

## DESCRIPTIVE THEOLOGY PART ONE - INSERTION: DESCRIBING “GLOBAL VILLAGE” BY LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF NEED TOLD BY THE VILLAGERS AS WELL MARGINALISED.

### 1. INTRODUCTION TO DESCRIPTIVE THEOLOGY

Don Browning understands descriptive theology to be the first task in all theology.

“It is to describe the contemporary theory-laden practices that give rise to the practical questions that generate all theological reflection. To some extent, the first movement is horizon analysis; it attempts to analyze the horizon of cultural and religious meanings that surround our religious and secular practices” (Browning 1991: 47).

In this study I will subdivide this first step of theology (descriptive theology) into two parts.

***The first part of descriptive theology of this study is listening to the stories of need.*** In this section of the study I will be listening to the problem stories which provide the study with the questions which will then be beginning of theological reflection.

***The second part is unpacking the story of the past.*** In this section of the study I will be unpacking the story behind the questions and the crises (stories of need) and thereby describing<sup>1</sup> the horizon of cultural and religious meanings that surround our religious and secular practices.

Insertion is the first step of the theological journey of this study. The purpose of this first step of this journey is to describe and to tell the stories of the context as thoroughly as possible. In this description I will firstly be telling my own theological story and how various experiences have challenged my theology thus leading to the formulation of this study. In this sense this study is also a narrative study as it tries to unpack my own spiritual/theological journey and discover a theological way forward within the context of ministry in the global village.

I will also be reflecting on the stories that I have heard in the various contexts, both locally as well as globally, as well as stories from other sources such as books, articles, etcetera.

This first step of the theological journey is primarily a very subjective step whereby the context is described from my point of view, by telling and re-telling the stories of need.

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<sup>1</sup> I would prefer to use the term *describing* rather than *analyzing* as Browning does, as the term analyses does not fit the narrative approach the study has adopted.

Chapter Three: Descriptive Theology part one: Insertion – listening<sup>159</sup>  
to the story of need within the global village

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It is my own subjective journey as I enter the context of ministry and hear the stories of others. I enter with a certain prejudice and hear the stories of others with the ears of prejudice, but it is also true that the stories of need, told by others, challenge my dominant story. This study can be seen as the narrative process of my theological story or spiritual journey as the story of the past is challenged by the stories of need. This challenged story then becomes my theological story of need, which is in need of unpacking and re-authoring. This first phase of insertion is the entry into the context and describing this context with its stories of need.

De Gruchy quotes from Holland and Henriot with regards to the first phase of the pastoral hermeneutic cycle - insertion:

“This locates the geography of our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities. What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they are responding - these are the experiences that constitute primary data” (De Gruchy 1986:87).

Thus I can say that insertion refers to my initial experiences within the specific ministry contexts, as well as the initial experiences of those travelling with me in this context. Insertion reflects on our initial struggles, responses and actions as the community seek to relate their faith to the specific context.

“That is where we usually start. We respond to the context from a perspective of faith. I live my faith in response to the things I encounter in the context” (De Beer & Venter 1998: 50).

Gutiérrez (Gutiérrez 1991:xxxiv), using the hermeneutical cycle which I am also partly using together with a narrative approach, describes the first step on the journey of theology “lived faith”.

“To live the faith means to put into practice, in the light of the demands of the reign of God, these fundamental elements of Christian existence. Faith is here lived “in the church and geared to the communication of the Lord’s message” (Gutiérrez 1991: xxxiv).

In this study I will seek to combine the hermeneutical cycle with a narrative approach. Lived faith could be understood as the story of faith within a community that is interpreted, authored and re-authored by the dramatic resources available to the community (church) with which we seek to understand and interpret our experiences. These dramatic resources are made up of: the Bible, tradition, dogma, the teachings of

Chapter Three: Descriptive Theology part one: Insertion – listening<sup>160</sup>  
to the story of need within the global village

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the church as well as the religious dramatic resources of society. The study's context is a pluralistic context therefore the dramatic resources of the other faith traditions and secular ideologies will also play a vital role in interpreting and reinterpreting the practices of the local faith community.

It is here within the lived faith that I would like to start the theological journey of the study – My lived faith, the dramatic (theological) recourses by which I seek to minister to a congregation within the global village, together with the lived faith of the people I journey with. I believe that it is within this lived faith that the stories of need arise because sometimes the lived faith lacks the dramatic recourses to interpret the day to day experiences of life in the global village.

Insertion is the story of our initial experiences within a specific context. It is the story of our struggle with this context. It is the story of need, in other words a story which is in need of interpretation or re-authoring to be able to journey forward into the future with hope. This phase of the theological process is hermeneutic and narrative as it tries to understand, interpret and retell the personal story of a journey into the context and into the world of church and theology.

This phase of insertion, the journey into the context, is guided and accompanied by the metaphor from Christ's story – **the incarnation** – Christ who entered into our context - our world - and walked our streets with us and listened to our stories of brokenness, our stories of woundedness, our stories of sin and the search for meaning. He did not only listen to the stories, but took these stories upon Himself. I believe insertion as a theological process is guided by this metaphor as we enter into the context of study, to listen to the stories of brokenness, sin and the search for hope and meaning. The metaphor of incarnation will not only guide me in the first phase, but all the phases of the study will be guided by this metaphor.

### **1.1 Practical way forward on how the context of need will be described.**

The primary story that I have access to is my own story as the subject of the study. My story of need is a story of varied experiences and how to bring these various experiences into a theological story of unity and coherence. Yet one does not construct stories of meaning or understanding nor experience in a solipsist vacuum, but experiences are understood and interpreted together with others. The study will incorporate the stories of those who have journeyed with me, or with whom I have journeyed. The stories of those with whom I have journeyed will form the secondary stories. I will in this section use two sets of stories, namely the primary story as well as secondary stories. The primary story is a subjective story of my personal experiences and how I tried to interpret these

experiences, although I did not interpret them in an isolated vacuum, but within and from a faith community's tradition. The secondary stories are also subjective in the sense that they are stories that I chose to include in this study and secondly they are stories as I heard (with my prejudiced ears) them being told.

#### **1.1.1 Primary story**

The primary dramatic resources for this study will be the story of my journey into the global village.

#### **1.1.2 Secondary stories**

The secondary stories are the stories of those who have shared this journey into the global village with me, both villagers and those marginalised from the global village.

These secondary stories will be made up of the following:

1.1.2.1 stories of the sojourners. (The re-telling will thus be my subjective re-telling of their stories). This will be done on the basis of stories gathered through unstructured interviews, discussions with individuals, council meetings, fellowship groups and meetings.

1.1.2.2 stories of people that I have read about in books and articles

1.1.2.3 descriptions of the context both personal (subjective descriptions) as well as descriptions of others.

## **2. THE PRIMARY STORY OF NEED LEADING UP TO THE STUDY**

### **2.1 The story of my journey**

The primary story is what Don Browning calls “the third, personal pole of descriptive theology” (Browning 1991:62) where I, as the subject of the study, tell my story thereby describing what Gadamer calls ‘our practical prejudices’.

After leaving school I was determined on following a career in medicine and went to the University of Stellenbosch and begin the first year B. Sc. I entered a new world, but coming from a German/ English (English school) background I was an outsider looking in. 1988-1998 was a time of political uncertainty in South Africa at the end of the P. W Botha era and the beginning of F. W de Klerk era and I became more and more involved and conscious of the social ills that were tormenting our country. There were numerous new experiences which questioned and challenged my story. My story was the story of a white South African, who had grown up with all the privileges of white South Africa. These challenges brought to my attention the need for a new story with which to understand and interpret my world, myself and my past.

It was during this time that my interest grew in Philosophy and Religion so that Medicine

and Science became more and more difficult to concentrate on. This time in my life was the first real confrontation with my own story being a story of need. I could no longer see myself studying medicine or science. The story of my past and my dreams for the future no longer coincided. I eventually turned to the traditions of the Christian faith to find new understanding and coherence for my story. It was during this time that I believe to have been called into the ministry.

### **The beginning of the end of the Cold War and the New South Africa.**

The year ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall and therefore the beginning of the end of the cold war. This event was for us as family of extreme importance because I have family living in East Germany who could now for the first time travel across the border to West Germany. That night the borders were open they climbed into their East German car and travelled across the border and arrived on the doorstep of a sister in the West. The sister in the West was watching history in progress on television. My sister was staying with the Family in West Germany at that time and so we personally, as family, partook in this great moment of history. Christmas 1989 was filled with hope – a hope that in this dark world of division, of Nuclear War, exploitation and growing poverty there was a new light of peace and reconciliation between old enemies.

When Nelson Mandela was released in February 1990 things could not get any better. Could this be the end of an age of violence and oppression and the beginning of a new world of hope, reconciliation and peace? At a time like this I thought it very appropriate to start studying theology as a new age of hope had dawned on the stage of world history. Yet before I left for Pietermaritzburg the director of the community of Lutheran Theological Students in Pietermaritzburg, Pastor Landman, was murdered. The newly born story of hope was challenged by a story of violence. This story of violence became more and more dominant during the years in Pietermaritzburg as it was the dominant story of the Natal Midlands in those years.

## **2.2 The theological story**

The story of theological formation did not begin with the theological studies in Pietermaritzburg, but already early in the family home. I was born into a German Lutheran home and my father worked as manager of a Berlin Mission Farm near Kimberley. I grew up within the Lutheran tradition and learnt the basic Lutheran doctrine in Catechism, but was also influenced by going to a Catholic Primary School. My father's work for a Mission society also influenced us and exposed us to the world of the churches that arose out of the missionary societies.

My theological studies began in a time of hope at the University of Natal within a multiracial community of Lutheran theological students at 29 Golf Road.

29 Golf Road is a community of Lutheran theological students, who come from all over Africa to study theology in Pietermaritzburg. This community started a few years earlier and the idea was that it should be a community of unity and reconciliation. This exposure to various different cultures and stories challenged my story and my prejudice that had guided my story thus far.

The Cold War had ended and did not usher in an age of peace, but rather of rampant capitalism. The fall of the Berlin wall was no longer a victory for humanity, but a victory for one ideology over another. There was no longer any counterbalance to the rapid growth and expansion of capitalism. In South Africa there were the frustrations of the multi-lateral talks and the euphoria of Nelson Mandela's release soon faded as the feeling became ever stronger that for the people living at the grass roots not much will change, besides a new constitution. The hope of the new era soon exchanged places with a new and bitter cynicism about the world and the "new South Africa".

At the school of Theology we were exposed to contextual theology, liberation theology, black theology and feminist theology, each bringing with it a new hermeneutic and thus a new language. We sat together in the class with Catholics, Evangelicals, Anglicans, Methodists and Pentecostals from all sorts of backgrounds debating the Bible, ethics and the purpose of the church. The different theologies, the ecumenical context as well as the context we were living in, shattered horizons, and opened up new worlds and out of it all grew the feeling of uncertainty.

It is out of this context that certain basic themes for my personal theological story developed:

1. Contextual approach to theology.
2. An attempt to be inclusive with regards to gender and class.
3. An ecumenical approach to ministry and theology.
4. Holistic integrated ministry that breaks down the walls between spirit and material as well as public and private.
5. Bias towards the poor and marginalised.
6. Praxis orientated ministry,
7. rooted in Biblical Witness and tradition.

I had a keen interest in Philosophy and Religious Studies which I took as extra subjects. In the final year of Philosophy I studied Wittgenstein's Tractatus and I believe that this had a tremendous influence on me. It brought about deeper understanding of language, truth and reality, but it also brought with it a sense of the mystical.

It was in these theologically formative years that I became aware of the influence of postmodernity on my personal story. This personal story was a world of confusion and fragmentation as a part of me was trying to hold onto traditional values and dogmas, but not being able to deny the rightful critique of feminism and various other liberation theologies. The world outside was also experiencing the frustrations of the postmodern era - of a world



turned upside down by the historical events of the last few years. Yet I had a sense that within this context the church's role had become all the more relevant, yet I needed to discover what this role is and for that I needed hands-on experience.

**The theological story of need that arose from the theological formation in Pietermaritzburg:**

- What remains as truth within the context of all this uncertainty and critique?
- What role could the Bible have within the context of the church and in a postmodern world?
- How can one opt for the poor and marginalised without excluding anyone, but taking them along?

## **2.3 The ministry story**

My first experience of ministry was within the context of the inner city of Pretoria doing a practical year with Pretoria Community Ministries (PCM). I later came back to Pretoria Community Ministries and worked there as spiritual director for two years.

### **2.3.1 Inner city of Pretoria – a ministry to those marginalised from the global village**

The city became my mentor who taught me so much about the world we are living in. The training in Pietermaritzburg had given us certain tools by which to look at the constructed realities in which we live. With these tools I started on a journey of discovery. I discovered a totally different world to the one I had lived in before. The city is the place where different narratives clash and to me it is the centre of the cultural, political and economic developments of the world. It is here in the city where trends are set and new ideas become a reality. It is in the cities that the “New South Africa” was becoming a visible reality.

In the inner city one could see that the group areas act was no longer in place. The people living in the flats were no longer white only, the people selling goods on the pavements were mainly black hawkers and foreigners. Pretoria was changing into a global African City. This idea was exciting to some but certainly not to all as numerous people wanted to get out of the city and move to the suburbs.

The churches had similar ideas. As their members moved out to the suburbs they felt the need to move out after them. The inner-city started to become a no go zone for many who lived in the suburbs. Many saw the inner city as a place of crime and overcrowding. The inner city, as I experienced it, is a place of suffering and poverty. It is a place where homeless and unemployed individuals try and make a living from the scraps of society, where economic and political refugees seek a living for themselves, where hawkers try and

earn some money to feed their families, where teenagers flee from their families and social conditions only to end up in prostitution and drugs. It is a place of brokenness, where people try to construct and reconstruct their lives on the margins of society with the broken bits that society throws to them.

### 2.3.2 Inner city of Berlin

After my studies and the practical year with Pretoria Community Ministries I had the chance to work and live in the old eastern part of Berlin a few blocks away from the Brandenburger Thor. In South Africa I experienced how the hope of the story of the New South Africa faded into cynicism as the story of the “New South Africa” did not have the resources to interpret the daily experiences of life in the New South Africa.

In Berlin I experienced how individuals struggled to interpret their lives within the setting of the story of the united Germany. However the story was not a story of a united Germany, but of West Germany who had “bought” East Germany. The individuals had to struggle with the notion that everything in the West was better and is better as they became witnesses to their own story of the past being stolen from them. The world was no longer divided into two and socialism was no longer a viable critique of capitalism. Yet critique was necessary, but from where, from what basis? There was no value system from which to criticise the “West”. People felt excluded from the system and for the first time unemployment became a reality for many.

The congregation in which I worked was situated on the borders of three areas of Berlin - Berlin Mitte, Prenslauerberg and Friedrichshain.

We, Ronél (my wife) and I, entered the congregation five years after the unification of Germany, yet all around us there were the signs of a time gone by. Prenslauerberg is a suburb of Berlin with beautiful old buildings, yet with a history of being a working class suburb. It was the suburb where Käte Kollwitz and her husband lived. The buildings were broken down as nothing seemed to have been done in the forty years of socialism. Friedrichshain on the other hand together with Berlin Mitte had seen socialist development. Much of the old historical buildings had been destroyed and new socialist residential facilities had been built. In Prenslauerberg many alternative communities (multi-racial couples, punks, homosexuals and artists) found a home, but many of the residential buildings were run down and illegally occupied by youths who lived together in alternative communities. In Friedrichshain in the socialist residential housing blocks there were many families who had privileges in the old socialist systems because of their involvement in the system, yet now that that system had broken down they adapted quite quickly to the new system of the West.

In the congregation we heard stories of frustration and a sense of *loss of meaning*. Many in the community were angered by the arrogance of the West, yet they had never really accepted the propaganda of the East either. Now the East was gone, yet they were not



accepted by the West, but first needed to be “*westernised*” before they were accepted socially and professionally. Many of the congregants found themselves in an ideological vacuum - not accepting the ‘western’ system fully, but not really having an alternative. They found themselves in the relativity of postmodernity.

It was during the winter of our stay in Berlin that we became aware of a group of youths who had moved into a broken down residential building. The building had no electricity, nor water, nor central heating, yet the youths wanted to create their own alternative community in this building. They had chosen a simple form of lifestyle as an alternative to the *rat race* of Western capitalism, of the global village. The group of youths were thrown out of the building as they were illegally occupying it. It was at this point that we got involved. Pastor Winkler from a neighbouring congregation had an interest in these youths and got involved as a facilitator between the youths and the city council. I accompanied him on several visits to this youth community and so we became involved.

The youth very strongly expressed their critique of the present system and were searching for an alternative by living together in community. These communities could offer them alternative resources with which to construct their reality.

The people we met and spoke to in Berlin were people in search for ways in which they could intelligible re-construct their lives. They were searching for dramatic resources to do this. The church did not seem to be able to provide these resources as the churches were empty. The story of the west did not provide the resources either.

### **2.3.3 Congregations in Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and Johannesburg.**

I have worked for short periods of time in three different South African congregations. First in Port Elizabeth in Springfield, then St. Peter’s by the Lake Parkview Johannesburg and St. Peter’s Skinner Street Pretoria. In these various congregations I came into contact with mainly white South Africans and their stories. I listened to their stories and together with them tried to search for meaning within Biblical and Lutheran tradition through Sermons, Bible Studies and pastoral conversations.

I will try to describe the challenges and problems that the members in the congregations faced, in the secondary stories of need.

## **2.4 Summary: The primary story of need.**

These different events in the chronicle of my life have shaped the story of need to which this study seeks to respond. The story of my ministry has been a journey into the global village. The story of need is a theological story that has entered the field of ministry and there in the different realities has been challenged by the stories of those with whom one wishes to journey with, within the context of ministry. It is a story that is in need of creative new resources by which to re-author the past (tradition) and enter with hope into the future.

What is needed is a narrative where the experiences of the inner city poor as well as the experiences of the congregants of urban congregations can be meaningfully understood and not exclude each other. I experienced both groups struggling with their own stories and in need of creative new narratives.

**The primary story of need can be summarised in the following way:**

2.4.1 The personal story of need: is a story of personal experiences within various contexts that challenged the story of the past and calls for a creative new story with which to enter the future with hope.

2.4.2 The theological story of need: is a story of my theological formation from childhood experiences through theological training to the reflection of this theological formation story in the context of the ministry needs of congregants as well as the inner city poor.

2.4.3 The story of need is based on two very different experiences: one the experiences of the congregants and secondly the experiences of those who are not members of the congregation namely the poor (economically marginalised). They both form part of the ministry, yet their situations are so different and thus the question arose: How can one minister to both the villager and those marginalised from the global village?

### 3. THE SECONDARY STORIES OF NEED - GLOBAL VILLAGE EXPERIENCES

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the past eight years I have been exposed to various ministry contexts in various cities both in South Africa and Germany. In these eight years I have worked in congregations as well as in inner city ministries and thus have heard various stories of people's experiences and struggles. The stories that I will be reflecting on are these stories of need, in other words stories of individual's struggles with the present or the past or where there is a clouded story of the future.

These are the stories of actions and of concrete practices within congregations and ministries struggling with the reality of the global village.

These secondary stories of need can be divided into two categories. Firstly the stories of need of those who are part of and benefit from the global village – the stories of the villagers.

Secondly the stories of need of those who do not benefit and are marginalised within the global village – the stories of the marginalised.

I have selected secondary stories of need which I will use to describe the story of the global village (villagers and marginalised).

## **3.2 The stories of need from the villagers.**

### **3.2.1 The story of unemployment – a villager’s story of need**

The story of unemployment is a story of need that seems to have become more frequent within congregations as the number of people finding themselves in this predicament increases.

It was especially in the congregations in Port Elizabeth and Berlin that I encountered numerous stories of unemployment. It is not only the actual reality of unemployment but very often the fear of unemployment which is a dominant theme in people’s stories of need. The church is more and more confronted with her members coming forward and seeking pastoral guidance through the various psychological (emotional) and social stages of unemployment.

In Port Elizabeth, the need was so great that in the congregation a care group was started with those in the congregation who had lost their formal employment. It is from these experiences and stories (the stories from the group), that the study will describe the story of need caused by unemployment and the fear of unemployment.

There are often differing factors that lead to a situation of unemployment, the study will reflect on these stories, with differing factors, which lead to the situation of unemployment.

#### **a. The story of retrenchment**

This is the story of Peter<sup>2</sup>. Peter is a family man in his mid fifties and he has ascended up the corporate ladder to a senior position in the car manufacturing industry. He is a father of three children. The children have all left the family home and have started their own families. Peter’s wife is a teacher, who never worked as a full time teacher, but mainly did substitute teaching.

The company had to downsize, as the production in South African was no longer competitive enough to compete with the same company in other areas of the world and this affected not only the labour force, but also middle and even some levels of upper management. Peter was asked if he would consider going on early retirement. Peter agreed to go on early retirement, but this had major financial implications for him and his family. The pension would not be enough to accommodate the needs of the family, nor was he emotionally prepared to go on pension. He had to find alternative employment.

This was very difficult for the whole family. Peter was the first in the congregation who had

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<sup>2</sup> The names used in the re-telling of these stories of need are fictitious.

lost his employment. He had to face the stigma of being unemployed and had to face the numerous emotional phases that he went through. It took two years before Peter found employment in a totally different sector of the economy. The family relocated to begin this new phase of their family life in another city.

After Peter there were numerous others who told similar stories, men and women who had built a career and just when they are well established they are forced to change direction and start all over again.

b. The story of the company closing down

This is the story of a young woman, Lucy, who had come to the city to look for employment. She had obtained a degree in economics. In the three years that I knew Lucy she had found and lost her jobs three times. Lucy worked in the finance world and three times the company she was working for was liquidated. The employees were either dismissed or were relocated to other sectors or if they were lucky some staff members were taken over by the new company that had taken the failing company over. Lucy's story tells the story of the economic instability of the world and especially the developing world. It is a story of insecurity and uncertainty.

c. The story of affirmative action

James, a young man just turned 38, was working for a communications company, one of the larger communications companies in South Africa. He worked in the personnel department. He lost his position because the company's lower management did not reflect the demographics of South Africa. James, being a young man, believed that he would easily find another job. It took him four years before he finally had another full-time job.

d. The story of a graduate who does not find employment

This is a very common story of many young graduates who come to the city with diplomas and degrees and start looking for formal employment, only to be frustrated as they lack one requirement namely experience. This story is very common in the young adult group in the congregation as they often express their frustrations in this regard.

3.2.1.1 Some characteristics of this story of need

a. The feeling of worthlessness

The person who has lost his/her formal employment goes through a period of feeling worthless especially if the period of unemployment is extended over years. It is only after the loss of employment that one realises the value of employment. Work is the standard by which individuals in society are judged (Kramer 1982:74). Peter, after realising that he will not be able to re-enter the sector of the economy he had left, soon started equipping himself for something totally different. James, on the other hand, sent numerous applications off to various companies in the hope to find something similar to what he had done in the past. To all his applications the response was negative. James started feeling unwanted and that there was no place for him in this world. He felt that his skills, gifts and talents were not needed. Emotionally the labour market pushed James to the margins.

b. Depression

James was in a situation where he could no longer see a future. His future was completely darkened by the reality of not being able to find another employment opportunity. We spoke for many hours about this situation and one question which was continuously on his mind was: where is God in all this?

James was soon caught in a terrible depression, which also made it difficult for him to continue looking for other opportunities.

c. Loss of self-esteem

James lost all confidence in himself, so much so that to some interviews he did not even bother to go. He did not think that he had the necessary skills to even go to the interview. This is very characteristic of people who have been unemployed for a longer period of time (Kramer 1982:74).

d. Feeling marginalised

If you do not have any work you feel useless and not really part of society, but rather excluded from society as you feel that you are not contributing anything to society. One of the characteristics of work is to contribute to society. It is a human need to feel that you are developing yourself and the world around you. “Das andere aber ist, daß Arbeit ohne Zweifel auch dazu dient, das individuelle Bedürfnis nach Selbstentfaltung durch Leistung zu erfüllen. Jeder soll nach seinen Gaben und Fähigkeiten mittätig sein dürfen an der menschlichen Kulturschöpfung, an dem, was notwendig erleichternd und verschönernd ist“ (Fütterer 1984:17).

3.2.1.2 The story of unemployment – a story of fragmentation

The story of unemployment within the global village is a story of tremendous need – as the

individual feels worthless as he/she feels that there is no place for them in the world and that they are unwanted and unnecessary. They feel marginalised, pushed to the outskirts where nobody wants them. They sometimes even believe that God is no longer interested in them and they feel forsaken by God.

James eventually started studying again and after completing his diploma soon found a stable position in a totally different sector of the economy.

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experience of unemployment?
- \* Can the stories of unemployment be seen within the story of the global village and how can the church help re-author these stories from stories of need to stories of hope?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### **3.2.2 The story of emigration – a story of the global labour market**

In the last few decades the tourist industry has boomed, but also the opportunity to work overseas has become a lot more viable than what it was in the past.

This is a global village experience that people are travelling around the globe a lot more both for work as well as for pleasure.

The study will like to look at the stories of people travelling overseas because of work.

#### **3.2.2.1 International job market and multi-national companies**

In the past few years South Africa has seen the exodus of numerous young adults. Many of them left for socio-economic and political reasons, as they did not see a future for themselves here in South Africa. Yet there is also another group of individuals who are qualified professionals and are working in multi-national companies. These companies have interests or outlets all over the world and thus there is a lot of movement of professionals globally. Individuals are requested to move from one continent to another for shorter or longer periods of time, fathers or mothers having to stay for two to three months in a foreign country because the company for which they are working has certain interests there, or is establishing contacts in those parts of the world.

There is the story of a congregational council member who had to resign from council



because he would not be able to attend the monthly council meetings. He said that he wouldn't be in town most of the time. He was in the finance department of a multi-national company and this meant that part of his job was to visit the various sites of the company all over the world. He has been all over the world. One evening he told me about the various cities and places where the company has offices. I asked him what it was like to travel so much and see the world. His answer was: "We do not really see much of the world, because we fly to the country, drive to the hotel and then attend the conference. The hotels, conference facilities and company offices look pretty much the same all over the world and there hardly ever is any time left to go sight seeing, so you quickly buy something for the children in the duty free shops."

He also shared that his family suffers from him not being at home for a large portion of the year, which means that he misses crucial moment in his children's lives.

Another young couple both have good jobs, but this also meant that both are continually away from home. It is not uncommon that they both are away on a trip but never to the same continent. They realised that they could only live this lifestyle for a limited time as "it took too much out of them!" Their plan was to make enough capital as quickly as possible so that they could settle down, go on very early retirement and then start a family.

There are the stories of families whose children have taken up permanent or semi-permanent jobs overseas. This brings with it major challenges as the weak Rand makes it very difficult to fly overseas to visit the children and grandchildren, so parents feel that they are missing out on major developments in their children's lives. I was surprised again and again how this situation both in South Africa and in Germany forced parents, who had an aversion to computers, to all of a sudden buy computers so as to communicate via the internet with their families all over the world.

I have so often heard: "yes it is very difficult that they are so far away, but today with the technology it makes it so much easier. We speak or write to each other just about every day." Many of these families are descendents of German missionaries who came out to Africa and they compare their situation with the situation of their grandparents, or great-grandparents. "In those days there was no communication for months. Parents didn't even know if their children had arrived safely. Only after 3-6 months did they receive a sign of life."

The families are connected electronically, but are fragmented all over the world.

When I asked about their children and how they are coping overseas the response very often is that the children feel they did the right thing and that economically it is going really well, but that they miss home, that they feel homesick and that they are not really coping with the cultural differences. There is a general feeling of homesickness.

### 3.2.2.2 The international job-market – a story of fragmentation

After listening to these various stories I realised that although the opportunities of life in the global village were amazing, it is at a very high cost. The people that I spoke to shared that the cost was high and mostly it was the family that had to pay this price, so in a sense they were connected to the world, but fragmented at home. I asked myself, what role does the church play in these families' lives? And how can the church minister to them effectively?

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experiences of family fragmentation and global village citizenship?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* The story of need cries out for a certain kind of church within the global village. What kind of church is that?

### 3.2.3 **The stories of families in the global village**

These stories are stories of families with whom I have journeyed in the various congregations that I have worked in. They are stories that I encountered during home visits or after meetings, and some are stories of families who came forward with their story of need seeking guidance and help.

#### 3.2.3.1 A story of marriage in the global village

This story of need arose after trying to start some form of ministry to young adults. The young adults were invited to a meeting where they could share their needs and interests so that appropriate activities could be planned. This meeting was held in Lyttelton, April 2000. The young married couples expressed a need for some form of activity or programme that addresses specifically their needs, but the immediate problem that we discovered was time. A weekly activity was impossible as nobody in the group felt that they could commit themselves on such a regular basis. The meeting settled for an activity once a month.

When asked about what exactly their needs were, the following came up:

- Time management.
- Christian financial and business ethics
- Relationships

When asked to explain why these topics were of interest to them, very interesting global village stories were told.

Time management:

The young adults said that their work takes up so much of their time that there is little time left for other things, or they are so tired after work that they have no energy left for other interests. The stories focussed around the issue of work. Most of the young adults are working as professionals. One recurring story was the story of overtime that is expected, without necessarily being paid for it. The complaint was that the work load had increased to such an extent that they were expected to do this extra work in their own time. There are various reasons given why the work load had increased, one reason being the rise in competition between companies, so that in order to stay in the market the company had to do more for less and quicker than the competitor. Some young couples complained that they hardly ever saw each other except over weekends and then they had so many other commitments. There was also a rather comical story when they shared their eating habits. The majority of the group shared that they eat fast food at least four to five evenings a week. The telephone numbers of these fast food outlets were programmed into their cell-phones so the only question left was, is it pizza, McDonalds, KFC and who is going to pick it up on the way back from work? Is this the cultural diet of life in the global village?

Christian financial and business ethics:

Many of the young adults are confronted with ethical questions at work. The company they are working for has a very aggressive competitive approach as “the business world out there is hard and harsh”. Sometime these professional young adults find themselves in positions where they are expected to do things which are against their ethical upbringing. This does not include illegal activities but expectations that go against their ethical fibre. When asked further about it they also agreed that the company/business has to have such an approach, because that is the way the world works and if they didn’t have this approach they would probably not survive. So it was a situation where they struggled with certain issues but could not really do anything about them.

Relationships:

The problem of relationships goes together with the problem of time. The young adults do not have enough time for each other and that is causing stress within their relationships. The stressful situation at the work place affects the relationship.

3.2.3.2 The global village's young families' stories of need

The young family in the global village on the one hand lives the exciting life of being connected and exposed to numerous opportunities. They have a freedom of choice, as the whole world is open to them and a lifestyle of apparent luxury in comparison to previous generations is accessible. Yet there is a story of need crying out as they seek continuity and time for themselves and each other.

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to demanding life expected of professionals in the global village?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### 3.2.4 The story of the young person in the global village

A whole new generation is developing within the global village – the “*global village kids*”. These are children, youngsters, who are growing up in the media and information age. It is the first generation which is growing up in a media drenched world (Sindode Oos-Transvaal 1999:98). It is a new generation which is growing up in a totally new environment.

This new environment is where they have everything that their hearts desire with regards to material needs and the physical and material conditions are probably the best ever in the history of the world. Yet there are numerous signs that are telling us that the youth in the global village is not healthy. There are differing signs ranging from physical ailments to psychological and emotional disturbances. The physical ailments are allergies, where the immune system of the children is breaking down. In Germany 20% of all children suffer from one form or other of allergy (Hurrelmann 2002:8). Children who live in the global village and eat the food of the global village, namely the food of the fast food chains, have weaker immune systems.

Emotionally children do not learn to cope with the demands of social interaction as they grow up in homes where there is very little balance between recognition, stimulation, and rules and regulations (Hurrelmann 2002:9). This imbalance is the result of the pressures within the family. When both parents have to work they do not have the time to spend with their children to develop a healthy sense of self, nor is there enough stimulation as the children are bombarded with all that the global village has to offer in entertainment, as the parents allow them to watch whatever the media world has to offer. The children have to discover their own value system with which to navigate through the stormy waters of growing up. The only values they receive from home are the pressures to perform so that they will be able to find a place within the job market. The entry into the competitive job market already begins in primary school (Hurrelmann 2002:9).

The dominant social relationships which are then formed are amongst friends, and depending on the circle of friends this social group could end up in a downwards spiral, such as the misuse of drugs, etcetera.

These youngsters are connected to the global village in numerous ways:

- Their absent parents working in the competitive global job-market.
- The absence of values, beside the value to compete which is a survival value in the global village.
- The connection to the media industry, via television and the internet
- The connection to the communications global village via internet.

An example of this connection to the information and communications technology was when the St. Peter's youth group went on a youth camp and each one of the teenagers arrived with their own mobile phone. They are well acquainted with the internet and therefore are exposed to the great diversity of the internet. The internet is probably their greatest source of information. This diversity of information also makes the group very diverse as each teenager follows his or her own interests, thus accentuating individualism and a form of egocentrism (Hurrelmann 2002:9). Besides the physical signs of allergies there are also the other signs such as depression, headaches and eating disorders mainly in teenage girls but also in boys, hyperactivity as well as aggressive criminal behaviour (Hurrelmann 2002: 9).

**"The latchkey kids"**

This is a generation that has arrived home to an empty house with both mom and dad working (or a single parent home where the parent has to work to survive). This is also the generation that has spent every other week or weekend at their other parent's home. They live and experience various different relationships, such as dad's girlfriend, mom's previous ex-husband, my second stepfather. This has caused young people to be sceptical of relationships. Peers and friends become surrogate families as a small number of dependable relationships are valued highly (Sinode Oos-Transvaal 1999 Agenda: Jeugverslag 1999:96).

It is also a generation for whom fashion labels have become very important as the St. Peter's youth groups explains why certain labels are cool and others not. One afternoon a girl came late to a youth meeting wearing new sunglasses. Immediately two of the boys asked: What label is it? This was then a wonderful opportunity to start discussing the whole matter of labels and how labels can determine if you belong to the in-group or not. In this discussion they also told their stories of competition between the teenagers, how important labels are and that there is a competition between the friends about which make of mobile phone they have.

These labels have become the new religion says Frei Betto a theologian from Brazil (Betto 2002:41). Labels dictate if you are "cool" and "in" and if you do not have these labels then you are "not-cool" and "out". The story of Sebastian, below, illustrates the pressures of being cool. This topic has come up again and again at our youth meeting and I was surprised how little empathy there is amongst teenagers. The story of Mark's dad's funeral tells how pain is dealt with.

#### The story of Sebastian

Sebastian is the third child from a family of five and he was in Mark's class. Now Sebastian did not have any fashion labels to wear because his family was struggling economically. He wore the clothes that his mom made or that he got from his two older siblings. This excluded him from the in-group. "There is no grace for somebody who is so completely out of the trend!" Sebastian was ostracised and victimised often by groups of 6 to 7, who would regularly make fun of him and laugh at him. The interesting thing about Sebastian and his school was that the group which made fun of him was liked by the teachers. The reason that the "cool group" was liked by the teachers was that they were eloquent, charming and quick to respond, they knew exactly what the teachers and people in authority wanted and they responded positively. "Input has to equal output!" They were fast, could outtalk nearly anybody and they always had a good joke to tell. They were made for success. Not only in school, but also after school cool equals success. Mark, one of the cool group, lost his father in an accident. Many of his friends were at the funeral and found it extremely cool that he did not show any emotion at the funeral, not a single tear. "He kept his cool!" This story tells of a totally different story namely the story of pain. What role does pain play in the story of being cool? Is your own pain and the pain of others something to be scoffed at? This maybe explains why it is so easy to make fun of Sebastian as weakness and pain are something that is look down upon. The story of Sebastian is a combination of an article I read by Doris Weber (Weber 2002 3) and a journey with a young teenage boy who was facing certain challenges at school.

At a Bible study meeting a concerned mother told the story of the latest craze with regards to children's birthday parties. She told us that there seems to be a competition amongst the parents to out perform the other parents by giving birthday parties. These little ones grow up into this competitive consumer society where labels are important. The mom told us of certain parents, who fly their children to Disney world in Florida for their birthday party and now this has become the latest fashion for birthday parties.

#### Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the stories of need that the youth experience?
- \* Can the church offer parents alternative dramatic resources to guide them in the task of parenting?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* Can the church offer an environment where the children learn a different story to the dominant story of the global village?



\* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### 3.2.5 The story of flexibility

One of the characteristic stories of life in the global village is the story of flexibility. A flexible human being is needed to survive in the flexible economic reality. As seen in the above stories it has become very common that people have to change their careers and they have to be flexible to be able to cope with the demands of the fast moving world. Those who are working in a stable job often experience the demands of this job changing as the demands of the economy changes. You can be working on one project and the next month on a totally different project.

Every young American, who has studied for two years, will be expected to change jobs 11 times in 40 years and at least three times completely re-orientate and educate him/herself to be able to respond to the new challenges (Richter 2002:46). Employment contracts will be short term with very few long term contracts. Many people working as professional engineers are responding to these short term contracts and are no longer employed for long terms at certain firms. The new 'buzz' word is *out sourcing* and *contracting in*.

This obviously has certain consequences as people learn to live in short term relationships and loyalty is no longer seen as a value that is useful within the global village. What is seen to be of value is a chameleon character that can change depending on the demands that need to be met. This obviously has consequences for the human character in the global village – a short term character that is only interested in short term relationships, that can respond to the needs of the moment (Richter 2002:46). The kind of person that the global village needs is one who thrives on chaos. "Das is der Typ des neuen Siegers, der nicht unter der Fragmentierung seines Lebens und seinen chamäleonartigen Anpassung an den Wandel leidet, sondern in dem Hin und Her jeweils rasch seine Bindungen an Umstände und Leute zu lösen versteht, um oben zu schwimmen" (Richter 2002:46).

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experiences of fragmentation as the self loses him/herself as he/she seeks to be flexible in response to the demands of the economy?
- \* Can the church offer a place where long lasting relationships can be built which offer stability and a foundation?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* The story of need cries out for a certain kind of church within the global village. What kind of church is that?

### 3.2.6 The story of no hope

The story of not much hope with regards to the future is a recurring story. In my first year in Pretoria (2000) I visited numerous members of the congregation in their homes and I was confronted with one very dominant story and that was the story of crime and violence. Each home had at least one story to tell of violent theft that either they had experienced themselves or a neighbour or a relative had experienced it. At home-fellowship meetings this was very often the main topic of the informal discussions during the coffee break. The result of these stories was very often that families contemplated leaving the country as they no longer saw a future for themselves here. The interesting thing was that when we went to Germany in 2000 we encountered similar stories. People were complaining about the rise in crime and that certain areas in the larger cities were totally unsafe. It seems to be a global story that villagers feel unsafe because of the rise in crime and violence.

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experience of there being no hope?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author these stories of need?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed that would create room for the stories of hope to be told as a counter balance to the stories of no hope?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### 3.2.7 The story of the church in the global village

In and amongst all these stories of hopelessness, unemployment, crime and violence the church is called to proclaim the good news of hope. Yet the church in South Africa was confronted with its own challenges as its authority was being questioned. Its authority as custodian of truth was under attack for the following reasons:

1. The legacy of the past.

The other theme that kept coming up in the years 1999-2000 was the past and the stories that were revealed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – Stories that turned a whole world view upside down and showed the immorality and absurdity of the past system. This was a system in which so many had believed and had even fought for. The church's role and her support of this system was also revealed, thereby questioning her role as an authority on ethical questions of what is right and what is wrong. If the church in the past

could consciously support a system that was wrong, how then can we trust the church not to do the same in the future?

## 2. The diversity of faiths and beliefs

Within the global village there is a greater awareness of the diversity of faiths and all around the individual there are people living with different beliefs and value systems, thus questioning ones own beliefs and values. South Africa in the past was protected from this diversity by the censorship of information. Today, in the New South Africa, in the evenings there is no longer only Christian meditation on the national television broadcaster, but also that of other faiths. The president is no longer inducted with a Christian prayer, but a multiple-faith prayer. The schools can no longer exclusively teach Christian faith principles but need to incorporate the other faiths as well. This diversity has brought with it a great uncertainty with regards to the authority of the truth claims of one faith over and against the other truth claims of different faiths.

## 3. The New Constitution - rights and values.

Most South Africans welcomed the new constitution, but were confused with the debates that arose concerning conflicting rights. These debates focussed on big issues such as the death penalty and abortion. They asked the question: who has the final authority on these issues? The church which had been in the past the authority on all major ethical and moral questions no longer could play this role in South Africa. Was there no authority above the constitution that could discern between what is right and what is wrong? No standard of value that is true and all need to adhere to? This poses the question: Is everything relative – even what people believe?

## 4. The challenges of life in the global village

We come back to the first question: How can the church proclaim the story of hope against the stories of hopelessness, unemployment, crime and violence?

Winter writes that the church, especially the protestant church, has failed to really respond to the challenges of modern culture in the cities and I believe the same is true with regards to the challenges of post-modern culture in the global village.

“Protestantism failed to penetrate the culture of modern cities, it has largely refused to take that culture seriously, and it has withdrawn from the task of relating the Christian faith to the problems and needs of human being in contemporary urban society” (Winter 1962:37).

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

\* Does the church need to be an authority to give guidance?

- \* How can the church guide when all is relative?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to be able to re-author stories of need, especially the church's own story of need?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### **3.2.8 Theological questions that can be raised from the villagers' stories of need within the global village:**

- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experience of unemployment?
- \* Can the stories of unemployment be seen within the story of the global village and how can the church help re-author these stories from stories of need to stories of hope?
- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experiences of family fragmentation and global village citizenship?
- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experience of the demanding life in the global village?
- \* Can the church offer dramatic resources to respond to the experience of there being no hope?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed that would create room for the stories of hope to be told as a counter balance to the stories of no hope?
- \* Does the church need to be an authority to give guidance?
- \* How can the church guide when all is relative?
- \* What kind of Christian presence was needed to be able to re-author stories of need, especially the church's own story of need?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

## **3.3 The secondary stories of need from those on the margins of the global village.**

### **3.3.1 Stories from the homeless community**

The stories that will be retold in this section are stories taken from individuals during unstructured interviews. These interviews took place during my time at Pretoria Community Ministries – at the street centre, or stories shared at support group meetings, from other members of the various communities of Pretoria Community Ministries as well as from books and articles. The homeless community is a diverse community and therefore the study will reflect on a number of differing stories.

### 3.3.1.1 The story of a business venture in economic difficult times

This is the story of Alfred. What makes Alfred's story so interesting is that his story is not far removed from the stories of congregational members. Alfred could easily have been part of the support group I started in Port Elizabeth for those faced with the challenge of unemployment. Yet Alfred's story took a different turn. For many years he worked in a government department and in 1997 he was asked if he wouldn't like to go on early retirement as the department was restructuring. Alfred decided not to take early retirement, but to rather take the "package". The package was a large sum of money that was paid out to him. With this money Alfred dreamt of starting a small business that would generate an income for him and his family. Alfred did not really have any business skills and the business did not do well at all. The family had invested all their money in this business venture and now that the business was not succeeding it caused a lot of stress in the family. Alfred, realising the financial crisis he and his family were in, struggled to cope and in order to calm his nerves he began drinking. The drinking became a problem and the downward spiral began.

He lost his business and his wife divorced him which only aggravated the drinking problem. His family was angry with him for drinking and therefore rejected him. Within four years Alfred's life had changed from a respected family man working in a government department to a homeless man on the street with a severe alcohol problem – a man marginalised to the pavements of our cities.

### 3.3.1.2 A story of terrible trauma and nowhere to go

This is the story of John. John is a teacher who lost his wife and daughter in a terrible car accident. John could not cope with the trauma of the loss and began drinking. The drinking started becoming a problem in his work and therefore the school dismissed him. When I met John he had already been living on the streets for three years. He had been in and out of rehabilitation centres but he struggled to find formal employment once out of the rehabilitation because of his alcoholism. So whenever he came out of the centres he was again on the street and it did not take long before he would start drinking again.

### 3.3.1.3 A global perspective: a story of a homeless man in Berlin, Germany

Hans-Jürgen is 35 years old and an insurance broker in Berlin.

"Two years ago I could never have imagined living like this. Now I know that one can live like this. With a few breaks I have been living like this now for one and a half years. This is a very short time. I know of people who have lived on the streets for 5 or even 6 years.

My story: Broken marriage, no work, no flat.

After our divorce I had a flat separate from my ex-wife. But I could not really work anymore

and so I lost my job and then I could no longer pay for my flat, so I lost that as well. Yes, where do I sleep? There are many places in roofs of houses, public toilets, in the basement of buildings and off course the forest, but it all depends on the season. Nobody needs to see that you are on the streets, because you can look after yourself. There are places where you can wash and clean yourself. How do I live? Get up very early in the morning so that nobody catches you. That means to get up at 4:00 AM or 5:00 AM. You can easily find out at what time people start getting up and there is movement and therefore you have to leave before they catch you. Then you need to start looking for a meal. Get onto the train and drive to Zoo to get a warm cup of coffee. Then spend the rest of the day in warm places, depending on the weather. Alcohol? That depends, if one is really frustrated then one drinks more, if it is cold one needs it to fall asleep. With me it is in phases. There are certain phases that I need it, but then again I am okay without. Most of the others believe that with alcohol they can forget their problems or at least drown their problems for a night. I am not really sure if that helps. I have made the experience that it doesn't. ...." (This is a freely translated and adapted story from Drommer's book: "...und segne, was du uns bescheret hast") (Drommer 1993:26-27).

#### 3.3.1.4 The story of a homeless refugee

It is the story of a man who has come to South Africa with the hope of a better future. He had left behind his family and his country. The reason why he has left his country was political as his home country was plagued with a civil war. He was a qualified engineer, but he could not go out to seek employment until his refugee status has been clarified. The clarification of refugee status takes some time as there are too many people applying for refugee status, many for political reasons but also many for economic reasons. He cannot go out to seek employment until his status has been clarified so until then he was living on the streets.

His story is a story of need, hopelessness and desperation aggravated by an increasing xenophobia in South Africa. Africa being the continent that is traumatised by civil wars, genocide and conflicts there is a continuous movement of refugees. So there are people and whole families who are fleeing adverse conditions at home and then seeking a better future elsewhere.

Having heard the story of need, from the homeless community there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Is the church open to the needs of the homeless community?
- \* Can the church offer the dramatic resources to help re-author the story of need?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to be able to re-author stories of



need?

- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context that also reaches out to those on the margins?

### 3.3.2 The story of a shack dweller

This is the story of Maria who has come to this the city from the Limpopo Province in the late eighties in the hope that she will find enough money to look after her family.

She had many dreams and one being that she will earn enough money to build a house in her village for her family. Maria came to the city without anything but for the money that paid for the transport to get to the city. Now she is here with nowhere to stay and nothing to do, and so the first stop is to find a place where she can sleep. One possibility is to sleep on the station, but that is not safe as the little bag that she has with her will probably be stolen. But where else should she go?

Eventually Maria found a place not far from the station in an informal settlement where she was taken in. After a long story of abuse, violence and many tears, she eventually managed to get a job in helping in an informal restaurant that sells “pap en vleis” to the commuters.

Now that she has a stable job, she also has money with which to build her own shack. Maria does not earn much like most of her neighbours and certainly not enough for her to build a home in her village. Her neighbours are in all sorts of “businesses”. There are many who make a living by selling a variety of things from roasted peanuts, maize or vegetables and fruits, and others have opened a shebeen where beer and other drinks are sold and then there also is a lot of prostitution in the area. Maria always has at least one new story of violence and crime to tell when one visits her. She would tell these stories in a lot of detail even pointing to the places where it all happened. At night she says she is very frightened because at night all sorts of things are happening, but she prays and hopes that nothing will happen to her.

Maria lives on the margins of the city in an informal settlement trying to make a living from the informal economy on the margins of the formal economy of the city.

I would like to add an article that was written in the News Letter of Pretoria Community Ministries May 2002 “Inkululeke!” that continues the story of Maria in that it tells the story of her informal settlement.

“MARABASTAD the struggle continues.

Although two social housing projects are currently being planned in the vicinity of Marabastad, and although at least 500 of the 2000 people living informally in Marabastad are estimated to qualify for housing subsidies, local government prefers to remove the people to an unknown venue far from the city centre. This is about to happen!!

This does not make sense at all; but then – without any consultation with the local

community, what else can one expect. It would make so much more sense to work with those in Marabastad who qualify for social housing, in order to integrate them into the envisaged housing projects. The new housing projects would provide more than 900 families with security of tenure. Why not starting at our doorstep?

If the people of Marabastad only arrived yesterday, but many of them are now well established after some years in the area. Marabastad is not just a collection of people, but has become a community. The informal economy is sustaining many families in a way that government can never do, because it lacks the resources. But instead of affirming the informal residents of Marabastad and the informal economy that has emerged there, government wants to wipe it out.

And they do it in the name of disaster prevention, better options for the poor –yet, don't speak to the poor themselves at all. This is an archaic method of dealing with inner city poverty. The new South Africa is not so new after all.

We have presented local government with proposals and suggestions. But no constructive discussion. It was clear that our suggestions were not welcomed because government had their minds made up. And that was that the poor has no place in the centre of the city.

We had one meeting with the Executive Mayor, two from his Mayoral Committee and the local ward councillor, where they told us how we had to use the proper channels. The proper channel for speaking about Marabastad was the Ward Committee. But at the Ward Committee the Ward Councillor said we can't discuss it until the Mayor and his committee have not made a decision. So, if they made a decision, what is there then to discuss? And what is the purpose of a Ward Committee, so-called participative governance, and so forth, if nowhere at any level of government they respect their own policies?

The people of Marabastad are not yet free; in fact, their freedom – which is to live in a place where they can at least create income for themselves – is now also under threat. And those threatening it are the very ones that are supposed to carry the principles of freedom and democracy... But they play with these principles as they wish... and think we are fools.

Somewhere the bubble will burst! Let's wait and see!" (written by Stephan De Beer in the Pretoria Community Ministries News letter Inkululeko! May 2002).

This article takes the story of Maria further and describes how those living on the margins and trying to make a living there are marginalised further and continuously live in fear, because they do not even have a place on the margins.

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* Is the church on the margins of the global village?
- \* Does the church have the dramatic resources to re-author the story of need?
- \* What role does the church play in telling alternative stories (prophetic stories) which challenge the dominant stories that marginalise people from the village?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to be able to re-author stories of need?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to proclaim stories of hope which challenge the discourses of marginalisation?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### 3.3.3 The story of a young girl in crisis

This is a story of one of the girls living in Lerato house which is a community of Pretoria Community Ministries.

The story is written by the girl and thus her words and style is used.

I am very sorry for myself But Proud.

This is just a summary of my life.

Firstly I don't know whether I was born in Pretoria or in Transkei and I am not really sure about my father either, but one thing for sure is that it doesn't matter now. Okay this is what I'm sure about.

When I was nine years it was when I knew my father (the one I am not sure about) then life was sweet and fine, and that was on 1993 June. I was then in grade 4 okay everything went well until after my moms birthday month by then I was eleven years. Just before 1995' Christmas there was a fire in my parent's bedroom and they were inside. Okay by then I didn't know anything about rescuing someone and were in the kitchen and to go out we had to go pass through the fire on the passage. Okay I managed to take my sisters and brother by wetting blankets and take them out, but the scary thing was that I couldn't see anyone of them when we were out.

After five minutes then came my father, then my mom's friend thereafter a while my mother. As she came running the skin was falling from her body and naked too. Okay I ran and called my grandmother then we made a plan for them to go tot hospital. After two weeks on the 18<sup>th</sup> my mother passed away and my father survived but he was still in hospital.

Okay my mom's brothers took her with them and buried her at their home since then we never heard from them they took her on January 1996 hence we were staying with my father's parents until we decide we wanna go back to our home. On 1997 we went back and my father was going out or dating three woman. I don't know what happened to the other two. He continued dating this other one with three children. After they broke up.

Thereafter he started dating this other one. She have the same name as my mother. It went on and on until he started changing on 1999 by then we were still staying with her parents. 2000 we started staying with both my parents in Soshanguwe ext 4 until 9 August he started abusing me. Okay it went on till 2001. Maybe April he forced himself inside me I tried to tell all my family member only one listened to me and that was my uncle. Others never believed what I was saying until I decided to take action after thy hated me all besides my uncle. They arrested him. After I decided to drop the charges on July okay everything went fine until 2002 January on the 7<sup>th</sup> we were arguing about my love life I don't know what happened but the next thing I was telling him that is telling me shit then he said to me then I will show you shit. He forced himself into me then the following day I decided I must call my uncle and tell him therefore I then decided I must go tell my pastor and on the 9<sup>th</sup> I came to Lerato house I stayed here until I say my father on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July we tried to talk but I wasn't fine about it. So I decided I must go visit home with Mildred. Okay everything went fine accept with my mother. She was swearing at me telling me that I will go back where I come from cause that is her house.

My brother was washing school shirts I tried to help him and she was telling me that if I came to spoil him I must get out of her house. This is how I lived my life.

These are the stories of many in the inner city of Pretoria – stories lived out on the margins of the city, in the streets or in the informal settlements of Marabastad or in the bushes of Salvokop and for many young girls in the Budget Hotels of the inner city of Pretoria. They

are stories of need, stories of brokenness in search of wholeness, healing and hope, stories without a future, empty of hope in search of a dream and to be able to dream again. These are personal stories of individuals, but their stories are affected by the stories and histories of families, cultures, societies, countries, economies and eventually the story of the global village. They are stories of need.

The words cry out for the Gospel and for the Body of Christ. Yet where is the Body of Christ? Where is the light to the world?

### **3.3.4 The story of the church and those on the margins of the global village**

The inner city poor and the church

The church in the inner city of Pretoria has reacted to the inner city poor in different ways. The church is forced to hear these stories of need, because not a day goes by without somebody knocking on the door of the church, telling the story of need and crying out for help. The members of the churches are challenged by these stories, because they have people coming to their doors crying out for help, people standing at traffic lights crying out for help and people approaching them as they do their errands in the city. The church hears these stories and is certainly challenged by them. The question that the study will be asking in this section is: How does the church respond to these challenges?

There is not a single response to these challenges and therefore the study will look at some possible responses.

#### **3.3.4.1 Flight from those on the margins**

The first option is to flee if challenged, in other words to move out of the area as a church or as individual member and join another congregation in the suburbs. *The church does not want to hear the story of need of those on the margins.*

Many churches have chosen to take this route and have moved out of the areas where they are confronted with those on the margins, like the inner city.

Many members of congregations, which are physically situated in an area where one is confronted with those on the margins, have left the congregation to go to different congregations. In St. Peter's congregation we have lost many members, who preferred to go to a suburban congregation where they are not challenged by the realities of the inner city. This is not the official reason given. Some of the reasons given, are:

- \* They left St. Peter's because it is no longer safe to travel to town, especially at night.
- \* The membership of St. Peter's has changed and this change has brought about a cultural change which does not agree with them and therefore they have found a new spiritual home.

#### **3.3.4.2 Fight against those on the margins**

The second option is to fight if challenged by the stories of need. This is a very aggressive ministry to those living on the margins. It is a ministry that believes the cause of the story of need is personal sin and that the only way to respond is personal conversion. This kind of response is a form of aggressive evangelism, exorcism and aggressive prayer as the ministry is seen as spiritual warfare. The solution to poverty and brokenness is seen in the exorcism of personal moral evil and sin and conversion. The systemic evil and injustice of society is not addressed at all. Nor is the story of need unpacked. *The church does not want to listen to the story of need of the marginalised, because they have the answer already.*

#### 3.3.4.3 A ministry towards those on the margins

Many churches have a ministry or support a ministry **to** the poor. This ministry is a ministry where the church reaches out via a soup kitchen, clothing handouts or food parcels. The church listens to the story of need and tries to respond, but does not seek to understand and unpack the setting of these stories of need.

#### 3.3.4.4 A ministry with those on the margins

The church listens, seeks to understand and shares in the story of those living on the margins of the village, in other words the church allows the story of need to become part of the congregation's story and together they seek THE STORY OF HEALING AND HOPE.

Having heard the story of need, there are some theological questions that are raised:

- \* How can the church truly listen to the stories of need?
- \* Is it possible to develop an ecclesiology that will include both the villagers and those on the margins of the village?
- \* How can the church listen to the discourses behind the stories of need?
- \* How does the church position itself with regards to these dominant discourses?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to be able to re-author stories of need, especially the church's own story of need?
- \* What kind of Christian presence is needed to proclaim and re-claim the story of the future as a story of hope?
- \* What does this tell us about the kind of church that is needed in the global village context?

### 3.4 **The primary story of need together with the secondary stories of need.**

After listening to the stories of those on the margins a new world was opened for me, but

most important of all these stories opened the Gospels for me in a totally new way. Never before had the stories of the Gospels been so real and relevant than in the Bible studies with the homeless or in the shacks of Marabastad. I became very aware of the vital importance of holistic ministry, the need to work together ecumenically and that the church needs to be involved in the practice of theology in the concrete context of daily life. It was during this time that I also became aware of key themes within my Lutheran tradition.

Listening to these stories I felt caught between two worlds, the world of the villagers and their stories of confusion, fragmentation, loss of meaning and pain caused by the various realities of life in the global village and on the other hand the world of those marginalised from the village. Could this be two worlds in one country - a postmodern South Africa in a global economy trying to heal the wounds of the past?

There must be a way in which the Gospel of Christ can enter into this context and bring healing, reconciliation, hope and meaning to the whole community.

### **3.4.1 The primary and secondary stories of need within the five dimensions of action or practice**

Don Browning saw there to be five dimensions to our actions and our practices. I would like to place these stories into the context of these five dimensions (Browning 1991: 110).

#### **3.4.1.1 The rule role dimension**

The stories told in this chapter are stories that reflect the practices and actions of individuals living within the global village. They are stories that tell us about these actions, be it the action of looking for employment, or trying to start a family, or making ends meet on the streets of the city. These action tell us about rules and the roles within the global village and the communication patterns that have developed.

#### **3.4.1.2 The tendency need dimension**

These stories also tell of the needs and tendencies of individuals and groups, the need for employment, the need for time, the need for new resources with which to interpret and re-interpret lives and events.

#### **3.4.1.3 The environmental and social dimension**

These stories also tell the story that these needs and tendencies cannot all be met, but that there are certain constraints, environmental, but also institutional constraints that force certain obligations on the individual. A mother might want or might need more time with her



children, but the institutional patterns of the economic world rule out more time for children.

#### 3.4.1.4 The obligational dimension

The individual and the company find him/herself in a situation that if you want to remain part of the system you have to play according to the rules and regulations. If you want more time to be with your spouse and children then you need to get out of the system, because the system says you have an obligation to put in the extra hours of work.

#### 2.4.1.5 The visional dimension

These stories also tell that the vision of the global village is not sufficient. Although it might be exciting and promising for some, the reality is in stark contrast to its promises.

### **3.5 Tentative theological reflections on my insertion experience, describing the stories of need of both the villagers and those marginalised from the global village.**

These are tentative reflections on my ministry experiences in the various ministry contexts and after listening to the various stories of need from both the villagers and those living on the margins of the global village. These reflections can be seen as a summary of the theological questions and issues that these stories of need have raised. These theological reflections and issues are tentative and need to be explored in greater detail. The next few chapters will be a journey of exploration, but especially in Chapters Five and Six I will come back to these questions.

- I have found it very helpful in the various contexts of ministry to be guided into the ministry context by the story of Christ and to have **the story of Christ as the guiding metaphor** that leads and accompanies one on the ministry journey.
- The first phase in the story of Christ can be seen as the incarnation. Christ that enters the world and enters the brokenness of the world as he is born into poverty and political and social turmoil. He did not shy away from the brokenness and the systemic sinfulness of his context, but entered it and experienced the harsh reality thereof. This I would like to call an **Incarnational Ministry** that allows the brokenness of the context to affect the ministry and even lead the ministry so that the ministry can enter the brokenness.
- I have found the narrative approach very useful for various reasons. The first

reason being that our faith is based on the narrative of Jesus our Christ and secondly that humanity is best understood through our stories. **A narrative approach to doing theology within the community from which we draw our dramatic resources.**

- From listening to the various stories of need I discovered the need for a **holistic ministry**. This journey towards a holistic ministry is a journey of struggle as one finds oneself caught within the false dichotomies of the dominant religious discourses – the dichotomies between private and public, spiritual and material, physical and emotional, etcetera. The church needs to relearn the relevance of the story of Christ for all areas of life and needs to face the challenge of allowing the story of Christ to question all spheres of human existence.

This holistic ministry needs to be guided by the story of Christ, who did not allow these dichotomies to influence his ministry of the kingdom of God.

- Listening to the stories of need of those living on the margins of the global village I became very aware of the need of any ministry in the global village to respond to the call for social justice. The ministry in the global village will need to have **advocate social justice**. The church as a language community will need to create space for the marginalised voice to be heard, so that this voice is not lost.
- After listening to the stories of need of both the villagers as well as those marginalised from the village I became very aware of the dominant dramatic resources with which individuals (both villagers and marginalised) construct their realities. The ministry in the global village will need to be aware and critically aware of these powers and the **dominant discourses** which are rife with **power imbalances**.
- In the context of these dominant discourses and power stories a space needs to be created where the other stories can also be told. **The alternative stories need to be told.**
- The dominant discourses and narratives seem to create the global village, but the global village is fragmented and rife with power imbalances. The alternative stories that need to be told will thus create alternative realities. These alternative realities could be understood as **alternative communities** offering the global village an alternative.

- These alternative communities, being different to the global village, would be **inclusive communities** where everybody is included both villagers as well as those marginalised from the village.
- Communities need to offer an alternative to the global village as they offer the global village inclusive communities including both villagers and those marginalised thereby challenging the fragmentation of the global village. These communities could be seen as **redemptive communities** as they offer the global village a redemptive alternative.
- The dominant discourses need to be challenged on the public stage. The ministry cannot be seen as a private matter. The dominant discourses need to be challenge there where they affect peoples lives, for example at the workplace and in public ethics. The ministry needs to understand itself as a **public ministry**.
- The scriptures have a certain bias to the poor. So also I believe there needs to be a **bias towards the stories of brokenness**, because it is in these stories of brokenness that the truth of the dominant discourses is exposed.
- Many of the stories of need were stories of no hope. The church as the messenger of God's hope needs to understand her ministry as **liberation from the enslavement** of no hope narratives of the global village.

These are just a few ideas, tentative theological reflections, at the end of the first step of this descriptive theological journey. I will now proceed with the second step of the descriptive theological journey and seek to unpack the stories of need of both the villagers as well as those marginalised from the village.