

CHAPTER THREE

LISTENING TO THE HEARD AND UNHEARD STORIES OF INNER CITY HOMELESS YOUTH IN CONTEXT OF PRETORIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Demographically youth constitutes two-thirds of the overall population of South Africa. Thus we must realise the potential that the youth population has to challenge the social scenario of South Africa. The many socio-political changes of the past century have affected all race groups in South Africa. Currently, “most South Africans are experiencing a threat to their previously established identities and, in many instances need to redefine their position in society” (Prins & Van Niekerk 2001:10). For instance, many middle-class black South Africans now experience a sudden progression up the social ladder because of employment equity measures. At the same time, crime, violence, political instability and poverty plague all sectors of society, especially the youth. Increasing numbers of street children and youth, and rising rates of prostitution, theft and crime are some of the negative effects of the 1994 socio-political transition. This does not mean that freedom brought only negative consequences for South Africa, but rather reflects the identity struggle induced by the transition. For people in their teens and twenties, already undergoing identity confusions and crises, this social change only makes the process of maturing more difficult. These young people need adults to listen to them carefully and openly, a process that will help them greatly in their efforts to define their identities.

But the 1994 transition has by and large brought great good to South Africa, particularly to women and young people, who are increasingly aware of their own human dignity. The redistribution of job opportunities has improved the economic situation of many families. Despite poverty and crime, many young people are becoming more creative in participating in nation-building processes, and trying to find small jobs and start their own businesses. The youth are also increasingly eager for education, which the government promotes. In his speech on the second National Youth Day of the independent South Africa, the first black President Nelson Mandela said, “This generation of youth stands at the borderline between the past of oppression and repression, and the future of prosperity, peace and harmony” (Ramphela 2003:242). During the apartheid era, black leaders in exile shared the stories of oppression with young people worldwide. This heightened the international response against the oppressive minority government in South Africa. Miriam Makeba, the famous singer, shared the stories of the people of South Africa during her musical journey in exile. About the title song of her album, ‘Masakhane’, she says, “And in the song I say I’ve been around the world telling the story of my country and my people and in that journey a lot of people listened and raised their voices against injustices” (Makeba 2003:281). Such activities accelerated the arrival of freedom in South Africa. After 1994 these stories became more hopeful, especially among the youth. This hope is that freedom will become a reality in all areas of life in South Africa, as economic and social factors slowly improve and culture and art challenge and motivate youth towards achieving a better future in their particular contexts.

3.2 YOUTH IN PRETORIA

The young people of Pretoria are not different from the youth in South Africa in general. The youth of Pretoria, rich and poor, urban and rural, represent the youth of South Africa. People are constantly migrating to urban centres seeking

economic opportunity and security, varied and alternative lifestyles and individual freedom and choice. The majority of the rural poor people end up on the streets, seeking a livelihood. This study concentrates on these street people, particularly the youth among them. The experiences of youth who live on the streets are complex. These young people have to cope with stress both from their immediate environment and from the complexities of society as a whole.

3.2.1 The reality of the lives of these young people

Even though governmental and non-governmental organisations have various policies and projects in place to help and develop South Africa's youth, many young people still leave their homes daily and end up on the streets of major cities. When they come to the city they have no place to stay or job to support them, so they become homeless and live in utter poverty. The influx of village youth coming to the city streets is growing, not only from the villages of South Africa but also from those of other neighbouring African countries. These young people come as illegal immigrants or refugees. Some of them turn to damaging behaviour such as drug abuse, robbery, rape and murder. Others live by illegal begging, or seek street centres and job programmes.

These are some of the realities of life on the street, and the number of young people suffering their ill effects is likely to rise, since 70-75% of South Africans are expected to be living in urban areas by 2030 (Sebelebele 2003). Young people will continue to come to the cities because in the villages they often lack even basic nutrition and education. Even if some of them leave school with an exemption, it is very difficult for them to enter a university for any kind of higher education. "One of the crucial challenges facing South Africa is the continuing inaccessibility of higher education to poor and disadvantaged students" (Cele 2005:11). According to Cele, the apartheid regime and democratic state's student funding policies are largely to blame for this situation. But it is easy to blame broad social situations and large institutions. We must rather take responsibility

as citizens, and not let the aim of the education system become profit rather than complete social development. Economic growth is of course a vital part of the nation's development, but it cannot be achieved without proper higher education for the nation's youth. Education is arguably the birth right of each individual in theory, but in practice accessibility to education is hindered by various social and economic factors in South Africa.

3.2.2 Homeless youth

A particular problem not solved by the social transformation in South Africa is housing. Accommodation initially became more affordable for the urban poor. For a while after 1994, middle-class people tended to move out of city centres and poorer people to move in. Housing in the inner regions became the most affordable in the city and many different cultural groups of people moved into these areas (Van Niekerk 2004:125). This influx of people has not stopped since, and as the inner cities do not have the capacity to accommodate all these people, housing has become unaffordable for many people. Many of the people moving to the city left their homes because of family problems, poverty and joblessness, so they have no economic or social reserves. The cities can offer only overpriced housing, and few jobs, and so these people have no option but to end up on the streets. As Johaan Meylahn writes from his own experience, "Inner city is a place where homeless and unemployed individuals try to make a living from the scraps of society.... [I]t is 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" (Meylahn 2003:164).

The homeless young people living in the inner city endure much hardship and have to struggle to keep their identities in very difficult situations. That they are homeless in the city does not necessarily mean that all of them have no home. Some of them have distant homes to which their economic deprivation prevents them returning. This alienates them from their relatives and friends who wait for

them at home. Other young people are truly without homes, since they left their families and have broken relationship with their relatives. Thus many young homeless people experience extreme loneliness, even though there are many homeless people around them.

3.2.3 Pretoria Community Ministries

Through its Street Centre, Pretoria Community Ministries strives to journey with the homeless youth of Pretoria through their experiences of homelessness. A brief history of this ministry is needed to understand the particular context of counselling sessions reported and analysed in this study. This context is the relatively safe and peaceful setting of the Street Centre where the young people strive to tell and interpret their stories. Pretoria Community Ministries (PCM), started in 1993, is the work of a fellowship of six inner-city churches in Pretoria and the greater Tshwane region, which joined together to work towards the freedom of the people in bondage and hardship. The churches are the Melodiya Tshwane Uniting Reformed Church, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Cathedral, St. Peter's Lutheran Church, St. Alban's Anglican Cathedral, and Wesley Methodist Mission.

The slogan of PCM is "Rebuilding our communities in the name of Jesus." This gives the goals and objectives of the ministry in a nutshell. To love the city and its people with God's love was the specific theme for the movement for 2005. The ministry thus includes within the framework of social work the opportunity for practical theology. "Just as human beings need love to carry on bravely, a city that is not loved also slowly withers away until it becomes a cold, soulless place, where nobody dares to tread. But a city that is loved attracts people, reflects beauty, exudes passion, becomes heaven for the soul" (Pretoria Community Ministries News Letter 2005:1). The goal of the ministry is to express God's love in meaningful ways in Pretoria. Street ministry is a part of PCM's activities, working from a street centre located near St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. The

Street Centre has been operating since January 1998 and provides between 1500 and 2000 instances of service a month, including advice, support and fellowship to homeless people in the inner city of Pretoria.

3.2.4 The Street Centre and homeless people

Akanani is the name for the street ministry started by the PCM in 1997. This is a Shangaan word which means “let us build together”. The vision of the Street Ministry states that “Homeless people can re-connect, recover their dignity, and access the resources that will re-integrate them into communities. At the same time Akanani wants to tell the stories of homeless people-both stories of struggle but definitely also the amazing stories of hope” (Akanani 2006).

The main objectives of the street ministry are as follows:

1. Preparing people for employment by providing them with job hunting training, preparing CV's and contacting employers;
2. Caring for people on the streets and referring them to shelters and housing projects; and
3. Giving counselling and support.

In the Street Centre homeless and jobless people gather everyday for Bible classes, life and job-hunting skills workshops and church services. After the sessions in the morning they all have coffee offered by some well-wishers. Food, clothing, blankets and shoes are supplied to the needy. Facilities and materials are provided for bathing and washing clothes, so that the homeless people can live with cleanliness and dignity. Staff members and volunteers are always ready to help the poor and needy in many ways. Some of the people who come to the

Street Centre are not only homeless or jobless but do not even have proper identification documents. The staff help them to prepare applications for ID documents and to follow up on these applications, to prepare CV's and send them by fax to possible employers and to call employers to ask for work. In addition, the staff counsels the distressed, HIV/AIDS infected and affected, persons, those involved in substance abuse and person in other hardship or danger.

3.3 CONTEXT OF THE STORIES OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

3.3.1 Homeless youth in Pretoria

Homeless youth in Pretoria originally come from various provinces of South Africa, and from neighbouring countries such as Burundi, Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. They have various cultures, social practices and languages. They all share the problems of lack of faith in each other. Crime, violence, mugging, drug abuse and rape are common experiences among them. Many of them have no identity documents. Most have no specific skills or work experience. Some have been unemployed for years. "Homeless people are generally marginalized because of society's stereotypes, a lack of policy that includes and affirms homeless people, and the lack of appropriate programmes and services to assist them" (Akanani 2006). For this reason PCM established its programmes to help and support the homeless, jobless youth, as described above.

3.3.2 My involvement in the Akanani programme

As part of the Masters course in Narrative Family Therapy which I attended at the University of Pretoria I joined the Street Centre as a volunteer. One day when I

went into the Street Centre I saw Lizy, a staff member, talking to a drunken old man. Lizy was talking to him with the affection of a loving mother and the old man was listening like a child. The Bible says God listens when human beings cry or talk. Our God is a listening God. I could not understand most of the conversation between Lizy and the old man, because it was in Afrikaans, but by their expressions I understood the feelings involved in that conversation. After some time another drunkard, a younger man, arrived. Lizy spoke to him about his mother, who was begging him to come home. He said he would stop his drinking and go home. These scenes were enough to convince me of the power of and need for street ministry.

So I met Mr Alson, the co-ordinator of the Akanani street ministry. He appointed me to lead Bible devotions every Tuesday for the homeless community. After the Bible classes I could spend time meeting people and talking with them. Sitting at the Street Centre and looking at the faces of the homeless people, I began to try to invite them to come and share their stories with me. As a student of the narrative approach I tried to listen and ask questions deconstructively. Many of the people who come to the Street Centre are youth, and because I am still young, though a pastor, these young people showed that they liked to talk to me. This motivated me to listen to more and more of their stories about homelessness and its various factors. Thus the youth became my main target for conversation, though of course I did not avoid talking with older people, who were free to also share their stories with me.

Our conversations were not without difficulties. The youth to whom I talked belong to various cultural groups such as Sotho, Swana, Tsepedi and Afrikaans. Also, the atmosphere in the Street Centre is very relaxed, nothing like the structured environment of a clinic or therapy room. People move about in the room, talking freely about topics of their own personal choice. However, despite these difficulties, I managed to interact with the youngsters. They shared their stories shaped by the dominant discourse of homelessness. All the stories gave

me insight into the impact of economic factors on their situation and their discourse, the unavoidable economic conditions which pushed them onto the streets and prevents them from returning to a more settled life. I listened to their stories and helped them create alternate stories of hope in their lives.

3.3.3 Context of the stories heard at the Street Centre

The various stories of the youth coming to the Street Centre reveal different dimensions of homelessness. How did these young people become homeless? What do they feel about being homeless? What are the struggles they face every day? These are some of the questions we pondered in these conversations. In sharing their past experiences the youth retell their stories and reframe their experiences. This helps them to see the past, not as something completely negative, but as experiences that can be seen from different angles. This can ultimately lead them to find hope for a new life. “Narrative practice makes use of this understanding of people’s need to find new meaning in their lives, and it is this important element which serves as a motivator in narrative’s emphasis on helping people to re-author their lives toward preferred outcomes” (Abels & Abels 2001: 83). The stories I heard at the Street Centre are typical examples of the re-authoring of lives. As example I can show part of a conversation I had with Joy, a young man who has been homeless for the last eight years, since he left home in his teens when his father died. For a time Joy lived with a partner with whom he had two children, but he left this home too, this time because of relationship problems with his partner.

Renjan: What do you think about leaving your home i.e. leaving your parents?

Joy: It was a necessity at that time.

Renjan: Why do you think it was a necessity?

Joy: When my father died my mother seek another man as her partner.
Then I thought I could not be there.

Renjan: How do you think about that now?

Joy: Being homeless is being powerless. So it is good to avoid such a
situation.

Renjan: You mean, it is not right to come out?

Joy: That is my thinking about my coming out from my wife and kids?

Renjan: How do you feel about homelessness?

Joy: As a homeless one for several years I don't prefer it as advisable. I
wish to go back to my home.

Joy begins by talking generally about his experiences, but as the conversation deepens he reveals that his real desire is to go back to his home. Nobody wants to remain homeless, which is an inhuman condition forced on individuals by circumstances. Enlarging the vision of young people like Joy of homelessness can help lead them to a more hopeful future.

Another example is a young man called Joseph, aged 23, who became homeless because of the poor economic conditions of his family. His father and mother died and he and his four younger sisters lived with their grandmother. She was too poor to support them, so they were starving. To seek a job Joseph left his home and came to the city. At the time of our conversation he had been looking for a job for a year without success.

Renjan: When did you come out from your house?

Joseph: Last year.

Renjan: What circumstances made you to come out from your home?

Joseph: My family is in poverty. My four sisters have nothing to eat. If I also will be there it will be a great burden.

Renjan: How do feel about coming out?

Joseph: It is so sad, but no other way?

Renjan: How do you think now as a homeless?

Joseph: It is not a pleasant experience. I miss my family very much.

Renjan: Do you think you can join with them again?

Joseph: Sure, I hope that I will get a job and can help my family.

Thus in the midst of his struggles with homelessness Joseph still hopes to be reunited with his family. This vision about a hopeful future stems from a better understanding of his present.

3.4 CULTURAL DIVERSITY

'Culture' can be defined and interpreted in many ways. It covers the habits, rituals, lifestyle and language for a group of people, whether this is a clan, tribe or community. "Basically, it incorporates all aspects of the society's life, including

production and technology, economic and family ties, governmental systems and so on” (Erasov & Singh 2006:12). South Africa has white, coloured, Indian and various types of black communities. Each community or tribe has its own cultural artefacts. Culture is formed in a specific social, geographical and historical context. Thus each culture is unique. This uniqueness should be seen as an opportunity not for rivalry but for unity.

Indigenous cultural systems are diverse, and give different meaning systems to the children that grow up in them. For example, cultural values are received through the stories children hear, and shape the social responses of these children as persons. The problem is when indigenous cultures die and is replaced by the generic, post-modern urban culture of the west. “We struggle in our post-modernist world between a dominant culture which emphasizes an instrumental stance and is bound up with the pursuit of freedom, independence, self-reliance and conquest” (Walrond-Skinner 1993:48). Instead of stressing the differences and conflicts between cultural systems, thus, we must strive to protect indigenous cultural values and promote them for the betterment of the community. Protecting these cultural values from the lingering effects of colonialism and the current threat of globalisation is vital in South Africa at the moment. This is why now the trend changes to localising of economies and values.

3.4.1 Beyond colour

Seeing and understanding communities beyond their colour and racial settings is a necessity in South Africa today. Until we see people in this more genuine way, we cannot separate a particular individual or community from their own specific context. This deeper understanding will help us to go beyond colour to find possibilities for working together for the betterment of society. A multicultural context always presents the possibility of miscommunication or lack of communication, and “the local context of the counselling organization is critical in

a multi-cultural environment” (Rawson, Whitehead & Luthra 1999:13). During the apartheid era in South Africa, people were discriminated against on the basis of colour, and non-white communities oppressed. After 1994 we must try in South Africa to rather use colour difference as a possibility, a chance to practice understanding cultural and social contexts and to help each other towards social growth. Colour difference, say management theorists, can be an opportunity for managing resources. For students of culture and of counselling colour or cultural differences can be an opportunity for getting to know each other and growing together through experience.

3.4.2 Understanding cultural differences

The coexistence of different cultures in one society is unavoidable in the post-modern setting. Globalization has opened the boundaries of nations and increased the economic, social and cultural interactions between societies. These interactions are not always easy. “Mutual inter-cultural contacts began in time immemorial and are a constant feature of communication among human communities. Modern culture as a whole is the result of the endeavour of the whole of mankind and the interaction between different cultures” (Erasov & Singh 2006:288). Coping with conflict requires social change, but merely recognizing the existence of diverse cultures will not contribute to this social change; rather a meaningful understanding of diversity is needed. This will not arise from just sitting together and discussing the differences and similarities of cultures in a sophisticated setting. Rather, members of different cultures need to interact in a down-to-earth way, such as by participating in each others’ cultural festivals and artefacts. Another effective interaction is through listening to each others’ cultural stories within the specific context of personal experiences. In this study, I as researcher need to understand the cultural overtones of the stories of the homeless youth, my co-researchers. I have the responsibility to listen to the cultural interactions within myself as the researcher, as well as to those within the co-researchers. At the Street Centre I experienced many stories and other

cultural interactions, such as singing and dancing together and sharing cultural values through Biblical discussions.

3.4.3 Diversity: hindrance or possibility?

Some people think diversity is a phenomenon that divides society and creates hatred between communities. Such people consider diversity as a curse and a hindrance to human development. Of course there are problems created by differences in colour, caste, language and other systems in society. But, as discussed above, diversity also offers immense possibilities. We cannot separate people from their particular cultural and social settings. For example, people worship differently in various languages and styles, all formed by their different geographical, social and cultural settings. The post-modern perspective celebrates plurality, accepting it as inescapable in human interaction. Young people especially now tend to accept the goodness of and celebrate plurality, which can have very positive effects. “In the South African situation, it was precisely the acceptance of diversity which forced politicians to seek a compromise by a creating a federal constitution which promotes the devolution of power to the nine regions” (Maimela 1996:90). This urge to understand different cultures and interact meaningfully must be encouraged. More literature, educational programmes and social events will help this endeavour of knowing each other, to transform differences from a hindrance into a possibility. My experience with the young people at the Street Centre bears this out; though we come from many different cultural backgrounds, and in the beginning I experienced some problems, particularly with language differences, their enthusiasm to share and my willingness to listen to their stories soon overcame these problems and I was able to understand them within their individual cultural contexts.

3.4.4 Cultural stories and youth

Cultural stories have a great impact on the youth and their destiny. Some of the young people I spoke to fear the future and others hate the present. All these responses were moulded by the specific cultural milieu of their backgrounds. A narrative approach to listening to the cultural stories can help them to retell their stories in their present context. In retelling their stories they will find new meanings and values for their life. The cultures of Africa have great potential for such meaning. “On the overall journey of life, African human and spiritual values can call people back to their roots and give them new meaning and purpose” (Healey & Sybertz 1996:15). The young people’s stories carry immense meaning which can support and propagate life. A spiritual-theological interpretation of their stories is a way of understanding these in a practice-oriented theological way. Inculturation of such stories is useful for addressing the contemporary issues these young people are facing. This is not Christianizing African culture or Africanizing Christianity. It is more an encounter of African culture with Christianity, an encounter which brings newness, freshness and originality (Healey & Sybertz 1996:19, 20). Understanding the individual young person’s cultural stories within his/her specific context as story teller will help me to be with him/her in his/her struggles, without westernised or personalised prejudices. Even if some cultural stories have particular meaning in their original setting, the storyteller, having a particular cultural experience, has the right to interpret such stories in light of this experience. One of the young men to whom I listened, Michael, fills his personal stories with cultural stories and understandings. He interprets and responds to such cultural stories and their values from his personal perspective. Thus I have to accord these stories a proper unprejudiced listening to extract the full content of cultural values and traditions.

African religion is rich with rituals and stories. The religious heritage of Africa can be understood only in the light of the stories of African traditional religions. Understanding these religious traditions is necessary for building a suitable

spirituality for our changing modern times. Inculturation in Christianity is an accepted religious approach in faith practice. “Inculturation stresses the encounter of Christianity with the cultural and religious heritage of Africa while liberation stresses the social and economic contexts in which Christianity is lived out” (Healey & Sybertz 1996:21). The mythical stories of African traditional religion have been passed down from one generation to the next with cultural emphases and alterations. Each story can be altogether new when it reaches the next generation. Many stories give the traditional community hope for liberation and power to persevere.

The Sukuma ethnic group has a mythical story about a young man, Masala Kulangwa, and a monster, Shing’weng’we. The story goes like this: Once upon a time, the monster Shing’weng’we swallowed all the domestic animals together with all the people in the world except for one pregnant woman, who hid in a pile of chaff. Later this woman gave birth to a boy and named him Masala Kulangwa. When he grew up he asked: “Mother, why are there only the two of us? Where are the other people?” She answered: “My dear one, everyone else was swallowed by the monster Shing’weng’we.” From that day on, the clever young man started looking for the monster. One day he killed a grasshopper and arrived home singing: “Mother, Mother, I have killed Shing’weng’we up in the hills. Rejoice and shout for joy”. But his mother answered: “My dear one, this is only a grasshopper, not the monster. Let’s roast it and eat it.” On other days he killed a bird, a small gazelle and an antelope. He came to his mother singing and dancing each time, and each time she replied that it was not the monster. Finally in desperation he went to the forest and shouted for the monster, which then appeared. In a great fight, Masala Kulangwa overcame the monster, killed him and cut open his back. Out came the boy’s father, along with his relatives and all the other people of the world. The people made the clever young man their chief, seating him on the Chief’s chair with his mother beside him as queen mother (Healey & Sybertz 1996: 64, 65). This story is an example of the narrative outlook of traditional African communities. This tale gives power to the young

people in the community. It makes them relevant, opening to them the roles of saviour and liberator. These stories influence the young people who grow up hearing them. But because of colonisation and urbanisation, many young people lose the stories of their traditions and world views. The impact of these hopeful stories is then lessened and the young people fall into hopelessness.

3.4.5 Meanings emerging from cultural stories

One of the cultural interactions I experienced at the Street Centre was morning devotions with the young people in which they shared their cultural stories about beauty. This exercise was intended to explore the beauty of each of the countries from which they come. The session included both hopeful descriptions and stories, but also stories of frustration and anger. The following are examples of both these types of narrative. George, from Mthatha, described the beauty of the land in his home area and narrated how new settlements were built on the mountain sides. It was lovely to live on a mountain side, he said, with nice breezes and a wonderful view of the natural scenery. This beauty came to the people because of the apartheid system, which forced black people to move away from cities and live in the meadows and valleys. Michael from Tzaneen shared a similarly hopeful story about the natural beauty of the Northern Province. His area is full of fruit trees and vegetable gardens. He likes gardening and cultivation, which he finds interesting, he says.

Another hopeful story, this time from a different country, was told by Fernandes from Zimbabwe. His land is beautiful because of the Victoria Falls. The water falls down and wets the land for miles around like rainfall. It is a marvellous sight, though also dangerous, because many people drown in the river. The famous Balancing Rocks in the falls are shown on the Zimbabwean currency. In his story, Musihi from Angola celebrates the natural resources of his land, especially diamonds and oil. Musihi tells how, because of the Portuguese invasion, the people of Angola struggled greatly. When the colonisers left, the different tribes fought each other. Now that was over and the country is getting better, though

still difficult to live in; Musihi left because of poverty. I shared the natural beauty of India and the diversity of cultures there. For me, the green vegetation and mountains of the south of India, the beauty of the deserts in the central part and the snowy mountains of the east make a perfect conglomeration of beauty in diversity.

It was fascinating to listen to the stories of people from different cultures. The stories also showed how the culture in which individuals are socialized influences the way they communicate. The way in which the young people shared their stories as well as the content of these stories reveal particular cultural repercussions and uniqueness. Trying to understand the stories within their particular manner of telling helps us to recognize the culture and life realities of the teller more truly. The meanings emerging from such sharing allow us to glimpse the teller's social, cultural and economic hopes and frustrations. When the young people share about the natural beauty of their homes they are sharing their love for and desire to be at home. A feeling of nostalgia is reflected in these stories. Yet though their countries have natural resources, the common people experience frustration because they live in poverty. Thus these same stories point to the naked truths behind the phenomenon of homelessness. However, they also show that the youth telling them all still keep alive hope for a future change in their life situations.

3.5 ECONOMIC REALITIES

3.5.1 Population growth

Population growth has both negative and positive effects on the economic conditions and sustainability of a nation. Some people curse population growth, saying that it hinders economic growth. Other thinkers read population growth as increasing a country's potential for economic development. Economic statistics and demographic figures affirm that population growth in sub-Saharan Africa is

higher than most other regions of the world. “In developing countries, population growth – particularly in cities – is still very large, although the rates of increase are declining” (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HAITAT) 2007:2). This decline is arguably partly due to the recent increase in mortality rates because of AIDS in South Africa, which translates into a decrease in population growth. When the population grows employment opportunities have to increase simultaneously, otherwise unemployment, poverty and deprivation of resources can result. These effects in turn negatively affect the economic growth of the nation. However a decrease in population growth because of HIV/AIDS, instead of improving the situation, can affect the self-confidence of people in their efforts to use resources for development. Many of the homeless youth in Pretoria show this effect, living in a mental and social situation of helplessness. Meaningful interaction can greatly help them to be liberated from this self-doubt. But more social action and better governmental policy are required for the development of the economic conditions of the majority of South Africa’s population, who are poor.

3.5.2 The labour market and unemployment

A labour market has two sides, demand and supply. If there is a demand for labour which the supply does not satisfy, the result is negative economic growth. But at the same time, if supply exceeds demand, the result is unemployment, which becomes a social problem. An unemployed person can be defined as one who is unable to find employment in the given economic conditions. Alternately, an unemployed person can be a person who is unable to find a job that suits his/her choice. Various different kinds of unemployment prevail in society, such as frictional, structural, seasonal and demand-deficient unemployment. Frictional unemployment is created by the movement of workers between jobs. Structural unemployment is caused by long-term structural changes in the economy. Seasonal unemployment arises because of a lack of economic activity in certain areas of production in some seasons. Demand-deficient unemployment is

associated with a lack of aggregate demand. Various kinds of unemployment are found in the different parts of South Africa. Demand-deficient and structural unemployment are the most common types of unemployment among the unemployed youth on the streets of South African cities. This is because the South African labour market is characterised by the simultaneous existence of a secure highly paid labour sector, large enough for the supply of educated/skilled workers, and a very low-paid labour sector, too small for the supply of unskilled workers. Population growth tends to encourage the rural poor to move to urban centres seeking jobs. Legislative factors prevented this to a large extent under the previous regime in South Africa. Now, because of liberalised government policies, urbanization is happening at an alarming rate. To a certain extent urbanization is needed as an integral part of the country's economic development. But when urbanization and a decline in labour needs occur simultaneously, the result is severe unemployment. When the government fails to provide cheap or free accommodation to the large groups of poor people coming to the cities, the result is homelessness. Thus joblessness and homelessness become the twin realities of life on the streets.

3.5.3 The market and competition

Profit is the slogan continuously chanted in the marketplace. To accomplish maximum profit, companies compete with each other. Competition is an inevitable phenomenon in a market, but healthy competition is very rare. The end result of companies' striving for maximum profit and promoting ruthless competition is a minimisation of the role of human beings. The value of ordinary human beings becomes insignificant in the market economy. In economic terms a competitive market will produce better products for a better price, but in personal terms, such competition evicts poor people from the transactions of the market, because they have no purchasing power.

There are some alternatives for competition, which may not ever replace the unhealthy competition in the market but which can challenge current market practice and give hope to the poor. One of such alternative is socially responsible companies. Such companies are socially responsible because of the personal commitment of their staff, which makes social transformation the aim of their work. Religious institutions and organisations can make positive contributions to society by investing in such firms. Another way of curtailing unhealthy competition is co-operative societies. These societies aim to bring the maximum benefit of production and distribution to the basic farmer or small-scale industrialist. These types of co-operative society create a new dimension for the market and a new transaction environment.

3.5.4 The youth and drug abuse

Since South Africa's first democratic elections held in 1994 and return to the international arena, the country has become more vulnerable to the illicit influx of drugs. Young people are at risk from a wide variety of potentially dangerous drugs including alcohol, crack, marijuana and ecstasy. "The fact of the matter is that the existence of any social problem, including the use of alcohol and drugs, depends to a great extent on certain social definitions held within a society. These definitions in turn depend in social attitudes and behavioural norms which are often reflected in and reinforced by law and government regulations" (Scarpitti & Datesman 1980:9). Young people start using drugs without any active awareness of such social norms or attitudes. They are influenced instead by peer group and backgrounds of alcohol abusing families. Whatever the causes of the abuse of alcohol and drugs, this practice does not contribute to the economic and social growth of the country. "The negative impact that alcohol, tobacco- and drug-related practices may have on health, economic growth, social relationships, community life and emotional and spiritual well being is widely acknowledged" (Rocha-Silva, Miranda & Erasmus 1996:3). The negative economic effects for young people are both cause and effect of homelessness.

People on the street tend to be jobless. But life on the streets also offers easy access to drugs, which seem to offer an escape from the misery of life. However, addiction results, and the youth only find their lives more miserable and dark. Alternately, many young people on the streets were drug abusers and alcoholics before they became homeless. The drugs decreased their productive capacity and ability to hold employment, so they end up poverty stricken and on the streets. Then their drug habit prevents them getting out of this hopeless situation. The conditions of life on the streets are not conducive to the correction of drug abuse, but rather encourage it. Destructive peer group influence can also come from other people on the streets. These realities negatively affect the young homeless people's possibilities for a sustainable and growing economic situation.

3.5.5 Economic possibilities

Despite the negative effects of rapid population growth, unemployment, a competitive market economy, drugs and other such things, which are economic realities in South African society, there are also possibilities of liberation and growth. If cities are seen as congested places populated by desperate, ugly, unemployed people, it is easy to lose sight of these possibilities. If we move forward to concentrate on the economic potentials within and for these persons, all citizens can gain the will power and attitude we need to achieve social change. This will surely include the creation of more employment opportunities, which will contribute to economic growth and sustainability in our society.

Economic restructuring is often suggested as a way to achieve economic growth. This restructuring is however an elusive concept with multiple meanings. Scholars on the right, who are market-oriented analysts, focus on the benefits of economic restructuring: job creation, urban revival, greater efficiency and enhanced national competitiveness. Scholars on the left focus on its costs: unemployed blue-collar workers left behind by capital flight, the "missing middle" in the wage structure, displacement caused by gentrification and fiscal crises in

local government. Both sides however generally agree that powerful logic supports economic restructuring as a hope for economic growth. Economic restructuring and its possibilities challenge jobless, homeless individuals not to conform to the negative impacts of changes in society, but rather to work with conviction towards creating possibilities. If the economic policies of the government and the attitudes of the homeless poor in urban centres could change simultaneously, their positive effects would work together and make economic growth possible and visible. This is possible, because my experience shows that despite the harsh economic realities and struggles experienced by street people; generally they have positive attitudes about change in the near future. Even in their frustrations, they see a ray of hope for good things in their lives and in the development of society.

3.6 LISTENING TO THE STORIES OF THE YOUTH

Listening to the stories of young people, as I have mentioned, is particularly interesting, because they have unique perceptions about homelessness, poverty, their lives, habits and so on. The ten young people whose stories I explore in this thesis are no exception. All of them are black except one, who is coloured, and all are male. Their names have been changed to protect their identities. In the following subsections, I present the stories of these ten young men, each exploring their experiences of homelessness in their own context. The headings of the subsections reflect the major theme of each story.

3.6.1 “Being homeless is being powerless”

Joy is a 28 year old youth from the Eastern Cape. His story was told above: when his parents died he was married for a time and fathered two children, but then separated from his wife and has now lived on the streets for eight years. Joy says that living on the streets is not a proper way of life for human beings

because it makes them powerless. Street people mostly live by begging, which gives power to the people from whom they beg. As Joy puts it, “being homeless is being powerless”. When he decided to leave his wife because their relationship had become unhappy, he says, he did not take into account how much worse it is to be homeless and live on the streets. He wishes to go back to his family as soon as possible, but only after getting a job. Joy’s stories reveal some of the hardest experiences of homelessness.

Renjan: How are you doing?

Joy: I am okay.

Renjan: What is your name?

Joy: Joy

Renjan: How long you are in the streets?

Joy: Eight years. It is a long story.

Renjan: If you don’t mind, I would like to hear your story.

Joy: I am from Eastern Cape. I have two sisters. My parents died. After their death I got married and have two kids.

(Then he told the long story of how he came to the streets.)

Renjan: How do you see your present situation?

Joy: Nothing to say.... I was thinking what to say. I am sleeping in the street corners. When it is raining it is so horrible. What I can do?

Renjan: How you are managing now?

Joy: I will roll up all my stuff and move to some shades of shops.

Renjan: How do you managed to have your food?

Joy: I am trying to get a job. But there is nobody to help. I did begging. But it is shameful for me.

Renjan: Can you name your problem or how can you describe your situation in a phrase or word?

Joy: Whole my story is a big name. What else?

Renjan: Can you try to summarise that whole story in one sentence or a word?

Joy: One thing I can say, I am powerless. When I beg I feel powerless. When I am in the streets I am powerless. When I am starving I am powerless.

Renjan: What do you mean by powerless or powerlessness?

Joy: If you have some thing for your needs you are powerful. If you have more money you are more powerful.

Renjan: Money makes a man powerful.

Joy: Yes. Also if you are able to do big things like having a company or something like that, you're powerful.

Renjan: So in the light of your definition of power, you understand your situation as powerless?

Joy: Yes.

The conversation continued in other sessions, and Joy gradually told his story in relation to powerlessness and then retold it with its possibilities of empowerment.

3.6.2 “No other way”

Joseph is a 23 year old youth from KwaZulu-Natal, whose story was also briefly told above. He is Zulu-speaking and has lived on the streets for the last year. His parents died and left him and his four younger sisters to live with his grandmother. She was unable to support them all, and so he left home to find a job. He says that he contacts his sisters regularly by phone, misses his home. He is searching for a job for survival. Though he is glad that his absence from home reduces the burden of his grandmother and sisters, he hates living on the streets. Joseph cannot see any other options for his life, though he believes that God will provide something for him, that Jesus is a God who cares for him. He longs for a Bible to read daily. Joseph experiences homelessness as loneliness and misunderstanding. Even though his family was so poor, he says, they were able to understand each other, whereas on the streets nobody understands each other. Homelessness is a pathetic condition where nobody understands you rightly.

Renjan: Hello Joseph, how is it?

Joseph: Not too bad.

Renjan: That's fine. How you are coping?

Joseph: It's so hard in the streets. Two days I was sick. Nobody was there to look after me.

Renjan: You feel lonely at that time.

Joseph: In the streets, everybody is selfish. They don't care others.

Renjan: How do you expect others to treat you?

Joseph: They can help me by buying some medicines, which are not so costly. Otherwise they can offer me a cool drink or juice.

Renjan: But nobody did.

Joseph: Yes, even they didn't ask me how my condition was.

Renjan: How did that situation and experience affect your relationship with the people in the streets?

Joseph: Now I don't want to talk to them. Even I don't want to face them. I know that there is nobody good to have a company with or to make friendship with.

Renjan: What is your feeling when you think about your family?

Joseph: I was really missing all of them. I know that I was a burden for them, because of poverty there. There is no job. But the fact is there is love. A painful love.

Renjan: You feel missing that love.

Joseph: Really. But I cannot go back. I have to get a job or at least some money to help them. But I am in the streets. No other way.

Renjan: Is there a possibility to search other ways?

Joseph: Now I am not seeing anything on my way... I have to think about that.

Renjan: Yes, that is good to think about other possible ways of survival.

Joseph: Yes, I will.

3.6.3 “I should have a plan”

Andre is a 25 year old who has been homeless for five years. He has a sister living with her family in a suburb of Pretoria. His parents are dead, and he has to support himself. Andre has strong personal beliefs; he is a fruitarian, a person who only eats fruit, which is an expensive way to live. His story reveals faith, confusion and hope. We all need a plan in life, a vision for the future, he says. Andre’s plan is to start a business of his own on the streets. He does not want to be an ambitious big businessman, but just to run a small-scale telephone public booth and a stationary shop. Andre says his plan sometimes conflicts with his faith; the Bible says ‘You don’t have to think about tomorrow, God will provide everything’, yet he also sees that without some business or job he will not survive.

Andre: Hallo, Pastor, how are you?

Renjan: I am fine. How are you Andre?

Andre: No problem. I have some questions about the Bible study today. The Bible says - I don't remember where it is - 'you don't have to think about tomorrow. God will provide everything'. Is that correct?

Renjan: What is your opinion about that?

Andre: I am confused.

Renjan: Can you explain it please. What confuses you?

Andre: If God will provide everything, he is not giving everything to me. He is not giving everything to the poor people here.

Renjan: How do you understand 'everything'?

Andre: Everything means everything I want.

Renjan: Is that everything I want or everything I need.

Andre: If so, I need a job, I need money, I need food. Nothing is there. What can I do?

Renjan: That is a good question, what I can do.

Andre: I don't know what to do.

Renjan: But you know that you have to do something.

Andre: But God will give everything. That is what you said.

Renjan: Does that mean we don't have to do anything, simply sitting, will God

provide everything?

Andre: No, we have to work.

Renjan: How or what can we do to get something?

Andre: Make some plans.

Renjan: Plans for?

Andre: Plans for the future.

Renjan: Ok. What are your views about such a plan?

Andre: I have to think about that... I will do some business.

Renjan: So you started working out something for your future with God.

Andre: Yes. I think so.

Renjan: So?

Andre: I will share something with you next time.

Renjan: That's fine. See you then.

3.6.4 “Hardships on the streets”

Salin is a 30 year old coloured man. Six months ago his mother, his only surviving parent died, and he came to the city seeking a job.

Renjan: How do you manage to be in the streets?

Salin: It is so hard to be in the streets.

Renjan: What do you mean by hard?

Salin: I don't have enough clothing. When the rain comes or in the winter I am struggling. Also it is not safe to sleep in the street.

Renjan: You don't have anything to be stolen, and then what is unsafe in the street?

Salin: Others are making fun of me, by kicking, using harsh words or not allowing me to sleep in some place.

Renjan: How do you feel then about living in street?

Salin: It is so hard and no one should come to the streets. It is a wicked place.

Renjan: How do you survive in these hardships?

Salin: I don't know how I am surviving, but I am living.

Renjan: It is disturbing, is it?

Salin: Yes, it is. Without a job it is so hard to live. How can I beg? How can I get something to eat?

Renjan: Are there people to help you in the streets?

Salin: There are people making fun of me. But there are some people who

look at me with sympathy. They are also not in a condition to help me.
They are homeless and in the streets.

Renjan: But they are not doing harm to you.

Salin: Yes, I am also in their condition, they know that. We cannot believe all
people in the streets. They need something for their needs.

Renjan: Do you have such experiences?

Salin: Once I got a piece of bread. If somebody asked me to share that bread I
don't have a problem to share. But a white guy snatched my bread and
kicked me.

Renjan: That was a bad experience.

Salin: I fought with him for a while. But he was a stout guy. So I stopped and
went away.

Renjan: That type of hardships give you pain.

Salin: Yes, I don't like to be in the streets. I want to escape from here.

Renjan: Are you seeing any opportunity to escape from this situation?

Salin: I can escape only to another street. There also the things may not be
different.

3.6.5 “I repent for being homeless”

Roul is a 26 year old man from the suburbs of Pretoria. His story shows that he believes that every human being should have some place to live and somebody to love. Roul became homeless ten years ago and is still seeking a job. He believes that God will take care of him and provide him with a job. Homelessness, says Roul, is not an enviable status. He sleeps in a night shelter, which is open from nightfall to eight in the morning. In the daytime he wanders here and there in the streets. On some days, in the morning, he comes to the Street Centre. Roul has had many terrible experiences, such as when he was ill for a month with no one to help or take care of him. Roul also recounts his experience of repentance. He regrets the wrong doings of his past, since he believes that if he had been better and avoided certain bad things his life would have been different. He longs to return to his childhood house, but it is no longer his home.

Roul: Pastor, as I shared last time, I repent for being homeless... I came out of my house at my age of sixteen after fighting with my mother. Now I don't know whether she is alive or dead.

Renjan: You are now thinking about your past.

Roul: It is really haunting me. I think that I could be different in my past. I was not like this.

Renjan: In what ways does your past influence you now?

Roul: The ill feeling about my doings. If I were a good boy I could get opportunities.

Renjan: What kind of opportunities?

Roul: I am not sure. But at least I could get my mother's love.

Renjan: You miss your mother and her love.

Roul: That's my fault. I thought that I could live on my own. But now I am in the streets.

Renjan: It's ten years back. Is it?

Roul: Yes, but still it haunts me.

Renjan: You are struggling with that ill feeling.

Roul: Yes, I don't know what to do?

Renjan: What you are doing now?

Roul: I am sleeping in the shelter. In the morning, coming to the streets, wandering here and there. Some days I go to the Street Centre. Your devotions are good for me.

Renjan: How is it good for you?

Roul: It gives new meanings.

Renjan: What kind of meaning, you mean?

Roul: Good meanings. Gives some comfort.

Renjan: Is it dealing with your ill feelings.

Roul: I can see some hope for my life.

Renjan: In what ways you see hope for you life?

Roul: I believe that God will open something for me. I don't want to be in the streets. If I get some job, I will find some place to stay.

Renjan: How will that affect your present doing?

Roul: I can move away from the shelter. I don't have to wander in the streets.

Renjan: How would your new routines influence your feeling?

Roul: I believe that I will get relieved from those wrong feelings. I am praying for that.

Renjan: May God bless you.

Roul: Thank you, Pastor.

3.6.6 “Being helpless”

John from Mafikeng now lives on the streets of Pretoria. He is 30 years old. He has a wife and two children, who live at home in Mafikeng, where the children go to school. John is looking for a job to support his family. According to John, being homeless is being helpless. Though he has a home in his town, in Pretoria he is homeless and struggling for money.

Renjan: Hai, How are you?

John: I am ok.

Renjan: Are you new here? I haven't seen you before?

John: First time I am coming here.

Renjan: You are from?

John: I am from Mafikeng.

Renjan: When did you come here?

John: Last year.

Renjan: Do you have some work?

John: I got some piece job with a construction company last year. In December I went home. When I came back in January, they said there is no job.

Renjan: So, how are you managing now?

John: I am sleeping in front of an apartment.

Renjan: How does your homeless situation affect your daily life?

John: I have to vacate my sleeping place every morning. By six'o clock in the morning everything should be cleared. So I wake up at half past four in the morning. At night I can go there only by 10 o'clock. Until then I have to be in the streets.

Renjan: What do you think about your situation?

John: Being homeless is being helpless. Nobody is there to help with money. If you are a rich man the banks or other rich people will help you. When you are a poor man, no body is there to help you, because the company of the poor man is always with the poor people. They are not able to help. They are also in a position of helplessness.

Renjan: How you are coping with your financial needs?

John: No money, no food, helpless.

Renjan: Work?

John: If I have a work I will have money. I am seeking a job, tomorrow I have to go to Centurion for a job.

Renjan: Did anybody offer you a job there?

John: No, but I have to search for a job.

Renjan: Then what makes you to go to Centurion for a job?

John: Here in Pretoria, see many people are seeking job and so it is so difficult to get one job here. When I go out of the city there may be more chances.

Renjan: So, you see some possibility there.

John: Of course. I hope so.

Renjan: Ok John. All the best for your efforts.

John: Thank you.

3.6.7 “Struggling in the street”

Mzwasi is a 25 year old energetic man from KwaZulu-Natal. He hopes to one day work for himself, but is currently struggling on the streets to find a job. He always seeks opportunities from life in the hope of achievement. Two years of homelessness have taught him the lessons of struggle and surviving.

Renjan: Hello, how are you?

Mzwasi: I am fine Pastor.

Renjan: How was the devotion today?

Mzwasi: It was so good. It was helpful to understand about the Kingdom of God.

Renjan: What is your comment on it?

Mzwasi: It is so difficult to know God is merciful.

Renjan: How it is so difficult, is it in relation with your experiences?

Mzwasi: We all know that God is merciful, but sometimes...

Renjan: Sometimes...?

Mzwasi: Sometimes it is so difficult to find a way.

Renjan: Can you explain it a little more?

Mzwasi: I have no job, trying to get one in many ways.

Renjan: You are trying, but it is not working.

Mzwasi: I have a diploma in security training from KwaZulu-Natal.
(showing the certificates)

Renjan: Are you from KwaZulu-Natal?

Mzwasi: Yes, I am.

Renjan: What pushed you to come to Pretoria from KwaZulu-Natal?

Mzwasi: There is no job.

Renjan: You tried there also.

Mzwasi: Of course, I worked with many organisations, but on a voluntary basis.
They will not pay much but only some allowances.

Renjan: How long are you here?

Mzwasi: Two years. I registered myself with a security company.

Renjan: Then how does it work?

Mzwasi: Working of that need initial capital, an office and security persons.

Renjan: What was your family's response for your coming to Pretoria?

Mzwasi: My mother and two sisters are not interested, but I have no other way.

Renjan: Where are you staying here?

Mzwasi: In the shelter. There I have some friends. They said they will work as the security personals.

Renjan: Are they having the security training?

Mzwasi: Yes, three of them have.

Renjan: They are ready to help you?

Mzwasi: By helping me, they know that they are also getting jobs.

Renjan: What is your plan then?

Mzwasi: I have to approach some companies or government offices, which need security personals.

Renjan: Did you approach some one?

Mzwasi: The problem is I don't have a cell phone. So they cannot contact me. Also they ask about the office, I cannot give the address of Street Centre.

Renjan: Then how do you?

Mzwasi: I am still struggling.

Renjan: What about your friends, what are they saying about these situations?

Mzwasi: They are ready to help. I am looking for the opportunities in newspapers and calling some companies.

Renjan: Do you think it will work?

Mzwasi: I hope so.

Renjan: Try to share with me the further proceedings on that later.

Mzwasi: I will.

3.6.8 “Lonely and angry”

Patrick is a young man from the Eastern Cape. His story is filled with anger against the system, society and eventually himself. He is naturally a scholar and is looking for a job according to his educational qualifications and interests. His story reveals how, though he is surrounded by many people, he feels lonely. He has big ambitions, to found a joint registered company.

Patrick: How are you, Rev?

Renjan: I am okay. How are you doing?

Patrick: I am fine. Thank you.

Renjan: Do you want to share something with me?

Patrick: Yes. I was watching you when you lead the Bible class.

Renjan: What did you watch?

Patrick: I was watching that you are a learned man.

Renjan: How do you evaluate it?

Patrick: I am interested in learning.

Renjan: That's good. How far are you studied?

Patrick: I completed matric. I left home after that in 1997. When I came to Pretoria I joined for a Construction course in Technicon Pretoria.

Renjan: Did you complete it?

Patrick: I did. Completed last year.

Renjan: Then, how do you come to street centre?

Patrick: I have no job. I am staying in shelter.

Renjan: Do you have your family?

Patrick: I am from Eastern Cape. I have nobody there.

Renjan: But when you came to Pretoria you got the opportunity to study a course in Construction.

Patrick: I did some other diploma courses there.

Renjan: Before you came to Pretoria?

Patrick: Yes, in my town. Also I worked with some construction companies. But those jobs were temporary.

Renjan: How do you experience in the streets?

Patrick. I am seeing many people in the shelter and in the streets, but I am feeling lonely.

Renjan: You don't have friends here?

Patrick: Streets are not a good place to have friendships. I have no relatives and I have no friends.

Renjan: What is your opinion in having some friends?

Patrick: I hate that. Friends are cheating. Everybody is selfish.

Renjan: Do you have any experience to say like that.

Patrick: I don't have any particular experience, but I believe so.

Renjan: How you are managing in the streets?

Patrick: I don't have money and food. Inside the town there are different organisations which give food to the street people. I am making use of all such opportunities.

Renjan: Is that ok for you?

Patrick: I am not satisfied. But it is ok for the time being. I have to get a job. When I approach some companies they all need experiences.

Renjan: You have experiences.

Patrick: All my experiences in the field were before my course.

Renjan: But you are experienced and you know the things.

Patrick: Yes, those experiences will surely benefit when I work for somebody.

3.6.9 “Darkness all around”

The South African tribal culture has a great impact on the belief systems of South African people, especially in youth. Some young people see in social change a ray of hope, but are then held back by existing tribal rituals. They drown in an ocean of traditional beliefs. Even if they become Christians they are obliged to follow traditional tribal practices. Michael from Tzaneen has stories that illustrate such tribal beliefs and their Christian versions. These beliefs, in addition to his homelessness, make his life miserable.

Renjan: How are you, Michael?

Michael: I am fine.

Renjan: You are from?

Michael: I am from Tzaneen.

Renjan: Tzaneen is a fertile place in South Africa.

Michael: Yes, it is. But there is no job.

Renjan: Why it is so? There is enough farming.

Michael: But they have their own workers. Some times they will call others for piece work. Other wise many people are jobless.

Renjan: When did you come to Pretoria? What made you to come here? Do you wish to tell your story?

Michael: In 1998 I came to this side. I got a job in Shoshangue that year. I have worked there for one year. At that time and later I am staying with a friend there. When I have work I pay a small rent to that man. When I lose my job he said there is no problem, I can stay there. I stayed there for six months and sought job. I got only some piece jobs. That was not enough to give him a rent. Then one day he told me that I should leave. I asked him the permission to keep my dress and other stuff there for some time. I took it back after six months. He didn't tell anything. But he took some of my clothes and my good shoes within that time. That may be the rent for that time. After that I am in the streets.

Renjan: Now how are you coping up in the streets?

Michael: That may be a correct word for my life-coping. It is not living just coping.

Renjan: What are the things behind that comment? Why you are telling like that?

Michael: It is the experience of me. I am really struggling and worried here.

Renjan: Can you explain it little more?

Michael; Here, I don't have a job. If I could have a job I could go to my home.

Renjan: You miss your family.

Michael: I have two girl children and wife there. Also my mother and three sisters.

Renjan: What is their response to your situation?

Michael: They all feel sorry about that. My two sisters are going to some houses as domestic workers. My girls are going to school. But the problem is my uncle.

Renjan: What is worrying you about your uncle?

Michael: I had six sisters. He killed my three sisters.

Renjan: So sorry about that. How it happened?

Michael: He is an agent of Zion church. There is a prophet. When disease comes he takes my sisters to that prophet and he will give some powder and treats. For my second sister he treated her for two weeks. After that he asked me to take her to some hospital. She died on the second day in the hospital. (Weeping...). I am really worried, he will kill my other sisters.

Renjan: That kind of death really hurts you.

Michael: Yes, I will kill my uncle one day.

Renjan: You are angry towards your uncle.

Michael: Yes I want to kill him. He brought my elder sister to a Sangoma for treatment for stomach pain. That sangoma gave some medicine. Actually after some days my sister died.

Renjan: All these incidents one by one put you in the problem.

Michael: I am in real problem. Don't know what to do?

Renjan: You hope that if you go back you can sort out many problems.

Michael: At least I can save my mother and the sisters.

Renjan: So you have a hope of it.

Michael: Yes, I do have some hope to help them.

Renjan: Yes Michael, that's good. Be in that hope.

Michael: I will tell about my uncle's doings next time. He is not good. He is killing my family.

Renjan: I will be available next time to listen to your stories.

Michael: Thank you.

3.6.10 "Dreaming of better"

Sam is a young man from Cape Town, now living on the streets of Pretoria. He is in a desperate condition, because of a tragedy in his life, but he hopes for better future. He seeks for a job because of his love for his children and the family.

Sam: Pastor, I want to share my story with you.

Renjan: Yes, I love to listen to your story.

Sam: Last October my wife died in a car accident, leaving sixteen days-old twins to me. A drunken man hit my wife and on the spot she died.

Renjan: So sorry about that. It was really shocking.

Sam: I became very angry towards that man. I caught him on his neck. Then that man said sorry. I shouted at him. You killed my wife, you made two kids who were just sixteen days old desolate, and you shattered my life. Then I realised that I don't have the right to take one's life. God will punish him. I released him.

Renjan: It was a confused situation.

Sam: There a policeman came and asked, How can I help you? I said, can you help me by taking care of these kids? I cried. (Crying...)

Renjan: That experience shattered your life.

Sam: Ours was a life without many problems.

Renjan: What was the response of your family members to such a shocking situation?

Sam: It was not believable to my mother. She is still crying. I don't know how to console her.

Renjan: How do you feel that experience now?

Sam: It is still shocking for me. My wife was a good, committed lady. She always urged me to go to the church. But I said, Ok, you go I will come. Instead of going to the church I will go to wine cellars and drink, drink and drink. But by that accident I stopped drinking and never touched it after that.

Renjan: How does it affect your daily life?

Sam: I realised that because of a drunken man this tragedy happened to my life. So I will never drink and drive. Some friend of mine asked me, how can you eat braai along with a coffee or tea? Once I asked my wife to have some beer. But she said I will never take, and I am praying for you to stop. She was a good Christian.

Renjan: The good memories of your wife give a meaning for your life.

Sam: It was nice, but some time pricking. I was not living as her wishes.

Renjan: But now can you live according to her wishes?

Sam: But she is no more to see. I have to live a good life for my kids.

Renjan: How did your experiences affect your relationship with your kids and your family members?

Sam: Thank God, they are three months old now. They are with my in-laws now. I am regularly going there and caring them.

Renjan: It gives more satisfaction to you.

Sam: One of my friends came there. I was bathing the babies. I bathed them one by one. Then my friend said, 'you are good with babies'. Then I replied, 'I have to learn. God gave me the opportunity to learn'. I love my kids.

Renjan: What about your mother and in-laws?

Sam: They all are in sympathy to me. They are always ready to help me. They are taking care of my kids nicely. I thank them really. It is not an easy job to take care of two kids in the same age.

Renjan: When you shared your experiences, how do you feel?

Sam: It gives a kind of satisfaction to me. I love to talk to you.

Renjan: I also love to listen to you Sam.

Sam: Thanks for listening. See you next week.

Renjan: Thanks. See you, bye-bye.

3.7 REFLECTION ON THE STORIES

3.7.1 Possibilities of youth

Youth is a period of emotion and confusion. Often young people struggle to express their emotions creatively and positively. "In counselling young people, intense, raw emotions can be encountered" (Mabey & Sorensen 1995:25). Handling their emotions is very important for them. When we listen to the stories of young people we often detect elements of emotional disturbance. This is not a

reason to blame or condemn them. Instead we have to help the young people to externalize their emotional problems. “Unconditional positive regard – the intrinsic valuing of the client without imposing conditions of worth – is of particular importance when working with young people whose sense of self-worth is often low” (Mabey & Sorensen 1995:26).

Often when talking to rich youth I challenge them to find new ways of bringing meaning into their lives by helping the poor. When talking to poor youth, I try to help them to see possibilities for their lives. To work among African youth is very challenging for me. The epidemic of HIV/AIDS and the aggravating factor of crime are some of the harsh realities I have come to know about in dealing with South African youth. The South African people, irrespective of race, class, age or gender, are engulfed in an ever-increasing wave of disease and crime. “Quoting figures from the South African Institute for Race relations, SAPA (2000) reports that the HIV epidemic will decrease the country’s population growth rate by 71% over the next decade. It is estimated that six million South Africans will have contracted the HIV virus by 2005, leaving one million children orphaned” (Prins & Van Niekerk 2001:12). The number of street children and youth are also increasing. However, despite all these negative factors in society, I believe that youth have the ability to overcome the struggles of life. As I am from another culture, an Indian culture, which has many similarities with African culture, I can see in the diversities of African culture promising possibilities for innovation. The young people I talk to take me on a journey through their life stories as African youth. They have the imaginative power to create new stories out of their life stories. If I as facilitator move with the teller through the story, I can help the teller search out new possibilities and work towards them.

3.7.2 Passion for change

Politicians always raise the slogan, “The young people are the power of today”, or, “They are the future of the country”. How homeless youth are practically to

become the real future of the country is the question. Instead of completely relying on the promises of politicians, young people have to develop an attitude of self confidence and really believe that they are the future of the nation. “[Y]oung people need to believe that they have a future if they are to fulfil their potential in shaping the new South Africa” (Johnson 2005:11). Nowadays, youth identity is shaped and dictated to a large extent by the multinationals through the media, who market their products. The craze for mobile phones, fashion dresses and shoes are examples of such youth trends. These trends result in a youth culture which may not be in line with social norms or tribal values.

In my personal experience I have found that youth have the potential to change. My theological understanding always challenges me to help the youth towards this change. When I work with youth in a parish setting and outside I feel a missionary urge, like that expressed by Jesus in his Nazareth Manifesto: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk. 4:18-19). My vision and passion for the poor are also influenced by the words of Jesus about the last judgement. “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ ” (Mt. 25:40). These verses are the biblical basis for my passion for the poor in society. Reading of and experiencing social realities further fuel my intense urge to help the poor and to work for their liberation.

3.7.3 Reflections on my role

My involvement with the youth is based on sharing. I feel concern for the poor people in society, especially the youth. In my pastoral practice I try to give more time to ministering to children and youth. I am eager to listen to their stories. Many pastors tried to avoid the youth, because they ask critical questions, which are difficult to answer sometimes. The interesting thing I have come to

understand from my experiences is that the youth often do not need concrete answers to all of their queries. Instead they just need someone to listen to them patiently, someone to understand them. We hold a youth fellowship in Pretoria twice a month, especially for university students. At a recent meeting the young people did an exercise in which they each anonymously commented on each person present. Most of the youth mentioned that they experience me as ‘an accessible person’. This was a welcome comment to hear from the youth.

I have also experienced times when my concern for and relationship with the youth have encountered opposition from elder groups in some places. These times I took as challenges and encouragements. I chose youth as my target for this research because it is my inner conviction that youth have many possibilities. But, because of drugs, alcohol and other social evils, many young people are spoiling their futures. We have to help the youth for the salvation of society and the future of the nation. Of course youth is an age of possibility. But it is also a time of confusion, and so it is vital that the youth have somebody to listen to them in their confusion, or they end up in social deviance and even suicide. Thus it is essential to help the younger generation in all ways possible.

3.8 CONCLUSION

As the waves touch each and every corner of the sea shore, my experiences with the homeless youth touched each and every corner of my perceptions, understanding and belief systems, and are helping me in my profession. But it is a great task to explain where the waves touched and the effects they had. Listening to the experiences of homeless youth in Pretoria has opened for me a new world of social, economic and theological realities. As they move on with their stories they give me hope about the future and about the youth. The shared stories in this chapter give us an introduction to the economic realities of the life experiences of these homeless young people. The examples showed the

dominant discourses of homelessness and its consequences. Narrations of further dimensions of their stories and their interpretations of these stories will focus on the economic factors in their experiences and in the discourses they use to understand their homelessness.