

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVES IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY

“UNTYING THE KNOT”

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As chapter one unpacks the whole epistemological and methodological position chapter two ventures into the stories of the co-researchers and how the focal point of the research was established. Each story also reveals the character of and important role each co-researcher played in the process of the research. Chapter two also shows how the epistemology of the researcher and co-researchers are implemented in listening to the stories and how the methodology has been used in the process of research. The methodology will be used to subscribe to the deep inner feelings of the co-researchers that have been covered up by a series of protective layers, like the layers of an onion. “The counsellor is encouraged to interpret the presenting issues in therapy as superficial concerns generated from the protective layers of the defended self.” (Monk et al. 1997:84)

Chapter two is written in a story form because I came on board with this congregation through the disclosure of a story, which comprises many different stories. This chapter also reveals the narratives of the people whom I as the researcher became interested in and knowledge about the meanings these people have constructed about themselves on the basis of their lived experiences in the world. “Narrative counselling belongs to a new group of therapies that align themselves with the philosophy of postmodernism, which uses the story metaphor.” (Monk et al. 1997:85)

It is also important to note that this chapter expresses the way the stories have been told, how I have listened to the stories and how they have been described by me in relation to a narrative analysis of the experiences of my co-researchers. Chapter two represents most of the steps (refer to summary at the end of this chapter) in the first step of the “Seven Movements Model”. The heading of chapter two was chosen to show that the research has its origin in exploration of the stories. This heading also tells that the researcher starts this research from the perspective of a story, which actually introduces us to the first step of the ‘Seven Movements Model’ that describes the specific context, which entails the general and historical backgrounds from which this research takes places. “Untying the knot” is a metaphor that represents the action of the research. It is the action of this research that sensitized me to take in a

certain epistemological position to move from a postmodern paradigm of listening to the voices of different people in order to give essence to this research. It is the action that actually drew my co-researchers and me into the start of this research as Lamott, (1995:62) describes it: “You begin with action that is compelling enough to draw us in, and make us want to know more.”

When listening to the stories of people one realizes that what the person comes up with is the “now” of the story which actually introduces the action part of the story and this part relates to the problem. The “now” of the story will be discussed later in section 2.3.2 of this chapter.

2.2 The epistemology of “Untying the knot”.

I started this research from an academic point of departure to show how researchers usually look for a certain point of understanding to start their research. I started this research by using the metaphor of “Untying the knot” which helped me to take in an epistemological narrative position from a postfoundationalist practical theological perspective to delve into the stories of my co-researchers. It is not easy to talk about a life situation when people in some way know who the person sitting next to him or her is. The person sitting next to someone has a life story to tell, which he or she interprets according to experience or an understanding taken from a social constructionist perspective. Sometimes these life stories are stories, which others already know but the person who owns the story is not willing or ready to talk about it. There are things that others know, but they are too scared to ask questions to unravel the truth. There are moments or scenes that people prefer to forget, but what if this is the scene that ties the knot for not unraveling the truth? Postmodernists are conscious about truth claims and define them, as the way people perceive things. “According to Foucault truth is a compelling story told by persons in position of power in order to perpetuate their way of seeing and organizing the natural and social world.” (Vanhooser 2003:11)

The metaphor of the ‘art’ of untying the knot is taken from the perception of Capps (1993:ix), who sees and describes, the art (which is the method of intervention, listening and understanding) as the tool that the pastor uses of untying the knot as he listens to people in a counselling situation. The art of untying the knot opened up a distinct moment for my co-researchers and me to listen to and understand their stories. Capps speaks about the narrative models, which “involve the employment of

counselling “arts” that the pastor may also use – the arts of using the power of suggestion, untying knots, and identifying expectations.” (Capps 1993:ix)

Müller (1996:75) regards pastoral work and conducting pastoral conversation as an art more than science. It shows the creative approach of a pastor rather than a diagnosis, with the expectation to lead the co-participant in a creative way to discover an answer rather than to design a strategy. The issues of science are not applicable because as the researcher I did not look at a type of quantitative analysis of getting to the answers or to get the co-researchers involved. In quantitative research your aim is to determine the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent or outcome variable) in a population (Hopkins 2000).

In using the art of “untying knots” to unravel the action part of this research, I realized how much explanation my co-researchers could give about their stories and in giving account of it I could understand their epistemology of what they have experienced. Müller (1996:75) sees this art as pastoral work, which is less concerned with diagnoses and more concerned with creativity, which creates expectations. Müller (1996:1) also speaks about listening to stories as a narrative approach, which is more than just the art of telling stories. In the telling of stories the researcher listens to the stories with the determination to detect any paradoxes or things that one has not expected. A paradox is a statement, which seems contradictory, unbelievable, or meaningless but which may in actual fact be true. The art of “untying the not” is used from an epistemological frame of mind which guided my co-researchers to discover answers they never knew by themselves, and helped them to construct their worlds through these stories. “Castaneda and Erickson have helped many therapists move from the assumption of naïve realism and show in their works that therapists can play an active part in the reconstruction of a client’s world of experience.” (Keeney 1983:4)

Every conversation with my co-researchers is a form of art, which helped me to understand the events on the outside (the events which also played a role in how my co-researchers interpreted their stories or why they came to a certain conclusion) and to observe how things happen by themselves. It is important that the researcher should wait for the story to unfold by itself and in its own time. The narrative pastor is fascinated by people’s stories, and becomes engaged whenever he or she observes and notes how stories take on form by themselves without his or her efforts (Müller 1996:76).

From a narrative perspective is it important to note when listening to stories, one should look for explanatory concepts, descriptions, even words and phrases that are repeated to express an important idea for the conversational partners. The researcher should also look for the opposite meanings of these phrases and concepts as they are discussed and defined in the stories by the co-researchers. As stated by Rubin and Rubin (1995:231) stories are refined versions of events that may have been indistinguishable or distorted to make a point indirectly and are a little bit different from a narrative, which comes out straightforward and to the point. It is important to look for underlying meanings and themes in stories, which might communicate important themes that explain a contemporary or informative subject. Rubin and Rubin identify the following characteristics in stories, which I actually experienced when I engaged with my co-researchers:

- Stories are told without any effort and with the main themes or happenings clearly in mind.
- Stories are told as adventures (journeys).
- Stories are carefully structured with a time location and background and introduce characters, describe some event or complexity, and then offer a resolution.
- Stories may be marked by memorable and recurring symbols which are overloaded with and carry a great deal of emotion and multiple meanings.
- People's voice tones mark a change in the story, which is defined by short incomplete sentences that substitute complex ideas.
- Stories are clues that show a disconnection or confusion between a question and answer as expressed in comprehensive responses. (Rubin and Rubin 1995:232)

The above-mentioned characteristics require from me as the researcher to read into them and figure out what they want to communicate. Some times one needs to hear and pick out the themes, which carry the weight or importance of the story. As previously mentioned my point of departure is from a narrative social constructionist approach. The narrative, which is also a non-blaming approach, helped me to put my co-researchers at the centre of this research due to the fact that they are the experts of their own lives. It observes no connections between problems and people. The assumption recognizes that people have many expertise, competencies, and ways of thinking or life, principles, obligations and abilities that could contribute to the reduction of the influence of problems in their lives. There is inquisitiveness and an

enthusiasm to ask questions to which people genuinely do not know the answers. My curiosity was to find out why my co-researchers were attracted to a picture of a “Six Calls Model” of “Journey to a New Land.” The epistemology of the “Six Calls Model” as explained in chapter one, section 1.2.2 pictures a painting of how lay-people can empower one another on a spiritual journey, which while it was still only a theory, was based on experience. The theory was embedded in a mental construction of ideas while it still existed outside the frame of the socially structured life of my co-researchers. “The distrust of reason means that truth must be experienced to be believed.” (Anderson 2001:20)

By looking at the epistemology of my co-researchers I became sensitized to my own epistemology as being attracted by the interactive conversations between the co-researchers and me. Although I concentrated on the narratives, and how they had been told, I was still conscious about the impact of knowledge on the context of this research. As I journeyed with my co-researchers I held perspective with the post-modern idea that there are no permanent rules when doing research and guarded against a modernist paradigm that requires scientific proof. I seriously became mindful of Janse van Rensburg’s discussion on how Lyotard explained art from a postmodern point of view as I was thinking about the art of “untying the knot”. The modern approach is critiqued by Janse van Rensburg as he agrees with Lyotard who supports any form of art that challenges fixed aesthetic rules, and uses Lyotard’s view that “the only fixed rule is that there should be no rule.” (Janse van Rensburg 2000:2)

The art of “untying the knot”, as an art and as an epistemological point of departure should be interpreted as the metaphor that I used to start this research from a “not-knowing” position. It is not from a perspective of a series of fixed rules, but how I respected the openness of my co-researchers to the process of the research so that we could be truthful to this research process.

It is so interesting and amazing to see how this art could show how the truth as portrayed in the Methodist tradition relates to the caring ministry of the Trinity Family Church. During the eighteenth century the early Methodist preachers took the gospel to labourers and criminals who tended to be left outside of organized religion at that time. In the last half of the twentieth century Methodists valued tradition in a more positive way. “This is undoubtedly due to the Methodist exposure to other Christian traditions as a result of the ecumenical movement.” (Kimbrough 2005:163)

Methodists are very mindful of the tradition of scripture and doctrine. This coincides with the Methodists consciousness of the belief and practice of the “priesthood of all believers”, which includes the importance of the ministry of the laity and the role they can perform in an ordinary congregational setup. Having a closer look at the “Six Calls Model” one can see how art used as a powerful tool, could be used by the church to listen to the stories of their congregants. “The message from local churches was that in spite of a plethora of activities going on, people were hungry to know God and to experience deeper spiritual growth.” (Storey 1995:4)

2.3 The Truth leads to Praxis

In listening to the stories of my co-researchers, I realized that for them to depart on this journey was to be confronted with the truth. The truth symbolizes who they are, where they come from, and why they want to be on this journey. This was not a truth that needed some scientific answer, but a truth to care and support one another. The truth is about their spirituality that comes into practice when they realized that they are in a community for the common good. In this situation of my co-researchers the truth is not an assumption but a reality of their history as mentioned in section 4.1.1 of the ‘Seven Movements Model’ and what they experience now in their current setup. Du Toit (2007:31) quotes Nietzsche in saying that people can only view things from a specific perspective. In the group conversations with my co-researchers I mentioned to them this quotation of Nietzsche in relation to their perspective. My co-researchers emphasized that their epistemological point of departure concerning truth is that knowledge comes from God’s self-disclosure concerning him or herself, the world and people. God created people and therefore they are capable of knowing God’s mind and making information about his mind available in their experiences in a crisis situation but also acknowledge that they do not have complete knowledge about God. They also argued against the idea that Christians do have absolute knowledge about God. The foundation of God’s self-disclosure, reminds Christians to stride in humility because, it is God’s grace, not one’s own independent reason, which allows people to know anything at all (Tedder 1993:1-13). Tedder feels that Christians should not be arrogant and claim that they know the truth. People cannot spy out secrets of God by a curiosity that is obvious. The postmodern scholars claim that there is no universal truth (refer chapter one 3.1), and this perspective teaches us that a social group and its language create meaning. When listening to my co-researchers I interpreted the above mentioned statement that the personal identity of my co-researchers as a team and the contents of their thoughts are all social constructions of the truth. “Postmodernism advocates relativistic variety

and rejects restrictive structures that seek to tyrannize individuals with “rules or criteria” for making or defending “truth-claims”. (Tedder 1993:1-13) Participants in a debate can only dialogue with each other if they agree on their epistemological foundations.

Tedder (1993:8) also supports the understanding of Winfried Corduan about truth and says that reality is a given and regardless of what reality might be, if something is true it will correspond to that reality. In leading this conversation between my co-researchers they started to understand that truth is not absolute or objective or universal, but together through dialogue they can find meaning and purpose for their lives. They became thrilled when they realized that they could take their knowledge and experience as a point of departure to think further on this process of research and to act positively in their new situation. “It is a process of reference that generates understanding by focusing attention on all role players who have a share in the outcome of a matter.” (Du Toit 2007:33)

The truth of praxis is that the model of an isolated individual knower as the ideal has been substituted by community-based knowledge. Truth is defined by and for the community, and all knowledge occurs within some community. Human beings are social products and influence and shape one another through the process of internalization. People’s ideas of interacting with one another are identified by the process of socialization. The socializing process helps people to internalize or identify “truth” in a practical way as being prescribed by culture. The sociology of knowledge alerts people to their social interactions, which supports their worldviews and experiences. “The responsive version of social constructionism is not only directed towards an understanding of how we constitute (make) and reconstitute (remake) that commonsense or ethos but also towards how we make and remake ourselves in the process.” (Shotter 1993:34)

The truth as interpreted by my co-researchers came from a critical reflection and attitude of a pastoral activity. The co-researchers interacted with other members of the church and then reflected on a shared praxis. According to my observation praxis is, as understood from my co-researchers an experience, genuineness and social interaction. Praxis indicates the continuing communication of reflection and actions. In quoting Brown (1980:34) Tilley explains praxis as occurring when “we act, reflect on the action, and when we act in a new way on the basis of our reflection.” (Tilley 1995:123) This coincides with Olivier (1996:3) who explains that the

convocation realized that the moment had arisen to do things differently but we are not sure how to do it. The truth of telling the stories of my co-researchers became the moment of praxis and the start of conversations that could actually bring a change in someone's life. From a researcher's point of view I allowed them to go back to their historical background, as mentioned in chapter one section 1.2.3 as in some of the stories revealed by two of my co-researchers of how they had been supported by the military social department and the church when their spouses (male or female) were away for long periods of time. The truth tapped so deep and brought out so much, beauty from a creative system of togetherness and support. The reference to "untying the knot" meant not having any method or set of rules at hand, but setting the right questions for the telling of stories, which people associate with and understand from a particular background of experience. "These are stories about their lives that they have linked to certain events in a particular sequence across a time period, in which they find a way of explaining or making sense for them." (Morgan 2000:5)

These stories become the truth when many events are selectively gathered into one dominant plot, and in this the story reaches richness and depth. Hulley (1987:56) quotes Wesley saying that Wesley believed that truth should be presented in a way, which could be understood and assimilated. My understanding of Wesley's thinking is that truth is socially constructed, which concurs with Morgan (2000:6) who says that people select certain events in their lives as important which actually fit into important happenings (dominant plots) in their lives. According to Ward (1996:18) "Truth is not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives name to a process." The truth, which has been described in the story of Priscilla (section 2.9.2), as the eye of God, which looks at God's children to represent Him in His fullness. In this chapter, the stories reflect how my co-researchers talk about their stories and experiences to explain how pastoral counseling can be conducted in a responsible manner by laypeople. I also explain how the more or less independent trends of pastoral care brought people closer together with the expectation that by doing so a new understanding and new stories of care may occur in the congregational setting. For this congregation, real counseling happens during coffee hour or before or after a committee meeting. A specific event leads to an opportunity of praxis, which relates to the telling of problem saturated stories and what happened in their lives.

The coffee hour, as experienced by my co-researchers, was related to Ricœur's moment of prefiguration as the place where the construction of the story takes place. Although Ricœur's study is more from a hermeneutical perspective of interpreting the text, he mentions the action of people before the text could be written. "Ricœur elaborately proves that the actions in the world have a pre-narrative nature and are therefore available to be converted into stories. One could say that the actions taking place in time are calling up the story. When constructing a story, people use the structure of a plot, the development of characters and ideas and bring together in a whole the heterogenic elements of fate's inconsistencies, of their own actions and that of other persons." (Demasure & Müller 2006:411)

2.3.1 The Action as Praxis

This section relates to the epistemological understanding of the first step of the 'Seven Movements Model' of doing narrative research. This section shows how I became involved in the stories of my co-researchers and my involvement in this research. The reason why I use the word involvement rather than intervention is to show that from a narrative perspective one can never be an outside observer, or the objective expert who is able to intervene without being part of the system. The word intervention is loaded with the perception that someone is intervening from the outside with expert knowledge and skills (Müller and Schoeman 2004:11).

My current job in the Methodist church is an involvement as facilitator and observer of the skills and qualities of laypeople in the process of managing congregations or leading small groups like the "class system". In this research my involvement is to observe the impulse of the life stories of my co-researchers and the conception of coherence. I am interested in why my co-researchers produced certain accounts, which account is coherent and why they became part of this congregation and this research. I thought about the fact that they want their stories to be written down. I agree with Linde (1993:7) who says that as we get to know people in a social process we expect successively more detailed life stories to be exchanged. In order to learn from them what has happened to them and what sort of people we are to understand them to be. "Telling these stories empowers people to understand and give meaning to their situation." (Klein 2003:4)

When people become involved in one another's lives they start telling stories about their involvement, which makes it clear that the start of the stories takes place at a distinct moment in time. The action that people usually think about is the story that

they tell or the story of the action. The start of this congregations' story lies in their world of action, the time when they start telling their stories of care. In the narrative approach, the focal point of research is not on acts of people but on the stories that are told about the action. It is interesting to note that the moment of praxis in this congregation happens during the coffee hour. As I have already said the coffee hour of this congregation was an important moment, a time different from the time for coffee that an ordinary congregation would have. I observed this coffee hour, which happens before church, not as the actual coffee hour for interaction but only a welcoming moment for the real time of praxis.

My observation was confirmed when the persons who sat together for coffee before church also clustered around one another after church. I could see faces being interested in what the conversation was at that moment. As I was watching the different groups and thinking where would I fit in, I immediately became aware of a figure next to me. Looking in the direction of the person next to me I was caught up in the eyes of someone whom jokingly said, *"I wonder is this the right time to talk to this dominee"*. I smiled with relief which witnessed to my excitement that I, now too, had a friend to talk to. This moment started in a polite fashion of *"how are you...I am glad that you came to visit our church."* The person continued by saying that for a long time he had wanted to talk to me and asked if I could please just give him a few moments of my time. I could sense the sincere genuineness as if it was the first time that this person saw me. Still in a very polite fashion, he put his hand on my elbow, and steered me into the direction of the lappa (entertainment area at the back of the garden) and gave me a chair to sit on. This gave me an indication that confirmed my suspicion and curiosity that *"I want to talk but do not have the guts to speak to you in front of other people."* At that moment I did not know his name or anything about his background but could then experience what Linde (1993:7) said that as our level of intimacy increases, we expect to know more and more about the other.

2.3.2 The "now" is the crucial moment.

It made me think that this moment of praxis came unexpectedly and very politely, but I immediately felt drawn in and I was interested in what he was going to tell me. The action of this moment was not a time, diarised at a previous occasion. Müller et al. (2001:65) states that people come for counselling and therapy to discuss a problem, which they think needs to be dealt with. Looking at this statement from a narrative perspective, I realized that I should not immediately become interested in the problem part of the story but rather concentrate on the part which is the action. The

narrative approach is concerned about the development of an alternative story, which is not yet the problem. The fact that he gently gripped my elbow and moved with me to a more private part of the garden made me realize that he experienced so much trouble that he wanted me to listen attentively to his story.

He introduced himself to me and for the purpose of this research I will call him “Tim” because he did not agree to be a co-researcher and left this church due to his difficult situation. The reason why I am interested in bringing in this scene as part of my research is that on several occasions I met people who were not interested in becoming a member of this church but visited it because one of the members in the congregation played a supportive role in his or her life. I added this story to show how some of my co-researchers also took a position that they would like to be anonymous in this research document. I mentioned this part to show that I was active and participated in this research rather than looking at it from the perspective of a passive and objective person. “By creating space for metaphors and for the development of new stories, the researcher takes responsibility through self-reflection.” (Müller and Schoeman 2004:11)

The scene in the above mentioned section showed me that “now” is the time for this man to talk about his problem and that the action part was about the “now” of the story. When he started revealing his story, I realized that the “now” of his story was very serious because during the sermon he became convinced that he needed to talk about his problem. Since I have been introduced to the narrative approach I realized that the “now” is flexible and never acts as prearranged or an annoyance but the possibility of a new story. It concurs with what Müller (2005:2) says: “Practical theology happens whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God.”

This was the crucial moment to say let us talk, which gives evidence to the fact that practical theology is spontaneous, informal and local. In this case, it speaks about a moment, which someone grabs because he does not know whether he will have the opportunity or be brave enough to talk about his situation again. The moment of praxis becomes the moment, of truth and reality. I found myself confronted with a specific and concrete situation of someone who was eager to talk about a real life situation that he was struggling with. Before we could become comfortable enough to start talking, one of the youngsters walked towards us with a tray of tea and cookies. As we helped ourselves, he very politely asked this youngster to excuse

himself from our presence. We could not actually go into a real counselling moment because the moment he started telling his story someone else came and interrupted us, which ended up in a promise from his side that he would contact me to make a formal appointment to talk to me. Unfortunately I could not continue with this story, but felt that this scene was important to mention as it shows that the moment of praxis sometimes comes unexpectedly. This relates to what Lamott says: “You begin with action that is compelling enough to draw us in, make us want to know more.” (Lamott 1994:62)

In starting this research I became consciously aware of the action part, which consisted of the problem but that there was more to it. What was important was the “now” of the stories. To be able to follow the stories of the co-researchers I realized that I needed to stay in the “now” of the story. Lamott (1994:48) describes the “now” as the substance that keeps the ectoplasm together. As I understood Müller et al. (2001:3) “The ‘now’ is never fixed and it never acts as a given or even as a curse.” In the narrative approach the “now” is action and is seen as a possibility that when it is told it creates a “now” for tomorrow. As researcher I was so conscious about and dwelled on the “now” to see what is happening at present in the life of the co-researchers as they divulged their stories. During the whole process of research I stayed in the “now” because it led me further into deeper parts of their stories so that we could not lose track of important events in their stories. In the telling of the stories we also realized that we got lost when we did not keep to the sequence of the events. Müller et al. (2001: 40) describe it as follows: “When moving away from the ‘now’ during the research process, it is important that the researcher and the co-researcher (s) find their way back from the past or the future and focus on the ‘now’.”

This event made me realize that every moment, whether made by an appointment or not, expected or unexpected, is a crucial moment or an opportunity for counselling or therapy. Sometimes people’s problems make them take the opportunity to talk. As I ventured with my co-researchers on this research I realized that even this research became a moment of counselling. A crucial moment to journey with my co-researchers in what they find as unique in their relationships with one another. Their situation of relocation became a journey of relationships that found meaning in love, care, support and a growth in spirituality. Co-partnership, co-construction and co-travelling were evident and became crucial on this journey. This evidence is defined as an experience where everybody is involved, which speaks about a togetherness of people (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:29).

When people journey together they experience a journey of togetherness and in the conversations find new meaning on the road concerning their relationships. With reference to chapters three and four my co-researchers' experience of togetherness on the journey developed into new realities and new stories were constructed. This was an opportunity for me as the researcher to encourage openness for conversations and to guide the channel of communication. As co-travellers on this journey the "not knowing" position becomes apparent, because the new knowledge expresses new opportunities for the co-construction of new narratives. These new narratives open up a new story with new meaning.

Although the story of this man as mentioned in section 2.3.2 has not been dealt with pastorally, I could still see an opportunity of understanding theology as contextual in this congregation. I have been confronted with reality, in a sense that the "now" was an opportunity for counselling but it was not the real "now". It is a story untold, it is a problem that has not been "untied", but it is a moment of truth.

The "moment of praxis" is a merging of practical theology and postfoundationalism from the experience of how this congregation engages in one another's lives and how they are consciously aware of their pastoral abilities and responsibilities to take care of one another. I felt drawn into these stories, which made me regard the moment of praxis also as the moment of theorising what I see and experience with my co-researchers. As a practical theologian I see practical theology as part of "doing theology", which links with social constructionism. As I listened to the witnessing that came through in a narrative mode I realized that the context in which people create meaning becomes the crucial moment. "The narrative of social-constructionist approach on the contrary forces us to firstly listen to the stories of people struggling in real situations, not merely to a description of a general context, but to be confronted with a specific and concrete situation." (Müller 2004:295)

2.4 Co-Travellers on a Social Constructionist Journey

The first step of the 'Seven Movements Model' identifies with direction in a narrative journey, which accommodates the selection of the participants on the journey. This section also refers to the involvement of the co-researchers in the process of research as indicated by the 'Seven Movements Model'. I understood co-traveling as the search for understanding what the interest of my co-researchers was for being part of this journey and how suitable this journey is for their preferences. To prepare for a journey is very exciting when one knows the road ahead as well as where and

when one will reach the destination, and what kind of journey it would be. Embarking on a journey also depends on who the co-travelers are and in what mood they undertake the journey. To journey with co-travellers especially when they come from different backgrounds needs thorough planning and discussion. It is from the planning and conversations that one detects what kind of journey this will be.

Co-travelling from a social constructionist approach but with a practical theological narrative point of view is not only about conversations but also which stories become important to the co-traveller and whether people would travelling separately or collectively. Müller (1999:3) sees it as where we come from and what our destination would be. He links this statement with the past and future of people, which they divulge in their stories and tries to link them with each other. Müller (1999:3) agrees as he quotes Niebuhr that “the past and the future cannot be described as that-which-is-no-longer and as that-which-is-still-to-be and portray themselves as extensions of the present.” This statement makes me wonder whether the Trinity Family church, as being sensitized by the “Six Calls Model”, when they embarked on this journey of resettlement and cultural regeneration; seriously took the past and the future into consideration and what the mood of the co-travellers was. What I have noticed and experienced was the intensity and excitement of these travellers who took on this journey with determination, which was evident in their contribution to the expectations of what they agreed upon. I could see clearly that these contributions made an impact on the soul of this congregation. Co-travelling and co-construction as I have understood it in this research is to recognize that people are actively constructing mental realities rather than simply uncovering or coping with an objective “truth”. People use their capacity to conceive a future, recall a past, construct meaning, and make choices (Hoyt 1996:1).

A journey is only pleasant if all the travellers travel together and at the same time. The congregants described and valued punctuality, as a virtue in such a way that people did not hesitate to reprimand one another jokingly. As I looked at all the travelers, I could see the enthusiasm and eagerness to be present and part of this congregation. As I have already said that the church gatherings of this congregation started in one of the houses of the, couple who felt led by God to open their house for the people to meet for worship. None of the co-travellers seemed uncomfortable about meeting in a house and everybody helped arranging the chairs with pride. Every Sunday morning was an exciting moment of true worship and companionship on a new life journey. Müller (1999:3) in his opening statement in his book

“Companions on the journey” brings it actually to the fore by saying: “life is a journey. If you are alive, you have departed and you are on the journey.”

2.4.1 Reconstruction

In comparison with constructivism the focal point of social constructionism is no longer on how individuals construct models of reality as taken from his or her individual experience but on focusing how people interact with one another to construct, adapt, and maintain what their society holds to be true, real and meaningful (Freedman & Combs 1996:27).

The concept of narrative reconstruction expresses the development of the personal activity of story telling and story making with the intention of making meaning and interpretation from what has happened in the lives of people. “Socially we, reconfigure our interpretations with others...Intellectually, we question and seek answers and meaning. We change our understanding and interpretations. Spiritually, we seek peace and consolation...We deliberately examine and experiment with alternatives...We revive what still works in our selves, families and communities...We transform ourselves as we reshape and redirect our individual, family and community life” (Attig 1996:41 – 43)

Narrative construction illustrates the complex activity of how an individual weaves a subjective story about his or her life events into an interpretation of meaning of identity and possibility of opportunity existing within transitions and life difficulties. The life story or narrative includes facts, perceptions, and interpretations that make up the ever-changing process of the construction of meaning in our lives. The narrative construction and reconstruction is a social phenomenon. The social network, with all its diversity influences the present, maintains, transforms, and informs the individual's reconstruction of meaning. Reconstruction is therefore, transforming the story so that the future is shaped with resilience. Metzger (1992: 55) writes that when we retell our own life history we become aware that we are not victims of random and chaotic circumstances, but are living meaningfully in a meaningful universe. She states: “we cannot cloister our inner selves ...or we will find ourselves bereft of one of the essential components for the process of transformation interchange.” (Metzger 1993:36)

This means that a therapeutic connection can become a context for restructuring the narrative, which can help a therapeutic conversation to hold, change, and reconstruct

peoples' meaning of what has happened. My understanding of this whole situation is that in the reconstruction of a story people bear witness to the evolving story with its fine distinctions of meaning, characters, emotional patterns, consistency, and unknown and unexplored courses. Müller states that the reconstruction of the positive past story strengthens the identity and as the story is told new meaning and interpretation is given. The story becomes reconstructed because of the new meanings and happenings that are allocated to it (Müller 1996:117).

According to Müller (1996:132) Lester argues that brokenness, fear, anxiety, loss, divorce, emotional pain and suffering, overlap and have a connection with future stories which integrate with one another. Müller explains further that in the light of this a significant reformulation needs to be understood in terms of the future story and not on the grounds of a better introduction or representation of the story of the past. The pain is not only caused by the story, which could not be dealt with in the past but the inability to construct a significant future narrative. Müller (1996:133) explains that on this point the narrative approach differs from the psychoanalytical models, due to the fact that the latter puts emphasis on the past and the present and puts little emphasis on the future. Müller continues by saying that a re-construction of the future vision is a powerful tool in the transformation of the present. This will then allow people to become motivated, excited and goal orientated (Müller 1996:134).

2.4.2 Story telling as Co-Construction

People's self-narratives are co-constructed by the narrator and the therapist. "The co-construction of experience is linked to the growing importance and theories emphasizing interdependence between individuals and narratives." (Qusthoff and Becker 2004:69) According to the theory of Vygotskian as quoted by (Qusthoff and Becker 2004:69) individual cognitive processes are formed as people participate in social life and this happens from the earliest, interdependence of the newborn with their caregivers until they reach the stage of adulthood in the community that they learn from. Vygotsky feels that human beings appropriate from their shared cultural heritage those means and artifacts that are necessary for their ability to learn, solve problems and to create. In the work that he wrote he illustrated this principal that every symbolic activity was at one time a social form of cooperation (Vygotsky 1978:41). Vygotsky's thought of community is that they are a group of thinkers who carry on intense interaction with each other and promote significant changes in their discipline. He sees the community as people who often travel together who talk and

argue with one another and co-construct their ideas, through sustained and intense interaction.

“Bezeckzky defines co-construction as a plurilingual interaction as it creates a vigorous vantage point from which to analyse both the complex interpersonal dynamics of a co-constructed narrative experience, as well as the metaphors used by the dyads to help conceptualise and define their individual collaborative experience.” (Bezeckzky 2000:46) He goes further in explaining that a plurilingual interaction is formed by a variety of social languages with their distinct world-views which cause tension in the process of verbal interaction. The process of interaction automatically produces new meaning. According to Bakhtin, in Bezeckzky “the speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determine this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver, he enters into a dialogical relationship with certain aspects of this system. “The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of his listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory against the listener’s appreciative background.” (Bezeckzky 2000: 46)

2.5 The Journey with a New Story

In the process of co-constructing their own story my co-researchers and I together looked at this research as taken from the ‘action’ and could clearly see how this research becomes a Journey with a New Story. This is a story within a Journey that is different from a ‘Church Journey’ (the situation which my co-researchers were used to in the previous church) or the ‘Military Journey’ (a journey of a structure according to their ranks). From my perspective it was a journey without the leadership of an ordained minister or a commanding officer (a person of high ranking like a general in the South African National Defence Force). The stories of my co-researchers gave me insight into how they narrated their stories and how together we listened to them enabling us to understand their relationships with one another and how the content of this research is understood, presented and used by both the co-researchers and I. I started to understand the whole process in the form of a Journey with a New story.

Many journeys have different reasons, points and ways of departure. Some are planned and others come by chance or un-expectedly. Davidson (2005:1-21) explores what a narrative is and conveys his point of view that stories are told through a variety of mediums. He agrees with Morgan (2000: 6) that the narrative allows the reader, or listener to place information in space and time (Davidson

2005:1-21). Stories are used to contextualize what people are saying so that their listeners can get a sense of the time and where everybody is in the story. Gennett (1983:41) identifies three aspects of narrative, story and narrating, comparing it with his determinations of tense, mood and voice. According to Davidson (2005:1-21) the “Tense” refers to aspects of the narrative that deal with temporal relations between narrative and story. The story consists of the narrative content, while the narrative is the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself. Narrating is the production of the narrative action, the situation in which the action takes place.

The “Mood” refers to the aspects that deal with modalities (forms and degrees) of narrative “representation”. The “Voice” refers to the aspects that deal with the way in which the narrating itself is implicated in the narrative situation or its instance and its two central characters the narrator and the listener. As the researcher I looked at distinctions between the stories of my co-researchers and the conversations that took place made an impact on this research. I agree with Parker in quoting Burr and Buff: “By experimenting with different narratives, by telling different stories of who we are, we search for a narrative which empowers us to deal more effectively with our circumstances.” (Parker 1998:17) It is through narratives that people construct meaning for themselves and others. The journey started with a story which brought new meaning to the lives of different individuals and could be seen as “new” because of its unique setting. It is through looking at Gennette’s model that the following story made sense to me.

2.5.1 The opened door for the start of the new church

By having a closer look at the Journey with a New Story one literally sees an open door, which actually really happened as well. This is part of the story of the couple that opened their house for this new congregation to worship God in the way they feel attached to God. This is the story narrated by Stalin one of my co-researchers, the husband of Priscilla. Priscilla is not her real name because she chose it from the biblical story as written in Acts chapter 18, which is about Aquila and Priscilla. The story of Priscilla is written in sections 2.9.1 and 2.9.2. The day that I interviewed Priscilla, Stalin joined us at some stage and as we conversed with one another he mentioned this story. Stalin preached one morning in church and even mentioned this story as one of the illustrations he used in his sermon. This part of the story was the introduction to Priscilla’s story when I interviewed her. I used the following story in this research as it gives us a pre-historical version of the previous church they attended.

This is a short extract of how Stalin narrated his story:

“My family must be the only family that has been relocated so many times, due to job opportunities. My wife and I have counted that our children have attended close to twenty four schools.”

His wife replied: *“Yes every time it was pack up and go. Sometimes we did not even know whether the children would be registered at a school and there was a stage that I had to give up my work in the Western Cape and could not find a job in Pretoria. It was every time a new setup with a new beginning and many struggles.”*

Trinity Family Church tells a story of how God can move people into newness in moments of love, care and support. The story of love, care and support speaks about a genuine involvement of how people became involved in one another’s lives and regarded it as a mission in action. The opened door gave direction to this story which, speaks about living in a caring and supportive community from a perspective of spirituality and a new way of doing things for Christ. This research journey could not take place without the necessary traveling equipment and compass. Although my co-researchers had in mind the “Six Calls Model” of the book written by Storey they soon realized that this actual journey is unique and starts with a story or stories of relocation with its emphasis on a practical-theological and social understanding of care, support and spirituality, which eventually moved into a new story of healing and transformation. The practical-theological point of view has been supported by a hermeneutical-interpretation of the stories. My co-researchers have been influenced and driven by their acts as interpreted from the biblical text (this will be discussed in section 4.2 of chapter 4). The hermeneutical interpretation of the biblical message makes this research sound because it is read from a particular praxis. West makes it clear that we need to understand that the biblical text is not the only route to interpret our situations, but that the hermeneutic circularity implies a “return trip”, in which the praxis of faith in a determinate social context also has a contribution to make the “meaning” of the bible (West 1994:161).

2.6 The Story of the new face of God

The conversational interviews that I had with my co-researchers led to moments where certain themes came out and I had to question my co-researchers for clarity as to why they used this or that story or metaphor. This story came out as a statement that one of the congregants made when I was visiting the church. Later

this story was discussed in one of our sessions on how they perceived their new church in relation to the previous church they all belonged to.

The theme is introduced with my own observation one Sunday morning when I visited this church so that I could understand their eagerness to come to church every Sunday. The reason why I describe this picture was because I also observed the same situation in the previous church where my co-researchers came from so I could easily make a comparison in relation to what was communicated from my co-researchers of how they see their new church and also in relation to the previous one.

(This part is written in the form of a story because I have observed it)

In getting on board with my co-researchers I continuously visited their church so that I could have a better understanding of why they wanted to start a congregation based on love, care and support. To be more realistic I decided not only to listen to the stories during interviews but even visited this church regularly. I felt I also had a story to tell so that the reader could understand the essence of the stories told by my co-researchers. This act can also be related to the rest of the stories.

It is Sunday morning, one of those sunny, shiny spring mornings as one hears the chirp of the birds welcoming each person who has come to worship. People gathered together in a house which became their new place of worship. The congregants regard worship in a serious manner, which is to seek the face of God in truth. The laughter of people still echoes in my ears with the smell of coffee that does not relate to a Sunday morning service but rather the tea gathering after church. Everybody is welcomed by the host with the invitation that everybody should join them for a cup of coffee. One of the co-researchers teasingly said: *“If this is the new look of a church then I will definitely come every Sunday”*.

Everybody bursts out laughing, which filled the whole house in chorus. I looked at each face telling me the story that *“I do belong here and this is where I want to be.”* Immediately after the coffee people started singing, hugging and showing one another that, they are happy and feel free in one another’s presence. It immediately strikes me that what is happening in front of me is very different from the ordinary Sunday morning service. I remembered the words of one of my co-researchers who said that: *“in this church there are no stiff necks and heads focused towards the altar and not even being aware of who came in and sits next to me.”* I immediately asked

her why she said so because this same statement has been said on a previous occasion by one of my co-researchers named Bennie. This is just an unusual image, which actually brought a vivid picture of who she thought God was. I agree with Chafe (1990:79) as quoted by Emmott that: “In a variety of ways, narratives provide for the nature of the mind ... I see narratives as overt manifestations of the mind in action ... windows to both the content of the mind and its ongoing operations. (Emmott 1997:v)

The above mentioned statement of Chafe shows that the human mind should not be underestimated and is a powerful and effective computer of written and spoken text. Emmott explains further by saying that there is a difference between the mind and a computer. The mind does not have the memory and processing capacity of a computer, but it performs a task, which falsifies the skills that researchers struggle to repeat. When reading a narrative text one should manage to create a richly represented fantasy world from sometimes insufficient strings of words. Davidson implies that the narrative does not have to be in one medium, it can be connected and continued between two mediums (Davidson 2005:1-21).

To be able to read a narrative is an amazing achievement to process the information at a number of levels. Here the whole process of language comes into play because each sentence must be interpreted by a letter of the alphabet, to assign meaning to the words, and even acknowledge the grammatical structure. In these stories I realized that a single sentence can have different interpretations to give meaning to the situation. What was interesting to me was to look at the differences and similarities of the experiences of my co-researchers and how meaning is developed through them. I noticed how one sentence described one action within a chain of events and how it showed a shift to a new context or even gave information about one or more characters. The reader must also judge how a sentence is linked to the previous text, often by making inferences based on the general knowledge or stored information about the fictional world (Emmott 1997: v).

The picture of the stiff necks and heads portrayed a God that was strict, rigid and unfriendly in a respectful way, but this new picture is so different. She relates her observation as the meaningfulness of truth that is portrayed in a social context. It came to mind that the co-researchers and I could give such credibility to the meaningfulness of their stories because it was real and true. Each community has a certain amount of shared ‘general’ knowledge, which is taken for granted. For me

what stands out is the mutual knowledge of my co-researchers and how it gave essence to this research. According to Parry and Doans (1984:2) all stories have in common, however serious or out of the ordinary, a quality of satisfactoriness. They go further in saying that stories give answers to so many questions in a way that most fully gives explanations for the implications of the questions through images that make life meaningful within specific cultures. The credibility of stories does not lie in their factual truthfulness, but rather in the meaningfulness of the answers that were given. “The hearers of the story believed it was true because it was meaningful, rather than it was meaningful because it was true.” (Parry and Doan 1994:2) Gennette (1983:115-129) argues that experience and the meaning of the narrative is changed because the new story drastically repositions the perception of the viewers in relation to it.

I further observed through the word of my co-researchers that this freedom of sharing and kindness could only come from a repentant heart and a soul that yearns to seek God earnestly. These characters symbolize a God who invites and accommodates anybody that comes to worship. Together with my co-researchers we then realised that it was about how the kindness shown to one another was experienced that defined what kindness and care was. In the service I could sense that people came with different issues on their minds but the difference in experience was so overwhelming that some said in their Afrikaans language: *“Ai vandag gaan ons nie kla nie, wil net die Here loof en prys”* (We will not complain but only praise and worship God). I at once noticed that this freedom in Christ was not easily disrupted by any kind of fear, discomfort or inability. My mouth literally hung open because I had known my co-researchers since I joined the South African National Defence Force and what I saw now is a changed version. As I was sitting there, I pondered on this changed version and “what is new to me”. I asked myself this question: “Have I been blinded not to see the deepened spirituality of Military people? Have I been blinded by the face (hard, strict, insensitive), of the Military?” Is this “new image” the unheard story or the story that was untold? Yes my spirit agrees, it is a story that has never been told because of where people come from and what their destiny should be.

This story became clear during the time of worship and testimonies rendered by my co-researchers. In having a closer look at this story my co-researchers and I examined the beliefs and ideas that supported the life of the problem and are now assisting one another to separate themselves from the problem. The co-researchers

admitted their perception was also that a caring ministry is only for the ordained ministry, but when they became confronted with issues of care they realized that they could do it themselves. The act of worship was an opportunity to seek the face of God and to experience a togetherness that only they could witness as a profound moment of love, care and support. This act showed clearly that the task of pastoral ministry – worship, preaching, social action, personal care, Christian formation and community etc, is not only the responsibility of the ordained clergy, but that sociological changes have led to the involvement and active participation of the laity (Pattison 1997:108).

Parry and Doan argue that the fundamental issue that has come to claim the attention of people is how they experience God's own pure unbounded love in such a way that their capacity for loving in return becomes the active and predominating disposition in and between us (Parry and Doan 1994:85). I agree with them that when they refer to the face of God they actually mean the presence of God as to what they believe the bible is emphasizing. The argument goes further that God's face should not be interpreted as merely a symbol or analogy that gives a vague reference to the presence of God in human life. I agree with them that a narrowed focus can overlook the deeper, underlying associations in the human experience of God between being in the presence of God, gazing on God's face, and being confirmed in God's love, which are associations that occur repeatedly in the bible. They used a comparison of how religious experience could be understood from the standpoints of both theology and psychology in using the following metaphor: "The face is the organ of communicating presence, the primary point of contact between human beings and between human beings and God and the primary medium for communicating love." (Parry and Doan 1994:86) The connectedness with God and the rest of the congregation gave them the assurance that they are cared for and not standing alone. I immediately thought about what Morgan (2000:49) says, that: "As people separate themselves from dominant ideas, they open new possibilities for challenging these ideas and enter into a new and preferred story or description."

I have been challenged by this statement of Morgan and was inquisitive to hear from my co-researchers where, when and how these ideas influenced their lives so tremendously that they could start their own congregation on the grounds of love, care and support, which actually brought about a deepened spirituality through healing and transformation. The story of love, care and support came out in one of the meetings that I had with my co-researchers when we reflected on all the stories

(refer to section 2.23). Care and support became the essence of a journey of cultural regeneration and resettlement. Regeneration sensitized me as I visualized a new look - a new image in an area of spirituality that they know was new to them. According to my co-researchers they are made in the image of God and feel that they represent God here on earth amongst one another. When they talked about “image” I thought about the theology of our Christian foundation that the starting point for understanding what it is to be human is the affirmation that people are created in the image of God. I tried to facilitate the term “image” as hearing it from their language and interpretation. Bennie, one of the co-researchers (told his story in section 2.17) took me back to the book of Genesis chapter 1:26 and 5:1 where God created human beings in His own likeness. This whole conversation circled out in a small bible study because at that moment I felt that they needed some conviction that they interpret the text correctly just to get their story in sequence.

The text speaks about “image” and “likeness”. Howe (1995:28) explains that the Hebrew text does not make any distinction between “image” and “likeness”. As the Hebrew text refers to human beings created “in” the divine image, but the Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek version of the Hebrew Canon speaks of our creation “according to” (*kath*) that image. (*Kath*) says that people are like God in the way that they are shaped to be. “Gods image is a representation of God’s nature by which God transforms people and by which people continue to shape one another (Howe 1995:33).

The co-researchers were thrilled when they realized that although we are not of a divine “nature”, we do contribute to a common “nature” as human beings and this nature has been given form in accordance with an image of that divine nature of God. When people participate in one another’s lives in accordance with how they have been shaped by God they imitate that image. When people are made in the “likeness” of God they can care for one another. Those who genuinely cared for others and who profoundly shaped people’s attitudes toward and beliefs about life and the world helped them to care for one another. Howe makes it very clear as he states that: “The images we form and inwardly cherish of our caregivers comfort and strengthen us especially at times of struggle with new challenges when they are absent.” (Howe 1995:106)

My co-researchers started to understand that the images that they have about others also contain their images of the co-researchers. It is from this perspective that my

co-researchers understood their eagerness to care and support. Their ideas about the face of God, linked to many different sorts of memories, thoughts and feelings, which are formed and reformed from images from those significant others. In having a closer look at memories, thoughts and feelings my co-researchers said that now they understand God's face as the association in the human experience of being in the presence of God. For them the face is the organ of communicating presence, the primary point of contact, between human beings and between human beings and God and the primary medium for communicating love (Howe 1995:86).

I looked at each co-researcher as a person with his or her own story but also participating in the story of a specific family. I clearly noticed the holistic understanding of a social constructionist process to which my co-researchers are invited and in which they are involved in the creation of new meaning in the life of this congregation. I agree with Van Meygaarden (2005:21) as she quotes Weingarten (1991:289): "In social constructionism, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others...the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into those narratives."

The invitation to share God's Word with this congregation became a journey on which the co-researchers interacted with one another. As I journeyed through the sermon, I looked at my co-researchers as they were, listening and nodding their heads telling me that they interact and agree with what I say. I was consciously mindful that at some stage I, would have to listen to more of their stories and realized that I was looking at a phenomenon of different worlds and different languages which became a journey that people undertook in a process through which people were able to hear their own voices and give identity to them. I noticed that the youth were free to speak out and identified themselves within their own stories, which made them no longer content to remain silent characters in the dominant story. In journeying with their parents and other adults, they created their own worlds of meaning for themselves and developed their own language within these worlds.

2.7 Experiencing a new beginning with a New Story.

The development of the research brought so many stories to the fore that we started looking at what is important and applicable to this research. As the co-researchers moved into one another's worlds because of their stories they realized that they could play an amicable role in one another's lives. This led to a telephone call that I received one morning from someone who was looking for this church but did not

know any one who belonged to it. Someone who once visited this church but had left Pretoria due to job related matters had referred her to me. This was one of the persons who, after my conversation with her, agreed to become one of my co-researchers, because of her story and of being in need of a church. I could not record this story on a tape recorder because I did not know if it could end up as an important story to add to this research. I chose to write down this story because it expresses and links to the content of this research.

After a ten-minute telephonic conversation, this woman whom I will call Alta, invited me to her house, so that she could share her story with me. We agreed that I would visit her in the late afternoon after work. As I stopped in front of her house she came out to meet me at the gate. Her face looked tired and depressed as she indicated to me to walk in front of her as we walked towards the front door. The house inside was tidy but simple (just the necessary furniture). As we entered the lounge, her kids appeared from one of the rooms and she told them to greet me before they could talk to me. The “hello aunty” echoed in a friendly manner and made me to feel at home, although I could immediately pick up a strong sense of loneliness. After the kids greeted me, the mother looked at them and they disappeared into the same room they had come from. As she offered me a chair, my eyes wandered over the pictures in the lounge. In the same breath as she offered me a cup of ‘tea or coffee’ she also mentioned that she would first tell me the stories of the people in the pictures and how these people fit into her life. Her warm and homely nature put me at ease and made me curious to hear who is who and what happened. As she arrived with the tray, she picked up the photograph of a man dressed in a military uniform. She said this was my husband, and then kept quiet. An atmosphere of discomfort filled the whole lounge and as she hands my cup of tea over to me, tears rolled down her cheeks. She immediately says, “Sorry that I am crying, he left me so suddenly”. As she sits on one of the chairs opposite me, she continues to speak as if someone was opening a tap of running water. She conveys her story as if this might be the last moment she could talk about it and she wants me to listen to it. While I was listening to her, she stopped as if something made her to stop. She then says, oh I actually wanted to tell you about my coming to stay here in Pretoria and how God led me into contact with you.

2.7.1 This story identifies with the oral story-telling tradition

The above-mentioned story was so reasonable to me to that I added it to this research. The telling of a story brings so much of therapy to the person because it

lifts peoples' lives and brings the broken pieces together again. Parry and Doan (1994:26) express the feeling that the world requires a valid standard against which people can measure their own and other peoples lives. They affirm the fact that a measuring standard will make certain characteristics visible which will help the person in a therapeutic process. No narrative has any greater legitimacy than the person's own story, because when people talk about their stories the story becomes valid or justifiable. The person's own story as told by him or her in their own words describing his or her own experience does not have to plead its legitimacy in any higher court of narrative appeal (Parry and Doan 1994:26). When the validity of a story is questioned one actually discredits the story of someone else. When someone's legitimate voice is discredited we tend to throw someone out of his or her own story and rob them of their own voice. In postmodernism people are encouraged to regard their stories as valid and that they should appreciate the fact that they can use their own words to describe their own experiences. A story represents a person's own life experience or history and no one has the right to take it away from them. The narrative affords the individual the chance to distance him or herself from events in their own experiences and become the central character in their own lives' narratives (Pearce 1996:xiii).

At the turn of the nineteenth century popular fiction then utilised the oral-style story to express genuineness. The oral story-telling tradition was part of a culture that told stories around a fire and was regarded as a particular mode of narration (Carpendale 1997:57). The purpose of the tale conversations, which actually reproduced the actual discussion, was to give authenticity and plausibility of the story in the process of narration. The tale told at the fireside was traditionally a thread with daring exploits and heroic deeds and not as the narrative approach that expects of the story to be told by the one who has experienced it and told in the person's own words. According to Parry and Doan the tale story could become a grand narrative which people should actually be freed from, because each person is entitled to only one self. The narrative story liberates each person from the many stories that have been suppressed into unconsciousness and ignorance by the autocracy of a single dominant story. "In a time of different worlds and different languages, different selves will be called upon to perform the many different deeds expected of people in their different worlds. " (Parry and Doan 1994:27)

I used this story as an indication that the stories of care and support of my co-researchers add value to this research. This story reflects a multi-storied nature of

the identities of my co-researchers and related meanings. This story could have been a very good narrative practice for my co-researchers as outsider witnesses in a process of consultation. I would have only used it if this woman had given her consent that my co-researchers could listen in. She was a friend of someone who had knowledge and experience of her problem, but also knew one of my co-researchers. This is also the same person who at some stage visited this church because of her friendship with one of my co-researchers.

This woman's story is about relocating to Pretoria and when they arrived here her husband filed for a divorce. She was confronted with issues like:

- Why this has to happen to her? and;
- Why Pretoria?
- How is she going to raise her kids as a single woman?
- Where is God in her moment of pain?
- How is she going to survive?

She made it clear to me that she also needed a church because she and the children had not been to church since they arrived in Pretoria. As I listened to her story, I realised and was consciously aware that she needed a church that she could attend just to get stability in her spiritual life. In the process I knew I could start counselling her, but instead envisioned her as part of this congregation. She needed the care, love and support of other people to cope and survive her situation. At that moment, I knew that she would definitely get the support and care of a caring community.

She then took me through all the pictures as she promised to do and in an hour's time, it was as if I have known this lady for a long time. She did not beat about the bush and the divorce story led to stories of rape, abuse, chastisement and love. I observed her as a strong and open person who had resorted to not trusting people. When she mentioned this, I questioned her eagerness to call me and her openness to convey her whole life story to me. She said that her hurt and pain forced her to talk about it but that she was still choosy about whom to trust. It was then that she met someone who was a visitor at this congregation and who heard me preaching at this congregation, and this person directed her to me. It was at this stage that she and I agreed to contact the leadership of this congregation. Although her friend was not a member of this congregation, I felt good because it is one of the characteristics of this congregation to act quickly in response to someone's needs. The mission of

my co-researchers was to listen and to respond to the needs and cry of this community.

2.7.2 This story sensitized my co-researchers.

Unfortunately, after two weeks, this woman's job promoted her, which led to a transfer to Johannesburg. She then just disappeared out of my hands before I could introduce her to the congregation and I assumed she decided to relocate to Johannesburg. It was at this stage of telling the leadership about this woman that they became more sensitive and decided to look around them and reach out to people who are in need. For my co-researchers this was not an easy exercise of contributing to someone's life. It was not easy for people who are in need to build relationships of trust with those who reach out to them. It was from this perspective that my co-researchers and I embarked on this research. It was also at this stage that the leadership of the church agreed to be drawn into this research but from a perspective of writing down the history of their church. It was then that I took the initiative to introduce them into the narrative approach of listening to their own stories as a field of action. It made me think of Lamott's idea of using the action as the starting point or point of departure, which actually transfers the weight from the problem to the story of the action (Lamott 1994:62).

Each story told is what gives the existing "stuck story" its driving urgency. Within this story the divorce and painful attachments of this woman opened my eyes towards the pain and struggles that my co-researchers experienced and made them aware that it is not only they that need healing and care. This specific meaning came to mind through a gathering together with many other events in the past that fitted with this interpretation. This story of divorce linked to so many other stories that my co-researchers could relate to, in the process of telling and re-telling their stories. This story shows a connection to so many other stories, which made the stories of love, care, healing and transformation stronger. The meaning of a group of events as it is described in detail is bound to the specifics of a given situation and is contingent on intersubjectively constructed accounts. Most of the time people experience things and suffer from unforeseen events they did not expect and cannot control.

2.8 Telling your story, making your contribution

The narrative approach has taught me that people tell their stories not only to amuse others, but that fragments of people's lives are exposed through these stories. "Each story told, represents a struggle in the process of thinking, doing and decision-

making. Through our stories we not only discover identity, but also build identity.” (Müller 1991:5) Story telling moved my co-researchers into a consciousness of a ministry that speaks about their involvement in one another’s lives. This perception was more about writing down the history of their congregation, which was embedded in a consciousness of love, care and support with a deepened spirituality. In each story there was the awareness of a tension between the experiences at present and also those of the past and the future. This uneasiness helped my co-researchers to understand that they are only human and all have a life story to tell. It is not always easy to contribute to a ministry that is new to someone who has not previously been involved in such an office. With the telling of the stories they realised that there is more to it and that they could contribute to one another’s lives through the acknowledgement that each story is important and makes sense of the ministry of this congregation. “Laypeople are a vast and largely unused support system in the contemporary church, because they are in close daily contact with suffering and alienated people at their jobs, in their homes, and among their friends.” (Stone 1991:14)

Stone explains further that people’s involvement in the lives of those who suffer is not simply for their benefit or liberation but provides a crucial position for coming into contact with the heartbeat of God and for discovering the decisive significance and relevance of Jesus Christ for all people. It was in the telling these stories that my co-researchers realised that God is on the side of those who are suffering and that God cannot put up with the destruction of human life.

It eventually led to people getting together to discuss how they would go about taking care of one another and what impact this involvement would make on their lives. Some of them looked at their own life situations and wondered whether they were equipped to take on the practical side of their caring gifts, while others felt brave enough to start a ministry without knowing what the outcome would be. The co-researchers quickly realised that they embarked on a journey that might become a challenge to them. My main concern was to find out what the problem-saturated stories of this congregation would be and how together we could separate the problem from my co-researchers? At this early phase of the interview, I tried to map out the influence of the problem on each of the members of this congregation. I looked at the stories, which influenced the experiences of care and spirituality in a negative way. I tried to set questions that would give each co-researcher an opportunity to learn how problems can echo through relationships and affect each

person. In doing this, I was continuously cautious and conscious not to sensitize my co-researchers to own the problem. I used external language and also concentrated on the language they used to identify the problem as separate from my co-researchers and the rest of the congregation. People needed a minister so that they could feel they do have a “shepherd” to take care of them, and that they want to worship in a church building with all its interior decorations and not in a house. People’s concern was to be guided by a minister with theological background that could uplift their spirituality. My goal was not to bring about change but to listen to the stories as they unfolded and be drawn into these stories. This approach differs from previous models where the researcher does the following as Monk et al. (1997:10) describe: “The externalizing conversation served to locate the problem within the cultural meanings that were impacting the person rather than in some internalized pathological condition.”

They started questioning me concerning their involvement in the lives of people. One of my co-researcher’s (Bennie) who is a leader asked me how he could play the role of a counsellor. He openly and very curiously mentioned that he feels led to guide people not to make hasty decisions. He realised how difficult it is for people to deal with sensitive issues in their lives. He questioned his own abilities and skilfulness to listen and to understand people as they relate their stories. The whole question about trust, guidance and confidence arose and they were really eager to become equipped to play the role of caregivers in peoples’ lives. I tried to understand and answer his question, but realised that we together needed to go and do research in his world as to where and how he played a role as caregiver in someone else’s life before. The statement made by Stone became evident when I realized that: “In recent decades lay pastoral care appears to have receded in practice, and when given it is often without the support and encouragement of the ordained.” (Stone 1991:15)

During the conversation I asked them whether this concern (to journey with people in a counsellor’s position) and questions come from all my co-researchers or is it only the concern of one person. As I raised the question, the acknowledgement came from one of the co-researchers who wanted to be called Priscilla (refer to section 2.5.1 and 2.9). This makes it clear that together they took this firm position as they put it: *“to win people for God and to open their house for fellow believers so that they could expand the kingdom of God.”* For me Priscilla takes in a firm position, as she would like to be found competent in her mission of care and support. These words of

Priscilla as co-researcher made me look more into the metaphor of the “eye” and this is how she said it. *“I would like to be the “eye” of this congregation”*. This statement made me to ask her the question: *“What do you mean when you say that you would like to be the “eye” of this congregation?”*

2.9 The metaphor of the “eye”

The metaphor of the “eye” opened up a new version of a story being told by someone who has a passion to serve her neighbour. Priscilla has chosen the “eye” because as she says “the eye is the organ of the body which sees direction to where things are going.” According to the anatomy of the body the eye is the organ of sight of a human being and has the ability to notice or discern. “To observe or to watch closely...” Heinemann (1985:348). In my conversation with Priscilla the Heinemann definition is the same as her interpretation of the “eye”. She observed that in the previous church there was no co-ordination and genuine relationship between the leaders of the church and the ordinary church members. Her experience concerning her statement is that only the minister governed the previous church and the leadership was not in touch with the ministry of the church. According to Priscilla their minister was the supporting shaft of the previous congregation. Although the minister’s charismatic leadership style made the ordinary members respond well when there was a cry for help or to support others in the congregation she did not get the same response from the leaders. It was only when a new leader who was a layperson was forced upon the congregation together with previous stumbling blocks, which surfaced again that the eyes of most of them (Priscilla included) were opened. Priscilla said that this minister had to leave this congregation because it was the end of the minister’s term there. Most of the people in the previous congregation felt that they understood the end of the term of the minister but felt insulted that they should be led by a layperson who was not even previously a member of this congregation. She says it was at this stage that a few of them felt that if this was the situation they as a laity could start their own congregation and would follow the “Six Calls Model”. The metaphor of the “eye” moved Priscilla to start searching the scriptures.

The following is the conversation verbatim that I had with Priscilla, as she liked this name after she read the text in Acts chapter 18. The same image and vision that Priscilla read in Acts chapter 18 was how she interpreted her and her husband’s determination to open their house for this new church. She liked this name ‘Priscilla’ because it actually represents a type of co-travelling into an unknown future. She also felt that Acts 18 verse 2 speaks to their context of how they have been

abandoned by a church. She interprets “tent-making” as a life skill that God has granted all of them (referring to all my co-researchers) and is an ability to care for and support one another and even to share the Word of God to their spiritual upliftment. Although they are only a laity without an ordained or fulltime minister they do have the skills to keep the flock together. I questioned Priscilla on why she felt so strongly about this congregation, after this group had refused to be led by a layperson. Priscilla was adamant that this is their congregation’s calling and that this is God’s time to respond to their needs and to groom them to play a role in the life of one another. This topic was further discussed in a bible study as mentioned in chapter three.

2.9.1 The Conversation between Priscilla and the researcher.

Ruth: *You say you would like to be the “eye” of this congregation... (Pause to evaluate whether I am on the right track.)*

Priscilla: (Speaks very firmly and with confidence.) *Yes you heard me correctly.*

Ruth: *What does the “eye” mean to you?*

Priscilla: *I have been born in the most powerful traditional churches and never had the opportunity to journey with people. I have seen people reaching out for help and no one not even the minister could help, assist or guide them. I witnessed the breaking up of marriages, suicides, abuse, etc, and when I look back I asked myself every time. What can I do to make things better in other people’s lives?*

Ruth: *What do you mean by making things better?*

Priscilla: *People need a home where they can feel safe...(pause) and by this I mean people need a church where they feel free to talk and worship God. People want to talk about their problems where there is no prejudice. People need guidance and support and a platform to convey their stories.*

Ruth: *You feel this church is the kind of organisation where people will be supported, guided and able to talk about their problems?*

Priscilla: *Yes...definitely. I would like to encourage and motivate people to talk.*

Ruth: *What do you have that you know that you could bring to this congregation that could help people to talk.*

Priscilla: *To be honest with you, we as a congregation have so much to give it is just that some of us do not know how to go about things. I think we are on a spiritual journey, and to slot into this journey is not an easy step to take. We need someone who could guide, mentor and facilitate a counselling group for care and support.*

As Priscilla and I went deeper into this conversation I realised that it is not only about others and their problems but she herself would like to talk about her own situation. She also needed guidance and assistance to talk freely and openly. Freedman & Combs (1996:23) say that: “Reality arises through social interaction over time, which means that people together construct their realities as they live them.”

2.9.2 “I would like to be the eye of this congregation”

It is clear that this story shows how Priscilla experienced and observed great neglect and was not taken care of by the leadership in the previous church, which she belonged to. When she and her family arrived in Pretoria they were searching for a church where they would feel comfortable to praise and worship God. When they visited their previous church, they experienced that it was the place God would want them to be. They felt immediately attached and overwhelmed by the friendliness of the people in this congregation. Slowly they started getting to know the people and leadership. During this time it occurred that the church, or rather Sunday worship, really met their needs and they felt comfortable about it. As they journeyed for the two years getting to know the people, they became more comfortable with the rest of the congregation.

It so happened that her husband was promoted in his job and they were relocated to Cape Town where they spent three years and then again relocated back to Pretoria. They felt comfortable joining the church (she does not want to divulge the name of church) again seeing that they knew the setup. Her voice dropped as she says that she is still baffled about what she then experienced and saw that she could never believe it was the same church. She made it clear to me that she earnestly searched for the face and presence of God and asked God if this was really the same church. She claimed that during an Alpha course, which they attended God opened her eyes because she did not hesitate to question the leadership about what she saw and

experienced in the church, which was contrary to what she knew this church was before they left. She realized that she longed for those moments of care and togetherness. Those moments that someone would pop in at their house just to ask if everything was fine with them. She misses those moments of prayer and support. She never thought that she would become lonely among friends called the people of God.

She expresses the “eye” as the metaphor that gives evidence of respect, love, care, support and fairness in each unpleasant situation. She claims that it was at this stage that God laid it on her and her husbands’ heart to open their house so that the new church could start. What I realized and will discuss later in chapter three is that although the journey, which started as a group, one still finds the individual journeys that sometimes stay separate from the rest of the group. Müller (1999:3) states clearly that some journeys are travelled separately and others collectively but for me the essence is that: “The narrative approach has made the discovery that people do not tell stories only for interest’s sake or for entertainment, but life’s grain is exposed through these stories.” (Müller 1999:5)

2.9.3 The use of the metaphor in the story

It is through the fantastic work done by Michael White and David Epston that a narrative metaphor as a therapeutic tool could be developed. Taken from the profound contribution made by Bateson which suggested that: “...in order to be able to detect and acquire new information, human beings must engage in a process of comparison, in which they distinguish between one set of events in time and another.” (Monk et al. 1997:7) In therapeutic sessions, White observed that many people adjust to their problems without noticing the extent to which these problems influenced their lives. Sometimes people do not even realize how much they contribute to the ineffectiveness of the degree of the problem. According to Freedman & Combs (1996:15) White takes us back to how Bateson used the metaphor of “maps” saying that the knowledge that people have in relation to the world is carried in a variety of mental maps of “external” or “objective” reality and that different maps lead to different interpretations of “reality”. The metaphor of the story has introduced people to ways they could engage their stories as a way of understanding and making sense of their experiences. “White discovered that by drawing clients’ attention to subtle changes accompanying the escalation and reduction of their problems he could foster new insights into their abilities and thus

help them develop a cleared perspective on how to address their concerns.” (Monk et al. 1997:7)

According to Webster & Schner (2000:3) “a metaphor is an image which gathers up in shorthand fashion all of the factual details, making an empty general definition concrete in quite a different manner.” Metaphors are not only used to interpret a situation but act as suggestions of how people should reason about life. Metaphors can be used as guides about how to arrange and assess a variety of actions and their interrelations. The thought of using a metaphor is to help people recognize some of the dynamics of human behaviour, and also to use the stories that have been told to reveal the things people are not aware of. “Metaphors have been used in more general ways to illustrate the human conditions; the path of life, being at a crossroads, climb every mountain, have all been used to illustrate a challenge an individual may be faced with, or choices that people need to make at certain points in their lives.” Abels & Abels (2001:32)

When people talk about their problem they give descriptions of it and even rewrite it to unfold the experiences that they did not mention. My co-researchers found names for their problems and personal qualities, which they could relate closely to what they have experienced. As my co-researchers talked and unfolded their stories was it amazing how they used certain metaphors to show their competency or eagerness to accomplish their mission. The use of metaphors helped my co-researchers to open chapters of their lives that have been closed and to choose the correct words to represent and to present the problem so that the identity of the co-researcher could be separated from it. Stories are not theoretical but lived experiences that can be examined and can be rewritten and often end with a happy ending (Abels & Abels 2001:32).

As my co-researcher used the word “eye”, I became, excited in following this eye. For that moment, I was eager to hear what this eye sees, how far can it see and how it links to the “now” of her story and even to the story of the congregation. I realized that there are certain things that the eye had seen but which were not important to divulge and which were difficult to talk, about. Although the “now” of the story has already been discussed I realised the “now” is that part of the story that appears every time and which I should not lose track of. Müller et al. (2001:4) says that: “When moving away from the “now” during the research process, it is important that

the researcher and the co-researcher(s) find their way back from the past or the future and focus on the 'now'."

As I was still pondering on this metaphor, I realized that I do not know what my co-researcher meant by saying "I would like to be the eye of this congregation." I gave her the opportunity to unpack this metaphor so that I could also get clarity on what she meant. I realized that to come back on track I needed to take on the "not-knowing" position of the narrative approach so that I could allow my co-researcher to tell this story as she experienced it in her social context. The "not-knowing" position also allowed me to be led by my co-researcher as she unpacked her story. At this stage, I could confirm the statement made by Anderson & Goolishan (1992:28) that: "The 'not-knowing' position allows the researcher to ask questions to the co-researcher(s), which are not informed by method and demand scientific answers" According to Priscilla the "eye" is that part of her body that experienced pain through seeing what happened when people got hurt. She says when she observed the brokenness of a congregation that used to be so loving and caring towards others; it was as if her eye felt a sharp pain of disappointment. As she was talking she blinked her eyes as if she is reliving what she saw. She continues saying that in this same church she experienced how people who were previously so kind and helpful towards one another could just become rude and disrespectful. She then came to the conclusion that she might have been blind all the time but now that she can see she will address and stand up against people who hurt or marginalize others. She made it a point to start looking at people differently so that she can detect where people are hurting. She affirms this statement with the following words: "God being my helper I hope to be there for people when they get hurt or insulted in the church. I am taking a vow that I will be the 'eye' of this congregation and address issues that break the solidarity and togetherness of people."

In having a closer look at what Anderson & Goolishan said it came to mind that when one concentrates on the narrative and social constructionist metaphor the experiential worlds of people are no longer organized in terms of "information" and "pattern". These terms have been taken in by "stories", which help us to think in terms of "culture" or "society" rather than "systems". By making use of questions one can bring out the knowledge and experience that is conveyed in the stories of the people we deal with. My co-researchers soon realized that we are not the experts who need to fix other people's lives, but that the stories influenced their lives and led them into a deeper experience of finding new meaning and these stories became

part of their history. “We think of ourselves as members of a subculture in collaborative social interaction with other people to construct new realities.” (Freedman & Combs 1996:18)

2.9.4 The dream of care.

On another occasion Priscilla and I spoke about her dream of care and she divulged the following:

“Although I am a person with a profession, my dream is to care for people who are in need. When we moved to Pretoria for the first time, we were hunting for a church and found our previous church as the most suitable place of worship. We felt at home in this church and we even received the expected spiritual care and love of this congregation. It was so wonderful to get up on a Sunday morning and be introduced to a mode of true worship, where one feels free to praise God. Both my husband and I agreed that we received and reached a level of spirituality, which we never experienced before. Our spirituality became the essence of why we needed to stay in this congregation. A year later we left Pretoria due to the relocation my husband’s job and came back after three years. We went back to this same church but in three months time we experienced a church that has changed. There was no longer the warmth of a church, which we knew and some of the congregants whom we knew before had left the church. It seemed as if every person had changed and we felt like foreigners in a strange country. One morning the Alpha course was announced and everybody who was interested in attending such a course had to submit their names. My husband and I decided to join the Alpha course, which only gave us more answers to our suspicion. We realized that the leadership was no longer the people we knew and that there were new leaders on the church council and those we knew became like foreigners to us. It was during this Alpha course that my husband and I became more open in our group and challenged the change that we observed, which led to people challenging those in the leadership position.”

She kept quiet when her voice dropped as she paused for a moment. I noticed her eyes became searching like one who is baffled. She then continues as she says: *“I do not want to go into this part of the story because the importance for me is to care for people who are in need and to look around me, to throw an open eye towards the mistakes that have been made and to guard against the error that the leadership could make. I am longing for the times that we felt together and cared for in a church where we came from different backgrounds. I remembered the time when my husband’s grandmother passed on and we were still new in that congregation.*

During that time we received so much support and care that sustained us in our time of grief that we even voiced it that we could not ask for a better church. We felt so united and at home, that we knew this was home for us among the people of God. With our return after three years we experienced a new dimension, a change had taken place. We felt rejected and not taken care of, therefore I am taking in this position of being the “eye” of this congregation so that the level of consistency could remain and to look for people who are in need.”

2.10 Externalising conversations

The problem of the congregation as we understood it was that my co-researchers were afraid that they would not survive as a congregation without the fulltime service and care of an ordained minister. They did not have any experience of leading and managing a congregation but only to love, care and support one another. They did not have a ‘church building’ to worship in as a group and made use of the hall of one of the Primary Schools in Valhalla. The problem was further aggravated by other problems that showed most of the co-researchers suffered domestic problems in the absence of their partners during the time of their being employed outside the country. The hurt that accompanied the problem was that the partner or the person who looked after the children at home had no support system from the military or the church.

The metaphor of the “eye” made me focus on the problem of my co-researchers, which made them become activists. Emphasis was placed more on the church because of the spiritual aspect. My co-researchers are individuals and part of families, which are the products of a culture and history of care and support received through the church. The situation of starting a congregation on the basis of love, care and support, had been socially constructed through their relationships with one another. This enabled people to realize that they and the problem are two separate things. In this research I realized that the success and confidence for starting a new congregation did not only arrive from my co-researcher’s personal problems but also from their personal qualities such as strengths, confidence, and ambition. To externalize conversations was not only to look at problems but also to concentrate on affirmative internalized qualities or behaviour. According to the article (2002 No.2) written by Michael White to externalize conversations is to focus on problems that may once have been internalized. I agree with White when he says: “Externalizing is to hold a particular way of understanding, a particular tradition of thought, called post structuralism.” (White 2002:1)

People are socially constructed in relation to how they deal with problems in their lives. The narrative approach tends to separate the person from the problem through externalizing of the conversation. According to Morgan (2000:17) externalizing is the foundation from which many though by no means all, narrative conversations are built. Morgan makes it clear that externalizing is not a technique or a skill, but an approach and gives direction to conversations. The problem is located outside the person and in the conversation together with this person the researcher looks at the impact or the effect that the problem has on the person. This helps the person to identify the problem as the problem and not the person as the problem. This is different from when the person owns the problem as in conversations where the problem has negative effects on the person. In the situation the problem is described according to certain words or phrases. "It is often important to encourage persons to construct alternative definitions of problems: definitions that are most relevant to their experience; definitions that enable them to address more adequately their immediate concerns." (White and Epston 1990:53)

To be able to externalize the conversations is to be guided by my co-researchers about what the problem is and how a possible solution can be found. My approach was to look at the deeper effects that the problem had on the congregation, which actually made them start their own congregation. Also to find out what might be the possible problem/s that created other stories that they could use as a means of a specific outcome of healing and transformation in a process of care and support. It was identifying this that led us as a research team to come up with the valuable themes as discussed in chapter three.

Through externalizing the conversations I could guide my co-researchers in a process of pastoral care that sensitized them to the important techniques and skills like attentive listening as an art, conflict management, pastoral care as a team effort and silence with respect to the "not-knowing position". By looking at their enthusiasm and ambition to start this congregation I realized as I journeyed with them that they would need these skills and techniques to sustain the congregation. What was very amazing was that in the conversations these skills and techniques were shown and opened their eyes about who they were in person and the integral role that they could or already played in this congregation.

Externalizing conversations is to map out the influence of my co-researchers in the life of the problem, because many times people find it very difficult to identify or

explain in ordinary language how they experienced the problem. As a narrative researcher I guarded against generalizing about situations and acting on them by using preconceived solutions. Externalizing conversations is to help people to a complete overall description when there is more than one problem at a time. A new context could be created where the person could break loose or distance him or herself from the problem. The problem is no longer fixed because the person is free from any negative beliefs about him or her self, and can now take action against the problem. I agree with McNamee in making the following statement: “The therapeutic conversation is a mutual search and exploration through dialogue, a two way exchange, a criss-crossing of ideas in which new meanings are continually evolving towards the ‘dissolving’ of problems, and thus, the dissolving of the therapy system and hence the problem-organising problem-dissolving system.” (McNamee & Gergen 1994:27)

It is not always easy to understand, people if one does not have a shared understanding of someone’s situation. When people have shared understandings they tend to check one another’s speech by questioning and challenging it, which eventually leads to reformulating and elaborating on it. To understand externalizing for me was not to become or be the expert but to concentrate on the use of language by my co-researchers, and to pose powerful questions to them so that meaning and identities could be constructed. It was also important for me to see how my co-researchers explored new ways of relating to their problems and their personal qualities. Shotter (1993:1) quotes (Garfinkel 1967) and says that: “In practice, shared understandings are developed or negotiated between participants over a period of time, in the course of an ongoing conversation.” It is clear that in a conversation people tend to respond to one another’s statements in linking their experiences with others around them and this leads to the establishment of a social relationship. Shotter (1993:2) explains it well: “For it is from within the dynamically sustained context of these actively constructed relations that what is talked about gets its meaning.” It is from this perspective that I have taken on the position as participant observer because what Shotter says makes sense to me because my co-researchers found meaning in their relationships through their experiences and talks because through language they could connect certain events and attach significance to them. My co-researchers realized that their talks made sense to them in terms of metaphors taken from the habitat of the conversation itself.

In my research as a narrative participant observer, I became excited with the model developed by Michael White for the use of externalizing conversations. As the co-researchers narrated their stories I could see these conversations as an attempt to move the focus away from self-centeredness, recrimination, blame and judgment, which are attitudes that can obstruct the productive and positive outcomes of counselling. Together with my co-researchers, I used this factor of externalizing conversations to venture on a non-blaming approach, which actually helped the process of research to become an effort of working together on the problems created by previous situations and even to concentrate on their personal qualities. Within the process of externalization the construction of the new stories would fill my co-researchers with excitement, hope, and promises, which should guide their decision to have the outcomes fulfilled. It became clear to me when Monk et al. (1997:7) quote and agree with Bateson (1979) that: “in order to detect and acquire new information, human beings must engage in a process of comparison, in which they distinguish between one set of events and another.”

As the stories were told, I found that I strongly agreed with White in Monk et al. (1997:7) that, people adapt to their problems so much that they do not realize the extent to which their problems have affected their lives. With every appointment, the stories of my co-researchers continued and I became more and more interested in what the problems were and what the problems had done to them and what is currently happening to them. Their problems actually brought out their personal strengths and eagerness to support one another on the basis of love and care, which further developed in a deepened spirituality. As researcher, I became constantly aware that therapy or counselling is not about satisfying my needs but to engage in the life situations of my co-researchers in such a way that neither they, nor I should be swamped by despair and frustration that might be evoked by the sensitivity of the story. This is where I, as the researcher, arrived and to “externalize” the conversation about the problem means to separate the problem from the co-researchers. In externalizing the conversations, I adhered to the narrative approach, which seeks to respect and not blame people for their problems and to see people as the experts of their lives.

To be able to enhance the above I mapped out the influence of the problem and personal qualities on each of my co-researchers. In doing this, I gave each of my co-researchers the opportunity to learn how a problem can echo continuously through relationships and affect each person. To externalize a conversation is also

not to let the co-searchers own the problems but to encourage each co-researcher to identify the problem as separate from them. To externalize conversations is a different perception from the medical model in which people identify themselves as “docile bodies” subject to knowledge and procedures in which they have no active voice (Freedman & Combs 1996:57). Identifying with Freedman and Combs, Morgan (2000:17) shares the same idea with Monk et al. (1997:7), that the therapist should separate the person’s identity from the problem for which the person seeks assistance. Confronted with this ideology, I guided my co-researchers to speak about their problem as separate from their identity. This also encourages a mind shift that includes a language that will speak about the problem as separate from the person.

2.11 The fear of non-existence

My co-researchers experienced the problem of the fear of non-existence. The fear of survival was a very sensitive issue to my co-researchers because often people will visit for some time but leave the church when they overcame their problem. This was the interpretation of my co-researchers’ experience (refer to Willie’s story in section 2.16) and they felt used by people (fully explained in section 2.23). The separation of the problem from my co-researchers helped them to come into contact with their fears. Every congregation experiences at one stage or another anxiety about the congregation’s life or the death of a member, the discontinuation of membership, emptiness in spirituality and loss of meaning or togetherness. As has already been mentioned the church is made up of individuals who belong to different families. When a family goes through difficulties or does not meet the needs of its members, it tends to become very affected by stressful situations. Stress and anxiety contribute to family tensions and can spoil the relationships amongst members. The same operation could happen in the church, because individuals come from different family backgrounds and have different ways of solving problems. In the church different family rules might apply and different routes be followed to get to a simple solution. What seems to be simple and easy for one person might not be the same for the next person. Different patterns of behaviour can slow down the process of moving forward for a church. The fact that different leaders have different leadership styles and people can become comfortable with a certain style of leadership and another style might irritate and frustrate them.

With reference to chapter three, paragraph 3.3 in every relationship and system, people become anxious. Shawchuck and Heuser (1996:279), interpret it

metaphorically as an alarm system that alerts people that something is not right and that there is a potential crisis. According to the postmodern therapist anxiety is a problem, which can be externalized and deconstructed as an opportunity for change and growth. If people do not know how to manage differences, fear can disturb healthy relationships in a congregation and can weaken a group's objectivity and creativity. Steinke explains that "anxiety can incite change; it pokes and thrusts people towards improvement and transformation." (Shawchuck & Heuser 1996:280) Anxiety is a sign that a congregation needs to address certain problematic issues and that healing and a transformed mind should develop. Healthy congregations acknowledge these situations and deal with them in time so that the anxiety can decrease. A very interesting statement is made by Shawchuck and Heuser, that recurring anxiety like spreading rumours, making allegations and exaggerating events, causes a highly dysfunctional behaviour in relationships among church members. People with recurring anxiety find a new reason every time to feed their anxiety, which later rubs off onto others. When anxiety is transferred to others the culprits find some kind of repose, which generates a vicious cycle of:

be anxious → make others anxious → rest a while → be anxious again.

Sometimes members deny the reality of the anxiety and they claim that everybody is at ease with one another and that everything goes well in the congregation. This kind of attitude demonstrates blindness to the true situation and they are no longer able to recognize their insensible damaging configuration. They are totally unconscious of their dysfunctional behaviour. I entirely agree with Shawchck and Heuser (1996:281) that such a congregation needs a therapist that understands the operation of systems and is able to guide them narratively from a postmodern perspective so that healing can take place.

Fear could also become a driving force, which distracts people from reasoning when they become occupied with surprising and random circumstances. Western societies have the belief that influential damaging forces, which intimidate their everyday existence, challenge people. Fears about the future are linked to anxieties about problems today. Fear has damaged society's perception concerning risk taking, because the insight of risk is formed by the contemporary lack of trust in humankind. The decline of trust influences people's actions in taking a risk that might have a healing effect on society, but which is potentially dangerous. The belief that risks are repeatedly 'undervalued', 'overlooked', or 'suppressed' reinforces the confidence that

in many situations there are concealed or indistinguishable risks lying in wait under the surface. Furedi (1997:29) who researched fear and risk taking highlights the consequences of this development as a strong connotation of fear about the side effects of any technological improvement or social experience. Communities as a whole are influenced by the fear of side effects, which make them sometimes assume that their well-being is affected by the side-effect of some developed process. One of the consequences of this position is that interaction among people and products is considered as essentially uncertain. The outcome of this course of action is a way of thinking that repeatedly anticipates the most horrible in every situation. "The conviction that improvements are fundamentally risky often leads to assumptions about side effects." (Furedi 1997:30)

2.11.1 The language of fear

It is important to note that the actual concern was to take care of one another and to support each other. My co-researchers were very clear about their fears but in the re-telling, testimonies in church and re-structuring of the stories they ended up recognizing that they have a commitment in the form of care and support towards one another. When the congregation started and was in the early stages of the process they became confronted with the fear of survival. At this stage they felt comfortable and taken care of through the support that they received. According to emotionologists the use of the language of fear in a cultural context has gone through different modifications. Bourke (2005:287) explains that fear does not follow its uses in language; it also possesses its own narrative. She goes further in saying that when individuals want to be understood by communicating their fears they need to conform to certain narrative structures, including genre, sentence structure, form, order and vocabulary. When people convey their fear it changes the consciousness of fear. She also quotes the words of William Reddy who said, "Emotional utterances or acts have a unique capacity to alter what they 'refer' to or what they 'represent'." (Bourke 2005:287) The subjective experience of fear has been altered by the shifts in the way people narrate their fear. The act of narrating emotions – to oneself as much as to others – is dependent upon the ordering mechanism of grammar, plot and genre. To the degree that these mechanisms are historical, the way emotions are experienced has a history.

Bourke explains that the narrative approach implies that there is no substance to the emotions at all; everything is reduced to discourse. She utters her reservations concerning the narrative approach, that it imposes an absolute softness to the

individual, always enslaved by disciplining discourse and institutions. Fear has a composition and has been given a physical body by social sciences, by describing the emotions as inconsequential side-effects of rational, class-based responses to material interest. Historians have struggled to accept the physical body of fear because, they could only analyse the emotions obliquely. The authoritarian division of the social and biological sciences and the advantaged academic position given to concepts such as logical thinking, guarantees that allegedly unreasonable and instinctive forces in human history were sidelined. “Focusing on human rationality seemed a more respectful way of interpreting people’s behaviour in the past.” (Bourke 2005:289)

2.12 Look around you and see what is happening.

This section arose from the enthusiasm, determination and diligence of Priscilla in her observation of where this group is heading. Through externalizing the conversations I became aware that the essence of story telling is deeply rooted in how stories unfold and find meaning in people’s lives. My co-researchers see story telling as a move into a positive direction. It is as one put it: *“It is like walking in the dark when you do not see the road, but when you look around you, you can follow by the little you see in front of you.”* This statement agrees with Freedman & Combs’ (1996:29) statement that: “Meaning is not carried in a word by itself, but by the word in relation to its context.” For my co-researchers their road of travelling with one another was not an easy road because on the road of care and support other conflicts and difficulties arose. It was not easy for them to start the new church because they did not have a name or a church building. One of the co-researchers admitted that in the beginning people were reluctant to join the group, because they were scared of not being led by an ordained minister and it was something foreign to worship God in a house whilst there is a church building in the vicinity. Even those who eventually joined were conscious that *“things might not work out well for us”*. My co-researchers testified that to be able to bring the group to a decision to join was a personal choice and no one was forced to do so. There were also no invitations sent out to join their church. They felt that people should feel free to discern by themselves whether they would like to join the group. As people came and joined the group their eyes became opened towards the actual need. The need for love, care and support became more and more the focus point of why people wanted to join this church. When they found this and it started to make sense they realized that the foundation of it was a firm direction into a deepened spirituality. More and more people felt the call of staying together in a situation that was new to them. This

newness has been linked to the previous moments of love, care and support. The difference was that they started to experience a growth and step in faith towards a deeper spirituality which cannot find meaning if they did not adhere to it.

To look around them and see what is happening became an inward journey to them. This was a statement that they at first could not explain, but through constant questioning we came to conclusions that the inward journey was about their own consciousness of care and support and what it does to them inwardly when someone's problem has been solved. These were moments of wisdom and a deep search that came out in bible studies, conversations about where they came from and who are they now.

My co-researchers were clearly determined that the direction to move in was to use storytelling as an assurance that they have been heard. The reason that they asked me to journey with them was this hope that someone would be able to interpret their stories and see things in the stories that they could not see. Their problem with the leadership in the previous church was that the leadership could not see the struggles and pain of people who were not from Pretoria. The church no longer catered and cared for foreigners. This church used to take care of people who come for a few months to Pretoria to do some kind of military training and leave after the completion of the course. According to their previous experience this was the time that the church should show openly the hand of care and guidance. Some people felt neglected when their loved ones had to go on deployment in other neighbouring countries. Complaints about the failure to reach out a hand of care had been lodged with the leadership but to no avail. They felt that the leadership did not look around them and therefore could not relate to the needs of the congregation. It is from this angle that my co-researchers felt what had been stated by Carr (1998:11): "When our stories about ourselves are interpreted, we feel ourselves are being interpreted."

The abovementioned helped my co-researchers and me to analyse their different ways of conceptualizing their stories and human development. "Narrative analysis is a mood of inquiry based in narrative as a root metaphor, a genre, and discourse." (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:x) They explain further that as a metaphor narrative analysis involves explaining psychological phenomena as meanings that are ordered from some theoretical perspective, like that of a storyteller, and consists of information and comments about the significance of that information. It is from this narrative analysis that my co-researchers and I could draw the themes and I could

later add the literary theory to it. It helped my co-researchers to understand and explain the change in their circumstances, which includes time, truth, benefits, their character and conflicting moments. Narrative analysis allows the invasion of value and evaluation into the process of research. (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:xiii)

2.13 The Visionaries

The openness of Priscilla allowed us to go deeper into the metaphor of the “eye” as a reality that she had been transformed due to what she had experienced in her situation. Together with the rest of the group of people she has found new meaning as a means of love, care and support through interacting with one another in the belief that their togetherness opened their eyes to each other’s pain and need and that they could move into a new direction through social and spiritual transformation. They understood the “eye” as part of the vision of the mission field which they need to explore. The mission field of guidance, support and assistance can only happen when people have a vision to care for one another. They became used to a Medical Disciplinary Committee (MDC) who helped them socially to survive in the absence of their partners. Coming from a military background the following three points relate to a Medical Disciplinary Committee (MDC) which they had been used to:

- Soldiers and their families, quality of life should be improved by social relationships through the development of competence and mutual responsibility.
- To give effective support.
- To secure the social environmental supports.

Although they had these critical facts as part of the definition of the vision it was not yet so much a concrete fact as the idea of the vision. They allowed the members of the congregation to give their individual interpretation of a vision but found very little consensus. They started looking together at a fundamental reason for them being together and why they enjoyed this partnership. They asked one another what they would lose if they should stop existing? For them it was their values and beliefs that engendered a ministry of care and support of one another. Care and support was the crux of the concept of the vision. This exemplified purpose, values, and mission in a picture of how the future congregation would look and operate. It was not yet real but what this group would desire to be in the future and gives some realities of their present position. Although they would have loved to see a minister as leader at this stage was it the voice of every member in the process of decision-making that

was important and the belief in promoting risk taking. “Values are extremely important if an organisation is to realize its vision.” (Rosenbach and Taylor 2001:134)

As my co-researchers ventured on this mission they assisted and supported one another in the belief and trust that it materialised under God’s command. Even when the command was given some dragged their feet as if the time to carry out the command was too quick. Soon some of the co-researchers realised that this command is very different from a military command. In some way or another there was some freedom to choose to follow the group and a way of responding to the call. They even jokingly said that a spiritual journey is different from a military operation. Priscilla said that in this situation, she experienced that a spiritual journey is not easy to take, because people were not sure whether this command was from God or was the decision of some people in the group that confirmed the statement. It was only through persistence and prayer that the rest of group could later see the importance of being part of the group. The getting on board of the rest of the group was still not easy, because some people would come the one week and the next week would go back to the church where they came from or would just sit at home. “Missions are milestones towards the realization of the vision.” (Rosenbach and Taylor 2001:135)

The group discussions with my co-researchers revealed that the vision to start a new church caught fire when everybody was comfortable to meet in a house for a few Sundays. Willie one of the co-researchers was during that time outside the country and heard from his wife what was happening. When he joined the group he made the proposal that they should start looking for a building or a venue where people could move away from a house setup and feel that they had attended church. This proposal has been accepted with great respect and excitement, which helped them to move into the hall of one of the schools in the Valhalla area. Everybody regarded this move as the perfect timing of God and people felt more secure to invite others. The visionaries soon made arrangements for the perfect décor and other interior decorations to decorate the hall in the form of a church.

As the visionaries made arrangements to implement a ministry of care and support their vision led them to a process of spirituality, healing and transformation. Klein (2009:13) says that the vision is the heart of healing and transformation. Priscilla interprets her own story as one who would like to engage with the pain of the broken people in this congregation. This statement of Priscilla compliments Klein’s

interpretation that people require passion and importance in wanting to do something about what you see and experience around them (Klein 2009:13).

2.14 The story of co-exploration.

I looked at their vision as something that needed to be explored and practiced. The story of this congregation expresses the statement made by Monk et al. (1997:3) that narrative approaches to counselling invite clients to begin a journey of co-exploration in search of talents and abilities that are hidden or veiled by a life problem. Their vision is surrounded by their immediate situations and the fact that they do not have a qualified minister to be their leader and to direct the congregation. My co-researchers were actively involved as collaborators in the reconstruction of their story, which resulted in something of substance and value. In the beginning there were the bits and pieces of experiences of the past, which was the evidence that led them in this direction. It was at this stage that people started grouping together and this raised the same concerns. Their ultimate concern was to rebuild the structures of the support they knew and in doing this they experienced confrontation, with great opposition from the previous leadership. My co-researchers shared the same vision as affirmed by Klein (2009:15) that the vision has the ability to bring hope into a painful present. My co-researchers were willing to voice their desire to share a vision despite stories of pain, brokenness and disappointment. Their stories also originated out of their painful situations and led to guilt feelings because of what they knew about the pain of others and they felt helpless to give a supportive hand. Their own brokenness and fears are mirrored in what they see is happening to others. The memories of opposition from the previous leadership made them become more determined to start this ministry. Bennie voiced the seriousness of his fellow co-researchers who wanted to be listened to, guided and supported, acknowledged and understood. This statement of Bennie made me quote Klein as he says: "...have a burning desire to become part of that which you want to offer." (Klein 2009:16)

The group's burning desire to care for their families and friends presented plans and actions to meet the congregation's mission. At first, the new group felt disillusioned because the whole situation was misinterpreted by the previous leadership and viewed out of proportion. It became such a heavy situation that they started praying to God for direction and spiritual guidance. The outcome of their seeking the face of God was to leave their previous church. They all needed a church which could support people and which would not be managed the way the "mafia" would do it. I became very interested in the metaphor "mafia" because it said something to me

about the powerful role of the leadership, but I had to make sure of my suspicion and not to take it for granted that I knew what my co-researchers meant. In the discussion I made sure that I asked them what they meant when they used the term “mafia”. I later found out that this term “mafia” brought great opposition among the co-researchers and the previous leadership and some of my co-researchers voiced it as a matter of challenging the integrity of the leaders of this church. When they agreed as a group that they could start a new congregation Priscilla was the one who promised God that she would be the “eye” of this congregation and would not hesitate to address wrong when she saw it.

The vision expanded when meetings were called so that a church council could be established because the people were ready and voiced that they wanted to be led by a group of leaders. People elected their leaders through prayer and God’s guidance and I could hear them saying every time: *“we want leaders who will lead us and not manipulate us because of their position. We do not need the ‘Mafia’ type of operation.”* Again this metaphor hit me in the face and I needed to know what was meant by it. One of the co-researchers mentioned that the people made it quite clear that they need leaders that would lead them with reliability and that God should guide them. The co-researchers who were elected as leaders acknowledged that they were sensitive to their leadership roles, and were mindful of not disappointing the people. The leaders realised that the vision for building this congregation expected them to delve into their own spirituality before they could lead the people. This made them organise and plan bible studies and prayer meetings at different houses. This again was a step in faith because, the leadership was not sure if everybody would be comfortable to avail their houses for the people to meet for these gatherings or even to share their problems with each other. Shotter mentions in his book on “Conversational realities” that knowledge ‘from-within’ is constructing social relations. He says that this knowledge is embedded in a conversational background and it is not theoretical but a knowledge-in-practice. “What is it in the conversational background of our lives that shapes our passions, and leads us to talk about ourselves and our world as we do – thus to ‘construct’ all our social relations along in individualistic and instrumental dimensions, and our psychology in terms only of mental representations – while preventing us from noticing the consequences of so doing?” (Shotter 1993:19)

2.15 The risk in taking a step in faith

In the conversations and bible studies my co-researchers realized that their social realities are based on evidence that should start with a social transformation. At this stage my co-researchers felt called to start their journey but had a little uncertainty as to whether they would be able to survive as a congregation. I understood them from this perspective and they even voiced that for them it was a risk to take the step in faith. They were confronted with a first time experience of starting their own congregation but with the assurance that they do have the ability to care for one another. The sharing of problems as part of story telling soon became the point of departure for taking care of one another. People in this church realized very early that to be part of this church was to participate in what these people believed were the life and promises of God and of their existence. Care and support were not only seen as a human response to a need but a God given gift, which was encapsulated in God's promises.

Although everybody was comfortable and eager to take the first step this decision also came with a great concern as to whether things would work out for the group or not. At first there was reluctance from some of the group members, because people felt insecure and feared the challenge of a new beginning. It speaks about how transparent people are in seeing their lack of self-confidence although they have the passion to drive this congregation. In such a situation people monitor each other, policing the norms of acceptable behaviour and thought (Monk et al. 1997:198).

This observation was so effective that it brought my co-researchers like the "eye" or Priscilla to police their own behaviour, thoughts and feelings. They have been challenged by the idea of not having an ordained minister as shepherd and the fear of being led by lay leaders. For others it was important to worship in a building that attracts people to worship, in a building that shows the interior likeness of a church. Priscilla mentions that despite their fears the group claimed that the time was right for them to move on. She also made sure that I should understand that they do not see their moving away as a type of "schism" but they resettled in a new community because of their need to support and care for each other. She acknowledges that people in the group have gained knowledge and skills that they never knew before. It was only in the beginning of starting the congregation and process of resettlement that these gifts and skills actually surfaced.

According to interactionist's theory individuals are mutually moved by a common knowledge and expectation. This perception is taken further that an extended system of shared knowledge can sustain a correspondingly shared social order. Unfortunately individualist theorists do not value the importance of shared knowledge and rather perceive it as shared information. They condone an individualistic theory of knowledge in which units of information are products of individual observation and link it item by item with elements of the environment (Barnes 1995:95). This research shows evidence of a collective point of view and departure of a shared knowledge through social interaction. Durkheim's sociology of knowledge coincides with social interaction as he views elementary forms of religious life as an experience that emerges from interaction with others and is sustained and reinforced through repeated interactions. "Durkheim's concern was precisely to understand the shared character of knowledge and cognition, to show why, in a world where concepts and beliefs vary enormously between different human beings, they none the less manifest a high degree of uniformity among the members of particular collectives." (Barnes 1995:95)

The appearance of a postmodernist approach has encouraged post-secular thinking, which includes other alternative worlds, which are in conversation with one another. This conversation helped to bring out the importance of the theological voice, which showed the importance of peoples' experience of space and time since the time of the Enlightenment, which motivated the turn to postmodernism. (Ward 1996 :xxii).

Following God's command is taking a step in faith, but also to have the willingness to take the risk together. Risk taking in the paradigm of this church is a shared vision with evidence in a shared practice. This risk taking will be different from the risks that people take in the military or any other practical operation in the form of a ministry. This risk taking involves making use of a God given moment to spend time with someone in need or someone who is in trouble. The understanding of a postmodern God can only be theologically understood in a postmodern climate, which culturally values the significance of a theological discourse. According to Rahner (1975) in Palakeel (1995:256) people and their experiences are the 'locus' of all human experience and language including human experience of God and human language about God. Rahner takes his theology from an anthropological point of departure, in which people are considered as an endless openness to a possible revelation of God who is the Holy Mystery. Rahner speaks about a transcendental method, which he explains as a priori condition of possibility of human knowing and acting. Rahner

explains that the person as spirit in this world and symbol of God is the point of connection between the transcendental and the historical experience. Theology is established on the articulation of the total faith, which is grounded merely on revelation, making human beings and their historical experience the 'locus' of theology. Rahner (1975) wants to shift theology from the traditionally dogmatic framework to concentrate on the existential aspects. Rahner's transcendental approach is used to position God's relation to the world within the history of the person's experience of him or herself. Through 'knowing' people can go beyond the object of knowledge to the experience of mystery, which is the ancient of God. The calling back to the ambiguity of God means that theology has a foundation in the transcendental and historical experience of people. The 'theological' is the ground and goal of all human experience and speech. God can only be known through an act of faith and obedience to the enlightening God and his gift of grace. "Man can only know God through analogy because revelation has come to man only as veiled revelation, making use of human possibilities" (Palakeel 1995:19)

In light of the above, the field of operation is so big that some of the co-researchers never thought of exploring their creativity of care. I asked one of my co-researcher to state his view of this new mission. His pronouncement was that although it has been difficult for him to listen to people he still needed to co-operate with his brothers and sisters together in faith so that they could plant the seed of faith in one another's lives. This is precisely what the step forward meant; that one needs to be willing and able to listen to one another.

He also mentioned that willingness is not always competency. This is a field that one needs to be found competent in because peoples' lives could so easily become destroyed. In taking this step people came with many problems of uncertainty but with great faith that in their willingness to help and care for one another, survival would be possible. In looking at the confidence developed in my co-researchers, we see that this is really a church that is eager to journey with people. People see and experience the togetherness of the group and can even speak about a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging is not only a faith thing, but also what people can physically sow in one another's lives. This sense of belonging sensitised them to take the step in faith.

2.16 God's church as the family of God

The following story has been told by one of the leaders whose name is Willie and who, was adamant that the new church should be established from the perspective of love and support, which should develop into a deepened spirituality. Willie relates his story under the statement that God's church is the family of God, where he emphasizes that the Trinity Family Church functions like a family under the guidance of God. Klein (2009:15) interprets this statement made by Willie as the beginning of a new worldview, a different way of thinking about and doing ministry and being in ministry.

This is how he tells his story: "I grew up in a Methodist Church where the ministry of love, care, support, and a sound spirituality has been the foundation of a class system (as discussed in chapter one). It was due to a class system that people picked up broken lives and brought them to church and I witnessed as a youngster a process of healing and transformation. I have witnessed the changed lives of gangsters at the Cape Flats.

It is from this background that I joined the previous congregation when I was relocated to Pretoria by the Department of Defence. Things really went well and we felt we have arrived because the minister at this church was very mindful of love, care and support. This was the time that the Department of Defence deployed some of its people in our neighbouring African countries. This led to periods of three to six months that most of the members in the Department of Defence are away from home leaving their wives and children or husbands and children alone at home. It was during these times that most of the people called upon the leadership to take care of families who mentioned that they feel abandoned or neglected. Some feel that this was the time that they feel the church should become a caring community. The minister really tried to keep the flock together but in some way experienced resistance from the leadership.... (He paused, wiped a tear and said): Well this is now history and we the new team have decided to concentrate on the new story because the past is forgotten and will never be mentioned again."

I realized that there was a hot issue here but respected the fact that he preferred to concentrate on the new story, which was actually the story that brought hope for a new future. As we paused and tried to shape the conversation he all of a sudden continued. I realized that this part of the story will never be told and respected his feelings and decision not to delve into it any further. At this stage I did not want to

disturb him and thought that there might be another opportunity to dig into this situation again. I experienced a clear picture that in this case the told story is not the whole story, but realized that the story of love, care, spiritual growth and the hope of a new tomorrow was more important than their hurt. I agree strongly with the following statement made by Abels and Abels. “The untold experiences may contain the seeds, which may be valuable in aiding persons to re-author their lives. Unspoken stories may have been forgotten, or appear irrelevant, but may reflect resilience, or a satisfying series of experiences that can serve to re-establish a new direction for the client.” (Abels & Abels 2001:2)

He continues with his story: *“Valhalla Trinity Family Church was established to live for the passion of Christ in a situation of care and support as being led by a process of healing and transformation and not only for the establishment of a new church. This group was formed from a situation of pain and hurt, which became the foundation of love, care and support, after a group of people felt we want to serve God in a sincere and serious manner. This did not come easy and the only way out was to break away from a pretence style of ministry and worship. At this stage the status or position and personal kingdoms within the church no longer took priority as people felt encouraged to look for an alternative place of worship.*

This group started with eagerness and the confidence that they will make a difference under God’s calling and guidance to plant a new church on the basis of care and support. This new beginning in Valhalla spread like a veldt fire as people heard about this gathering and enquired about the resettlement of people without a full time minister.” My co-researcher claimed that, God sent many people on their road, which led to many appointments for consultations. He continues: *“These consultations even became a mountain, which was not easy to climb as people challenged their own eagerness and genuineness to resettle in a new community. Most of the members of the group stood firm, which led to several meetings, consultations and prayer meetings.”* Through all this havoc they later could see the guiding hand of God upon their lives as He steered them into the right direction. Hudson (1999:24) concludes this statement in the following way: *“...for the Christ-follower seeking earnestly to grow in faithful obedience, learning how to become a pilgrim in daily life needs to be a vital component of his or her discipleship”*

He continued: *“As people enquired on the being of our new congregation I felt encouraged to visit some members in the Department of Defence and told them*

about our congregation. This was not done to collect people for our congregation but to show my colleagues that I am concerned about families, who do not get any love, care and support though it be materially, socially or spiritually. Soon some of our group members started phoning or visiting people just to check whether they are "oraait". What actually motivated me in this mission was that one day I received a phone call from one of the congregants to tell me that her husband is in hospital diagnosed with cancer. When I arrived at the hospital she burst out in tears as she fell into my arms. I phoned the previous minister because we could still count on some spiritual care from an ordained ministry when we felt incompetent to do it. In a few moments our group crowded the reception area of the hospital. Among one another a strategy of support was discussed in how we will now journey with this family. Full time support and prayer meetings followed the mission until we buried him last year in March. (This is the story of Colonel Johan Heunis who died in March 2007 as mentioned in section 1.2.3) This situation attracted more people to the church and we became like a home-based care unit for people to heal. As a group we have decided that it is the choice of people if they want to stay with us after support and healing has been granted to them. Unfortunately and this is part of our sad story is that people want to worship in a church and not in a school hall and under the leadership of an ordained minister. Some times we feel like a shopping centre; only there for people to get the necessary groceries, but we the small group still feel motivated to continue. This is our third year of being together and we are looking forward to the day to see how this baby has matured."

Willie's story was so interesting because in some moments his voice was very tired and I could see he also needed some guidance and closure on certain issues. I realized that what keeps them going is the fact that the small group continues and is still eager to continue. According to Willie's story it is clear that the people moved together and rediscovered what the church was meant to be. They chose to be committed to a ministry that involves all members and they have found their own unique mission and sense of identity. This church as a family has been driven by reality as an engagement in one another's lives as what they would experience as a means of togetherness. "Subjectivity, consciousness and experience constitute the real, and are the products of a structure lying prior to or behind human efforts" (Parker 1998:19)

2.17 When the ears of people were deaf, God heard our cry.

The abovementioned knowledge played a crucial role when I ventured into the stories of my co-researchers and the following stories were revealed during interviews. I interviewed Bennie who is also a leader and involved with the youth. His friendliness and eagerness to talk about this congregation has been very attentive and informative since the first moment my co-researchers asked me to write a story about this congregation. My question, “How do you experience your congregation?” opened up emotions of excitement and openness. Listen now to the story as told by Bennie.

“I am very excited about our congregation and people’s involvement in it.” Bennie feels that he has the freedom to voice his opinion in this congregation without feeling that he will be insulted or discriminated against. He sees his role of care and support as an opportunity to sensitise people to talk about their problems. He views the church referring to this congregation as the centre of healing where he himself finds solutions to his problems. He feels that what he experiences and benefits should be open and attainable to others as well. Bennie says that he sees their congregation as a place where people become aware of their pain and struggles and are given the antidote of healing. This statement of Bennie took me back to what Klein (2009:26) wrote in his book that, “A vision can only be implemented where there is a need, where there are people with a deep passion for ministry, and where there is an intentional plan to make things happen.”

Bennie continues: *“I feel comfortable because I can preach a sermon in its simplest form and know that someone will feel touched and find an answer.”* I have asked Bennie what he meant with this statement. He says that he is continuously mindful that he is only a layperson. He does not have a sound theological background to deliver a sermon, as it would come from the mouth of an ordained minister or a theologian. He made it clear to me that the sermons he preached in this church were what he read in the Bible and how he could relate it to the situations of the people he journeys with. He feels that to journey with people in a situation of pain, fear and support is really to find yourself as a person who is also in pain and who needs guidance. *“Although we feel and experience a sense of belonging it is not always moonlight and roses, but sound relationships are transparent. It has been a long time that I prayed to God to that I need a church where we could genuinely take care of and journey through spiritual guidance with one another. The answer did not come quickly because our ears were deaf to discern the voice of God. It only*

happened when it was my turn to leave our country and deployed in Burundi. When I left home I was worried how my family would survive in my absence and who will drive them to church or give a pastoral visit. To my surprise, on the occasions when I called home, I would hear from my wife that someone from the church visited my wife and children or helped them in some way. My heart was thrilled and I felt ashamed because I doubted God so much and thought that we live in a world where people no longer cared for one another. When I arrived at home I then realized that people still do have caring hearts. It was from this perspective that some of us came together and looked at the positive side of our involvement in one another's lives. To my surprise others who did not get the same treatment as my family felt the same and voiced their concern as how they felt not cared for by the church or leadership in the absence of their husband or wife. Some people felt that the ears of the previous leadership were deaf when people raised the concern that in moments of the absence of their spouses the church needs to be there. It was from this perspective that our group started to get together for prayer meetings and after we attended an "Alpha course" our vision was confirmed. Unfortunately this step led to an immediate confrontation with the leadership of the church where we come from, which we as a concern group has laid it to the grave. We want to talk about our stories of care and empowerment and our positive move towards our spirituality". (Again I hear the concern of not going into the painful story, because the story of care and a new beginning was important.) "I am involved in the youth and very proud of our youngsters and I feel I can perform my ministry with diligence. I experience and treat these youngsters as if they are my own children. I think it is because of that bond relationship that we as adults and parents have with one another. We know one another on a personal and professional level and we make it our mission to serve one another on a spiritual sphere as well. My family gains out of it because when I am not here the leaders' will be there to take care of them. When I leave my family to go on work related missions I feel at ease because the leaders will visit my family or check whether they are in need of anything."

He continues with a smile on his face and says, *"spiritually I have grown. I have shared my changed life with the congregation. I realised that when a person accepted Christ in one's life you've got to do research."* I asked him to explain to me why he has to do research. *"My relationship with God and my involvement in the community compelled me to bring the good news. I have decided to become part of the preaching team that volunteered to preach on a Sunday. Sundays became a day of looking forward to hearing the word being preached by my fellow brothers or*

sisters. *I realised to keep up to the standard of good sermons I need to do some extra reading, in conjunction with the word of God. If I want to reach people and see change I need to do research because people need answers and I do not always have the answers.* He continues saying that, *“People are very polite and need sound answers from the preacher. In doing house visitations, which I use as part of my research I realized that people need to be heard and are eager to respond to the voice of God. In the bible studies, which we have every week and at different houses the discussions that arose from it opened our eyes to see the needs of people. In our leaders meetings we voiced the concern that people want to grow spiritually but for some congregants their relationship with the church must first come through care and support before a spiritual involvement will happen.* (He then spoke very affirmingly and said): *“I have seen and heard people saying that their peace can only become affirmed when they see a church operating in their lives.”* In this interview I learned what it means that narrative research in relation to qualitative research is to learn about people’s feelings, thoughts and experiences and that interviews provide crucial information, which can later be analysed and shared with the co-researchers (Rubin and Rubin 1995:2).

The story of Bennie continues: *“My own spirituality has taken a new shape, and sensitized me to pastor my own family in such a way that we have regular evening bible studies and prayers. In these quiet moments that we have with God we realized that we cannot continue on the old road and that God became the focal point of our family life. Even my children these days will never go and write an examination without inviting and praying to God. In this house we have experienced miracles when God answered us concerning the chronic asthma attacks that our daughter suffered from. For the past three years she was never hospitalised and is no longer on medication.”*

2.17.1 The story of the chronic asthma attacks

This was one of the sensitive issues in Bennie’s narrative that his child has to suffer from asthma. He and his wife came to a point in their lives where they could no longer stand the effects of the asthma attacks on their child and he was scared that she could become a social recluse because her body was very frail. She was very insecure and would not easily speak in a conversation. He said no one ever knew how he felt and he made it a point to speak to Priscilla concerning this matter. One evening she addressed the youth on how to conduct yourself in a company and how to participate in debates. To his amazement his child came out of her shell and she

could explain how the asthma attacks made her to feel unloved and inhuman. She thought God made a special attack on her and punished her parents. She admitted that sometimes when the attacks came she wanted her parents to suffer and feel what she was going through. That evening she came under conviction of how incorrectly she had handled her situation and accepted the Lord into her life. She asked her parents to forgive her and became a changed person who can now even read the bible in church.

As Bennie conveyed this story I realised that he narrated the story from the way in which he perceived his child's pain and how he interpreted what his daughter felt after Priscilla's speech. He explains in full how his child's illness haunted him as a father who could sometimes do nothing except rush her to a hospital, which gave her some oxygen. His rush to hospital to save his child's life became a moment that he could cry out to God. There was times that he felt that God had turned his face away from him.

The journey to the hospital became an inward journey and he wondered whether there was someone else in this world or in Pretoria that was experiencing the same pain. I was interested in why he made this statement. He said that his own inward journey made his eyes open towards the pain and problems of others. He then said it that if this congregation can only become a place of healing then people will experience what he is experiencing now.

The experience of Bennie made me listen to most of the storytellers from the perspective of how they described their stories and what impact it had on their lives. This is a kind of co-investigating a problem's many influences on the person and his relationship with his daughter. He mentioned that the asthma attacks made him, his wife and children move closer to one another. His vulnerability to his daughter's situation in the past made him take some alcohol to soothe his mind. This statement coincides with what White (2005: workshop notes) describes saying the therapist should focus on the effects of problems on people's lives rather than seeing problems as inside or part of people, so that people can observe the distance between them and the problem. The objectification of a problem makes it easier to investigate and evaluate the problem's influences. I asked Bennie how did this situation, which he conveyed to the rest of the congregation in the form of a testimony, affected the lives and faith of his co-partners. This helped Bennie to reflect upon and connect with the intentions, values, hopes and commitments of the

co-researchers in starting this new congregation. He agrees with White (2005: workshop notes) that people's values and hopes have been located in specific life events, which helped them to "re-author" or "re-story" their experiences and which can clearly be used as acts of resistance to problems. In the end, narrative conversations help people clarify for themselves an alternate direction in life to that of the problem, one that comprises a person's values, hopes, and life commitments.

2.17.2 Listening to God creates room for introspection and research

Bennie makes this statement from the perspective that there was a time that this congregation has been confronted with the question of whether they would survive as a church. To be able to come up with a relevant answer they had to go and do some soul searching as well as research. The research helped them to put all the facts on the table as to the problems they had been confronted with and they were measured against the possible solutions. At this stage the problem was the fear of taking the risk and the fact that they would not be able to survive as a congregation. They were intensely mindful of problems in families and how would they be able to help without the guidance of a fulltime or ordained minister. I guarded against the temptation to make generalizations about situations, but kept in mind the specifics of every situation and what the consequences might be.

What are the facts of becoming involved?

- The co-researchers admit that there are families who experience marital problems due to the fact that spouses are away for long periods from one another because of deployment in other countries.
- Some marriages are at risk of divorce and relationships needed to be re-instated.
- Most couples felt that they needed care and support from the Military Welfare Committee and at that stage they were not receiving it.
- Most people feel that they are struggling with difficult issues like drugs and alcohol abuse among the children and they did not know how to handle such matters.
- The most important was that they needed a spirituality that would bring about healing and transformation in their lives.

What were the negative issues that could damage the vision and ministry of this congregation?

- What prompted them to do this research was that some people spread rumours about the congregation and said that they would not survive as a church.
- The previous church did not acknowledge the supportive and caring role that they could play in one another's life.
- Although most of the people who were eager to join the group did so they still feel uncomfortable about being led by laypeople. They argued that they just left the previous church because they had not wanted to be led by a layperson.
- They felt the need to worship in a church building and not in a school hall.

The above mentioned positive and negative factors made my co-researchers dig deeper into who they are, where they come from and why they want to journey with one another. Most of my co-researchers came from a Methodist background and knew the Methodist tradition and doctrine and have decided to continue from this background because for them it was about God and the people. God has granted them the opportunity to find one another and in a unique way and gave them the knowledge to care for each other. To become silent sometimes even when the leaders have a meeting and it seems as if there is no way out, one has to search very deep for an answer. Answers did not come easy it was with prayer and talks and looking for facts that gave evidence that we will survive and find meaning among each other as children of God.

2.18 The Church creates room for therapy and testimony

(This is the story of Andries one of the church leaders, who later left the church.)

Andries was one of the leaders in this congregation and played an amicable role in the transition period of this group. I took this theme as taken from Andries' mouth as he gave his testimony one morning in church. Unfortunately he left the church at a stage where people became disillusioned towards this congregation. The disillusionment came from the fact that people wanted to see growth in numbers and a church building. The essence of the story of the Trinity Family Church is that the rest of the congregation felt that if he wanted to leave no one should stop him. I then could see the evidence that it is not about a church building or who is in front as the main leader but it was about their commitment and spirituality. They found in one

another such joy and encouragement but with maturity that no one could stop them from being who they wanted to be. I was disappointed by his departure because he really played a crucial role in the development of this group. It was at this stage of the research that I also became disillusioned and frustrated because I became mindful of what the actual problem was and wondered whether it still related to the vision of this congregation. In my experience with them there I realised that I should become interested in the way that “things or situations” relate to each other as in a social world. In social research the term ‘relationship’ defines that certain events are related when one event seems to precede another (Mouton 1996:95).

As I was thinking about all the events and stories I became conscious that Andries became a fellow traveller because of the caring attitude of this congregation and when it was met he was looking for a deepened spirituality. The group admitted and acknowledged that the spirituality of the group was not on the level of everybody’s expectation. This is one of the painful situations of this congregation in seeing people coming and going. This is what Willie interpreted as a “shopping centre” where people come and fill their baskets and leave again. A journey stays a journey when a destination and the route to it are still unclear. “People travel for various reasons, depending on their particular interests and motives.” (Mouton 1996:24)

This story comes from a father that really struggled with his son who was deeply involved with the wrong characters in the community. What interests me in his story was the way he untied it with an Afrikaans chorus that inspired him in his days of despair when he thought his son would never change. This chorus says every ‘eye will see God in His fullness and every tongue will confess that He is Lord’. For this father God includes every person in His plan of salvation, even for his son who used alcohol excessively. This was something that he and his wife thought would never happen even though they talked to and prayed for their son. He links the second coming of Christ with the changed life of his son who gave his life to God. Andries interpreted the second coming of Christ as a kind of judgement that those who did not qualify to enter God’s Kingdom would stay behind. Now he can look forward to this day because his son will be one in the crowds who will pass this test.

He relates his story by picturing his son as a very stubborn and rebellious teenager, and who never wanted to part from his friends, who were not good company for him. Despite all the warnings and rebukes to remove, himself from this group their son would not listen to their plea. They witnessed with pain all the wrong doings of their

son and did not know what to do when the embarrassing moments came. One day at one of the schools' sports events things turned out badly and their son with his friends, was almost expelled from school. On a very disappointed note and very disturbed the parents left every thing to his decision. At this point the parents were looking for a church to find consolation and peace and they decided to join the Trinity Family church. It was at this stage that the youth of the church went to the Eastern Cape on a youth camp, and they gave their son permission to take the opportunity to join the group, without any expectation of what could emerge from the camp.

After the camp they noticed the change in their son's behaviour. This was a great relief to the parents because they no longer had to fight with him on a Sunday morning to go to church, but now he takes the lead by being the first one to wake up on a Sunday morning to go to church. This was a change that they could not believe and still do not know how to thank God. Their son joined the confirmation class and was then confirmed as a member in this church. It is on this note that this father says that God does not exclude anyone from His plan of salvation. He saw growth and spirituality in his whole family's life and together they worship God for the wonders He has performed in their lives.

He values the leadership of this church that was very supportive to and involved in the life of his son. The youngsters in the youth group who knew their son's previous behaviour accepted him very well with the support of their parents. *"This brought much joy and appreciation to my wife and I, and we feel at home in this church. With this whole change, my son is no longer involved with his previous friends and his behaviour even in the house is a blessing. My son is totally a changed person and I am proud of him. We are so happy that God showed His healing power and saving grace in our house and this led to great deal of change in our family's situation."*

In the telling of this story Andries regarded the church as the room where he could talk about his problem, as he never had the chance to voice his unhappiness and worries concerning his son. His wife even mentioned that if it was not for this family the church, she would have never had the courage to talk about her problem in the form of a witness in front of other people. This statement concurs with a statement made by Payne (2000:163): "Practices of telling and re-telling bring 'real life' into the therapy room, and also take what has happened in the therapy room out into the real life – not just leaving it to the person to make these connections but providing specific contexts for this as part of the process of therapy."

In line with what Payne says the church became the room for therapy where people could talk about their problems. This linked with the interviews where experiences could be understood and events reconstructed in which my co-researchers and I as the researcher did not participate. The interviews in conjunction with the testimonies in the church provided me with information about the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of my co-researchers. The openness of testimonies helped and encouraged my co-researchers to understand one another's worlds as described in their own terms. According to Müller (1996: preface) the understanding and telling of a story brings about healing. This also helped the co-researchers and me to explore specific topics, events or happenings. "People who live or work together or have similar racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds develop shared understandings that are communicated to others in their group and constitute their culture." (Rubin and Rubin 1995:3)

2.19 The youth should make a "reality check"

Fabian is the son of Andries, and is a teenager who is very quiet and humble but also very brave. He is very firm when he speaks and one can hear he knows what he wants and how he feels about his life in God. He wrote his story from the perspective that the youth should make a "reality check". At first, I wondered what he meant by this and then he explains in his story that there should be the continuous question that youngsters should put to themselves and it is: *"What is God's purpose for my life, and do you know that Jesus has a plan for each one of our lives?"*

He answers this question by referring to himself and says that he knows God has a plan for his life. He knows that he can identify the voice of God among the other voices that want to confuse and destroy him. He admits it is difficult to identify the voice of God but his relationship with God sensitized him to run away from influences outside his Godly territory. He says that the influences from outside are always attractive, misleading and cause problems but his emergency exit is to spend time in God's presence and to read His word and promises that give direction and consolation.

Fabian admits it is not always easy to divorce oneself from friends who are a bad influence because youngsters are struggling with issues like:

- a. Who am I in the group?
- b. Whom to blame when things go wrong,
- c. My parents do not understand me and do not care for or love me.

- d. Thoughts of and opportunities to use drugs and alcohol, unprotected sex and even attempts of suicide.
- e. The church does not cater for young people or it is boring to sit in church.

All these distractions are real issues that youngsters struggle with and do not know how to communicate them to their parents. Some youngsters do not have a relationship with their parents, which makes it more difficult to open conversations and the need to surrender to better ways of behaviour. With this fact, he motivates youngsters to talk to their parents, try to develop a relationship with their parents and vice versa. He feels youngsters should have open talks with their parents without being afraid of being scolded or threatened with disinheritance or to being thrown out of the house. Fabian acknowledges the fact that his parents are very supportive and encouraging. He also admits that he disappointed them on several occasions but they never turned their backs on him. His greatest stronghold is that God never abandons someone who is already lying in the mud. He will always pick one up, cleanse you from the dirt and give new life and meaning to you again. He has hope for every youngster because if God could do it for him, He can do it for others as well.

His involvement in this congregation changed his ugly mindset and behaviour. On a previous occasion, he visited this church but at that, time it was only to please his friend who had invited him to a youth service. The weekend trip to the Eastern Cape brought an ultimate change for the better because he was confronted with who he was as a youngster. He then realized that he was busy messing up his life and that he was continually unhappy and depressed. He was challenged with the invitation to a changed behaviour and a life style that represents good morals. He explains that he had to admit that in the beginning it was scary because he thought it would only last for a while. When he discussed the matter with his parents they supported him and joined him at Trinity Family Church. The church then played the role of total acceptance of who a person is in Christ Jesus. It was in this church that he heard and learned that Christ can change a person for the better that we are all sinners who have, been changed by the act on the Cross. For the first, time the happenings around the Easter event made sense to him. He remembers the day that Bennie opened the bible and they were asked to read the sections that speak about the sufferings and death of Christ. *“Among the other congregants, I could identify who I am and what I am heading at.”* Fabian realized that this is a story that is part of our Christian heritage and history and it became part of his life story and led him towards a positive direction for his future. This showed him that the bible is the source that

brings light and hope into people's lives. Nürnberger even refers to the Word of God that relates past history into ongoing history, which he sees as an endless task, called biblical hermeneutics because the Word of God touches the lives of people who heard it and they pass it on to others. "Hermeneutics retrieves the meaning of the Word of God from ancient documents and interprets it in such a way that it speaks authoritatively and redemptively to our contemporaries in their own situations." (Nürnberger 2004:31)

According to Fabian the text only made sense to him when he could relate it to his previous lifestyle and the story that goes with it. This coincides with what Walhout says in Lundin et al. (1999:75) that even if the text does not contain all the data needed for interpretation the narrative voice of the text, in what ever form it takes, gives people a "model of reality" or "world picture" in their minds which makes sense to people when they read the text in conjunction with their own situation.

2.20 The story of spiritual upliftment and a new chapter in spirituality

This is the story of Graham Jacobs also called uncle Jakes, a retired general in the military who joined this congregation after a long search for a church in Pretoria. He is a very firm, deeply devoted Christian and in the beginning showed a very autocratic leadership style. Uncle Jakes relates his story: *"My turning point arrived when I phoned Barney Links (also a retired military general and they have been friends for many years) one day to find out where he attends church. My wife and I have been visiting Methodist churches around Pretoria since April 2004. That day in 2006 was destined to happen because I knew the Holy Spirit was present and led me to make this telephone call. The day when we picked up Jean and Barney for church was the start of a spiritual upliftment and a new chapter in our spirituality. Before this day we felt like sheep without a shepherd as we visited different churches Sunday after Sunday, roaming from one church to another to find peace for our souls. Not once did we encounter the presence of God as we have expected it to be. We felt like wanderers who have been robbed of their spirituality and had nothing to feel excited about, until God met our needs at this church. This was a wonderful Sunday and after church as we walked out I knew that this time God was confirming with me that this is where I belong. I felt the presence of God and knew this is where I belong this is "home" and that we have arrived.*

I praise God every day that He has led me to these wonderful Christians and a family of true friends who live and maintain their spirituality in a wonderful way. Prior to

2004 I have been a society steward (a leader or deacon) at Kleinvlei Methodist Church where I had to lead almost six hundred souls compared to the sixty members in the Trinity Family Church. For someone else it would have been a slight disappointment, but for me it is joy above measure. I quickly realised that “bigger” is not necessarily “better”. In spite of our small number in membership we have the ability to know everybody by name and to experience everybody’s level of spirituality, needs and gifts. From this perspective it was clear to me that I have to play a crucial role in the spiritual growth of the church. It did not even take the church council too long to place me in the position of spiritual director. How awesome are the ways and guidance of the Holy Spirit that everything had to happen in this way.”

2.20.1 The story of Craig

Craig is the youngest son of uncle Jakes who fell ill in 2007 and was diagnosed with cancer of the rectum. Uncle Jakes wrote this story in Afrikaans and I wrote it down as given by him.

“Ek stel die gebeurtenis op skrif om vir wie ook al te vertel hoe ek en dié familie (referring to the church) die wedervaringe hanteer het. Craig is my jongste seun en is verlede jaar 2008 op 23 jarige ouderdom gediagnoseer met kanker van die rectum. Wat ‘n slag vir ons en natuurlik vir hom. Ons was toe alreeds lidmate van die Trinity Family Church.

Die eerste bekendmaking van Craig se kanker met die daarop volgende 6 maandelikse behandeling, voor die operasie, was vir ons sowel as die gemeente ‘n groot skok en ‘n ervaring. Dit is toe dat ek, my vrou Denise en Craig dankbaar is teenoor die Here dat ons deel kon wees van hierdie gemeente. In die proses van ondersteuning het ‘n gebeds groep ontstaan en ons het almal die wonder van God se genesende hand ervaar en gesien. Op hierdie moment was eerwaarde Ruth Jonas alreeds besig met die navorsing van hierdie gemeente en sy het saam met die leiers van die kerk ons ondersteun en ‘n mooi pad met ek en my familie gestap. Ons was op ‘n daaglikse basis deur die gemeente ondersteun. Hierdie ondersteuning het ook gepaard gegaan met rituele soos die aan steek van kerse tydens die kerk diens.

Craig erken daagliks dat sy geestelike lewe nie op dreef was nie en hoe hy deur sy pyn moes uitroep tot God en my vra om vir hom te bid. Hy erken ook dat hy die krag van gebed van ander mense in sy tyd van lyding kon voel. Die Here het wonderlik in

sy lewe gewerk en vandag kan hy hiervan getuig en vir ander 'n inspirasie wees van 'n God wat wel genees. Craig is 'n lewende getuigskrif van God se wonder dade.

Craig is nou in Kaapstad sedert Maart 2009 en was gesertifiseer deur sy onkoloog dat hy in totale remisie is. Ek sluit af met die woorde dat God nie uitsoek waar Hy wonderwerke wil laat plaasvind nie. Of dit nou 'n kerk gebou is of in 'n skool saal dit maak nie saak nie. Ek dank God dat ek in 'n gemeente dien soos Trinity Family gemeente. Dit is nou wel nie 'n gemeente wat groei in getalle nie maar die Gees opereer elke keer wanneer ons byeenkom en mense gee om vir mekaar.

2.21 Interviews as conversations

The conversations have been done formally and informally and at other times by means of uninvited listening. By 'uninvited' I mean that sometimes I would sit in a conversation and two persons or a group would talk about their experiences in this congregation. I then later wrote it down as important information that links to part of the stories. Some of the stories came out as I questioned them on some operations or difficulties they might have experienced. I was continuously mindful of not coming to a conversation with preconceived questions, because of the unpredictable nature of interviews and conversations. I have been sensitized by the characteristics that Rubin and Rubin have observed in their evaluation of qualitative interviews. Rubin and Rubin highlights a shared characteristic between an interview and a conversation in the sense that both are made-up anew each time they occur (Rubin & Rubin 1995:7).

Due to the subjective role that the researcher plays the interviewee or conversational partner is allowed to control the interview or conversation, by which the subject could be changed and the rhythm of the conversation be directed. Mishler (1986:46) concurs with this statement and says that when an interviewer rephrases, paraphrases or expects clarifications from the respondent, it actually shows that questions which are not preconditioned leave considerable room for interviewer variation. By asking the wrong questions and not allowing the interviewee to take the lead he or she might become intimidating, overfriendly, bullying or playful in a flirting manner. In a process of listening to the interviews or conversations I concentrated on the key words and ideas and the events that my co-researchers wanted to talk about. I soon picked up and have even been told that there were certain things that they do not want to talk about. During these moments I did not feel in charge but comfortable to be led by their emotional tones, which were accentuated in their

nonverbal signals and the language they used. Mishler believes open-ended questions leave room for interaction between interviewer and interviewee. The convincing statement made by Rubin and Rubin came out very clearly that “sometimes one follows up with the questions about the emotional tone you observed rather than the content of the answer.” (Rubin & Rubin 1995:5)

I concur with Rubin and Rubin that in the process of listening to my co-researchers I was curious to hear the meaning of their stories and even the interpretation and the understanding that shaped their context. The themes, ideas and other issues that spread out from the research were dealt with in later questioning. The interpretation of one of my co-researchers where he identifies this church as “The Church as a Family of God” has been dealt with in later questioning, which led to more detail, depth and richness, which Clifford Geertz (1973) as quoted by Rubin and Rubin (1995:8) has called “thick description”. Freedman & Combs introduce a deconstruction of questioning whereby the interviewer invites the interviewees to see and unpack their stories from different perspectives, which help people to unmask the “so-called” “truths” that “hide their biases and prejudices” behind the “disembodied ways of speaking” that give an air of legitimacy to restrictive and subjugating dominant stories. (Freedman & Combs 1996:57)

2.22 Discussion of the stories

This section gives some insight into how I used the step in the ‘Seven Movements Model’, which speaks about the effective move from “listening to experiences” to “describing the experiences” of my co-researchers. The telling of the stories came so naturally and openly that when an event was discussed or explored my co-researchers and I focused on the matter at hand as we talked, responded and reflected on it. This chapter is an explanation of what happened in ordinary conversation between my co-researchers and me and sometimes in the groups with others. These conversational stories were not decided upon as in a structured interview but naturally flowed from one interesting theme to the other. The transition of the stories as told moved from a smooth to a logical interpretation, which showed that there was no previous agenda set up. The conversations clearly indicated that my co-researchers had heard one another also allowed me to understand their point of view in response to one another’s needs. During the conversations they constantly made sure that I understood their backgrounds and what they were aiming at. At times when I looked puzzled they did not hesitate to make sure that I fully understood what they meant. When this happens Rubin and Rubin (1995:123) sees

it as a conversational repair, which clears up possible misunderstandings between the researcher and the co-researchers.

2.22.1 Moving towards thick descriptions.

This section becomes clearer in the selection of the themes and that which gives some more insight in the above mentioned step of the 'Seven Movements Model' and also the step regarding the collaborative interpretation and description of experiences. People have different perceptions concerning their problems and identify or explain them according to the impact or effects that the problem has on them. As researcher I could observe a 'thin' or 'thick' description of the problem. The thin description allows little freedom for the complications and challenges of life. "It allows little space for people to speak about their own individual interpretation of their actions and the context within which they occurred." (Morgan 2000:12)

Thin descriptions are sometimes labels given to people as observed by others with whom the person stands in relation and tend to have substantial consequences. Thin descriptions give people perspective concerning their actions and identities. Comparing to the thin descriptions there are also the alternative descriptions, which may open new possibilities. These possibilities are the alternative stories, which could decrease the influence of the problem on the person. Sometimes thin descriptions are articulations of the truth of the person who is struggling with the problem. Moving towards a 'thick' description is to allow the person to describe the problem with all its detail and how this story links to other people and events. Thick descriptions give a more comprehended version of the person and even his or her life in relation to others. Thick descriptions help people to describe their stories in such a way that the problem is not supported or sustained. For me to understand my co-researchers' stories I had to journey with them in the telling and re-telling of the stories they preferred to concentrate on in relation to their past and uniqueness. They explored their subjective experiences, which identified their expectations, desires, enthusiasm and zeal, purposes, fantasies, ambitions and commitments. These experiences contributed to their thick descriptions of their behaviour for caring and supporting each other. Thick descriptions help people to look at alternative stories that could be inhabited and lived out so that a new self-image and possibilities for relationships could surface. "The ways in which alternative stories are co-authored, how they are told and to whom, are all important considerations for narrative therapists." (Morgan 2000:15)

2.23 The story of love, care and support

The exploration of the alternative stories helped my co-researchers to co-construct and co-author their preferred stories. At this stage my co-researchers felt motivated to continue on their journey. The stories express only the feelings of the co-researchers who consented to be participants on this research. In the discussions, re-telling and reconstruction the story of love, care and support surfaced every time. My co-researchers listened, discussed and elaborated on their own stories and recognised the story of love, care and support. For them the issue of fear is something of the past and they felt driven to look at the things that made them become co-partners on a journey of love, care and support. I delved into this story and Bennie told me of a situation where his car's engine seized. He told his dilemma to Priscilla and her husband and they both decided to lend him Priscilla's car until his car was fixed. My mouth hung open because I grew up with the perception that one does not borrow a car. For them this was not an issue but the fact that someone was struggling and needed to be helped. My father died in January 2008 and most of them could not attend my father's funeral due to job related matters. Their support to me was a prayer meeting, an air ticket, a big wreath (flowers) and money to contribute towards the expense of the funeral. As someone that was only involved in their research story I became a recipient of care from people who felt called to help someone in need. There is evidence of stories when someone's relative had died one member or a few would attend the funeral. When someone is unemployed the whole congregation gave his or her help and support and even looked for a job for that person. Some of the boys in the congregation are very good rugby and cricket players. When they go on tournaments the whole congregation becomes involved in fundraising efforts and ways of supporting these boys. The whole congregation shares happy moments regularly over a cup of tea and each couple in the congregation take turns to host the event. This happened naturally and the whole congregation sees it as a deed of love, care and support. They also mentioned that some of them know how it feels to become stranded in an environment that shows a 'lack of care'. I questioned them on the use of the phrase 'lack of care'. They clearly stated that at this stage they want to concentrate on their story of love, care and support. I respected their feelings as we continued on this journey of their new story.

REFLECTION

As I have listened to these stories I realized that each has been told from the perspective of the life situation of this congregation as people engaged in one another's lives. For some people these stories might look empty or ordinary but they

had a deep meaning when it came out of the mouths of the conveyers. Peoples' engagement became a ministry, which some of my co-researchers have never experienced or even performed. The following chapter is based on what the stories entailed and how I together with my co-researchers unpacked and interpreted the stories.

The interest shown by my co-researchers as they divulged their stories also left room for an in depth discussion and the explanation of specific words and phrases. The openness of my co-researchers led to fluency in the conversations and there was no searching for information. This fluency of speech led us to explore various aspects of their stories and I did not have to struggle with superficial answers. The stories discussed ranged more from what my co-researchers see as narrow to what is more specific. The depth of the conversations shows how my co-researchers responded to one another's needs and how they viewed their ministry. The conversations also highlight the concerns of the community or the congregation in a new setup as they shared their hopes and fears in a newly established community. The conversations took place during bible studies, gatherings for reflection of the congregation and even informal conversations at homes. The conversations consist of oral history, life history, evaluation of the stories, and other focus group interviews. The conversations also give clear evidence of the interpretative approach toward social knowledge. With this I agree with Rubin & Rubin that: "The interpretive approach recognizes that meaning emerges through interaction and is not standardized from place to place or person to person." Rubin & Rubin (1995:31)

These stories became narratives that showed the humaneness of people who felt called to perform an act of care and support. My observation and interpretation made it clear to me that this act came from hearts that understood the 'lack' of care. My own experience with them showing the love, care and support that I needed at some stage helped me to understand their eagerness to care and support one another.

SUMMARY

The following steps of the first step of the 'Seven Movements Model' are reflected in this chapter.

- The in-context experiences as described by my co-researchers in the form of stories.

- I have partly already used the methodology to understand the stories.
- It states the involvement of the co-researchers in the process of research, which then moved over into chapters three and four.

Chapter two showed a clear picture of my epistemological point of departure and how my co-researchers told the stories. The stories have been told and understood from the interpretation of the narrative approach and gave a clear understanding of this research. The stories have been heard from an epistemology of “untying the knot” as a point of departure to get into the stories. The art of “untying the knot” has also been used to understand the events outside the stories and been revealed in chapters three and four. Each story portrayed the character of my co-researchers, how they think and how they journeyed together in this research.

By making use of the art of “untying the knot” I could listen to the stories and extract themes from them. This chapter leads us into the themes in chapter three and four as the stories were unpacked.