

CHAPTER ONE

POSITIONING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In my current position as the Coordinator for the training of Lay Ministries in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) I realised the significant role that lay-people play in the lives of people and perform an outstanding ministry. In my role of training laypeople I have observed that laypeople have the skills and the capacity to take care of one another. The laity are people who serve in a non-ordained position in the church, but who can also render a service like an ordained priest or minister. The reason that I have ventured into this research is that the stories of the people who did the research with me speak about managing a church in the absence of a fulltime pastor. The stories relate the journey of people who travel together from a perspective of love, care, support, healing and transformation.

Although I am an ordained minister in the MCSA (Methodist Church of Southern Africa) during my time of being a fulltime minister in a congregation I really observed and experienced a deep level of a growing maturity in the skilfulness and spirituality of lay people. I remember where I came from as an ordinary layperson in the MCSA. In reflecting on my past I could still see myself involved in the ministry of pastoral care, healing and transformation, but doing it under the leadership of a fulltime ordained minister, to whom I had to give feedback on all important matters.

In my own capacity as a fulltime minister in a congregation I experienced the responsibility for and initiating of a ministry as something only done by the minister. There were only a few lay leaders who had the courage to implement certain important ministries, but still with my consent and under my authority. In the beginning my co-researchers saw this research as only writing down of the history of this congregation. They were thrilled and enthusiastic to see this congregation materialising but only realised later the importance of their ministry and how they performed it.

The people who ventured with me in this research are people whom I have met in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) while I was still a chaplain and a part time minister at one of the Methodist Churches in Thaba Tshwane. Most of these people are still in the military environment but others are in the Public Service and other departments of the government. In this research they are known as co-

researchers because in narrative research one does not use the term clients or counselees but rather co-researchers. According to Gergen in Demasure and Müller (2007:7) in the process of social construction one should guard against seeing one person as the opponent and not as somebody that is participating in the construction of meaning. I would like to regard my co-researchers as people who are participating in this process of research from the perspective that they can give meaningful inputs. In narrative research we look at a participatory action research that will first and foremost be to the advantage of the participants (Kotzé and Kotzé 2001:9). Participatory action research does not look at the co-researchers as objects but as participants who are actively involved in the process of research and the researcher as the participant observer. My understanding of this statement made by Kotzé and Kotzé is that in research all participants have the right to be heard in the construction of new knowledge. All the information that is gathered in this research is taken from the stories of my co-researchers and in doing this both the researcher and co-researchers learnt in the process of doing research. In comparison with the term participants or co-researchers, there is also the term “client” (also used as patient) and commonly used in the medical field of therapy. It assumes (though it is by no means still completely operative) that the “doctor” is the one who “does something” and the “patient” is the one who passively has “something done” to him or her. The term client however, assumes a similarity between the professional and the person seeking assistance. This term is used in the social work community and acknowledges the partnership of the client in the process (McDonald 2008: September). Their inputs and stories are the most valuable in this research as they guided the process of research.

One day my co-researchers invited me to celebrate a church service with them in commemoration of the founding of this new congregation. When I met my co-researchers, they met in one of the houses of a couple, who felt led to offer their house, to start this new church. It was not only the start of a new congregation but they were already involved in one another’s life stories. When I came on board they wanted their stories to be written down so that the history of the church could be heard. I questioned them on why they wanted this church’s history to be written down. They responded that they know that they can take care of and support one another without the involvement of a fulltime pastor. It was at this stage that I tapped deeper into why they started a new church and did not continue to worship at the church where I used to worship with them. Their answer was that they are not from Pretoria and feel the need to support foreigners who feel lost in Pretoria. For sometime they have journeyed with people who suffer and experience death and dying, divorce,

sickness and other issues related to their situation. They felt that when I left that church after the end of my term of ministering there, they no longer felt the involvement of someone who could keep the flock together. In my absence they started meeting and having prayer meetings and other social activities like we used to have. I was surprised when one day I got a telephone call from one of them telling me that they have started their own congregation. I made it quite clear to them that I will not journey with them in the capacity of a minister shepherding a flock but will use this opportunity as a research project. After a long conversation they agreed and in the process of brain storming this new venture they were thrilled with what they might achieve from this research. The overall aim and specific objectives of this research are outlined in point 2.

The research procedure will be discussed in section 4 of my thesis and is outlined as follows:

- 4.1 Description of the context of research.
 - 4.1.1 Historical background of the context.
 - 4.1.2 My relationship with the context.
 - 4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to practical theological research.
 - 4.1.4 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm.
- 4.2 The in-context experiences.
 - 4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers
 - 4.2.2 Methodological implications.
 - 4.2.3 Ethical Guidelines
 - 4.2.4 The effective move from “listening to experiences” to “ describing the experiences”
- 4.3 The collaborative interpretation and description of experiences.
- 4.4 Description of experience and traditions of interpretations.
 - 4.4.1 Valuable inputs from the scientific community.
 - 4.4.2 Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research.
- 4.5 Religious and spiritual aspects: God’s presence.
- 4.6 A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.
- 4.7 The development of alternative interpretations, that point beyond the local community.
 - 4.7.1 Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research.
- 4.8 My own story as part of journey to a new land.

The theological point of departure for this research is based on the postfoundationalist theology, which involves the narrative approach that is embedded within a social constructionist paradigm. This research also shows that although in the beginning my co-researchers had been sensitised by a “Six Calls Model” of doing mission in a congregation, they quickly realised that a “one-size-fits-all” model could not be used in their case. The essence of this model and why my co-researchers wanted to use it is discussed in section 1.2.1. The importance of this research is to demonstrate how lay people can take care of one another in a process of healing and transformation in a congregation where a fulltime minister has not served them.

The theme of this research developed from the perspective that my co-researchers were concerned about the writing up of the history of their congregation. The theme also engendered from the narratives of how they took care of one another. Later their narratives made sense and guided them towards an action of what they were able to do in one another’s lives.

1.2 The research as a journey

The point of departure for research is not an easy exit or approach. Having the metaphor (refer to a journey) in mind one needs to be conscious of an expedition that starts with a collection of treasure that underscores the trip. In this research the compilation of valuable treasures stipulates the point of departure and angle from which one understands the journey and the direction it should go. My understanding of positioning, in this research is influenced by the treasures of how I understand epistemology and the construction of reality.

As researcher one becomes enticed by different epistemological points of departure which are actually so intertwined that it becomes difficult to give a clear logical structure to the different starting points. According to my interpretation of doing research, a researcher is mindful of the fact that he or she should choose a scientific paradigm or research process, which concurs with his or her own perception of the world or view of people and their own convictions. As researcher I felt comfortable to associate myself with a narrative pastoral theology, which is well established in a postmodernist approach to theology. Being led by this approach I concentrated on a theological spiritual point of view, which is emphasised by a pastoral narrative theology. Together with the postmodernist approach I also aligned myself with the thinking of a social constructionist paradigm of how people look at one another and the world. The social constructionist paradigm helped me to choose the narrative

approach as the foundation of a participant, co-traveller or co-constructor of a shared story in a research process.

1.2.1 General background of “Journey to a New Land”.

A few years ago the Methodist Church of Southern Africa looked at a “Six Calls Model” for doing mission in Southern Africa as a means of journeying to a new land. This research is further motivated by a statement that Rev Peter Storey a Supernumerary (retired) Methodist minister makes in his book, “Journey begun”, about how God moves a whole people into newness. This book speaks about a Convocation, which was held in 1994, and was named “Journey to a New Land”. This book verbalizes the sensitive issues of ordinary lay people as discussed in this Convocation of 1994 and how they see the mission of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in a new South Africa (Storey 1995:2-31). He poses the following question: “Is it possible that a church such as ours needs, not only faithful people, but a new birth as an institution?” “A new way of living in community and a new way of doing things for Christ” (Storey 1995:iii).

This statement, “A new way of living in a community and a new way of doing things for Christ” was the confirmation for my co-researchers to venture on their mission. This venture was not only about mission but a new spiritual birth and journey for them, as some were never involved in church activities or leadership before. The above mentioned statement and question reminds me of John Wesley the founder member of the Methodist movement, who was extremely conscious about getting converts together in order that they should encourage one another in the faith. Wesley’s new way of doing things for Christ made him suffer great opposition. He instituted the “class system”, which provided the first level of pastoral care for the people called Methodists. In contemporary terms the “class system” is called a “cell group” or a bible study group. In the class system people would read and discuss scripture and how it relates to their context. Wesley was able to do this, because he was familiar with the science, politics, literature, and economics of his time. The bible formed the basis of his theology and together with historic Christianity he reacted to personal, ecclesial, and societal issues. In his theological reflection he never diverted from pastoral, administrative, or evangelical duties, which lead to the transformation of peoples’ lives. “It was the thread that held together the fabric of his being, and he expected no less of his preachers and class leaders.” (Maddox 1998:23)

The “class system” was also instituted for people who were mindful of pastoral care and how they could socially and spiritually look after one another and look at their needs in relation to God’s saving grace. The “class system” consisted of a group of twelve people with a leader who met regularly to encourage one another spiritually through scripture reading and prayer. The “class system” contributed to the immediate pastoral and caring needs of the people and also monitored their spiritual growth. Wesley regarded ‘fellowship’ and ‘discipline’ two aspects of the Christian life and growth, as essential. In his mentorship he was open to new ideas, which would improve the effectiveness of his ministry in helping people to grow spiritually. In helping people to grow spiritually he also opened up the awareness of ‘care’ as an act of grace. “He was concerned also that Methodists should exhibit a level of simplicity and modesty in every aspect of their lives.” (Hulley 1987:23)

Rev Storey starts his book in the light of a new vision “The Journey to a New Land” to prepare the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for the transition from resisting Apartheid oppression to sharing South Africa’s reconstruction. As Storey referred to the past, I became impressed with the statement that he makes in saying that as the church journeyed, God took hold of them and showed them that it was not what the church wanted that was at fault, but how they were going about it (Storey 1995:iii).

In the new process, the journey became a new road, which the church had never travelled before. Storey sees this new process of change as a story told to set individuals and congregations free to serve God in a new way. He regards it as an unfinished story, which identifies Christian discipleship as a journey, not a destination. In most Methodist churches especially in rural areas, this journey manifested itself already in the way that ordinary congregants could care for and also listen to one another and could take bold decisions concerning life in the congregation. The first Convocation (consisting of ministers and lay people), of “Journey to a New Land”, exposed a deep longing among our Methodist people for the new wine of spiritual renewal and a confidence that God wants to pour out this gift. It also identified a process of worshipping, listening and consulting, which began to set people free to think in new ways. According to Storey, the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) was concerned about a process that needs to be followed so that the people at grass roots level should decide on the process and not the hierarchy. “If our people are to really own what comes out of this, stop planning from the top-down. Let the people themselves write the agenda – then it will be their journey.” (Storey 1995:2)

1.2.2 The Six Calls Model

The “Six Calls Model” challenged my co-researchers to venture on a journey of care, support and spiritual upliftment, which led to a process of healing and transformation. The Journey to a New Land was a bold initiative aimed at re-inventing Methodism so that people called Methodists could become equipped to meet the challenges of a transformed sub-continent and a new millennium. A deep longing among the Methodists to become spiritually renewed and a confidence that God wants to give them this gift brought about this re-intervention during convocation in 1993. The delegates to this convocation were determined that real change that was frequently blocked by practical traditionalism and institutional inactivity should this time materialize. This convocation members or delegates also identified that being led by the Holy Spirit one needs to worship, listen and consult with one another and be able to become liberated and think in a new way. The new openness to God and to one another made people aware that Methodist structures were imprisoning rather than liberating God’s Spirit. “It was important to take the process forward, systematically, involving more and more people on the way, but it was also crucial that visible changes would happen in a definite time-frame.” (Olivier 1996:1)

The “Six Calls Model” fits into the description of experience and traditions of interpretation of the historic past of my co-researchers from a perspective of faith and it also has traces of tradition in chapters three and four. The following “Six Calls” were identified in a process of talking and listening to one another so that a new way of being church could materialize:

1. A deepened spirituality for all our people in the life of the church.
2. The life and work of the church be directed towards God’s mission rather than maintenance. Methodists’ believe that there is no participation in Christ without participation in His mission to the world. The challenge for every Methodist is to have a clear biblical vision of the church, which actually flows from the biblical view of God. This view corresponds with the term ‘mission’, which the church interprets as “sending or sent”. Mission is not something that Methodists do or see as projects that are undertaken somewhere else, but a position that the church occupies of “being sent”.
3. We discover every member of the ministry or the priesthood of all believers (refer to section 5 in chapter one.)
4. To truly express what it means to be one so that the world may believe. The church as the body of Christ is supposed to take on the character of God. Since God is a missionary God, God’s people are missionary people.

5. Re-emphasize servant leadership and discernment as a model for leadership and decision-making. The ministry of all Christians consists of service for the mission of God in the world. The mission of God is best expressed in the prayer that Jesus taught his first disciples in Matthew 6: 9 -13. All Christians therefore are to live in active expectancy: faithful in service of God and their neighbour; faithful in waiting for the fulfilment of God's universal love, justice, and peace on the earth as in heaven. Methodists believe that the ministry of all Christians is shaped by the teachings of Jesus. The handing on of these teachings is entrusted to leaders who are gifted and called by God to appointed offices in the church. Some are called to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 11 – 12). For these persons to lead the church effectively, they must embody the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries and servant leadership. The Methodist Church has recognized that laypersons as well as ordained persons are gifted and called by God to lead the church. The servant leadership of my co-researchers as people with different gifts is essential to the mission and ministry of this congregation. The obligation of servant leadership is the forming of Christian disciples in the covenant community of God in the world.
6. To set the ordained Ministers free for their primary vocation of preaching, teaching and spiritual guidance (refer to section 5 in chapter one). The ordained ministers are called to a lifetime of servant leadership in specialized ministries among the people of God. Ordained ministers are called to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, hopes of the world and the promise of God for creation. Within these specialized ministries, deacons are called to ministries of Word and Service, and ordained ministers devote themselves to Word and Sacrament and wholly to the work of the Church and to the building of the ministry of all Christians.

In starting their congregation these “Six Calls” sensitized my co- researchers and will be discussed in chapter three. In this chapter one realizes that the “Six Calls Model” was only a guide that sensitized them but at the end of the research together we came up with a new method of ‘Care Giving’ and this coincides with the position in terms of a theological paradigm.

1.2.3 Background of the Trinity Family Church

When people write their own agenda, they start with a journey that they have prescribed and planned for. This journey portrays the vision, mission and decisions that a congregation takes when it moves from one point to another, noting the mission that is at hand. This research is, based on a congregation called Trinity Family Church, who used the model of “Journey to a New Land” as outlined in the book written by Storey to start their own congregation without the leadership of a full time or ordained minister. This research constitutes all the stories of the establishment of the Trinity Family congregation, which according to the Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a society, in a circuit consisting of a group of six churches, in a district, which is a group of 35 to 40 circuits together.

The people of this congregation are predominantly from a military and public service background. Apart from their professionalism in their institutions, they are laypeople who knew very little about planting and managing a church. Prior to the establishment of this congregation, they had never been involved in any church activities, which could have groomed them in these skills. One of their strong characteristics in their previous churches was only to support the church financially.

This church started because of the need of a support system for people who were not previously from Pretoria. The need arose when someone realized that there are people living in the Valhalla area of Pretoria who are in need of a church and a support system that would bring them closer to God. Constant dialogue and interaction help to detect and determine a clear picture of unity when people are open to one another’s needs and challenges. The people of the Trinity Family church have been sensitized by the “Six Calls Model” of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa of planting new churches and doing mission. The essence of this congregation is built from the perspective of love, care and spirituality among people who do not have extended families living in Pretoria. This statement could be linked to Wesley’s definition of a society as quoted by Hulley (1987:25) in Works VIII 268: “A society is no other than, a ‘company of men (those days meant people) having the form and seeking the power of Godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, to watch over one another, in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation”.

This journey of love, care and support started with the members of 6 families that have grown now to 60 adults and 25 youngsters. The church activities consist of Sunday morning worship, prayer meetings and bible studies at different houses, youth

development programmes, home based care for the sick, door to door visitations, outreach to the needy, fundraising and social events that empower them and give them a sense of belonging. These activities became events, where people started to discuss their needs and concerns about practical love, care and support. It is only at the heart of these events that this congregation could relate to Storey's statement: "A deep reservoir of concern had been tapped and it was clear that the people wanted to be heard." (Storey 1995:2)

As I listened to the personal and family histories of my co-researchers as will be explained in the following chapters, I could sense a deep concern of people who are living together in a community and yet have a positive awareness of the value of cultural regeneration under circumstances that make them feel connected as a newly established congregation. I also sensed the skills and togetherness of these people and this prompted me to do some research at the request of this community. My curiosity was further sensitized when a man who died of cancer, experienced and witnessed the caring skills of the people of this congregation. *"I have found a church where I felt free to serve God. My soul has been fed spiritually and now on this bed I can feel the closeness of friends who became like a family to me and my house."* (November 2006). This was a personal talk that I had with Johan Heunis who died in March 2007. I then realized that doing theology contextually is to take into account: "the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture ..." (Bevans 1992:1)

2. OVERALL AIM AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES.

The personal talks and other group discussions of my co-researchers moved me in my way of listening to life-changing narratives. The overall aim of this study is to listen to the narratives of Christians who have taken up the responsibility to care for and support one another in order to understand their stories of cultural regeneration as a pastoral community.

The research question as taken from the overall aim is: Is it possible for ordinary laypeople to start and manage a church based on love, care and support and which stumbling blocks stand in the way of such a goal?

In view of the overall aim, the specific objectives would be:

1. To listen to and understand the stories of love, care and support of these people.
The stories of love, care and support developed from the stories of painful situations and problems.

2. To listen and explore the spiritual qualities of these stories and the connection which, brought about healing and transformation. The stories of listening and exploration were used in a process of guidance and support which led to healing and transformation of my co-researchers.
3. Together with the co-researchers we would co-construct and develop a new meaning of care, and support that would lead to a new spirituality of doing ministry.

3. EPISTEMOLOGY, POSITIONING AND METHODOLOGY

Every researcher positions him or herself from a set of values regarding how or what he or she understands about the reality of positioning. Before any researcher can attempt a research project one has to look at the perspective from which a researcher would look at the world or people with whom he or she interacts. The point of departure for any research project is centred on what knowledge is available for the research project and how the researcher will interpret this knowledge. It is also important to note that the researcher approaches the research from a certain field of knowledge and interacts with other fields of thought. It is important to note that the researcher makes a sound decision for each position of approach to the research. A meaningful epistemology is necessary for the existence of rational thinking and reasoning.

A particular approach is taken with the necessary confidence and integrity to choose a scientific paradigm or research approach, which will complement the researcher's perception concerning the world or people or convictions. My approach to this research comes from a narrative pastoral theology, which finds its roots in a postfoundationalist approach to theology, which harmonizes a spirituality that is contextual and liberates people to think, support, care and act differently in coping with life's difficulties. I was also sensitised by a social constructionist concept, which helped me to look at a world that is socially constructed.

When a researcher approaches a research project, he or she looks at the theory of knowledge, which may be driven by three main questions:

- "What is knowledge?"
- "What can we know?"
- If people think they can know something the way everybody does then the question arises. *"How we know what we know?"*

- Greco and Sosa explain that Plato considered knowledge as a true belief on which someone can give an account of or an explanation. Greco and Sosa looked into the misrepresentation of epistemology and analysed it as:
 - (a) the quest for certainty,
 - (b) the attempt to find absolute foundations,
 - (c) the attempt to legitimate other disciplines, such as science,
 - (d) the project to contest scepticism (Greco & Sosa 1999:2).

Janse van Rensburg (2000:2) defines epistemology as a mental attitude, which complements certain ideas that have an effect on people's behaviour. I agree with both scholars in my perception that epistemology integrates different theories under the same understanding. It integrates people's personal experiences and shows how people understand what they comprehend about their experiences in the world. During this research, I became aware of my own epistemological basis of knowing the world. I became mindful of what I need to understand concerning the way in which my co-researchers see the world and how they made distinctions and separated their experiences.

Before the composition of a research project can be submitted one needs to look at the different angles or approaches from which a researcher would view the world and people or interpret problems. This approach will influence the researchers' therapeutic stance and allow him or her to understand how people perceive their own experiences and how these experiences function. According to Browning (1991:55) "Strategic practical theological thinking drives the theologian to understand the concrete situation in which people should act." Janse Van Rensburg (2000:2) uses the term paradigm shift to explain epistemology as a certain frame of mind from which people gather knowledge about a particular subject. I am content with the statement made by Janse van Rensburg (2000:2) that people find direction when they gather knowledge, which could persuade them into a certain frame of mind. This agrees with Van Meygaarden (2005:9) as she quotes Auerswald (1985) that, "epistemology means a paradigm of paradigms or a meta-paradigm, which is a theory of knowledge". This statement corresponds with Janse van Rensburg (2000:2) that sees epistemology as a frame of reference, which is used as a point of departure in the process of gathering knowledge and organizing it to form a conclusion. I interpreted this knowledge, as what my co-researchers experience or perceive is what they know and understand concerning their situation of relocation, love, care and support. The epistemology of

postfoundationalist practical theology expects from me as a pastor and theologian to understand people and their experiences as they function at different levels.

The philosophical reasoning about epistemology is that it is the study of very important restrictions and other characteristics of the processes of knowing, thinking and deciding. Gregory Bateson, who was an anthropologist and social scientist, makes this statement clearer, when he defines epistemology as the theory that is a combination of a branch of science and a branch of philosophy. As science epistemology is the study of how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think and decide. “As philosophy, epistemology is the study of necessary limits and other characteristics of the process of knowing, thinking and deciding.” (Bateson 1979:246)

My understanding of epistemology is the study of the gaining of knowledge that forms the basis of how we think and reflects the knowledge, which is investigating or searching for truth to discover facts or causes concerning the composition of our foundation for knowing anything, with the belief that things can be known. The foundationalist perspective of epistemology as being rejected by Grenz and Franke justifies that beliefs could be known. “The Enlightenment epistemological foundation consists of a set of incontestable beliefs or unassailable first principles on the basis of which the pursuit of knowledge can proceed.” (Grenz and Franke 2001:23) They described, the foundationalist view as, the acquisition of knowledge, which is similar to the construction of a building, because knowledge must be built on a sure foundation. My interpretation of a foundationalists view is that all beliefs are warranted and is based on basic beliefs, and that knowledge is attainable only if some substance operates as a positive foundation for the rest. Foundationalism is a theory of knowledge or category of epistemology which takes for granted that all knowledge is built upon certain main beliefs, givens or indisputable facts. Foundationalism holds on to the theory of justification, which epistemologically justifies basic beliefs or a chain of beliefs that are supported by a basic belief or beliefs. “On this view, beliefs cannot justify or support themselves, even in the presence of other supporting premises.” (Mc Grew 2003:3)

Foundationalism has also been challenged by rationalism and empiricism to express their epistemological position. The rationalists hold the belief that truth can only be attained through reason. The rationalists claimed that knowledge could be thoroughly thought through and be bound into commonly accepted rules of knowledge. The

mathematical, rather than the experimental side of science impressed Descartes who was a rationalist. He believed that only directly intuited clear and distinct ideas provided us with certainty, for sense-impressions are confused and unreliable. “The mind apprehends a priori ideas which are not dependent on experience for their vindication.” (Barbour 1966:31)

In my postmodern perception about knowledge, I agree with the postmodernist idea that human beings do not have from birth or just naturally, because people experience situations in their lives differently and convey messages from those worlds and formulate certain perspectives of experience. When different worlds of experience are brought together, people start interacting with those worlds, which can give common meaning to the participants.

The pre-modern world, which was prior to the period of the Enlightenment viewed reality as basically metaphysical. This worldview emphasized that a person's ethical nature could be formed by obtaining the qualities of integrity through discipline, thought and devotion to these ideals. The pre-modern thought, viewed religion as the most important concept in every area of life, in conjunction with politics, science and morality. God's will was the centre of political power and influence, ethical policies and scientific laws and it was also the direct good reason of everything that happened. Nature was assumed to be a complete mechanical system of rigid cause-and-effect, governed by exact and absolute laws, so that all future events are predictably determined. The materialistic, mechanistic philosophy of natural world occurs with the finding of a new theory of cause-and-effect, which eventually took the place of the old pre-modern theory. Modernity embarked on the scientific revolt and the detection of a more naturalistic, less spiritualistic world perspective.

The following three conditions come from modernist knowledge:

- a. The appeal to meta-narratives as a foundationalist condition of validity,
- b. The outgrowth of strategies of legitimisation and exclusion.
- c. A desire for criteria of legitimacy in the moral as the epistemological domain (Vanhoozer 2003:9).

The scientific report of Lyotard concludes that science legitimates itself with reference to a meta-discourse in appeal to grand narratives. Modern discourses like science appeal to meta-narratives that legitimate it. Lyotard's analysis puts in the centre the role of meta-narratives as the master story that serves as a comprehensive

explanatory framework for everything else. Narratives, which subordinate, put in order and explain other narratives (Lyotard 1984:30).

The modernists propose that true knowledge of understanding can be obtained through objective observation. The modernist epistemology is rooted in the enlightenment assumption that observers can be separated from what ever is being observed. Descartes believed that people could continue to restructure the foundations of an objectively existent (mind-independent) world whose reality could no longer be assumed in an uncomplicated, rational way. “Descarte’s attempt to provide a new foundation for philosophy in his famous declaration ‘cogito ergo sum’ (‘I think, therefore I am’) conceived as an absolute, unquestionable ground of knowledge.” (Norris 2000:7) His notion was that people can use this incontestable truth to reach further truths, which are just as reliable. He also thought that people could know they exist, therefore we know there is such a thing as existence. The knowledge and question about “who I am” became debatable by human reason. People reasoned that if there is something like existence then we know God exists. God created the world therefore we know God is alive. After a few centuries came Kant with his attempt to provide a transcendently justified account of the various human faculties, that present the cognitive understanding, practical reason, aesthetic judgement, and reason in their “pure” speculative modes. Modernists believe that some of our concepts do not come from experience but one can reason about it and that truth is a fixed idea. “Epistemology becomes a study of how people or systems of people know things and how they think they know things.” (Keeny 1983:13)

The modernist frame of mind, qualifies scientific proof and the success of science, which determines the worldview of people. Scientific knowledge could be used, as a power to shape perception and interpretation in one direction rather than in another (Brueggemann 1993:7). In different situations it has been experienced and proved that people who hold the power are only interested in what they know and how influential they become due to what they know. Throughout the years the scope of knowledge has been put together by human beings and shows that knowledge is not only an essence of fixed objectivity. My understanding of a modernist perspective is that all facts are taken into account to explain events and reality, but with the belief that the explanation given is done without any resort to anything incredible. They also believe that events that happen in the existing world take place not because of the determination of some unseen divine being, but because of material or social realities that bring them about. According to Erickson (1998:16) modernists believed that

observation and experimentation are the sources from which our knowledge of truth is built up and knowledge was seen as objective, which could attain certainty.

Anderson's explanation of modernity rejects the denial of Nietzsche's declaration of objective facts in Janse van Rensburg (2000:11) that there are no objective facts but claims that there are no facts only interpretations. Anderson (2001:16) refers to the modern period as a time that theory continued to dominate practice, with epistemological and hermeneutical models positioning the establishment of a practical theology. Anderson understands the modern idea that truth and interpretation form the hermeneutical bridge by which reality informs theory and theory determines practice.

He also quotes Ballard and Prichard who favour the habitus/virtue model of Hauerwas who believes that truth is found in the community of shared meaning, which eventually develops into wisdom. Anderson discards this model and sees the weakness in it being that practice has only admission to truth through theory. He expresses his appreciation of the groundwork made by Bonhoeffer, that a praxis-orientated theology through an ethic of discipleship and obedience, where theory emerges only through engagement with truth as an ethical demand in the form of the claim of Christ through the other person. "The modern mindset valued objective certainty, based on rational rather than religious or mystical means of attaining truth." (Anderson 2001:18)

This research shows that epistemology is taken from an independent position of knowledge that exists in a community of laity who reacted on the call to care and support one another from a possible "Six Calls Model" but later realised that their knowledge and experiences played a crucial role in the process of story telling. With reference to White and Epston (1990:35) who states that: "...it has been demonstrated that independent knowledge can exist in a community and be passed on by other means (than writing), including through the art of storytelling and through the medium of song and dance." The independent knowledge as been demonstrated by my co-researchers is an attempt to gain a better understanding of how they understood their situation. They tried to follow the "Six Calls Model" but realised that their own knowledge and how they interpreted their stories helped them to use the social-constructionist approach in a narrative way to journey with one another. Müller et al. (2001:2) speaks sometimes of the social-constructionist paradigm as the postmodern paradigm.

3.1 A postmodern epistemological point of departure

Janse van Rensburg (2000:4) gives emphasis to the fact that the radical change in thought, perceptions, world-view and frame of reference brought about a paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. The shift between modernism and postmodernism represents an intense move from an objective approach to knowledge to a subjective and personal narrative and context of reality.

Postmodernism is an aesthetic, literary, political or social philosophy, which was the basis of the attempt to describe a condition, or a state of being, or something concerned with changes to institutions and conditions (Giddens 1990:45-50). Vanhoozer agrees with Giddens on defining postmodernism as a condition by describing it as an intellectual/theoretical and cultural/practical condition that affects modes of thought as well as modes of embodiment. He continues by saying that a condition is something different to a position. "A position refers to one's location in space or, alternately, to one's opinion on a certain issue." (Vanhoozer 2003:4) Vanhoozer explains that the position whether geographical or argumentative can be plotted and specified more or less accurately, and can be determined or is fixed or definite, but a condition is altogether dispersed, an environment in which one lives and moves and, in some sense, has one's being. Best and Kellner acknowledge that different accounts of postmodernism are given by various disciplines (Vanhoozer 2003:5).

The mark of the postmodern condition of knowledge is to discard the authority of universal science but accept narratives of local knowledge. This resulted in the firm decision of a postmodern paradigm that knowledge is never complete but always contextual and rejects the idea that there is one universal rational form. For the postmodernist reason is a contextual and relative affair. What they see as rational is comparative to the main narrative in a society or institution. Reason is always situated within particular narratives, traditions, institutions, and practices.

Postmodern theory rejects the following modern beliefs:

- a. That reason is absolute and universal.
- b. Individuals are autonomous, able to transcend their place in history, class, and culture.
- c. That universal principles and procedures are objective whereas preferences are subjective.

Postmodernists maintain that scientific knowledge, which is related to evidence, through experiments is not value-free and neutral but value-bound. Postmodern thinking rejects the claim that science and technology can solve the worlds' problems. Postmodernism disagrees with modernism that truth is universal and views knowledge as experiential and not rational. This perception is taken from the philosophy of empiricism that knowledge arises from experience. Empiricists claim that sensory experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge. Empiricism gives emphasis to the function of experience and evidence especially sensory perception, in the formation of ideas, while ignoring the notion of innate ideas. It also maintains that knowledge is copied from information that has been composed under firm conditions, about variables that are operationally defined, producing data that are scientifically proven. "Knowledge is thus the joint product of sensory material and the structure of consciousness which actively organizes and interprets by its own forms of understanding." (Barbour 1966:74)

Postmodernism is a worldview that determines meaning and purpose in life and when people live together in a community, they need to decide what is right and wrong. Postmodernity is also viewed as the emergence of new forms of experience, thought and social organization. In having a closer look at epistemology, which examines carefully how we know things, because it studies the grounds of knowledge, I was inclined to agree with the postmodern perspective that says there is no single, concrete reality and advocates realities that are compound and constructed. The postmodernist claims that there is no distinction between knower and known, but that they are interactive and inseparable. Lincoln and Guba (1985:14) give a more simplistic definition, which states that there is a relationship between the person "knower" and the situation "knowable". This statement concurs with the description that Mcleod (1997:9) gives of epistemology, "how we know what we know".

The postmodern approach sees knowledge as an interpersonal and contextual matter. Knowledge is also the paradigm or point of departure from which people think and act. Janse Van Rensburg (2000:1) quotes Ouweneel (1994a:1-24) who says that: "One's paradigm determines one's perspectives and convictions on life and world." People do not always realize that their idea of life and the world actually started with a certain frame of mind. It is clearly put by Janse Van Rensburg (2000:2) that: "the paradigm from, which people work determines how their worlds operate and how their knowledge about the world and life will be structured. "The physical world as well as the world of sensory experience and human behaviour were regulated largely by

appeal to the abstract and well-defined that transcends the ambiguous and uncertain temporal and historical order.” (Anderson 2001:15)

Van Huyssteen makes it clear that most theologians engaged in dialogues with the sciences and rejected grand, legitimising meta-narratives and rather accepted pluralism, which is a challenge to theology and science (Van Huyssteen 1997:268). Some scholars like Janse van Rensburg call meta-narratives, grand narratives and explain that they represent the way things have traditionally been explained. They are called “grand” because of their constant meaning that is always applicable to all people in all areas of life at all times (Janse Van Rensburg 2000:7). Meta-narratives are narratives, which are grounded in certain ways or perceptions of thinking, like sexism, racism, the patriarchal system, etc. “A meta-narrative is a story that wants to be more than just a story, that is to say one which claims to have achieved an omniscient standpoint above and beyond all the other stories that people have told so far.” (Norris 2000:10) I agree with Norris (2000:9) that the way we live now is emphasised by postmodernist thinking that our way of living affects the way we listen to music, watch television, absorb the latest news of world events, and even our response to advertising. The challenge that postmodernism asks of grand narratives is whether these grand narratives are applicable to the local context that might be in opposition of the global interpretation. According to Van Huyssteen (1998:5) postmodernism is the behaviour of looking differently at modernism and argues that theology and science centred on the radical criticism of all global narratives that rule and legitimise a universal perspective but instead embrace pluralism and diversity. The post-modern rejection of important legitimate grand narratives and the acceptance of pluralism is already a formidable challenge for both theology and science (Van Huyssteen 1997:268).

A pluralistic approach discards a ‘one true theology’ and the meta-narratives that have been upheld by modernity but recognises the validity of distinct experiences and specific traditions in theological reflection, and the unavoidable emergence of local theologies. According to Placher in Van Huyssteen (1997:35) Christians should become genuine partners in pluralist conversations between diverse research traditions and also continue to be faithful to their own mental picture of things that they can see logically, which are internal to their Christian faith. It is important for Christians to find an authentic and committed voice in a pluralist conversation. It is important to note that postmodernism dialogues always critique our own assumptions that there are no universal standards of rationality against which we can measure

other beliefs or research traditions (Van Huyssteen 1997:38). As Christians we can make fundamental judgements and argue them against other various and different epistemic communities and can communicate them with one another meaningfully through discussion, reflection, consideration and assessment. In theology and science the different points of views must be used specifically for or against the choice of theory, because these arguments and valued judgements can be influenced by broader assumptions and commitments that can always be challenged. “One reigning image or projection of postmodernism is encapsulated in various models of plural discourse.” (Leitch 1996:114)

Van Huyssteen (1997:278) acknowledges the fact that postmodernism is in direct opposition to modernism. Postmodernist scholars critically analyse and question the statements made by modernists. “Epistemologically speaking, postmodernism works out as a deep-laid scepticism about the possibility of knowledge and truth, the possibility of a constructive, cooperative enterprise aimed toward truth at the end of enquiry.” (Norris 2000:17)

Postmodernism shows the challenges that our current community is facing, because of insecurity and instability. According to Graham (1996:1) our communities are no longer mindful of a value system. The difference between postmodernism and modernism is that postmodernism represents the desirable, the new, the vital and the liberating which argues against the oppressive unity, homogeneity, universalism, transcendence and other concepts.

The postmodernism debate is centred on the critical evaluation of the bible. Postmodernism investigates how modern thought influenced people’s lifestyles and ways of thinking which actually sensitised people to the fundamentals of theology. Van Huyssteen supports the postmodern thought that modernism distracted us from dealing with the fact that we have clearly been deprived of any general, universal, or abstract ways to talk about the relationship between religion and science today (Van Huyssteen 1998:2).

I align myself with postmodern thinking because my co-researchers have important knowledge and experience that they bring to the process of research. In this research I need to rely on the words, thoughts and values of my co-researchers, which will actually tell me what their narratives mean to them and not the text of their social history. My co-researchers were not objective spectators but participants in their

stories of care and support in a process of healing and transformation, which led to a new spirituality of doing ministry. In this new spirituality of doing ministry my co-researchers realised that the “Six Calls Model” was there as a guide but that it depended on how they implemented the “Six Calls Model” to find a suitable method that could help them to perform their ministry. Although this “Six Calls Model” involved everybody, from the top to the ordinary layperson, my co-researchers realised that they are in a unique situation. This uniqueness taught them that although this model came in sort of “one-size-fits-all” their local intelligence, knowledge, interpretations, questions and behaviour played a crucial role in this research. According to Parry and Doan (1994:45) is it important to note that people should not be left outside their old story, but helped to be inside a new story based upon a description of their own experience that is meaningful and accurate for them. In the post-modern thinking people can author their own stories, communicating them in their own ethical perceptions as they respect their own thinking, feeling, and show consideration for what is right and wrong. In this process they can take up responsibility for their own moral actions and they can express their own identity and genuineness. This shows us that human reason is not dependant on an isolated, epistemic awareness, but involves a variety of socio-political functions that include the interaction of everybody.

3.2 Postfoundationalism

As we journey through life, we get to a stage where we have thoughts about God and start arguing God’s existence and disclosure from what we have heard or experienced. People start exploring the experiential and interpretive roots of their belief system on the grounds of their commitment and patterns of behaviour that they have discovered which they can relate to a specific context or story. The traditional foundationalist paradigm demonstrates with certainty that human reason can be totally liberated from unfairness, preconceived notions, fixed ideas and practices; and that by the ability of self-reflection people can go beyond their historical context and horizon and know things as they really are in themselves. “The postfoundationalist acknowledges that rational reflection (and more broadly experience itself) is always and already conditioned by communal and historical contexts.” (Van Huyssteen 2000:421)

Our postmodern thinking expects us to cross the borders of our fundamental perceptions and beliefs, but still to find meaning in the ongoing traditions and further uphold the importance of pluralism against the views of power that are imposed. Looking at the explanations of Van Huyssteen it comes to mind that postfoundationalist theology views faith as a condition, which needs to be

rediscovered. The argument is not only centered on the experiences of faith but formulates criteria which could be used as valuable and reliable theological information (Van Huyssteen 1993:371-376).

Postfoundationalism rejects the one correct way of understanding God, faith or religion and respects the plurality of ways of understanding. Postfoundationalists accept the model of rationality that recognises that the individual is always a participant within a particular community of inquiry, and so works out of the standard of its tradition, but also acknowledges that the personal voice of a rational agent may also critique those standards that separate them from the tradition. "Postfoundationalist theology acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic as well as nonepistemic values that inform our reflection, our thoughts about God, and what some of us believe to be God's presence in the world." (Van Huyssteen 1997:4)

Van Huyssteen (1997:3) rejects postfoundationalism as the strong foundations of people's belief-systems but accepts that our beliefs are connected to a groundless web of interrelated beliefs. Postfoundationalists believe that shared and historical contexts have already been conditioned by rational reflection, especially experience. They also believe that contextuality makes it possible to cross the boundaries of particular communities or to strive for interdisciplinary and transcommunal conversation. Postfoundationalism highlights that the epistemic involvement of the community forms a rationality of its own, which brings into action different modes of reflection.

The goal of postfoundationalism is to search for truth as an ideal that drives inquiry, without asserting that any particular claim to knowledge provides a totalising and final metanarrative. Van Huyssteen (1997:2) observes that postmodernism discards all kinds of epistemological foundationalism, as well as its universal associated meta-narratives that so willingly endorse the legitimization of all knowledge, judgements, decisions and actions. Postfoundationalism holds on to the ideals of truth, objectivity and rationality, while at the same time acknowledging the provisional, contextual, fallible nature of reason. The postmodernist perspective agrees with the acceptance of a nonfoundationalist stance in rejection of a foundationalist belief system.

The nonfoundationalist as a resource for postfoundationalism denies the strong foundations of the foundationalist belief-system and argues instead that all of our

beliefs together form part of a baseless network of interconnected beliefs (Van Huyssteen 1997:3). Postfoundationalism supports the importance of rationality in every community and context and that all social activities may function as test cases for human rationality. The theory of knowledge is generated from a community, which values its own rationality as sound. In its most extreme form nonfoundationalism positions itself with the fact that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual, which could be dangerous for the interdisciplinary status of theology, but also claims internal rules for different modes of reflection. “This extreme form of conceptual pluralism leads to a relativism so complete that any attempt at a cross-disciplinary conversation faces the threat of complete incommensurability.” (Van Huyssteen 1997:3)

Looking at nonfoundationalism from the perspective as explained above we often find the position of fideism. Fideism is an uncritical, almost blind alliance to a basic set of beliefs, which sometimes appear as the focal point of the epistemological composition of nonfoundationalism. In actual fact this means that fideism can in some situations turn out to be a foundationalism that is very incomprehensible. It has been declared by Van Huyssteen (1997:3) that a certain form of fideism and foundationalism is certainly merged in theology when the boundaries between the trust, and the personal faith we have in God, and the set of beliefs in which we hold this trust, become unclear or vague. He explains further that in theology the basic fideist move therefore takes place when a specific set of beliefs, in which we hold our faith commitment to God, is first inaccessible in a very explicit defensive procedure and then confused with faith in God itself. “What is believed and trusted here is not so much God, but our own various sets of beliefs about God, about the nature of God, about God’s action in the world, and about what we see as God’s will for us and for our world.” (Van Huyssteen 1997:3)

My interpretation of Van Huyssteen’s explanation of fideism is that postmodernism does not actually impose or suggest a postfoundationalist approach, because in postmodernism people can become persuaded to position themselves within a certain point of view or paradigm that could be closely linked to or interpreted as a form of fideism (Van Huyssteen 1997:23-29).

The postfoundationalist choice for the relational quality of religious experience thus opens up the possibility of interpreting religiously the way that we believe God comes to us in and through our manifold experiences of nature, persons, ideas, emotions,

places, things, and events (Van Huyssteen 1997:29). Non foundationalism rejects any forms of foundation, which accede to the postfoundationalist belief that people can relate to their world through the mediation of interpreted experience. Postfoundationalists believe that our experience and explanation can be challenged or contested, while postmodernism challenges universal or neutral standards of rationality (Van Huyssteen 1997:5).

The search for a unified world view will only be found if theology is located within an interdisciplinary context to help people to move towards a coherent interpretation of our experience, which will finally be made possible by revealing and retrieving the shared resources of rationality of our different and often diverse approaches of human knowing (Van Huyssteen 1997:15). Van Huyssteen observes (1997:16) that our search for valid information always takes place within the social context of a community, which comes from individuals who share a certain expertise to help, challenge, critique, and confirm one another in this community. Van Huyssteen goes further in arguing that the Christian faith has never been just a set of intellectual beliefs, or a universally accepted set of theoretical ideas and experimental results, but has always first of all involved a way of life for very specific communities of faith (Van Huyssteen 1998:1). It is normal for religious communities to demonstrate unique forms of individual experience, communal rituals and specific ethical concerns.

By looking at an intensive analysis of postfoundationalism by Van Huyssteen I realize that he recognizes that postfoundationalism goes beyond the boundaries of our own interpretation, culture, community, etc., and invites or includes interdisciplinary conversations. These interdisciplinary conversations could be used to question our own subjective assumptions. It will help Christians to become liberated to interpret their own personal faith but still be open to other disciplines that might challenge their faith or experiences.

Postfoundationism believes that our experience together with theory allows us only to know the world from what we have heard or experienced. This does not say that our own interpretations are the only legitimate interpretations. According to postfoundationalism “we overcome the kind of fideism in which our own experiences and explanations are never challenged or contested and the kind of nonfoundationalism in which the need for transcommunal or intersubjective conversations are not taken seriously.” (Van Huyssteen 1997:24) “The quest for the

rationality of specifically theological reflection was presented in terms of two rather strong claims:

- Rationality of theology is definitively shaped by its location in the living context of interdisciplinary reflection;
- This interdisciplinary context is epistemologically, at least significantly shaped by the dominant presence and influence of scientific rationality in our culture.” (Van Huyssteen 2000:421)

3.3 Practical Theology

People search for meaning in life from different angles of life, which will make sense to them. David Deeks in Atkinson and Field (1995:43) defines pastoral theology as a theology that is concerned with the conversations that people have which betray their search for meaning in life. As a theologian this focus of Deeks is not appropriate for counseling but could be of help in conversations to find out where people feel there is no God or that God was absent in their search for meaning in life. Practical theology is an approach, which attempts to understand the encounter between God and people. The core question to practical theology today is: “How should the welfare of the soul be interpreted in a world that is dependant on technology, science and progress?” Louw (1999:6) questions how people understand and interpret the truth from their world of experience without falling back on subjectivism. According to Galileo in Barbour (1966:30) nature is the soul source of scientific knowledge, and in comparison with Scripture it is also a source of theological knowledge, a way of knowing God. Galileo put nature as equivalent to Scripture as a possible way to God. Later Descartes argued that the existence of God is instinctive and is implied by the idea of God when clearly understood (Barbour 1966:31).

The focus of postfoundationalism is to fully acknowledge the contextuality and the embeddedness of both theology and the sciences in human culture (Van Huyssteen 1998:23). Van Huyssteen regards the epistemic role of interpreted experience and how tradition shaped the epistemic and non-epistemic principles that enlighten our reflection about God and our world as fundamental.

The expectation of practical theology is to question people about the meaning of life (Heitink 1993:285). For Heitink this question is rooted in fear and discouragement or hopelessness and distress. People are looking for meaning that equals the presence of God and other important matters that would make them feel in control of their lives. Scholars like Webster and Schnier (2000:3) raised the questions: “What is life about?

and what is Christian Theology?” Grenz and Franke (2001:5) quote David Tracy who maintains that Christian theology is a philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language and on the meanings present in the Christian fact. According to them, Tracy sees theology as addressing the disclosive and transformative issues of any intelligent, reasonable and responsible human being. This liberalist idea of Tracy, has been rejected by post-liberal theologians like Lindbeck, who came up with an approach to theology that seeks to re-describe and contextualize the modern world using the stories, symbols and categories of the bible.

Louw (1999:7) questions how people should understand and handle problems in their life in relation to their understanding of and relationship with God. Louw understands practical theology as the understanding and brightening of the relationship between God and people. In this relationship Louw (1999:30) sees practical theology playing an integral role in the dialogue between God and people. “Die pastorale gesprek word beskou as die basiese metode om die dialoog tussen God en mens te operasionaliseer.” (Louw 1999:30)

Goh supports Gadamer when he says all understanding takes place in and through dialogue. It is only through dialogue that people can ask questions, which need to be answered and through this a discourse is developed that paves the way to new knowledge (Goh 2000:21). Goh (2000:42) mentions MacIntyre who defines the *humanitas* so that the human participation in particular practices will not be seen in isolation but be considered in their totality within an integrated vision of human life. “In this vision, the intelligibility of human actions must be ascertained in terms of their being ‘embedded’ in a “narrative sequence’ having a certain teleological character.” (Goh 2000:43) In this case MacIntyre clearly understands a human being as a story-telling creature.

According to Goh, Lindbeck’s understanding of theology as a sentence structure helped his nonfoundationalist understanding of intelligibility, authenticity, and applicability. Rorty and Stout persuaded him that meaning in general cannot be justified foundationally. “Lindbeck chose language over experience, as a medium for meaning.” (Goh 2000:324) Research has shown that religion is not only a cognitive phenomenon, but that there is an aspect of religion that exposes itself to us forcibly in theological reflection, and therefore the dimension of religion stays relevant for interdisciplinary reflection. In theology and the different sciences people grapple with

what they perceive as different, because of the reality of the experience they go through. People can only talk about the world from the perspective of what they know and experience in this world. The communities we draw our knowledge from make the same cognitive claims about theology and science. “On this view a postfoundationalist model of rationality not only focuses on the experience of knowing, and thus on the experiential dimension of rationality itself, but – for both theology and science – very specifically implies an accountability to human experience.” (Van Huyssteen 1997:14)

Practical theology as its name implies is a study of theology with the intention of making it useful or applicable to everyday concerns. Browning (1996:2) regards practical theology as a theology that is based in a religious community, which consists of a memory and tradition that engages practical reason and practical wisdom. He also argues in favour of the Barthian model of a systematic interpretation of God’s self-disclosure to people. According to Browning, Barth excludes the human knowledge, action, or practice in the understanding of God’s self-disclosure.

In having a closer look at the above mentioned statement I see from Browning’s discussion on the Barthian model that the practicality of theology lies in the practical concerns that people bring to it. His argument is that when a theologian stands before God or Scripture and the history of the church he or she has already experiences, which could be related to what is written. He affirms this with an accurate description, which he states as: “We come to the theological task with questions shaped by the secular and religious practices in which we are implicated – sometimes uncomfortably.” (Browning 1991:6) It does not matter where we come from, all our practices are embedded in a theory. Browning regards practice as something that comes from the theory or that consists of theory. Browning also says that although we could have these theories and be guided by them practically, we actually sometimes assume and view them as normal and obvious hence we never take time to abstract the theory from the practice and look at it as something in itself.

It is only when the community is struck by a crisis that it questions the meaningful or theory-laden practices. When this happens the community must re-examine the sacred text and events that composed the source of the norms and ideals that guide its practices. The normative text is then questioned against the crisis. “A conversation, is then started that changes the practice as the questions change, and the community will consistently see different meanings in its normative texts as its situation and questions change.” (Browning 1991:6)

Browning divides practical theology into four sub-movements of descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology and strategic practical theology (Browning 1991:8). According to Browning (1991:55) a strategic practical theological thinking connects an understanding of:

- How people understand their concrete situation?
The concrete situation is understood by the study of the diverse religious and cultural narratives and histories that compete to define and give meaning to the situation.
- What should be the praxis in this concrete situation?
“It brings the general fruits of descriptive theology and practically oriented historical and systematic theology back into contact with the concrete situation of action.” (Browning 1991:55)
- How do people critically defend the norms of their praxis in this concrete situation?
The revised correlational approach to practical theology is distinguished from all simple confessional, narrative, or cultural linguistic approaches through the critical defence of the norms of actions.
- What means, strategies, and rhetoric should people use in this concrete situation?
This question deals with ministry in its different forms as a first step to begin the process of transformation and where people are at this point.

Browning relates the perspective of Reinhold Niebuhr and Louis Jansens concerning the understanding of the relation of the Christian narrative to practical reason. Browning (1991:34) strengthens the fact that practical theology should not only be seen as theory “theoria” or praxis “techne”, but uses the notion of “phronesis”, which affirms the narrative disposition in practical wisdom or practical reason. Relating to Niebuhr’s Christian narrative as a contribution to practical reason, Browning agrees to an interrelation between practical reason and our narrative traditions. This statement made by Browning coincides with Van Huyssteen (1998:24) that theology and science point beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture, towards a plausible form of interdisciplinary conversation. “Sometimes a narrative is very difficult to discern. Even when it is practical, thinking will reveal what I call deep metaphors that suggest something about how the world really is.” (Browning 1991:142)

Viau (1999:3) says that for years theology has claimed its position with experience, because of believers who experienced their faith in a community. He situates experience at the centre of the assumptions inherent to the discourses of Practical Theology (Viau 1999:67). According to Viau to speak about theology is to question where experience is located in a theological discourse. Viau associates practical theology with pastoral activity, which in itself complements theology in a practical manner. I align myself with the thoughts of Viau because people can only tell their narratives from a context in which they can explain their experience in a language that others can understand. According to Viau sentences constitute objects and theological discourses and their objects can only be understood in relation to the context (which is the experience) in which the dynamism of language is at work (Viau 1999:116).

Van Huyssteen (1997:19) observes that the epistemic goal has a clear similarity between, the experiential accountability of science and theological understanding of experience. In this research I have concentrated on how meaning is experienced, how meaning is given through experience and the telling of stories - how meaning is found and acted upon. In having a closer look at this research project approaching it from a practical theological perspective by not only describing or interpreting the experiences of my co-researchers but from a point of view of how these experiences could be deconstructed or emancipated in order to contribute towards meaning of and in life. "Religion has always been an experiential matter and never just a set of doctrinal or credal statements, or a cluster of rites or rituals." (Van Huyssteen 1997:72)

Van Huyssteen (1998:168) agrees with McMullin as he pinpoints the problem that there is no way that science and theology could deal with the same reality, but that there are different levels of reality. Van Huyssteen highlights McMullin in stating that science and theology deal with different domains of the same reality. He goes further in quoting McMullin: "Science has no access to God in its explanations: theology has nothing to say about the specifics of the natural world." (Van Huyssteen 1998:168)

Postfoundationalists believe that religious experience is a valid methodological starting point for theological reflection, which actually opposes the nonfoundationalist perception. "People found the care of God and God's people communicated to them in the richness of ritual practices as well as in wise guidance." (Gerkin 1991:24) By using the narrative approach, I have noticed that by looking at the story of God with the people the metaphor of care has many origins. Gerkin (1991:21) makes it clear "that

as human socio-cultural experience has changed, pastoral care practices have likewise been modified to respond to the changing need of people.” This statement made by Gerkin, stands in agreement with Müller & van Deventer said (2003:90), that poverty, as a human need is a problem, which dehumanises people. “Members will thus have to learn that mercy, faith and land ownership, church services and the supply of appropriate energy, ministering the word and providing water, prayer and health, praising the Lord and sharing luxuries, community singing and schools, Bible study and housing, catechesis and culture, Easter, Pentecost and pit toilets are all part of the church in service of a poor world.”

My epistemological approach for this research will be from a practical-theological spiritual narrative point of departure. In this research I see spirituality as viewed from the perspective of my co-researchers as an advancement of the condition of the spirit. When I noticed this from my co-researchers’ experience I could agree with Eric Springsted (1998:49) that theology and spirituality go hand in hand because people do not only think about God but as they are thinking about God they become involved with God in such a way that their spirits become connected due to their involvement with God. In this people sense the uniqueness of theology from other sciences because the theological way of thinking is inseparable from the changes of the one who experienced an active relationship with God. Springsted concentrates on a theology that speaks about the improvement of the spirit of the believer who identifies the involvement of God in his or her life. This affirms the fact that Springsted (1998:50) does not acknowledge any other science, which speaks against the fact that a human being can become what he or she has studied. He sees every person as reaching the potential he or she has studied for.

As a pastor and a practical theologian I became attracted and engaged in the conversations with the people of this congregation and how they viewed and handled their situation as they moved from being not taken care of and tried to work out a spirituality and a relationship and method of care among themselves. I listened to the stories as my co-researchers interacted with their stories, which they regarded as a process that brought healing and transformation in order for them to care for one another. As I journeyed with this community I listened to the stories of my co-researchers from an understanding that could only develop from a local context. This local context is embedded with local narratives which reflect the values, beliefs and experiences of a particular group of people. This local context is the moment of praxis

from which I explored, and tried to acquire or develop a relationship or an attitude that could develop out of a uniquely motivated Postfoundationalist Practical Theology.

3.4 Narrative Theology

Our first interaction with the Christian faith is taken from the bible as the story of God's connection and dealings with his people. Lucie-Smith (2007:vii) defines Narrative Theology as the account that begins with a particular story rather than abstract principles, operating inductively rather than deductively. Our Christian narrative tells about God who inspired the novelists of scripture by his Spirit to speak to all generations of believers, including us today. We are all immersed in this authoritative narrative communally and individually to faithfully interpret and live out that story today as we are led by the Spirit of God. In understanding Christianity we read the Bible as a story and in this we realise it is a story that is going somewhere.

My own assumption interprets narrative theology as a story in which we are characters participating in the story by showing our roles to play as we move towards the end of the story. The role that we play is based on faith through experience. Nürnburger (2004:16) justifies the fact that our personal faith is embedded in the history of the experience of a community of believers. My understanding of narrative theology is that it encourages people to draw meaning from larger structures and allows for a diversity of perspectives without criticizing between them. Theologians instead saw life as based in a community that has a story about where it came from and where it is going. The individual is only a derivative of this community and reasonableness can only be determined within the confines of the community story.

Van Huyssteen (1997:180) quotes Gary L. Comstock's definition of narrative theology as a reflection on the religious claims embedded in stories and regards this significant approach to theology as one of the most viable and important alternatives for doing theology. Narrative theology as a concept of postmodern theology grew directly from the profound certainty that temporal narrativity comprises the core of personal human identity. This statement shows that the main intention is to interpret the story of peoples' lives, which actually tells through the study of ontology what it means to be human. Through ontology we now obtain valuable information through literature, history, philosophy and religion.

I also understand Ricœur as quoted by Demasure & Müller (2004:411) that he considers human actions as texts. The interpretation of most of the texts is gathered

from a hermeneutic approach and used as transcripts of interviews. In the process of configuration the text is read and seen as a meeting place between the world of the text and the reader's world. In some hermeneutic studies the scholars analyse other forms of data such as videotapes and tape recordings to listen to stories. In the process of interviewing, the data is gathered orally and then translated into a text. I agree with Van Meygaarden (2005:37) that "Most research interviews are in one way or another, narratives about a particular phenomenon of interest and a hermeneutic approach is used to interpret and understand these narratives and the phenomenon that the narrative is about."

It is important to note that a narrative is not an objective reconstruction of someone's life but rather of how others perceive the person. It is always based on the person's life experiences and involves specific selected parts of the person's life. To narrate someone's life is to be able to interpret the world of the person's activities. In this research I used the stories of my co-researchers to illustrate how the narrative approach could be used like a porcelain vessel in which substances are heated or melted from which stories of hope, success, care and vindication could emerge. "...People live and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience." (McNamee & Gergen 1994:26)

The rapid growth of narrative theology came with its own struggles, which sensitised Van Huyssteen in understanding Comstock's distinguishing two separate groups named pure narrativists and impure narrativists. As pure narrativist is known to be anti-foundational and cultural-linguistic and uses the narrative for theological reflection because of its independent literary form. Pure narrative theologians endorse a postmodern perspective on theology and also apply the narrative to understand the construction of theological statements, but do not regard abstract reasoning and philosophical categories as important. They understood Christian faith on the grounds of the language and concepts of the texts and practices. (Van Huyssteen 1997:182)

The impure narrativists in agreement with pure narrativists, place the narrative in the centre of the communication of the Christian story but do not recognize it as having any autonomous theological function. For them narratives show signs of philosophical, historical and psychological arguments, which need to be scrutinized with the methods of those particular disciplines (Van Huyssteen 1998:768).

Impure narrativists are very creative in revising the paradigms of language, reason and practice of the liberal tradition in diverse attempts to justify the cognitive claims of theological reflection (Van Huyssteen 1998:768). They appreciate the correlation of language games from other contemporary disciplines in conversation with the Christian language games, which are actually unacceptable to the reasoning of pure narrativists.

Niebuhr divided narrative theology into two sections namely, 'internal' and 'external' history. Comstock (1987b) in Van Huyssteen's (1989:188-191) explanation is:

- Internal history based on the self-description of the Christian community in interpreting their present experiences of the divine revelation. Internal history comes from the subjective perspective of "living selves with their resolutions and commitments, their hopes and fears, and is the story of people. It is the story of the past, present and future and is based on particular characteristics. The past as a function of the memory is organic or social and together with the future relates with each other in the present.
- The external history is a story and it presents what we think of as objective, journalistic reportage of events. It is data, which consists of impersonal ideas and does not present feelings and opinions regarding the history of the group, but gives, a story of what really happened.

Narrative theology consists of accounts that develop. In the process of development a specific meaning is given to a secret. Language plays an integral role in the development of a story. Stories are told and listened to but should also be re-interpreted. Michael White's model of narrative therapy is that specific events in a story are linked, to a specific sequence according the interim aspects of the past, present, future and specific plot, which White calls the "landscape of action." (White 1991:3)

White believes stories are compounded out of two "landscapes":

- A 'landscape of action', which with reference to the thematic unfolding of events presents a specific perspective to the reader;
- A 'landscape of consciousness' which expresses the interpretations of the reader as he or she is introduced by the author to the receptive world of the people portrayed in the book.

The 'landscape of consciousness' divulges the meanings as interpreted by the characters in conjunction with the readers, by reflecting carefully on the events and plots disclosed by the 'landscape of action' (White1991:3). These two landscapes show clearly the role that language plays in the understanding and development of a story. Wittgenstein emphasises the fact that the use of different languages takes place within different contexts, governed by different rules (Grenz & Franke 2001:73).

This research shows clear evidence of a narrative perspective through the telling of stories, which is embedded in a practical theological point of view. The co-researchers relate and talk about their experiences of care, support and spirituality to bring out the main or new narrative of healing and transformation. In these narratives the co-researchers understood their faith in response to the biblical story of care, support, healing and transformation.

3.4.1 The “Not-knowing” position of the researcher

Most people have the assumption that therapists have all the answers to their problems. Some therapists and even counsellors have a kind of superior and “know it all” attitude towards their clients. Gergen (1994:243) makes it clear that a type of “cause and cure” has developed between counsellor and counselee that according to my interpretation put the counsellor above the counselee. The “not-knowing” position expects the researcher to take the perspective that he or she is not the expert on people’s lives, and binds the researcher to a “try to understand” position. Although the researcher’s inputs are important the researcher must struggle and attempt to stay in the “not-knowing” position. According to Müller (1999:13) the pastor’s expertise lies especially in the way that he/she has mastered the art of taking on an honest “not-knowing” position and in empowering the companion to take on the role of being the actual expert.

“Not-Knowing” is an attempt to understand, explain and interpret without any influence of theoretical information (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:28). The “not-knowing” position does not allow the researcher to use any theory as an answer in relation to peoples’ stories, but speaks about sincere sensitivity and interest to “know more” about the story that has been researched. The “know more” discards any idea of pre-conceived notions, thinking or connotations, which might influence the process of research (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:31). Where the narrative researcher does not understand he or she uses questions to open up some explanations and interpretations, which were not easy to understand in the telling of the story.

The therapist formulates these questions from a “not-knowing” position and these questions are drawn from what has been previously said by the co-researchers as he or she follows the conversation in a way of keeping track of the “now”. In following the conversation the therapist composes the narrative by setting the next question. The next question is not a prescribed question that the therapist brought with him or her to the conversation because therapeutic narratives develop spontaneously within the conversation so that a new narrative could be developed. The “not-knowing” position expects the narrative researcher to give people and communities the opportunity to convey their stories completely. The “not-knowing” position allows the researcher to ask questions to the co-researcher(s), which are not “informed by method and do not demand scientific answers.” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28) Müller et al. (2001:4) agrees with Anderson and Goolishian but goes further in saying that the “not-knowing” position on the one hand allows the co-researcher(s) to tell their stories as they live them in everyday life, and on the other hand allows the researcher to follow these stories of the co-researcher(s) as they have been constructed within a lived social reality.

I performed this research from a point of practical wisdom, where the stories of the co-researchers are valued with the understanding of how they interpret their stories. I placed myself within the “not-knowing” position irrespective of whether I possessed knowledge concerning research and even about the topic. I took on this position to guard against having a superior attitude towards my co-researchers. I trusted the practical knowledge, which has been portrayed in the actions of my co-researchers. According to the modernist perspective the therapists’ scientific knowledge and formation developed into a “know it all” kind of attitude. I concur with this “not knowing” position as it permitted me as the researcher to ask questions to my co-researchers, which are not “informed by method or demand any scientific answers.” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28) Gergen has observed this “not knowing position” in a setting of relating narrative theory to therapy “that traditional therapists believe that there are ‘essences’ in the human experience that must be captured in some kind of narrative and offered to clients in place of their old illusionary narratives.” (McNamee & Gergen 1993:18) This means that therapists went into a session of therapy with some idea or preconceived notion. The Postmodernists challenged this perception of an essence and believe that knowledge can only be socially constructed when it alters and renews itself in each moment of interaction. They discarded the fact that previous

meaning could be hidden in stories or texts. In the process a therapist should expect new narratives that will surface spontaneously or without planning during the conversation. I understood the “not-knowing” position as not dominating the conversation with my previous knowledge or own ideas and solutions but to listen attentively giving my co-researchers the opportunity to talk about their situations the way they see and interpret them with a possible solution in the new story. I will respect my co-researchers as the experts of their own situations as divulged in the stories. The “not-knowing” position speaks about the freedom that the co-researchers have to talk about their stories as they relate to their stories or worlds of experience in a way that can also give structure to the process of research.

According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992:382) the position of the therapist is not to hasten the process of interpretation, rather the researcher should be sensitized by his or her curiosity to listen to the stories of the clients. The therapist should be willing to be informed not knowing what happened previously in the lives of the clients but to follow the conversation step by step. This will help the therapist not to give preconceived answers when people talk about their problems.

Shotter (1993:120) gives preference to Anderson and Goolishian’s view of the “not-knowing” position of the therapist and highlights it as follow:

- The therapist should take in a specific position in relation to his or her clients;
- To adopt a method of listening to what the client says;
- To respond in a special way to what the client has said;
- By way of invitation to allow the client to try to explain how his or her world is;
- To help the client to avoid giving a perception of a world as seen by others;
- The “not-knowing” method introduces a form of biased togetherness, in which the client is able to show, in relation to the therapist, his or her sincere uniqueness.
- Postmodernism abolished the professional academic method in favour of a social constructionist approach.

I therefore maintained a consciousness about two realities:

- (a) Experiential reality, which are the things I know that are functional because of direct experience.
- (b) Agreement reality which are the things I consider as real, because they have

been told to me as real in agreement with others for whom it is real.

(Rubin & Rubin 1995:12)

3.4.2 The expertise of the client

The situation where the client is seen as the expert on his or her life can also be regarded as the “know-how”. The client is the expert when one looks at the kind of therapy that could help people to interpret and become authors of their own stories. The aim of the narrative researcher is to encourage similar and free communication. In narrative research everybody’s story and every story is taken seriously, but the story of the researcher should never be seen as more genuine and more reliable or appealing (Müller 1996:14). The aim is to progressively discover the client’s experience and how he or she interprets it, so that the therapist can learn what is helpful and what is not. The postmodernist approach helps counselees to look at what the actual problem is, and therapists can help them to become creators of knowledge. From a research perspective the researcher is not allowed to become the dominant figure with specialised knowledge that qualifies him or her to be the expert on other peoples’ lives (White and Epston 1990:280). The help of the researcher should actually be regarded as an opportunity to guide the co-participants to read their own worlds and interpret their stories. In this situation the researcher should rather move towards an understanding than analysing it (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:33).

3.4.3 The problem is the problem

My co-researchers told many stories about their social situations that were well described in their experiences. These stories conveyed valuable memories and interpretations of events that made an impact on their lives in situations where care and support had been given to them. The informal and formal telling of the stories was influenced by the social context in which my co-researchers lived. A number of self-created stories accompany people in their thoughts and interactions and become woven into the remembered texture of people’s lives. People actually remember only little bits of descriptions of their experiences because the stories they tell are subject to what their memories select as important. People sometimes lose treasured images and associations, which brought comfort to them. “We can only, even in telling the most detailed stories of our lives or parts of our lives, create partial representations called ‘maps’ of our experience, which are not fully accurate or all-inclusive representations.” (Payne 2000:45) It is from this perspective that people tell their stories of a map that they show, which is very upsetting, confusing,

troublesome and threatening. These stories are filled with reality and accurate representations of what they remember and what they are experiencing at that moment. This is what White as quoted by Payne (2000:45) calls 'problem-saturated' stories, which should be respected and believed as the truth. White goes further in saying that these stories entail other stories as well. "People come with stories. They have stories to tell to you, because they want to make up a "new story" with you. Somehow they can't. They are the authors of their stories and they need a co-author... People organize their meaning, their experience in conversation. They cope with each other by inventing a story about themselves. Every human being is basically a story teller. All human beings have a story to tell. If they have no story they don't exist as humans. Their story is what makes them human, but is also their prison (Ceccin 1988)" as quoted by Payne (2000:45).

Considering this perspective I engaged with the problematic stories of my co-researchers as they started re-authoring their lives to construct a new reality. The stories reflect selective incidents of important aspects that have happened over a period of time. It is not always easy for any researcher to handle such information correctly, but according to the narrative approach one needs to wait and create a relaxed setting that will encourage the person to talk, because some experiences are very difficult for people to talk about.

It is from this point of view that I encouraged my co-researchers to stay with the problem description and to elaborate on it. The process involved setting the correct questions that demonstrated my interest without marginalizing them or forcing them to open up everything immediately. According to my interpretation I would interpret this as a type of 'leopard crawling', which is a method of subtle but cautious way of a leopard attacking the enemy. In this case I do not see my co-researchers as the enemy but for me it is a metaphor of guiding my co-researchers in tracking down the main problem. The leopard does not see itself as the enemy, but the opposition as the enemy and in this way takes up a position to track down the enemy in keeping it away while still being in control of the attack. Coming from a military background it was easy to use this metaphor of the leopard to show the co-researchers they are not the problem, but the problem could be seen as the enemy, which could be controlled in a subtle attack. This subtle attack is a positive making up of the mind in taking a decision for or against the problem. The person can position him or her self differently to the problem and can control it.

When people grapple with difficult issues in their lives they tend not to think soberly. Some issues might be life threatening but the more the situation is discussed, the more the problem could be centralized to find a solution. The person needs to be guided to give a clearer description of the problem and important issues in the story should not be taken for granted or dismissed. In discussing the problem in detail the person will realise the effects that the problem will have on him or her and that there are limits to the influence of the problem. It is only at this stage that the person realizes that there are certain areas in his or her life that have not been affected by the problem. This is a crucial moment for the person to see which issues are less destructive and the person could be courageous to control the little pieces of the problem by breaking it down bit by bit. It is important for the person to speak about how the manageable parts of the problem could be controlled, but other possibilities are also invited.

Many people suppress the influence of the problem with medication due to a physiological imbalance, which does not actually help the person to see the problem in a different way. A whole explanation is given by Epston (1994:170) concerning the medical influence of medication on the psychological, which makes people internalize their problems. Epston explains the influence of the medication on the physical body and the way people think they cannot go without it to be normal again and gives an objectivity of the reality. According to Louw (1994:7) medical science is ignorant of the uniqueness and maturity of the human being. Louw prescribes a holistic approach, which means that people should be regarded as relational and social in a cultural context. Narratively one moves away from such an approach and rather guides the co-researchers to name the problem so that they are not bullied or over powered by their problems. People should guard against internalizing problems and should separate themselves from the problem. White and Epston (1990:38-49) agree that when people see themselves as one with the problem they will not be able to differentiate between themselves and the problem and therefore change will require their interpretation of themselves in relation to the problem. It will boost the morale of the co-researchers in describing the problem and normalizing it. The naming of a problem sometimes takes time because of the impact of the problem on the person. This re-naming of the problem leads to externalizing of the problems, which are discussed in section 2.10 of chapter two. Payne (2000:48-50) agrees with White and Epston (1990:38) that: "Externalising is an approach that encourages persons to objectify and, at times personify the problem that they experience as oppressive." In the re-naming of the problem a metaphorical language is used to

describe the problem. It is important to guard against metaphors that were constructed by psychological theory because this could become damaging to the person and such perspectives should be separated from whatever psychological factors have contributed to the effects of the problem.

The identification of problems is handled differently by the narrative approach than by psychotherapy due to the fact that psychotherapist uses the modernist approach that discourses can be assumed to represent behaviour and mental reality. Psychotherapists are very objective towards their approach to psychotherapy. According to Anderson (1997:32) “the modernists use a deficiency based language which represents behaviour and mental reality as accurate.” In the postmodern approach language is used to sketch the real problem and organize it according to the experience of the person. The only reality that can be identified with the problem is constructed through language. This makes clear the fact that the person can refer to the problem in a language by giving it a name. The person is not the problem but the problem is situated in a language, which gives evidence of what the problem is and the effects of it on the person. In therapy we speak about therapeutic systems, which refer to groups of people who give meaning to a language by constructing it. I understand Anderson and Goolishian (1992:379) in this way that “language about problems makes systems and systems do not make problems.”

3.4.4 Deconstructing the problem.

According to Derrida deconstruction is a dream or a desire to counteract the impossible as created by the Enlightenment. “Deconstruction is a dream and a desire of something *‘taut autre’*, that utterly shatters the present horizons of possibility that confuse and complicate our expectations and leaves people breathless.” (Caputo and Scanlon 1999:3) Derrida calls it the moment of proving the impossible *‘l’ invention de l’ autre’* and it defines the arrival of something that no one could see coming and caught everybody by surprise. He sees the impossible as the “aporia” which means the ‘no way to go’, but also states that in deconstruction the ‘aporia’ is made to be broken and not to distract people. “He defines deconstruction as the ‘aporia’ of the impossible, where the way of knowledge has been blocked, but where it corresponds with the imperative of doing the truth.” (Caputo and Scanlon 1999:3)

The impossible goes beyond the constraints imposed by modernity’s condition of the possibility. In deconstruction the very strong formulation, and the conditions under

which something is impossible, is declared impossible in the light of reason. What is impossible is what drives people to the desire to make things happen. Kant argues that modernity and its Enlightenment imposed certain restrictions upon the thinking of people, which Kant compares with police who do border controls, “mark off the boundaries and patrol the limits of possible experience.” (Caputo & Scanlon 1999:2) According to Kant it is like participants who have gathered together at a conference with a desire to experience the impossible to go where no one could go. He quotes Angelus Silesius who said that where the method prescribed by modernity prohibits crossing these limits, that is, to defy border control, to think the unthinkable. According to Derrida, to experience the impossible is to open the doors for deconstruction. Derrida sees deconstruction as a bold move into the positive where Lyotard calls it a new move in an old familiar game. In the process of deconstruction every attempt that might be confronted with a problem should be demolished. The possibility of demolition does not need academic cleverness and theoretical skills but can happen by a dream, desire, and a deed.

Deconstruction is a number of ideas with an approach of analyzing language, literature and philosophy. Derrida’s strategy for demonstrating the imperfection of metaphysical thinking was to deconstruct the text, symbols or words. Derrida sought to expose the problem of centred discourses and display the boundaries of metaphysics. Through deconstruction Derrida sought to broaden the conceptual limits of the meaning of the text imposed by metaphysics, preferring to explore meaning in the margins of the text through unrestricted semantic play and limitless interpretation. He examines and illustrates how the meaning of any word, symbol or text is difficult or complicated when it is removed from its context. Grammatology identified Derrida’s central concerns about speech and writing. His extremely difficult writing style demonstrated his understanding of the nature of the texts. Derrida and other deconstructionists regard it as fruitless to search for one ‘real or true’ meaning of any text, as all narratives are full of cracks and uncertainty. These cracks and uncertainties are focused on to prove that the generally accepted meaning of a given text has different possible meanings (Freedman and Combs 1996:46).

He challenged the ideas that govern the way people read and proposed another way of looking at writing and speech. This alternate way had nothing to do with the metaphysical but to deconstruct verbal and written signs that had their origin in the logos, especially those connected to truth. There are also certain ways of listening to people when they relate their stories to others. People relate to their life narratives

as actively constructed stories and not as passively received facts. Through deconstruction people need to be liberated from stories that limit them. Listening deconstructively to people's stories is to listen with the certainty that these stories have many possible meanings. To get clarity to what the person said or meant is to allow people to fill in the detail by listening for vagueness in meaning. People need to explain how they will resolve or deal with these uncertainties. "The meaning a listener makes is, more often than not, different from the meaning that the speaker has intended." (Freedman and Combs 1996:47)

According to the postmodern epistemology reality is created by a variety of stories that should be dealt with as open-ended indications of reality. These open-ended reflections on reality are valued interpretations because the narratives rely only on the outcomes, which then determine the ethical evaluation (Janse van Rensburg 2000:9). The narrative approach discovers, acknowledges and deconstructs the beliefs, ideas and practices of the larger culture in which people interact with one another, that serve and assist the problem and problem story. Cultural beliefs have the tendency to assist problems, which come into the life of people and the beliefs and ideas sustain the life of the problem. These beliefs and ideas manifest themselves as the "truth" and could only be removed through questioning and conversations in the process of defining, rooting out the problem and tracing back its history. Deconstruction in conversations is to dissect and examine the taken-for-granted "truths" in cultures. Deconstruction suggests that interpretation should be viewed from the perspective of language. "The view that language is a continuum of meaning that supplies the speaker with an all-encompassing vocabulary where the meaning of words always stays the same is challenged by the presupposition of deconstruction that the meaning of words is in a process of constant change." (Janse van Rensburg 2000:9)

Religion and faith are analysed differently by Derrida. He continuously makes it clear that religion can only be deconstructed when it is constituted by convictions, doctrine and organizations. The universality of faith is regarded as sound in any human being.

3.4.5 Externalisation of conversations

People meet counsellors with a story they need to tell. This story usually dominates their lives in the form of a problem and which makes them subjects of the problem. They speak about the problem in a way that situates the problem separately from

them and their identity. “Externalising conversations are ways of speaking that separate problems from people.” (Morgan 2000:17) White (1991:29) attempts to explain that externalisation deals with the objectivity of peoples’ dominant story, in showing what the actual problem is. It helps the researcher to investigate by means of asking questions:

- The problem’s influence in the different areas of the subject’s life (for example its effects on the co-researchers relationships with others, it’s impact on the co-researchers’ feelings its interference in their thoughts, it’s effects on their story about who they are as a person, how the problem is affecting their life, etc.)
- The strategies, techniques, deceits, and the tricks that the problem has resorted to in its efforts to overpower the person’s life.
- The special traits that the problem has which undermine and disqualify the person’s knowledge and skills to overcome the problem. This can include an inquiry into the powerful ways that the problem speaks in its efforts to manipulate the subject’s life.
- The purposes that guide the problem’s attempts to dominate the subject’s life, and the dreams and hopes that the problem has for the subject’s life.
- To look at the plans that the problem has ready to put into action should its dominance be threatened (White 2005: September 2-4).

It is important to see the problem as different from the person and that the problem no longer exists within the person. When people see problems as different from themselves they can easily detect the influence of the problems on their lives and can come to a point where they can make a sound decision to get rid of the problem. Externalising conversations allow the person to view him or her self as different from his or her problem (Freedman and Combs 1996:282).

Externalisation helps people to realize that problems are never totally successful in their ambitions for people’s lives and relationships. People become so loaded with problems that when they get the opportunity to talk about them they openly admit their failures and yearn to achieve their ambitions to counteract their problems. Through externalization the researcher has many options through questioning to expose the failure of the problem. An inquiry can be made on the:

- The territories of life over which the subject still has some influence despite the problem’s attempts to totally dispossess the subject.

- The counter-techniques, counter-strategies, and the tricks that have been developed by the person that have been at times effective to stand up against the problem.
- The special qualities, knowledge, and skills possessed by the person that made it difficult for the problem to control the person's life.
- The person's family, friends and others who played a role in the person's life to root out the problem through certain behaviour.
- The options that are available to the person to take advantage of the problems' vulnerability and for to reclaim the territories of their own life.

3.5 The importance of language and meaning

People use language to give meaning to their experiences. These stories are interpreted by using words or grammar, which are accessible due to the construction of a language. The above-mentioned statements concerning language used by the postmodern approach determine the nature and intensity of relationships in society. I concur with the statement made by De Saussure quoted by Janse van Rensburg (2000:16), that language is relational and not neutral. When language is used as a neutral concept words have a fixed meaning no matter what the particular words are or in what situations or context they are used. Seidman (1994) in Janse van Rensburg (2000:16) helps us to understand this new approach and that language is a system of signs in which their relation of difference generates their meanings. I find support in Seidman's suggestion that language is an active and dynamic social force. It gives me the assurance as put by Loevlie (1992:124) quoted by Janse van Rensburg (2000:16) that words find meaning when they are comparative to the user's plan of action and the context of their use. "Language provides the conceptual tools through which we construct the world we inhabit." (Grenze & Franke 2001:143)

The postmodern change from meta-narrative to narrative brought about a change from subjectivity to language. Modernist thinkers viewed language as an obvious medium, which could consciously describe reality, but this view is unacceptable to postmodernists who struggled with and found the connection between the mind and the world hard to believe. "Not only do we not have nonlinguistic access to the way things are but the way we speak and think is conditioned by the particular language in which we dwell." (Vanhoozer 2003:12)

It should not be understood that reality enlightens thought and that thought brings about a language. 'Language' does not propose a specific language but speaks of a

system of differences, which reflect a pattern of distinctions and connections. A certain language is connected to or supports different kinds of human experience. Derrida suggests that texts should be read in a particular, positive and convinced way, a way that plays with words outside the restrictions of conventions. “Derrida means that it makes no sense to inquire into the meaning or truth of a sentence or text outside of a specific context.” (Vanhoozer 2003:13)

“Postmodernists believe that there are limits on the ability of human beings to measure and describe the universe in any precise, absolute, and universally applicable way.” (Freedman and Combs 1996:21) From a postmodernist perspective, language is used to constitute the world and beliefs of people. The world does not speak but can only speak through people when programmed with a language. The moment language expresses a social construction then it is difficult to depend on a universal point of view. What is important to the interpretive social scientist is how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives. The postmodern condition makes us aware that all systems of meaning and truth need to be deconstructed (Vanhoozer 2003:13).

Theology and science use different languages of experience to construct the world that we live in. People’s speech and actions are always already situated, and for this reason conditioned, by different vocabulary. I agree with Van Huysteen (1997:22) that even if theology and science are two different domains of the same world we should not remain content with a nonfoundationalist pluralism of unrelated languages. Together with my co-researchers I searched for a legitimate knowledge within their social context in a foreign community as individuals who share a certain expertise generated within this community to help, challenge, critique, care, support and confirm one another. In other words, we journey together towards optimal cohesion of meaning through describing co-experience in the context of a loving, caring and supportive congregation. As we relate to our worlds epistemically through the meditation of interpreted experience, our attempts to relocate theology in the ongoing and evolving interdisciplinary discussion acquire new depth and meaning.

The modernists are concerned with facts and rules, but the postmodernists are concerned with meaning. “Postmodern social constructionism focuses on language as informing the construction of meaning.” (Van Meygaarden 2005:6) In getting the meaning of what comes from the stories of the co-researchers I will also concentrated on the language that this congregation used to empower people who

have been neglected pastorally. The interpretation of the stories can only be made if links are drawn between things, and this is done within a time-frame. A story is constructed when words and concepts are assigned to the raw and meaningless experiences. “Language allows us to reframe the past events into usable experiences.” (Müller 1997:9) White and Epston (Payne 2000:8) are very conscious of the need to use language as a therapeutic tool very carefully and draw particular attention to the correct use and understanding of language because it can present an unclear vision or misrepresent experience in the telling, and it can even control or direct the ways in which people act and feel. The sensitivity in the use of words is important because it gives an interpretation of the world.

I agree with Demasure (2006:414) “that language consists of a structure that people can use to give form and meaning to their experiences.” The co-researchers used a language that will describe or prescribe a certain action or behaviour to tell their stories. I looked at the language that the co-researchers used to describe their perception and actions on care, support, love, concerns and cultural regeneration. Ricœur, in Demasure & Müller (2006:413) is correct to say that language can be used to describe different actions and can be used strongly as a weapon of power. With reference to chapter two, section 2.14 my co-researchers used the word “mafia” and this word came out very strongly in a group discussion. In section 2.14 we together dealt with the understanding of the use of this word and the impact of it on the feelings of my co-researchers. I rather opted to look at the power of language that rubbed off positively on this congregation. I looked at expressions or themes in chapter two, section 2.15 like ‘The risk to take a step in faith’, chapter three section 3.6, ‘Togetherness is a challenge to reconstruct’, etc. These sections consist of words used by my co-researchers which acknowledge words like difficulties, struggles, but have changed them into words like ‘commitment, love, care, abilities,’ etc. White is also very observant in expressing terminology that is embedded in a power-based relationship especially in institutions where foreign language terms have been relocated to and used in other contexts where people do not understand its unspoken meaning which is not yet known to people but influential. White is very cautious about using terminology that defines people as objects, because people come to therapy with experiences that have already marginalized, bruised, puzzled and disorientated them in which ways which they need to explain (Payne 2000:9). My co-researchers are people who have come from situations where they have experienced a lack of interest from the leadership. How would my co-researchers and the other congregants hear, experience and interpret the language of the leaders

of this congregation? What are the feelings and attitudes centred on the interpretation of the words being used by the leadership as expressed by my co-researchers. "...it gives a certain group of persons the power to lock others up in prison..." (Demasure & Müller2006:415)

According to White (2005:x) people's identities are shaped by the explanations or descriptions of their lives located in their stories or narratives. As I listened to the stories of my co-researchers I became aware of the fact that a narrative research also expects the researcher to guide the co-researchers to fully describe their stories and experiences, and direct them towards other possibilities that will give new meaning to this research. It is important to note that when research is done from a practical narrative perspective one is expected to journey empathetically with the co-researchers who are living with the situation. Müller and van Deventer explain that in using the narrative approach researchers should pay attention to how people experience their situations. "Practical theology should constantly guard against making generalisations, but should rather attempt to understand on a small scale how people experience their concrete lives, and earnestly listen to the stories of the persons involved." (Müller and van Deventer 2003:86)

Narrative theology highlights the fact that people constantly deal with their life story, which should give meaning to them. Louw (1999:3) and Ganzevoort (1989:9) acknowledges the hermeneutical perspective of practical theology, which involves a combination of a language of faith in God and the ordinary daily life experiences that bring about meaning. Ganzevoort emphasizes that narrative research investigates the way in which individuals concentrate on facts and events in their world of experience to give meaning to their lives (Ganzevoort 1989:9). The narrative approach engenders a deeply rooted insight in the process of research so that people should know how to handle their situations to be able to give meaning to them. Together with the co-researchers the researcher co-investigates the many influences from the problem and the other relationships that the co-researchers have. By focusing on the problems' effects on people's lives rather than on problems as inside or part of people, distance is created. The essence of narrative research is to formulate alternative research stories and not to substantiate the theoretical philosophy (Ganzevoort 1989:12).

Postmodernist scholars with interaction from different disciplines hold on to the idea that the narrative is the primary form through which people's experiences are infused

with meaning. “The primary focus of a narrative approach is people’s expressions of their experiences of life.” (White 2005:1) The desire to tell a story is so natural that it almost without doubt reflects a very central aspect of culture. Many psychologists and therapists use stories to understand the human mind in the use of certain language and grammar. The narrative approach does not use a rigid and structured method to analyse and interprets the development of the different stories into a new story of understanding, but as Müller (2004:293) says, “It rather happens on the basis of a holistic understanding and as a social-constructionist process to which all the co-researchers are invited and in which they are engaged in the creation of new meaning.”

We make use of stories to understand our own lives and also to understand the actions of other people. In narrative research the story of the narrator is prominent and plays a vital role in how meaning is constructed in the expression of stories. People’s experiences carry meaning in life, because people need answers or explanations of why certain things are happening to them. People want to find answers to questions about a world that is sometimes foreign to them. By making use of conversational interviewing I as the researcher tried to find out what my co-researchers think and feel about their worlds. In this research the narrative approach invited my co-researchers to begin a journey of co-exploration in which they can search for their talents and abilities that are hidden beneath the problems that they experienced. It is exciting to know that the narrative approach allows the co-researchers to be actively involved and engage with one another as collaborators in the reconstruction of something of substance and value.

In the narrative approach I invited my co-researchers to tell their stories of how they experienced and perceived them and to listen to their own voices in conveying these stories. The narrative approach does not allow the researcher to enter the field with specific questions in expectation of possible answers. I link this to how Alvesson (2003:16) uses interviews as a mobile device to get information from people concerning their knowledge of their social realities and the worlds they operate in. “...interview statements must be seen in their social context. An interview is an empirical situation that can be studied as such, and should not be treated as a tool for collecting data on something existing outside this empirical situation.” (Alvesson 2003:16) Research can become a threat if the respondents’ stories are “suppressed in that their responses are limited to ‘relevant’ answers to narrowly specified questions (Mishler 1986:68).

3.6 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism originates from an epistemological perspective and is an approach to psychology and other associations of knowledge. It focuses on meaning and power, because from an epistemological position it dictates that meaning and power are all that people can claim to know about. Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge that reasons about how social incidences, happenings, events or observable facts develop in a social context. The most important principle of social constructionism is that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, descriptions, classifications, laws, divisions of labour, etc, that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from different generations and daily (Freedman and Combs 1996:16).

Herbert Mead (1934) discusses in his book *Mind, Self and Society*, that the mind and the self plays an influential role in the communication process between human beings. The mind plays a crucial role in the process of communication and which influences the person to act in a certain way which is acceptable or rejected by society. The origin of social constructionism dates back to Mead (1934:175), who explains symbolic interactions of how children learned to interact with other people by learning the behaviour of others and to present this attitude in the same fashion, which shows the social partnership of meaning. He relates this to the roles that children play as simply a matter of doing what others do. In the process of playing the child imitates the role of another person (could be the parent or a sibling) and through imagination can identify with the role he or she plays. By continuing in this way they later play a variety of roles, and become involved in internal dialogues between the 'I' and 'me' and can later make sweeping statements of the social group (Mead 1934:175) According to him role playing is clearly a matter of imitation. Mead interprets this behaviour as the basis of social order, which explains Berger and Luckmann's perception that "Every individual is born into an objective social structure within, which he or she come across important people who are imposed upon him or her and in charge of their socialization." Berger and Luckmann (1966:151)

People can create attitudes, feelings, beliefs, etc and make them fully part of their personality by absorbing them through repeated experience of or exposure to them. According to Vygotsky (1978) children internalize conversations with others, and gradually obtain knowledge of the social and cultural meanings of a variety of practices. These meanings act as a go-between language and cognition therefore is problem-solving seen as an interactive process. Vygotsky (1978:84) states that

learning that children come across in school has a previous history. He sees play as a leading factor in the development of a child. Constructionism could only account for representations of mind in social interaction and became enthusiastic about the idea of a shared system of meaning and less enthusiastic about the idea of a structured 'self'. "Thus, through symbols, meaning is derived from interaction; humans are unique because they can imagine the effect of their symbolic communications upon others." (Mead 1934:1-6)

It was acknowledged by Berger and Luckmann (1966:51) that all knowledge, from the most basic to the taken-for-granted commonsense knowledge, which was used daily derived from and was supported by social interactions. People interact with one another due to what they perceive as real, genuine and which they can relate to. As they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes stronger and more supportive. An objective reality was comprehensible since people, human characteristics, things that people show by means of signs and institutions, have formed a common understanding of knowledge. In this sense it could be said that reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1966:51).

The postmodern perspectives reveal evidence of social constructionism and have been influential in the field of cultural studies. The general idea of social constructionism as seen from a postmodernist position, is that the concept of social reality emphasises the continuous accumulation of worldviews by individuals in dialectical interaction with society at any given time. The literature studies helped me to understand social constructionism as the social theory that considers the historical processes through which findings or constructions are arranged, brought together, interpreted and then become socially powerful or widely distributed as a social construction. Social constructionism disagrees with the fact that our knowledge is a direct perception of the reality. Within constructionist thought, a social construction (social construct) is a concept or practice that is the creation (or artifact) of a particular group.

The understanding of social reality and cultural meaning is visible in the interactive processes, which also involve the researcher. Hoffman (1993:25) also states that the social constructionist is concerned about the social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family and culture. Social constructionism interprets and regards certain realities as more valid than others. It understands

reality as a construction that functions in relation to the belief system people bring into a specific situation and according to which they operate.

The context in which people create meaning, results in a crucial component. The social constructionist point of view focuses the researcher on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family and culture. I agree with Fraser (1992:92), “Sosiaal konstruksionisme beskou nie die konstruksie van kennis as ‘n interne proses soos verstaan word deur konstruktivisme nie, maar as ‘n intersubjektiewe sosiale proses waardeur persepsies herstruktureer word binne ‘n netwerk van kommunikasie.” The following definition of social constructionism as defined by Terreblanche and Durrheim gives us a clear picture of what it is. “Social constructionism is the research approach that seeks to analyse how signs and images, which have powers to create particular representations of people and objects that underline our experience of these people and objects.” (Terreblanche & Durrheim 1999:148)

An explanation expressed by Parker (1998:13) is that social constructionism does not focus on objective reality but upon the different meanings with which our worlds become invested. According to Vivien Burr (1995:7-11) social constructionism conveys a liberatory message if human beings see themselves as constructions and not objective descriptions then re-construct their lives in ways which might be more facilitating for them.

According to David Paré as mentioned in Freedman and Combs (1996:20) people observe the world as an object while the observing person is the subject and the place between the subject and object is the focus of interpretation in a community with others. The following three beliefs, are mentioned by Freedman and Combs as Paré explains it:

- a. Reality is predictable because human beings can precisely and replicably discover, describe and use its elements and workings.
- b. People are prisoners of their perceptions. What people try to tell us about reality tells us more about the person describing it than external reality.
- c. Knowledge takes place within a community of knowers. The realities people live in are those they discuss with others.

Taken from this statement made by Paré that people are subject in relation to a world as an object, Freedman and Combs see people sometimes being treated like

objects. Sometimes people are subjected to dehumanisation through experience and could feel like machines on an assembly line. An example of the cause of this situation made by Freedman and Combs is when someone is put on medication to function better in an unstable position. The medication might help the person to sleep better, or feel less stressed, but does not say it will root out the problem. This behaviour or objectivity comes from a modernist perception which puts its emphasis on facts and procedures which give proven copies of the truth and rules that could be applied to it, but does not take the specific, localised meanings of individual people into consideration. Modernists treat people like objects and attract them into relationships in which they are passive, powerless receivers of other peoples' knowledge and expertise (Freedman and Combs 1996:21). They link this to Kenneth Gergen in McNamee and Gergen (1992:57) as he states that: "The postmodern argument is not against the various schools of therapy, only against their posture of authoritative truth."

I align myself with Freedman and Combs who accept a postmodernist belief that the capability of human beings to evaluate and explain the universe in any accurate, complete, and universally applicable way is limited. The postmodernists concentrate on particular, contextualized details more than grand generalisations, difference rather than comparison. They are not concerned about facts and rules but would rather decide on meaning (Freedman and Combs 1996:22).

Gergen (1985:268) sees the move from constructivism to social constructionism as a shift from the knowledge of experience to a social epistemology. This shift has been explained by Freedman and Combs (1996:27) as a move away from focusing on how an individual person constructs a model of reality from his or her individual experience to focusing on how people interact with one another to construct, adjust, and keep up with what their society holds to be true, real, and meaningful. I support this explanation given by Freedman and Combs because my interpretation of social constructionism is that it concentrates on the different patterns of behaviour in which, people and groups are involved in the construction of their visible social reality. For me knowledge becomes socially constructed when reality is repeated by people acting on their understanding, explanation and their knowledge of it.

People interpret their worlds through the eyes of society and not the individual. I understand Gergen (1985:266) as making us aware that social constructionism represents a shared consciousness that all participants in society are in dialogue as

to what they view as valuable, genuine and trustworthy. “The realities that each of us take for granted are the realities that our societies have surrounded us with since birth and provide the beliefs, practices, words, and experiences from which we make up our lives.” (Freedman and Combs 1996:16)

From a social constructionist perspective I tried to understand how this community reasons and reflects on their situation and their actions in the process of resettlement or relocation, healing and transformation in a new congregation with a new perception and experience of pastoral care. The legitimacy of knowledge is based on the social context of this congregation in which the co-researchers and other people of this congregation share the same experiences and because of these experiences they live out their lives in help, challenge, positive criticism and acknowledgement of one another. Keeney (1983) understands epistemology as the process through which people understand their experiences, and through this understanding find meaning on a meta-level. The therapist can understand an individual's experience only by observing how his social context is punctuated (Keeney 1983:27).

As I have journeyed in life I have realised and also noticed in some communities that knowledge arises within a community that has gone through many experiences and situations. These perceptions that we have about the realities of other people come from our conversations and interactions with people. “The modernist, sees people as objects, because they discard the specific, localized meanings of individual people.” This “objectivity” categorizes people into a relationship in which they are passive, powerless recipients of their own knowledge and expertise. For the modernist peoples’ experience can only be judged or understood by a meta-narrative as explained by Lyotard in section 3 (pg 14 - 15). In this research I looked at how the co-researchers perceived their relationships with one another as a means of inward journey, interaction towards love, care and spirituality and how they use their knowledge as a way of wisdom to support each other. Knowledge is attained through social construction, and changes and becomes new every time that people interact with one another. I see some agreement in the words of Browning (1991:4) as influenced by Gadamer that peoples’ present concerns shape the way they interpret the past, but that the reverse could also be true. Peoples’ situations can, be interpreted by their practical thinking as a search for knowledge and understanding. Peoples’ solutions to their present ethical problems involve appropriate reconstruction of the past. The postmodernist is not against the various

schools of therapy, but only against their posture of authoritative truth. “Postmodernism is, rather than an attitude, a radically different way of looking at the world of modernity...” (Van Huyssteen 1998:5)

From a post modern perspective the research was conducted from its subject matter, human social life and also information obtained from post and non-structuralist understandings of life and identity. This worldview not only has implications for the way in which we think about truth, but also for the way in which we try to be truthful in doing research. According to social-constructionism it is important for me as the researcher to play the role of a participant observer and not to abuse the process of research. According to Graham (1996:112) “researchers should not disadvantage the co-researchers, which can damage the process of research.”

Müller et al, (2001:2) also state that, “Postmodernists differ from modernists because exceptions interest them more than rules, and they look at the importance of specific contextualised details rather than grand generalizations, difference rather than similarity.” As I journeyed with my co-researchers we looked together at the different ways that they interpreted their vision and mission towards their ministry of care and support and how it differs from the structure that has been laid down by the church, or what would be the similarities that strengthen their capacity to care for and support one another. We looked at what they perceived as different from the world introduced to them by the church to what they are now experiencing. This automatically drew me into the stories that had not been told and, according to narrative research, became the unheard stories.

Social constructionist methods are also hermeneutical and interpretative in nature and concerned with meaning. The interpretative traditions focus on the subjective understanding and experiences of individuals or groups. From a social constructionist point of view I, as the researcher, will show how such understandings and experiences are derived from and fed into larger discourses. By using the interpretative approach I regarded people as the owners of the origins of their thoughts, feelings and experiences. The social constructionist perspective allowed me to make use of conversational interviews and different kinds of text to trace the ways in which people talk about themselves. It was only through the ongoing interaction with the co-researchers that they developed a sense of identity or an inner voice. “The social constructionist theorist sees ideas, concepts and memories arising

from social interchange and mediated through language.” (McNamee and Gergen 1994:8)

Members of the same culture construct social realities as they interact with one another over the years, which means that societies construct the lenses through which their members interpret the world. I made use of the narrative approach to listen to the stories of my co-researchers as members from a specific congregation, who have journeyed with God and with the church in a given cultural setup. This allowed me to become involved and listen carefully to the stories of my co-researchers. I stayed curious and explored the stories by connecting cultural things such as metaphors, historical moments or events, etc, as their narratives unfolded.

4. THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

In view of my epistemology and positioning as mentioned in paragraph 3, this research is based on the ‘Seven Movements Model’, which speaks about the integration of the narrative approach, social-constructionism, post-modernism and post-foundationalism. I have chosen this research procedure, because it reflects the assumptions and foundation of a postfoundationalist theology to develop a practical theological research process, which, is made up of seven movements. This research procedure has been developed and introduced by Müller, who tried “to take the concepts of postfoundationalist theology one step further towards the development of a research process for practical theology.” (Müller 2004:301)

I used the ‘Seven Movements Model’ because it clearly express how the research was done in conjunction with the telling of stories, the social interaction between the co-researchers, scientific community and I, the use of the literature material and how a new story could be explored through experience.

In this research I pursued the following outline of the seven movements:

4.1 Description of a specific context.

The description of the context shows the information and background from which the research started.

4.1.1 Historical background of the context.

Every written story conveys a historical moment that gives you an idea about how the history fits into the essence of the research and how it links to my personal story.

4.1.2 My relationship with the context.

This section shows my involvement with my co-researchers in this research and how it corresponds with my current job situation.

4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to narrative practical theological research.

I entered this research from a certain epistemological point of departure. My epistemological point of departure is an expression of my way of thinking in conjunction with the knowledge of my co-researchers. This point of departure is centred around the knowledge that is available for the research project and the interpretation of it.

4.1.4 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm.

The stories concerning God's self-disclosure as experienced by my co-researchers and how these stories found meaning.

4.2 The in-context experiences

The experiences as described by my co-researchers helped me to discover, understand and gain insight into the world of my co-researchers.

4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers

The selection of the co-researchers shows the involvement of people in this research who contributed valuable information as they perceived, experienced and described their context.

4.2.2 Methodological implications

Shows how I used the research method to listen to the stories.

4.2.3 Ethical guidelines.

These guidelines involve the ways in which the researcher thinks about the essence of the research. It shows how I regard the information that is gathered and how it is used with integrity in the process of research.

4.2.4 The effective move from "listening to experiences" to "describing the experiences".

Listening to the experiences expects an intense way of listening and the description that was given brings out the meaning of the experiences.

4.3 The collaborative interpretation and description of experiences.

This section distinguishes the collaborate approach of all participants in this research.

4.4 Description of experience and traditions of interpretations. The different discourses and traditions in this community are explored in order to discover the different perceptions of behaviour. The church and military discourses and are explored.

4.4.1 Valuable inputs from the scientific community

In the process of research other valuable information, interpretation, comments and inputs from different fields of study can be brought into the research.

4.4.2 Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research

The research is based on the experiences and stories of my co-researchers. Their inputs and structure of this research is regarded as important.

4.5 Religious and spiritual aspects: God's presence.

The stories divulge the experience and interpretation of God by my co-researchers.

4.6 A description of experience, made more profound through interdisciplinary investigation.

The use of the different interdisciplinary methods gave description to experiences of my co-researchers.

4.7 The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community.

The ideas, beliefs and new interpretations that come from my co-researchers actually enhance transformation, and the development of a new story about care, support and spiritual transformation.

This research is not only about how to describe and interpret the experience of people but also about deconstruction and emancipation. Together with the co-researchers, I will allow the different stories in the research to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community. According to the narrative approach, this will not happen on the basis of beforehand structured and rigid methods through which stories are analysed and interpreted. The research will happen on the basis of a holistic understanding and as a social constructionist process in which all the co-researchers are invited and engaged in the creation of new meaning. This implies a continuous cycle or interaction of practice-theory-practice until it comes into operation.

4.1 Description of a specific context.

The context of this research is based within a specific congregation in Pretoria from the Valhalla area, which is going through a process or is in a situation in which they realised that they needed one another for love, care and support. This community came into being due to the need for fellowship amongst resettled and relocated people (strangers) in a new setting of a spiritual and pastoral journey. This pastoral journey is explored in the narratives of care, healing and transformation as

mentioned in chapter two. The moment of praxis for this congregation started from the perspective of spirituality in the form of love, care and support. It is from this situation that I understood Müller's (2004:296) perspective of a "practical theology that cannot function in a general context...It is always local, concrete and specific."

4.1.1 Historical background of the context.

My knowledge concerning this congregation is that it is situated in a military environment where the members are predominantly employed in the SANDF (South African National Defence Force) and other departments of the government. The congregation is predominantly coloured and consists of the characteristics of a cross-cultural society where people felt the need to assist one another in love, which is expressed in a manner of care and support. The signs of healing and transformation were immediately visible due to the openness and spirituality of the people. This research arose when one of the members realised that the military members of the church were deployed most of the time in other African countries. People felt the need to take care of the families and that the church should play an integral role as a support system, especially in cases where the social well-being department of the military has delayed to perform their task.

My personal story as told at the end of this chapter, links to this congregation in a way that as a Military Chaplain I knew most of these people and worshipped together with them at the previous church they belonged to. I also served as a minister for some time at this congregation and know most of the people quite well. I became involved and drawn into this community when I saw the tremendous growth (in spirituality and attendance), and their initiative to support one another. From my own point of view, together with the stories from my co-researchers, I became aware of what love, care, support and spiritual growth means to people in a situation of resettlement and relocation.

4.1.2 My relationship with the context.

This section refers to the introduction of this chapter, section 1.1. In my current job where I am stationed as the Coordinator of the training for Lay Ministries in the MCSA (Methodist Church of Southern Africa), I coordinate training for laypeople who have special gifts or skills to continue a sound ministry in the church where a church cannot afford the service of an ordained priest or minister. Laypeople in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa are ordinary church members and some are elected as leaders, who are not ordained to the order of the priesthood, but who have

the leadership skills and abilities needed to lead a small group or a section of the church, where he or she attends. Most congregations invite me to train them in the different courses that the church provides for the training and empowerment of lay-people. In training laypeople, I recognise and acknowledge the special gifts and skills laypeople have and would like to empower them in being more creative. Some churches in the Methodist context cannot afford a fulltime minister and the ministry becomes the responsibility of laypeople who do not sit back and see their congregations without a hand of care and support. My interest in the stories of these people is sensitized by the gifts and skills they have and practice. This brought me into a partnership relationship with this Trinity Family Church. I also see in my relationship with this context as Browning (1991:55) would say that, “a concrete situation consists of the histories, commitments, and needs of the agents in the situation. It consists of the interplay of institutional systems and how they converge on the situation.”

4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to practical theological research.

In section 3 one can see clearly that epistemology allows people to understand how they perceive their own experiences and how these experiences function. According to Browning (1991:55) “strategic practical theological thinking drives the theologian to understand the concrete situation in which people should act.” As a pastor and a practical theologian I became attracted to and engaged in conversation with the people of this congregation and how they viewed and handled their situation as they moved from being not taken care of to try to work out a spirituality and a relationship and method of care among themselves in the Valhalla community. I listened to the stories and interacted with the stories, which they regard as a process that brought healing and transformation in order for them to care for one another. As I journeyed with this community I listened to the stories of my co-researchers from an understanding that can only develop from a local context. This local context is the moment of praxis from which I explored, to try to acquire or develop a relationship or an attitude that could develop out of a uniquely motivated Postfoundationalist Practical Theology. In journeying with my co-researchers I realized that their experiences through the telling of stories helped all of us to understand how they understood their resettlement or relocation, healing and transformation in a new congregation with a new perception and experience of pastoral care. The soundness of knowledge was based on their communal situation in which they and other people of this congregation shared the same experience and because of this experience

they live out their lives in contribution, and how to deal with, positive criticism and acknowledgement of one another. I interpreted this knowledge as what my co-researchers experienced or perceived as what they know and understand concerning their situation of relocation, love, care and support. Epistemology expects from me, as a pastor and theologian, to understand people and their experiences as they function at different levels of understanding.

In this research the co-researchers and I were in a definite conversation with something at hand to contribute to the process of research. In this situation, I listened to the stories of my co-researchers' experience and ideology of God, and how they perceive God in an act of healing people physically, mentally and spiritually. In order for me to understand the stories of my co-researchers I looked at how they observe their situation and in what manner they relate to and construct their reality. Many different realities exist at the same time, as each person creates these through his or her individual perceptions, senses and cognitions. As I listened to the stories and observed the behaviour of my co-researchers I became more and more conscious of a researcher who listens and understand within a subjective position as mentioned in paragraphs 3.4.1 and 4.1.4. "According to post-positivist every observation is subjective." (Lincoln and Guba 1985:14)

4.1.4 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm

As already mentioned in this chapter section 3.2 the postfoundationalist practical theology finds its action, where there is a reflection on practice, especially where there is an experience where God has made himself known to people. This drew me into a relationship of journeying with my co-researchers in a process of knowing, thinking and decision-making. I then started my research from this perspective because as researcher I was looking for the information of valuable stories, which arose from a congregation, who have through many experiences and situations. These realities that I have about people came from conversations and interactions among people who shared the same and different ideologies of life. I listened to the stories of my co-researchers as they unpacked each event of their lives or experience about their encounters with God and how they perceived God in each situation. I looked at the local wisdom that has developed from a local context. This made me take the stance of a postfoundationalist approach that sees knowledge as an understanding that can only develop from a local context. "This way of thinking is always, local, and contextual, but at the same time it reaches beyond local contexts to transdisciplinary concerns." (Demasure & Muller; 2006:417)

Some people had experienced God differently in a specific situation than in previous experiences. I was interested in how my co-researchers regarded their own faith compared to their experiences in the past, which I took as a guide as to whether there are stories of hope and comfort. I embarked on this research from a postmodernist perspective, because my main aim was to be truthful in doing this research. I participated in this research where my co-researchers were actively involved in the process and in which they are the stakeholders of their own knowledge and expertise. I chose the postmodern perspective because I, as the researcher, allowed myself to be led by the new ideas, developments and conversations of my co-researchers, which actually put me in a subjective position. The research was conducted from its subject matter, human social life and identity. “Social research is not about categorizing and classifying, but figuring out what events mean, how people adapt, and how they view what happened to them and around them.” (Rubin and Rubin 1995:34)

In my role as a pastor and practical theologian I focused on how faith through the use of the text is contextually interpreted and experienced by the co-researchers. I was continuously mindful of how faith and context worked together to create an understanding of God and of our experience of God as well as to establish meaning in the lives of my co-researchers. This process involves listening to the stories of human relationships, situations, hearing and understanding how God is present in these stories. “This process involves a multilogical relationship between the issues and problems involved in a particular human situation and the core metaphorical values and meanings of the Christian story.” (Gerkin 1991:19) According to Woodward and Pattison (2000:36) “a critical creative conversation develops between the beliefs, perceptions and assumptions of the researcher and arising from the Christian community and tradition and the contemporary issues, practices or events which are considered”. As a practical theologian I am part of the process and am regarded as a participant observer taking in a “not-knowing “ position as explained in section 3.4.1. I also regard the statement made by Müller (2004:294) as crucial for this research ... “Post Foundationalist Practical Theology should be seen as a way of understanding within the paradigm of the hermeneutical approach.”

4.2 The In-context experiences

4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers

The selection of the co-researchers is fully described in section 4.2.2 and shows the selection of five families. From this congregation I chose five families because they

have been concerned about the recording of the narrative of their church, so that the story concerning the origin of this church could be heard correctly, because they would like future generations to have a real human document of this church. It was the narratives of these five families that the research was based on. The selection of my co-researchers was made from the background of their involvement in the action of this research. They are people from a military and church background but not specifically Methodist although most of them are from a Methodist background. This selection helped me to involve people in this research who gave me information as they perceived, experienced and described their context. I was selective in doing this so that I could obtain information that would help me to discover, understand and gain insight into the world of my co-researchers and what could be learned from it. "The researcher selected the sample, purposely, based on judgment and the purpose of the study." (Babbie & Mouton 2001:166-167)

In section, 4.2.2 clear evidence is, given of the target group of this research so that typical and valuable information could be given. In listening to and collecting the different stories, I realized the importance of different kinds of stories from certain characters as displayed in section 4.2.2. Together with my co-researchers we explored their experiences and described the findings as experienced by my co-researchers, which were used as the foundation for formulating guidelines for new dimensions of love, care and support. The narrative approach made it possible for me as the researcher to explore the topic as I enter into the field of study. This research is context-bound and it is conducted from explored and described experiences of my co-researchers within the context of their life-world. This included the field of perception of the participants, observing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon and looking for meaning of the participants' experiences. (Creswell 1998:17,31)

Throughout the whole research I tried to understand what gives meaning to my co-researchers and how they made sense of their world and the experiences they had in the world. This shows clearly my interest in the meaning that my co-researchers gave to their own experiences of love, care and support in a setup where they do not have a minister. This sensitized me to spend some time with my co-researchers in the natural setting of the research but from a perspective of a participant observer as hearing it from their voices.

4.2.2 Methodological implications

The method for this research entailed the following guidelines:

- To conduct conversational interviews: The interviews were based on the stories of the five families as mentioned in section 4.2.1
 - Family one is the couple and their children who felt led to open their house to start the new church.
 - Family two is a couple that joined this congregation because their son joined the youth organization of this church.
 - Family three is a divorcee who wanted to join this church with her children. (Unfortunately she moved to Johannesburg after her interview)
 - Family four is a family that has a passion for young people and they accommodate the youth meetings in their house.
 - Family five is a couple that was wandering around and looking for a church in Pretoria and eventually visited this church through an invitation from a friend.
- One story included is of a person who did not agree to be a co-researcher but due to the nature of the story it formed a kind of introductory statement to the rest of the stories used in this research.
- Another story is used of a person who agreed to be a co-researcher but was relocated to Johannesburg on a job related matter.
- The interviews are the stories of the co-researchers to show how this church came into existence.
- The content of these conversations will be dealt with more extensively in chapter two.
- The process of conversational interviews will be broadly attended to in chapter three. The interviews I have conducted were conversations with the heard and unheard voices of the members of the five families.
- Each conversational interview consisted of conversations, three bible studies and four leaders meetings.
- All these stories and interpretations of the stories, with their discourses, literature and contexts have been integrated into new alternative stories and traditions, which will be dealt with in section 4.4 of the seven movements and chapter three.
- I made use of the social-constructionist narrative approach to interpret the interviews.

- I used the literature and argued it against the context of the co-researchers in a mode of query or confirmation of its validity so that a new story could be developed. I reflected theoretically on the process of communicating the message of the text to the stories of my co-researchers. Browning (1991: 55) explains this as the nature of practical reason within a theological context. I used the stories of my co-researchers as proof that local knowledge goes beyond the historically situated nature of all knowledge including religious knowledge. This knowledge includes the events that have taken place in the lives of co-researchers and the impact of these events on their lives.

In this process of listening to the stories of my co-researchers, I agree with Garfinkel as quoted by Shotter (1993:27), that to make sense of an event in a conversational reality is not a simple “one-pass” matter of an individual saying a sentence and the listener understanding it. Garfinkel goes further in saying that events talked about are in particular unclear, which means these events do not give structure to a clearly restricted set of possible determinations, but that the events, which are, described, include a purpose and approval of a special aspect or part of it. This aspect or part is open with respect to internal relationships, relationships to other events and relationships to past events and potential possibilities. In the interviews with my co-researchers I experienced what Garfinkel (1967:36) in Shotter (1993:27) says that when these events are specific or determining for the relevant practical purpose it then involves a complex back-and-forth process of negotiation both between speaker and hearer, and between what has already been said and what currently is being said. The present context in relation to the waiting for something that will be said later, would make clear what was meant earlier, and other background features of everyday scenes, might be seen but not noticed.

The co-researchers and I regarded the conversations in the form of an empirical research, but within the narrative approach. I listened to the stories of my co-researchers who are parents, children, the group who are the leaders of this congregation and the visitors who regularly visit this congregation. I made use of the outcomes of the stories from the different people who participated, in the process of research.

In doing this research I concentrated on the following:

- As researcher I was not only interested in the descriptions of the experiences of my co-researchers but also in their own interpretations of what happened in their congregational set up.

- Interpretations were handled in constant feedback loops in collaboration with my co-researchers. I also looked at the other disciplines to see how they understand and give account to human behaviour and experience expressed through their language, reasoning and the strategies they use.
- I was interested in the stories of the youth who are confronted and challenged with the ordinary life battles in the community and the use of drugs.

Throughout the research and writing of it I made certain that I stood in the theological paradigm that I have positioned myself in. As researcher I could only choose a method from the perspective of understanding the concrete situation in which the co-researchers act. The action of the co-researchers brought both the researchers and I into the “now” of the story. The “now” of the story was seen as separate from the “future” or the “past” of the story. The “now” is discussed in chapter two, section 2.3.2 This showed my position within a narrative, social-constructionist or postmodern paradigm, which also linked this research project with the postfoundationalist approach, which I already adhered to.

In this research the social-constructionist methods were also qualitative interpretive and concerned with meaning. From a qualitative perspective I explored the shared experiences of my co-researchers and how they gave meaning to these experiences. The narrative approach coincides with the qualitative way of doing research but does not discard the use of the quantitative method. I did not use the quantitative method because it was not necessary to develop an instrument and method to measure this research. I also looked at the metaphors and symbols that have given me an indication of how my co-researchers interpreted their experiences and their worlds, and how they interacted with other people. There are interpretive traditions that focus on the subjective understanding and experiences of individuals. I used the interviews as my main source of information to teach me how the assumptions were taken for granted and understood by the experiences that have been shaped by these assumptions. “The image of a partnership with the interviewee does not always work, but it represents the goal of integrating those who give us information into our research.” (Rubin & Rubin 1995:12)

I looked at the way they divulged their stories and the stories they felt comfortable with me writing down. I asked them to write down their stories, to read it to me and again to re-tell it from the same perspective. I looked at how the stories have been retold, what made it different or why more emphasis has carried weight on the re-

telling or on the written story. I looked at how their subjective worlds have been described and what makes it different to the world they can easily talk about. Together we looked at how these worlds linked to their contextual world and how Methodists perceived their mission as stated in the “Six Calls Model”.

I also looked at the reality of the narrative information that had been given to me, which means that I allowed my co-researchers to describe their experiences in their own terms. This helped me to understand their culture, their relationship with other people and to hear what gave my co-researchers a public voice or the feeling that this research could give them a voice to be heard. In this research I adhered to Alvesson (2003:17) in saying, “My ambition is then to use the interview as a site for exploring issues broader than talk in an interview situation, without falling too deeply into the trap of viewing interview talk as a representation of the interiors of subjects or the exteriors of the social worlds in which they participate”.

The interviews showed clearly how my co-researches experienced God. I also looked at how they relate to God through the church as a healing community and what added or made it different to the situation they are experiencing now. How did their stories link to the stories of previous experiences? I wrote up these stories as their stories given in their language and their terms and together looked at how these stories could close the gap to what was not yet heard.

4.2.3 Ethical Guidelines

Ethics are very important in the process of research, which contains a system of morals and policy of conduct. Seeing that I have embarked on narrative research the emphasis fell on personal, idiosyncratic stories, which challenged me to be ethically sound. This means that as I journeyed with my co-researchers I continuously negotiated with them to gain their consent concerning the research. Their consent was given voluntarily and was informed. Each of my co-researchers received a full, non-technical and clear explanation of what the research was all about and what was expected from both of us, so that they could make an informed choice to participate voluntarily in this research. Fortunately for me this writing of the research was a request from this re-established community so that the history of this congregation could be put on paper. Despite their request I could still respect their dignity and consent. I also protected their personal identity and told them that the data would be recorded, stored and processed for release. “The informed consent form signed by

participants should also assure them of the parameters of confidentiality of the information supplied by them.” (Terre Blanch & Durrheim 1999:68)

- I submitted a research proposal to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, to obtain permission so that I could do this research.
- As mentioned above I received written consent from all my co-researchers to participate in this research.
- Their request for writing this research was still open to voluntary participation and their right to stay anonymous.
- The contribution of the co-researchers was open and gave permission to reveal the findings of the research on completion of the research.
- As researcher I would like this research to be published and be of use to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and others who could learn from it.

As the author of this research project I was continuously mindful of adhering to the truthfulness of research and to deconstruct the sometimes abusiveness of research projects and would like to adhere to the following statement made by Graham: “We want to be researchers who do not pathologize or victimize their narrators”. (Graham 1996:112)

4.2.4 The effective move from “listening to experiences” to “describing the experiences”

As I have listened to my co-researchers I discovered themes and concepts that were passive in the conversations. These themes and concepts guided me into specific discourses or traditions in this congregation that explain or gave evidence to certain behaviour and perceptions. There were discourses that led my co-researchers to take a bold step and a firm stand so that they would take care of one another without the presence or guidance of a minister. There were discourses and experiences of support, which actually gave them a sense of belonging and affirmed the presence of God. My aim was to identify and listen to these discourses and try to understand the current behaviour of my co-researchers as being influenced by these discourses. As I listened to my co-researchers I became sensitised to listen to the literature, the skills, talents, creativity, methods of care and support and also the context of the culture of my co-researchers. To be able to do this I analysed the different discourses, revisited the research narratives, as they were written in the literature, expressed in their art and other cultural facts or events. “To get beyond ordinary listening and hear meanings, you have to focus the discussion to obtain more depth

and detail on a narrower range of topics than you would in ordinary conversations.”
(Rubin & Rubin 1995:8)

As I discovered the events that stood outside the problems’ influence I traced down and also recorded the history of these events. I located them alongside the problems that influenced these events. Alice Morgan (2000:78) gives very clear direction regarding this: “As these events are linked in a history over time, people are invited to explore their meanings: what these events mean in terms of their personal qualities, commitments, preferences, desires, beliefs, skills, knowledge, etc.”

4.3. The collaborative interpretation and description of experiences.

When people re-write their lives and interaction with others, their knowledge about the problem and the person’s choice for living becomes clear and meaningful. The story that seems dominant to the other stories becomes weak or vanishes and a new preferred story emerges. In the conversations the co-researcher can legitimately take over the direction and flow of the interview. Together with my co-researchers we decided what issues to explore, suggested what remains to be said, and worked towards an in-depth description that builds an overall picture. Together the researchers and I classed the research as therapeutic documents as they made important commitments or celebrated important achievements. “Researchers and conversational partners share the task of maintaining the flow of dialogue, creating the frame in which discussion takes place and creating a setting (both symbolic and physical) in which communication is relatively easy.” (Rubin & Rubin 1995:11)

I wrote down the stories and events in collaboration with the co-researchers and edited them according to their judgment of what is important. I wrote it according to how they would like it to be edited and what they intended doing with it. This information included letters written by my co-researcher or people from the church council and minutes of leaders meetings. It shows a record of steps that brought about unique outcomes. Agreements and suggestions between the co-researchers and I were recorded and viewed again in the process of referencing during a therapeutic session. Together we made sure that the unique outcomes were thoroughly re-viewed as stated by Morgan. “Unique outcomes (events that stand outside of the dominant story or problem) can often go unnoticed, unless the therapist listens and watches out for them.” (Morgan 2000:54)

The co-researcher's experience was told and at hand, but as researcher I concentrated on how the co-researchers interpreted their own stories and experiences. I gave attention to the co-researchers' understanding of their problems, and how it had an effect on their lives, relationships and behaviour in the congregation. I was in full time consultation with the co-researchers who played an important role in mapping the direction of the journey, through the telling of their stories. I did not only rely on my own assumptions and made sure that through the re-telling of the stories and guidance of interpretation whether I heard the correct story. As researcher I tried to understand what the interests of the people were and how the journey was suiting their preferences. Postmodernism's pervasive impact on social sciences comes from its use of interpretive methodologies based on the model of language and discourse. "Just as all scientific observations are always theory-laden, so too all religious experiences are always interpretation-laden." (Van Huyssteen 1997:19)

I posed certain questions to keep the conversation as part of consultation going. Narrative conversations are interactive and always in collaboration with the people consulting the therapist. The questions that I raised helped my co-researchers to rewrite their life narrative in a more affirming manner. When the co-researchers were exposed to new knowledge it helped them to prioritise the situations in their lives and assisted them to retrieve their lives and relationships from the problem and its influence. "In this way, narrative conversations are guided and directed by the interest of those who are consulting the therapist." (Morgan 2000:4)

This research project was incorporated in a conversation with different theological disciplines and other sciences. I looked at the other disciplines and they understood and gave an account of human behaviour and experience as expressed through their language, reasoning and strategies they use. This interdisciplinary conversation was in participation with practical theology. I listened to the different stories of understanding and tried to integrate them with the perspectives from the different theological disciplines. "The researcher has to listen carefully to the various stories of understanding and make an honest effort to integrate them into one." (Müller 2004:303)

To be able to integrate the different disciplines, I made use of different literature studies. I gathered the inputs of colleagues with knowledge from different disciplines.

My co-researchers were my main focus group, and my involvement showed the role of a participant observer.

4.4 Description of experience and traditions of interpretations.

As already explained in 1.2.1, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983:1) also mentions that they see traditions are also invented, constructed and formally instituted within a brief and dateable period. Traditions attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. As taken from 1.2.1 I observed how the Methodist tradition impacted on the knowledge and stories of my co-researchers in the establishment of a new congregation. I looked at the different discourses or/and traditions in this community which formed perceptions of behaviour. For instance, some of the people in this congregation have gone through stages of power struggles that come from a military background, which left people hurting with no one to talk to. Some of the men were deployed in other neighbouring countries leaving their families alone and without attention to some of their needs. This situation was heightened when my co-researchers felt that they could not trust anybody with their problems. They experienced no guidance and support from the military disciplinary committee (which consisted of the nurse, doctor, psychologist, chaplain and social worker). They started to experience this same situation in the church where they belonged. They started sharing these stories with one another until they decided to support one another. My co-researchers have identified these discourses and tried to gain some understanding on how the current behaviour or maturity and spiritual growth of the people were influenced by these discourses. As for me, together with the co-researchers I understood and deconstructed the events, which resulted in the way that the current behaviour was influenced by these discourses.

As researcher, I ventured on the tradition of knowledge, because knowledge goes together with power and they are sometimes so integrated that it is hard to believe that they can exist without one another. My co-researchers saw themselves in my descriptions, but I did not feel offended when they did not agree with every detail or interpretation. I agree strongly with Foucault as quoted by Van Huyssteen (1998:18) that “it is impossible for power to be exercised without knowledge, and it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. “We should be able to enter into cross-contextual and interdisciplinary conversations with our strong personal convictions intact, but at the same time be theoretically empowered to reach beyond the boundaries and limitations of our own traditions and forms of life.” (Van Huyssteen 1998:19)

4.4.1 Valuable inputs from scientific community

When human beings meet one is introduced to what they feel, think and how they listen. From this perspective I respected my scientific community as people, who are critically looking at the art, structure and development of the research. To be able to listen to the scientific community, I focused on the literature, art, and the culture of a certain context. Seeing that they were people from different fields of study, I invited them to analyse the stories of my co-researchers. My scientific community recommended certain literature for doing further research on the topic. I have sent around a copy of my research document to my co-researchers, colleagues and people who were knowledgeable in the field of practical theology or pastoral counselling and care and who journeyed with me in the process of writing. I expected them to comment on the writing and in reply, respected their view of literature. I made use of my scientific community and colleagues to go with the co-researchers and me, through the whole process of research, and how the research findings should be analysed. I used their comments and incorporated it into the rest of my manuscript. “Analogously, our brute experience helps us to gain deeper and deeper insights, beneath our narrative traditions, into the tendencies and needs of our basic human nature.” (Browning 1991:179)

4.4.2 Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research.

At this stage I became involved with my co-researchers, so that together they could discuss and evaluate the importance of this research and how much they value it and how the rest of the community will value it. We also tape recorded the conversations, analysed the length of the intervals and put the wording in the correct sequence and the exact words that the co-researchers used. Together we grouped their responses in categories and similar ideas, concepts or themes, of which some they, others and I had discovered. We also concentrated on the steps and stages in the process, and coded the names or evidence and even signs of emotions. I consulted with my co-researchers concerning the information given to me. If they agreed with the facts, but disagreed with my interpretations, I then requested them to repeat what they had said. I allowed them to write the agenda of how they would like the information to be edited and analysed. I had constant and continuous conversations with them.

To be able to venture further in the process of research I did a discourse analysis, revisited research narratives, which I found in literature, worship, meetings, talk sessions, and other cultural phenomena. From a practical theological narrative perspective I was interested in discovering, acknowledging and deconstructing the

beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which my co-researchers live. They adhered to the understanding that practical theological research is not only about description and interpretation of experiences.

4.5 Religious and spiritual aspects: God's presence.

According to Gerkin (1996:24) "there is a long biblical history of how God cared for His people in difficult times." These people have found the care of God in the form of Wisdom as been given by the prophets and experienced it in the richness of ritual practices. I looked at moments, which were regarded as Wisdom (refer to chapter four sections 4.8 and 4.8.1) by the co-researchers and how they then experienced the love, guidance and presence of God. These clues were words like: faith, prayer, Bible, mercy or grace, hope, change, commit or commitment and belief. The stories were told as an eye opener on the "journey" that God had been with them as they found one another in the process of care and support. I paid attention to the stories of my co-researchers as they unpacked each event of their lives or experience about their encounters with God and how they perceived God in each situation. I took the local wisdom that has developed from a local context into consideration. This made me take in further the stance of a postfoundationalist approach that sees knowledge as an understanding that can only develop from a local context.

I allowed the co-researchers to hear and understand their religious and spiritual understanding and experiences of God's presence in their own language and use of language. These events, stories or discourses, were integrated into the social-constructionist process. I realized that my own understanding of God's presence in a certain situation was also a valuable contribution they had to make. I took note of clues in the different narratives about their experiences with God. The co-researchers and I together interacted with these clues through methods congruent to the world and language of the co-researchers.

As a researcher I embarked on this research from the perspective that people have different ideas and experiences of God. I respected the religious background and experiences of my co-researchers and guarded against influencing them to fit in with my perspective. In the process of research the researcher and co-researcher come with a background of experiences, emotions, pain and challenges, whether negative or positive. If these backgrounds are negative I, as the researcher, can become trapped into dominating the process of research, by projecting my own fears, pain, experience or happiness onto the co-researchers. This behaviour can direct the

research in the way that the researcher wants it to go rather than by being led by the unfolding of the narratives of the co-researchers. “In deconstruction conversations it is important to note that therapists are not trying to impose their ideas or thoughts on the person, to change a person’s thinking”. (Morgan 2000:50)

Some people have experienced God differently in a specific situation than before. I was interested in how my co-researchers regarded their own faith compared to their experiences in the past, which I took as a guide as to whether they are stories of hope and comfort. In my role as practical theologian and researcher I focused on how faith through the use of the text is contextually interpreted and experienced by the co-researchers. I listened attentively to how faith and context worked together to create an understanding of God and of their experience of God as well to establish meaning in the lives of my co-researchers. This process involves listening to the stories of human relationships, situations of care and support, hearing and understanding of how God is present in these stories. “This process involves a multilogical relationship between the issues and problems involved in a particular human situation and the core metaphorical values and meanings of the Christian story.” (Gerkin 1991:19) According to Woodward and Pattison (2000:36) “a critical creative conversation develops between the beliefs, perceptions and assumptions of the researcher and arising out of the Christian Community and tradition and the contemporary issues, practices or events which is considered.”

4.6 A description of experience, deepened through interdisciplinary investigation.

The use of the different interdisciplinary methods resulted in the description of the experiences of my co-researchers. Also through interdisciplinary methods I found ways in which these alternative stories could be ‘richly described’. I was constantly mindful of different methodologies that could be applied and also in conversation with other theological disciplines as well as the other sciences. As the researcher I listened carefully to the various stories of understanding and made an honest effort to integrate them all into one.

When I looked at the stories from a practical theological perspective it not only reflected on description and interpretation of experience, but I also had a closer look at alternative interpretations. I used the other relevant material from other fields to argue with their views or interpretations on my research. This led me in a direction of practical theological research that enhances deconstruction and emancipation.

Appropriate to this the different stories of the research developed into new stories of understanding that point beyond the local community which then deconstructed the discourses that impacted negatively on it. This approach also involved other religious communities, which are typical examples of individual experience, communal rituals and specific ethical concerns. Postmodernism challenged me also to look at material on the relationship between religion and social science. This whole approach happened on the basis of a holistic understanding and as a social-constructionist process in which all the co-researchers together with other fields of study were invited and engaged in the creation of new meaning. “According to the narrative approach, this will not happen on the basis of structured and rigid methods, by means of which stories are analysed and interpreted. (Müller 2004:304)

Postmodernism grooms us into a new way of looking at the world and how people interpret their experience, which actually helps us in the way we do theology and science. The Postmodern philosophy of science works in conjunction with the narrative and hermeneutical approaches because it acknowledges science as a cultural and social phenomenon. The postmodern view of knowledge is important for theology and science because it helps us to reflect on God's action and presence in the world today.

My theological position allowed me to also make use of non-theological evidence and to balance this with theology. To be able to do this I looked at literature studies, interviews with colleagues from different disciplines, focus groups, participatory observation and action in the interdisciplinary field. According to Van Huyssteen (1998:2), “postmodernity challenges us to deal with the complex but important relationship between theology and science in a contextual situation. We relate to our world through interpreted experience, and according to postmodern relativism science is just one more belief system.” According to Lyotard narratives provide a certain kind of knowledge that cannot be added in any other way. “This narrative knowledge can also function as a legitimisation of scientific knowledge instead of the grand meta-narratives that previously legitimated science in the modern world.” (Van Huyssteen 1998:14)

4.7 The development of alternative interpretations, that point beyond the local community.

At this stage I looked at the ideas and beliefs of what the co-researchers say about what transformation, church growth and “Journey to a New Land” means to them. I

allowed all the different stories of the research to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community, so that the negative discourses could be deconstructed. I invited all the co-researchers to engage in the creation of a new meaning through the social constructionist process, so that a holistic understanding could be achieved.

I made use of the following methods to disseminate the research:

- Group discussions with co-researchers.
- Workshops or seminars.
- The various communities like the scientific community, church synods or conferences, the listening committee, church council meetings, the policy-making committees, etc.

5. MY OWN STORY AS PART OF JOURNEY TO A NEW LAND

Before and with ordination ministers usually romanticize about where the church will send them. This goes along with different feelings and emotions of fear and excitement. The vow of, “I will go wherever the Methodist Church of Southern Africa will send me” is entertaining while one still romanticizes about ministry. The term “Calling” in the Methodist Church means to respond to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. At some stage in a person’s ministry this vow becomes heavy to carry especially when one feels called in a specific direction of ministry. It is at this stage that it feels as if you become the step-child of the church. This beautiful family becomes difficult when one child decides to go in a direction where one feels that there is more to offer in a certain field or area of ministry. It is at this stage that the other children start questioning your call and your abilities to perform in a congregational setup, as if the congregation is the only holy habitat to perform God’s mission in a dying world. In my own journey with the laity I realized that they all had special gifts, which complemented certain responsibilities. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa distinguished a clear line of partnership in ministry between the laity and an ordained minister. This partnership in ministry is affirmed by the “Six Calls Model” of the Journey to a New Land as outlined in section 1.2.2.

The “Six Calls Model” also refers back to the Priesthood of all believers as adopted by most Protestant Churches. With reference to John Wesley’s class-system as explained in section 1.2.1 of this chapter, the laity (people who are not ordained as

priests) is acknowledged as a people who can offer a ministry in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa from a missional perspective. The Priesthood of all believers as understood by Methodists is an acknowledgement of the gifts and skills of laypeople to offer a sound ministry of mission in a small group setup or in the bigger church structure. As already mentioned in section 1.2.1 the small group was an opportunity for the laity to encourage one another through scripture reading and prayer as a means of spiritual support and growth.

The “class system” as observed in section 1.2.1 affirms the doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers that all people are priests as understood by Martin Luther, that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ is a priest. This statement discards the assumption held by Roman Catholics that ordinary believers in Christ are not good enough to approach God and that they need an intermediary to look after them for a fee. Our Christian doctrine believes in the one mediator between God and people in the person of Jesus Christ that Christians come immediately and directly to God. The Ninety-Five Theses of Martin Luther were aimed at the very destruction of the Roman Catholic priesthood, which stood between believers and their God.

People no longer have a need for any fallible human priest, because in Christ everybody is set free from all slavery and granted the dignity of a royal priesthood. As God’s elect, believers have been given new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:23). Believers are a holy priesthood who offer spiritual sacrifices as priests (1 Peter 2:5). There is no difference among believers, as Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) (The Holy Bible 1978)

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa regards the ordained ministry as a special calling to Word and Sacraments in the case of Priests which means that it is only the minister that can preside over the sacrament of Baptism, Holy Communion (Eucharist) and wedding ceremonies. The order of Deacons is also a recognized ordained ministry in the Methodist Church but Deacons are called into the order of Word and Service, which excludes the performance of sacraments such as Baptism and the Eucharist. The ordained ministry in the Methodist Church is affirmed by the laying on of hands by the Presiding Bishop, the Bishops of the different twelve districts, Presbyters and the Lay president.

It is in the light of the above that I realized that to journey to a new land is not as easy as a person thought it would be. When I moved out of a full-time appointment in the church to the military, I realized how the church could become so insensitive and discriminative towards a minister who feels that he or she has the capacity and could be used elsewhere in a different area of ministry like the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). I thank God for the years of employment in the SANDF as a chaplain and researcher. My journey to a new land with the church became more and more meaningful and at certain stages baffling due to insult, discrimination and loneliness.

According to my experience, the church has not yet accepted the fact that women can play a crucial role in the ministry. The moment one can make a difference in a congregational setup as a leader, the men (in the laity and ordained positions) become bullies. One's journey becomes something of a lone ranger and where other women delay or are afraid to voice their concern. In the military the opposite is quite visible and I have experienced that equality is important and that the voice of a woman can become sound even if your sub-ordinates are men.

Reflecting on my life story I became aware of my own vulnerability and joys of resettling in a context other from the one I came from. My own pain from lack of care and support from colleagues and struggles made me become a co-traveller of the church and with this community of resettled people.

REFLECTION

This chapter expresses the introduction to this research as a springboard to the unique role that lay people can play in the process of ministering to other people from a position of care, support, healing and spiritual transformation. This unique style of ministry is embedded in their skills and competence to care for one another. This competence is further proved in the witnessing evidence (in the form of stories) that this ministry materialized without the guidance of a fulltime or an ordained minister.

The general background of this research is conveyed in the "Six Calls Model" of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for doing mission in Southern Africa and interacts with the stories of my co-researchers. The process of research is taken further by looking at the background of the Trinity Family Church of the co-researchers as a stepping-stone for starting this research.

The participation of the researcher comes from the interest of an observer who experienced and saw the ability of laypeople to care for one another. The process of participation and co-travelling has further been strengthened by the narrative approach in the process of social construction. This research was first regarded as only the writing down of stories so that there could be some historical evidence for future purposes of this congregation. After many discussions the opportunity arose for rather looking at it as a research project. In journeying with one another the overall aim and specific objectives are as outlined in chapter one section 2. This research shows clearly the background the co-researchers came from and how their stories played an important role in the structure of this research. The stories and their inputs guided this process as they journeyed with one another.

The process of the research is outlined in section 1.1 and discussed in section 4 as upheld by the epistemology, positioning and methodology of the researcher. To be able to stick to the process of this research, the epistemological point of departure is taken from the postmodern postfoundationalist theological position, which embraces the narrative approach that is embedded in the social constructionist paradigm. Together with the research procedure the essence of this research is affirmed by the “Six Calls Model” that enhanced the spirituality and involvement for all people in the life of the church.

The theme of this research is developed from the experiences as told in the stories of my co-researchers and the role that they played in one another’s lives. The development of the theme brought in the perspective that the research became a new journey for my co-researchers and me. It is now not only about the writing up of the stories but rather that the whole process of research brought about the unique outcomes or stories of healing and transformation.

SUMMARY

The first step of the ‘Seven Movements Model’ has been dealt with and reflects the following steps in this chapter:

- Description of the context with background information.
- Historical background of the context.
- My relationship with the context.
- My epistemological understanding with regard to practical theological research.
- Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm.

- The selection of the co-researchers
- Discussion on the methodological implications.
- Ethical guidelines.

This chapter gave an overall picture of what the research entails and how the methodology is used to accomplish the overall aim of this research. It gives information concerning the historical background of the research and how it fits into the stories of my co-researchers. The different links of the research are thoroughly discussed so as to bring out the main themes as they link to the stories that will be discussed in chapters two and three. Chapter two expresses the venturing into the stories of the co-researchers and how the focal point of the research was established. Here each character or co-researcher is introduced and the important role he or she plays is described and an explanation is given as to why this specific story was important for me to write down.