am not kept back any longer and go forth in dark and bright.

I am so sure of what I have to do.”

5.4.2 Dripping for the future

“I want to expand my horizons, limits and cross my borders.

Step out of my comfort zone and drip into a large dam.

I want to go into a field of art and graphic stuff.

The paint drips.

My mind drips with creativity.

The water drips and flows from the same source [herself: I am who I am] to the same source; my thoughts, ideas drip and flow from the same source (my mind: who I am) to the same source (my physical doing: what I am doing).”

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In spite of the fact that remarried families are a growing family pattern in the world, various issues regarding remarried families have been shallowly treated

in traditional research. As a result, the unstructured interview method, which is true to a pastoral narrative approach, was adopted in this study. However, even this method could not guarantee that it included all the members' voices in this study.

One crucial voice concerning the upbringing of adolescents in a remarried family is that of a stepparent living with them. Although this study indirectly heard the stories of the stepfathers of the co-researchers, that was not enough to see how the stepparents bring up their stepchildren in terms of daily family routine. Also, it is necessary to listen to a biological parent and stepparent who do not live with the children. What do they experience with children in parenting and how do they help children to grow? How do they cope without precluding, or being precluded from, other opinions on the upbringing of children which may be different from that of parents living with the children? All the above questions are of critical significance in the growth of the adolescents in remarried families.

As one co-researcher in this research implies, one remarkable role in the growth of adolescents in a Christian remarried family is the family of Christian faith. If a researcher attempts to contribute to the life of the children and their families, she or he should include the voices of their community of Christian faith.

For this study, the pastoral narrative theory provided not only the basic ethics but also the methodology for conducting the research, and understanding and

interpreting the told stories of the researched. It is strongly suggested to future researchers in this field that they utilize the narrative approach, so as to adequately understand the lives of members of remarried families.