CHAPTER THREE

PASTORAL CARE IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY

"EACH STORY IS IMPORTANT AND SHOULD BE VALUED"

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one shows my epistemological point of departure and the methodology that I used to do this research and in chapter two the stories of my co-researchers were told.   In chapter two each story was told in a different way from a perspective that is important to my co-researchers.   In this chapter the interpretation and analysis of stories that happened on the basis of a holistic understanding of how the stories unfold.   The social constructionist process was used as an invitation to the co-researchers to engage in the creation of new meaning.   This chapter also expresses the involvement of my co-researchers in the process of research and touches on step five of the 'Seven Movements Model', which speaks about the religious and spiritual aspects and God's presence in the life of this congregation.   Moving into this chapter entails a discussion on the themes of pastoral care in a community of laity that developed from the stories and how the co-researchers valued their stories as important.   It is not only about discussing the themes but also what each story has done to the spirituality and attitude of the different co-researchers.   It also speaks about their views or perspectives concerning theology as a practical activity and how it links to pastoral care in their congregation.   As the stories were told, new themes developed and the researchers claimed that they made positive responses to them. The themes developed out of the co-researchers way of understanding their partnership and how I viewed this research and their involvement in this congregation and the effects on their spirituality.   This chapter will show how my co-researchers realised that spirituality does not mean the same thing to everybody and how the leadership took bold stands in bringing the congregation together.

3.2   Theology as a practical action

The stories of my co-researchers affirmed the reality that theology is in fact an indispensable practical activity.   The practical nature of theology contributed to a Christian understanding that is based on practice (Willows and Swinton 2000:27). As described by Willows and Swinton my co-researchers and I could support the notion that theology is a critical, evaluative activity that tests, refines and explores the possibility and nature of belief.   This notion finds substance in the service of the

community of faith and must be associated effectively and positively with the task of living and working out Christianity in the present with all its uncertainty and demands. We noticed in the story of Bennie in chapter two section 2.17, that there was a time when everybody needed to do some soul searching and measure it against the evidence of the stories. They could do this by looking at what scripture says, through discussions in the bible studies and their Methodist tradition. They came to the conclusion that theology is at the centre of the life of the Church. The Church as the bride of God needs to be deeply rooted in her ministry with theology as the educational awareness of faith. Through the engagement of different topics of discussion they realised that theology is not only an academic subject but is a way of having a better understanding of the Christian faith and its implications.

In the bible studies discussions took place, which gave meaning and purpose to questions that are fundamental to life. The following questions surfaced through out the discussions:

- Why do they feel that pastoral care is a journey?
- Why are their stories the foundation of care?
- Why are they so conscious about their new story of care?

It was through questioning and discussions that their spirituality was groomed and they became better informed about their commitment in Christ. They also had many questions to ask that made them open and self-critical so that they could give meaning to their actions. Browning (1991:4) says that when a community goes through a crisis it re-examines the sacred texts and events that comprise the source of the standards and principles that direct its practices.

This critical awareness helped them to distinguish between a theoretical theology (for them it was the bible and other commentaries) and practice. From a biblical perspective it was very easy to understand the text as it was written, but the part that they needed to play was not that easy. This was a very difficult exercise for me to interpret their actions from a practical theological perspective. It is from the perspective of Browning that I realised that posing questions is important because the practice always contains theory. The outer envelope of practical reason is its fund of inherited narratives and practices that tradition has delivered to us and that always surrounds our practical thinking (Browning 1991:11).

3.3 The stories are the foundation of pastoral care.

This section is taken from my understanding of the story of Andries in chapter two, section 2.18 who experienced the church as the place that created room for him to tell his story in the form of a testimony.   For me this is a foundation for people to talk about their problems, which sensitised the others to perform a ministry of love, care and support. This dated back to the class system in the Methodist Church as mentioned by Willie in section 2.16 where people journeyed together from a physical and emotional perspective.   I interpreted most of the stories of my co-researchers from this perspective, whether spiritual, emotional or physical.   The stories in chapter two are based on what they have experienced with or without a theoretical background. Browning endorses the fact that practical reason has a narrative envelope, which does not always represent a Christian heritage. He says that Christianity has an explicit narrative tradition that constitutes the envelope for a core model of practical reason   (Browning 1991:12).

3.3.1 Pastoral care as a journey.

Pastoral care as taken from a perspective of practical reason and experience has its importance in the form of a journey of people travelling together. Travelling is a very nice and exciting event, but to travel in a foreign country is not always exciting because of the "unknown" setting and also the fear of getting lost. When people embark on a journey there is sometimes so much baggage that they take with them, that at times on the road they realise it was not necessary to take everything with them.   The journey of pastoral care includes a reaction to human experience with the tradition of care as its point of departure. As I listened to the stories of my co-researchers I saw people who had arrived and also those who had not yet arrived. Some people are on a spiritual journey and others are just there to worship and find consolation in being in a church on a Sunday. Others came only for sight seeing, and then only to withdraw at a later stage. This statement is my interpretation of what Willie and the other co-researchers see as 'those who only come to fill their baskets'. A journey starts where people are in agreement about the journey they have planned to embark on.   This journey is about stories, which allow people to link their actions together. This came to my mind that: "Christian discipleship is an unfinished story, because it is a journey and not a destination."   Storey (1995:6)

Pastoral care dates back to a history of the Christian Community, which took in a position of care to sustain that community. It relates to the position of a pastor who is the shepherd of a flock and moves where the flock goes in the process of looking

after the flock. It also dates back to the image that Jesus in (John 10:11) gives about himself as the "Good shepherd". The Christian leaders adopted this image as they functioned in this same role, so did my co-researchers.   Pastoral care is taken from a Pastoral theological position, which is actually a theological reflection and underpinning that guides pastoral care as directed towards the well-being and flourishing of individuals as part of the Christian flock. Many traditions have seen pastoral care differently and measured or defined it according to the role that it played at that stage. "(Duffy 1983; Hunter 1990:87ff) explains a Catholic tradition that used the term "pastoral theology" as an action that distributed the sacrament, prepared people for marriage and burying the dead. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology, its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education, and church government." (Woodward & Pattison 1997:2)

Pastoral theology had to go through different streams from the different traditions. I agree with Tracy in his discussion of Christian theology as a domain (he uses the term public) of society and the church. He actually mentions the academics as the third public but for the importance of this research I regarded society and church as important and equals. He divides society up into three realms, as techno-economic realm, the realm of polity (a system of church government) and the realm of culture. When one looks at pastoral care in the light of a Christian theology I would place it in the realm of culture. Culture is not only about art and religion but involves travelling around and communicating the meaning and values of individual, group and communal existence. The analyses of culture converges in the relationship between ethos and worldview, whether in a specific occasion they are either challenging or equally accommodating and how they interact to alternative possibilities of both. On the other hand the church, which also subscribes to a culture, may be regarded as a community of an ethical and spiritual discourse that exercises a reconciling function between individuals and society as a whole   (Tracy 1985:21).

The journey of pastoral theology and practical theology has various historical backgrounds and operations, which show different points of departures. The sociological approach to pastoral care integrates the cognitive, cathectic (feelings) and the evaluative orientation (ethics).   Pastoral care also struggles with its unique position because of other therapeutic modalities, which also focus on attention to feelings, on active listening, and on the dynamics of transference and counter-transference. "Pastoral care shares with psychoanalysis, human psychology and

other forms of care and counselling – both individual and group – the focus on a therapeutic relationship of caregiver and care-seeker." (Furniss 1994:2)

In this research I see the journey of pastoral care in the form of a dialogue between caregiver and care-seeker. In chapter one section 1.2.3 one notices that this research started with the concern that the people needed to be taken care of by the church when their spouses or partners went on deployment. Pastoral care is concerned with practice relating to the Christian theological tradition. The postmodern approach concentrates on life narratives to listen to and journey with people who experience problems. Pastoral care is not necessarily only done by the ordained but, "…Christians take seriously the fact that pastoral care is the responsibility of all individuals – 'to bear one another's burdens' (Galatians 6:2)" "Laypeople are in close contact with suffering and alienated persons daily, at their jobs, in their homes, and among their friends – and could be seen as partners with the clergy in the ministry of care giving." (Stone 1991:12)

This journey of the community of laity started with a concern to care for people who were not originally from Pretoria. In the telling of the stories the journey enabled my co-researchers to link their experiences of care and support to events and time. The journey could be regarded as events, which have taken place within a specific time frame, but which were still uncertain until they had been organized in a story form. The stories of love, care and support became the foundation of the journey and the beginning of a new congregation. The roles that the co-researchers played were as mediators and reconcilers as they listened to one another in a form of commitment. The stories offered hope and not a crisis to the members of this congregation due to their availability to journey with one another. This links to what Müller (1996:7) regards as a crisis: "A person enters into a crisis whenever his or her story does not offer any hope for the future."

3.3.2   Pastoral care from a social constructionist perspective

When people experience a crisis in their lives they start to relate to their situation through the telling of a story. Their interaction with their situation together with my co-researchers, we listened to their stories as they struggle with real life situations, as they were confronted with them. Gerkin refers to pastoral care as a rediscovery because "the primary source of Christian nurture lies in the gathering together of God's people." (Gerkin 1996:90) Pastoral care has a communal and cooperative implication of how people can care for one another as demonstrated in Jesus'

ministry to his disciples. Most of the New Testament parables, like the woman at the well, (John 4:7 - 25) speak about how Jesus tapped into the stories of his followers or hearers so that their needs or problems could be addressed (The Holy Bible 1978). In the conversations, we realized that my co-researchers maintained and disseminated knowledge of themselves and their worlds, which links to what postmodern writers perceive as: "The central role of narrative is to organize, maintain and circulate knowledge of ourselves and our worlds." (Freedman & Combs 1996:30)

As I listened to the stories, I realised that the stories were filled with ideas that the tellers hold about themselves and that these ideas changed as these persons interacted with other people. These ideas were revealed when my co-researchers stepped into the worlds of individuals who visited their church and were given the opportunity to enter into the hurt and suffering of another person with true feelings and solidarity. Pastoral care is displayed from a compassionate and relational type of ministry. Compassion is a type of kindness, which is shown in a sympathetic or empathetic way. People usually show their compassion by "internalizing" the suffering of other people. I also realised that the knowledge, which people arrive at changes socially and becomes new in every moment as people interact with one another. The pastoral interaction in one another's lives helped them to understand God's presence in their situation. For them pastoral care spoke about a God at hand and a God who listens and cares.

The co-researchers interacted in one another's lives from a perspective of care and support. McNamee & Gergen (1994:18) makes it quite clear that "there are no prior meanings hiding in stories or texts." This made sense to me because the development in the process of listening to the stories made it clear that the knowledge my co-researchers had was obtained through social interaction and every time we met it changed and was understood differently. This statement helped me to listen to the stories expecting new stories to come up during each conversation and to see these new stories as 'spur-of-the-moment' events rather than planned ones. With this in mind I guarded against an intervention that could lead to a hypothesis that supports it. I held on firmly to the idea of social constructionists that there are no unquestionable social truths, but that people tell stories of what they know about the world and others. Pastoral care practices have been adapted to react to the changing needs of people, which continually emerge into an open-ended future. As seen from a social constructionist point of view I realized that the researcher is not

the one with all the knowledge but should allow him or herself to listen to the stories and be led by the storyteller. Social constructionism encourages the therapist to engage in the stories, but in taking in a 'not-knowing' position approach as stated by Anderson and Goolishan in Shotter (1993:120) "…an approach, which allows the client to 'make' a to-an-extent-new biographical narrative, rather than to have imposed upon them a theoretically already determined kind, 'found' for them by the therapist."

3.3.3   Pastoral care as a group activity

The eagerness of my co-researchers to see growth in their congregation made them mindful of the fact that it is better to perform their ministry as a group. To say something is essential does not necessarily mean that one does it everyday, or that one devotes many hours to it every week. I am aware of the fact that pastoral care is very distinct from pastoral counselling and that 'care' is a practical characteristic of this congregation. When I look at pastoral care as a practical characteristic of this congregation I am consciously aware that through the listening to the experiences of my co-researchers that it is the integral ministry of this church. The members of this congregation play an informal participants role in providing some moral support and could give some clarification about a problem or issue. Pastoral care takes place on a voluntary basis and is not conducted as a minister or psychotherapist would go about seeing a parishioner or client. I strongly agree with Capps (1993:5) that after a psychotherapist has seen a client, two-thirds of the clients tend not to come back because they feel that "the initial visit has been so clarifying that they did not need more counselling." The difference in this congregational setup of lay pastoral care is that people feel that their own situations, togetherness, journey in spirituality and cultural values compel them to take care of one another. What is taking place in this congregation is not comparable to what has been written in books about models of therapy of how they should take care of one another but comes from an informal caring style that brings healing to the soul.

For my co-researchers pastoral care became a responsibility that could be accomplished by their togetherness as a group. They regarded themselves as the group who is together because of their consciousness to help and support one another. In the group they could together reason what their next step was in relation to their specialized ministry of care and support. In the group they could give account of the group's seriousness concerning their ministry. They could talk about their flaws and incompetence where they felt they could not accomplish their mission.

3.4 The church as the family that communicates a family ministry.

This theme is taken from the story of Willie who saw the Trinity Family Church as a family that could support one another. He relates his story from his upbringing, as a youngster in the Methodist Church who grew up in a society where he could have easily became a gangster on the Cape Flats. He mentions the "class system" as discussed in chapter one section 1.2.1 and refers to the physical and spiritual involvement of a group of people. Already here Willie gives evidence of a family life situation that speaks of togetherness that presents healing and transformation in the lives of individuals. This vision of a family was again noticed and experienced by him and he could relate it to the previous congregation where he attended regularly. Again I could hear the unspoken disappointment when he experienced that his previous church no longer supported his family in a situation of care and support. He acknowledged that there a time that he was confronted with a situation of lack of care which he expected from the military, but which he was used to at his previous church.

My interpretation of his story was not the military negligence that brought hurt in his life but the fact that the church as a family no longer offered that kind of care and support. With my third interview with Willie I questioned him about these issues just to verify whether I understood him correctly. We tracked back his story to where he said in section 2.16 that "the leadership showed resistance". I asked him what he meant by "resistance". He explained that at some stage the hands of the minister became very full with all the pastoral visitations and the effort of keeping the congregation running. The congregation was divided into "class groups" and obviously the leaders had to become class group leaders. This allocation would have helped the whole congregation to be cared for pastorally and people would feel that they got the necessary care and support. It was this episode that started a variety of conflicts because the congregation felt that the leaders were not serious about their position and calling. This started infighting and animosity towards the minister. It is this story that he did not want to elaborate on because in his being away from home, his family felt the absence of the church leadership's ministry of care and support. I respected his feelings and did not go deeper into this situation. Over and over again the sense of being a family was obvious to the visitor on a Sunday morning in warm relationships which are expressed within the worship service and in times of fellowship before and after it.

The laughter, friendliness and genuine conversations, and the hugs communicated the enormous interplay between church and family. It was clear that the families

needed the church and the church needed the families. When Willie left his previous church and started with this new group he made sure that the Methodist tradition was adhered to. Tradition is understood as some kind of historic interest group, which has shaped the particular understanding of scripture, in the lives of Christians who are products of some strong-minded and determined confessional tradition. "The way in which Christians have understood the gospel and their own identity and task in the past not only shapes their understanding and identity today, but also provides a 'surplus of insight' upon which we can draw today in a different historical situation." (Cochrane et al. 1991: 20)

Taken from the above perspective it is generally understood that the way families are constituted in any society is an indication of the cultural ethos and traditions of that society. The modern view has a universal perception of the family that differs from a postmodern perspective that people belong to communities that shape their perception of reality. The metaphor of the church as the family of God in chapter two, section 2.16 is taken from a social constructionist point of view that interprets peoples' social, interpersonal reality as an interaction that has been constructed through communication with other human beings and human traditions and focuses on the influence of social realities on the meaning of peoples' lives. This metaphor played a role in how people perceived their congregation as a family in the form of a caring church. This moved me to look at the "family" as a metaphor, which Paul Rosenblatt (1994) as mentioned in Freedman & Combs (1996:1) discusses a "family as an entity", "family as system", "communication" and "structure." This discussion defines "structure" as a guiding metaphor, which categorises families in an unyielding, numerical understanding of people. The metaphor of the "structure" can hinder us from seeing the change in family relationships and causes us to see people as objects. A number of therapists like Freedman & Combs (1994), Anderson and Goolishian (1988) and White and Epston (1990), have moved away from looking at systems as a metaphor, but rather chose metaphors of narrative and social construction. The "systems" divided families into first-order cybernetic theory and second-order cybernetics. Cybernetics is the science of communication and control, which shows interest in measuring up human and animal brains with machines and electronic procedures. It teaches that people and animals can be controlled like a robot or a computer.

- **First- Order cybernetics:**

  Therapists analysed families like machines: the therapists positioned themselves outside the therapeutic process and could control the family, to make separated or impartial evaluation of what is wrong and fix problems in the same way that a mechanic would fix a faulty engine. This method makes one believe that people get stuck in habitual patterns of behaviour in which they try to get solutions to their problems, and this is in any case ineffective and not goal orientated. Therapists, who used this model after noticing the recurring pattern, then approached it with a tactical interference, which could dislocate or readdress family members into new or changed behaviour to achieve their goals. They later realized that in some cases these goals had never been met and this "family system as machine" and "therapist as the one who repairs" did not work.

- **Second-Order cybernetics:**

  This model's purpose is a "less control-oriented model" that does not detach the therapist from the family. It does not entertain objective assessments and alterations. "For a therapist to believe that it is his/her job to know how to change the reality of the client is to overlook the possibility that this opinion is itself a reality that needs to change." (Hoffman 1993:260) Therapists realized that cybernetic systems are subject to change and their language started to change. Auerswald (1985:321) called this new paradigm the ecological systems paradigm, and wrote that it defined "a family as a co-evolutionary ecosystem located in evolutionary time-space and saw it as different from the family systems paradigms that preceded it." (Freedman & Combs 1996:5)

Reflecting on this changed idea of the family I see the church as people who are co-participants in the same systems as families. The church is a community, which is involved in a moral and religious discourse. More clarity is given when the church is defined as an association, which willingly functions as a mediator between individuals and the entire society. "Unlike participation in a family, participation in the church is strictly a voluntary matter." (Tracy 1985:21) Individuals and families have a relationship with the church, which is historically a continuous body as adopted from a Christian belief system of a common life in Christ Jesus. Anderson (2001:113) agrees with Tracy (1985:23) that the church is a participant in the grace of God disclosed in the divine self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. This self-manifestation has

been identified as the calling or mission of the church, which is grounded in its character as the group of people called the children of God, whose lives have ontological foundation in the very being of Christ   (Anderson 2001:113).

Anderson (2001:180) goes further and speaks about the metaphor of the "soul of the city", which relates to the people who share a common fate and whose lives are connected to one another in a struggle for continued existence and sustenance. People can only establish relationships in their relation with Jesus Christ. I agree with Anderson saying that the church only finds its true ministry in the maintenance, healing and transformation of the civilization of others as already comprehended and reconciled to God through the personification, acceptance of punishment, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

3.5   The "self" in relation to others

In chapter two, section 2.18 we find the story of Andries who left the church to join another church.   My co-researchers chose this theme because when I listened to the story of Andries and later to how my co-researchers interpreted the story of Andries I questioned them as to why Andries left this church.   I asked them this question because if they say that their church is built on love, care and support then why is Andries' behaviour a kind of counter act on the mission field?   This question took my co-researchers into deep thoughts of reflection and reconstruction.

In the stories of Andries and Fabian I found a type or powerlessness, which actually gave Andries and his family the comfort of becoming part of this congregation. As they grew spiritually they found their feet and at some stage could evaluate themselves outside this group and decided to leave this church.   I have seen this as a theme that stood out and the reason for arriving at this theme of the "self" that both Andries and Fabian used was to evaluate themselves, and I would say in terms of their spirituality, against the rest of the congregation.   According to my interpretation who they are in the crowd was more prominent than the identity of the group. People participate in a world of stories by their understanding of moments in their daily lives in terms of development and setbacks, accomplishment or satisfaction and annoyance.   Gergen's (1999:70) understanding is that a person's story comes somewhere from the past and leads to something he values in future.   People's stories entail dreams, daydreaming, things and moments to remember, expectations, desires, miseries, considerations, uncertainty, planning, amendments, criticism, construction, rumours, studies, hate and love. In the same way others respond to us

as people who also come from a past, present, and future that connect with us in a relational manner on a journey with a direction whether good or bad.   All the events in our lives are seen as two dimensions of the story, which are *progressive narrative* (happy ending) or *regressive narrative* (story with a negative ending).   According to my interpretation of Gergen (1999:70) this is how we always value ourselves in relation to others on the ground of how our stories could find meaning and be understood. I threw this interpretation of Gergen open to the group, because they felt bad and disappointed in Andries and his family because they left the church. This episode helped my co-researchers to reflect, interpret and re-structure their stories. They came to awareness and a question about where things went wrong. They thought they were very supportive and caring but realized something was missing. This reflection led to hours and hours of introspection and talks.   These conversations led to a search of their own spirituality as mentioned in sections 3.6.2, 3.7 and 4.2 to 4.3.

3.5.1   Self as a consciousness or awareness.

By looking at the above mentioned explanation I became mindful of the consciousness and awareness of the "self".   I chose this theme because in the discussions my co-researchers questioned themselves and what led to Andries' decision to leave this group.   As researcher I was curious to see how my co-researchers moved in a direction where they became concerned about this journey of care and support.   Was it a consciousness or awareness of what was happening in the lives of people?

In the works of Ferrari and Sternberg (1998), three discoveries have been discussed in relation with consciousness and self-awareness.

- Consciousness is not always awareness because consciousness can take place while one is not aware at the time.
- Consciousness is a type of self-awareness; it is a manner in which one is concurrently aware of certain occurring fractions of oneself, characteristically of them as being such.
- Every illustration of consciousness entails, as a characteristic of itself, self-awareness in a number of ways   (Ferrari & Sternberg 1998:15).

The above mentioned three statements of Ferrari and Sternberg developed an inner consciousness and awareness of who they are and how their own behaviour was in

relation to Andries and his family. My co-researchers came to the conclusion that Andries was looking for a deeper spirituality which he might not have found among the members of the group. They decided to continue with bible studies but needed to dig deeper into the Word of God to understand their ministry and journey. Ferrari and Sternberg quote Mead's understanding of consciousness as not a common explanation that agrees that consciousness is to be aware of anything but does not necessarily mean it includes oneself as the object of awareness. Consciousness is to witness one's own opinion or feeling concerning a specific issue, having the witness within oneself, knowing within oneself, privately rational or aware (Ferrari & Sternberg 1998:17).

3.5.2   Care comes from the relational self

The discussions with some extra reading helped me to present the following to my co-researchers. The interdisciplinary reasoning from a psychological background in relation to pastoral theology made us dwell on crucial information and the experiences of my co-researchers. All people have the ability to think and to make choices, which makes them unique and significant as human beings. When someone loses his or her capacity for conscious reasoning it means the person loses him or her self. The self could be traced back to a comprehensive cultural history, and is capable of observing the world for what it is, and reflects (think and evaluate) about the best route of action.

The "self" is an identity of how someone relates to others, whether family, group in society or a role-model (Gergen 1971:2). Gergen quotes Cooley who made a study of the "self and social environment". Cooley says Gergen (1971:3) implies that "the person's feelings about himself were seen largely as products of his relations with others, and these relations affected the person from the early years of his or her life. To identify oneself as a human being in relation to others is to be concerned about self-evaluation. This study of Cooley was later influenced by the writings of Mead who looked at the self from a philosophical, psychological, and sociological perspective. For Mead, the person's identity comes to reflect the views of those around him or her and becomes a product of the social environment (Gergen 1971:3). John Locke's description of human knowledge is the way observations of this world have been recorded within the minds of people. He defined "knowledge as private and personal, and not dictated to by decree from on high" (Gergen 1999:7). He explains three conceptual problems at the heart of the individual's mind:

The problem of two worlds: People are confronted with the world "out there" compared to "the world in here". People are always in contrast with the outside world; the psychological world refers to what people observe, are aware of and make decisions about it and at the same time are confronted with a material world that exists outside our thoughts. People are in constant dialogue with the reality of the mind and the world. There are things in the material world that people cannot comprehend within the physical or mental world. Questions like "how can smoking cause lung cancer? or, how can thoughts influence our emotions?" "The reduction of the mind to the material ultimately destroys the tradition of the autonomous self." The material world is understood as a world of cause and effect, of past history and consequences linked in expected ways (Gergen 1999:9).

The "in here" is related to a world of subjectivity and "out there" to a world with objects, which relates people to subjects that obtain knowledge from an objective world. The epistemology of psychology challenges people to understand how individual perceptions come to form knowledge of the outside world. The empiricist understanding sees the mind as a reflection of nature and that experience is the foundation from which knowledge is drawn. People's individual beliefs and knowledge are related to cultural moral principles of responsibility.

In the discussion of the problem of the two worlds, Gergen (1999:6) expresses his perception that the modernist idea of the individual mind, which made an impact on the Enlightenment and our contemporary account, became wobbly scaffolding. The question concerning the perception of knowledge of the inside and outside worlds as viewed from an empiricist and rationalist point of view had not yet come up with a positive answer. They could not come up with reasonable answers to show a rational link between "reality" and "self-knowledge". For the empiricist knowledge can only be valued through experience, and they still struggle to grapple with the fact that conceptual thoughts develop from experience. The epistemology of rationalism sees concepts as important for the production of knowledge. The world does not construct our perceptions; to a certain extent our concepts help us arrange the world in numerous ways. Both the rationalists and the empiricists dialogue with the question of how we as subjects gain knowledge from the objective world.

My co-researchers started to dig deeper into their calling of why they as individuals are together on a journey of care. The presentation helped them to engage in their awareness of where they themselves come from and also to re-tell the moments

where they were in need of help. They realized to be "out there" and to be in need could become a lonely journey of carrying your own burden. The "out there" makes one hold on to perceptions that are formulated by an imperfect world. The "in there" helped them firstly to find and acknowledge one another as participants on a social constructionist journey and that they are continuously confronted with situations of care and support.

3.5.3   The church in relation to the self and others

All the stories of my co-researchers gave me a clear picture of who they are and where they stand in relation to one another. In the stories as presented by my co-researchers I was always consciously aware of how they evaluated their situation and the pain that protruded when they were confronted with uncertainty. Barry Stone (1996:8) uses the story of Jesus of Nazareth as confrontational narrative that challenges us with the possibility of being human. People encounter this possibility as something that is a gift and command rooted in the character of God as simply an everyday possibility for our lives. Human beings are created in the image of God, which characterizes them as liberated, mutual and creative. It is from this perspective that people claim Jesus to be the Christ because it is in him that people discern with certainty and clarity who God is. Stone (1996:98) uses two metaphors to recover the image of God in this world.

- The church is like a big ship, with Jesus Christ as captain, the Holy spirit as the wind and the Bible is the rudder that guides the ship and keeps it on course. Stone see some limitations of the ministry of the church in the metaphor of the ship and feels that the church could offer a safe journey across a stormy sea of life but encourages a model of ministry that would make some people inactive passengers.

- The second metaphor is the church seen as an army, which is aggressive, well trained and on the move. The difference in this model is that the, church's mission and methods are different from the mission and methods of the army. The Church does not seek to conquer or destroy but to transform, convert and heal. The army metaphor conveys a model of leadership, which is presupposed by its top-down chain of command. According to Christ leadership begins at the bottom; the greatest is the one who is the servant. "The second vocation or calling of every Christian is as a member of the priesthood of all believers." (Stone 1991:28) According to the Mosaic

covenant all the people of Israel were to be a "kingdom of priests". (Exodus
19:6 ff., Leviticus 11:44 ff., Numbers 15:40. Isaiah 61:6). Wilkens in Stone
(1991:28) describes Luther's understanding of the second vocation with
great clarity: It is a calling with, so to speak, both vertical and horizontal
dimensions. Vertically, the calling grants the privilege of free access to God
with the potential of faith and salvation. Horizontally, the calling occasions
the responsibility of sharing the gospel through concrete priestly functions
or ministries of the Word. The horizontal dimension of ministry is meeting
not only one's fellow-priest with the spiritual ministries of the Word but
also one's neighbour-fellow-priest or not – in love within the total context
of one's temporal situation and human need.

All Christians should be mindful of two vocations, which reflect their position in life;
and on the other hand the universal priesthood, while both commission people to
love and serve others. As people become involved and journey with one another
they take care of one another in a pastoral manner.

3.5.4 Deconstructing the Self-Narrative.

In the group discussions I specifically concentrated on the feelings of my co-
researchers as to why Andries left their church. I decided to go deeper into the
deconstruction of the self-narrative. I wanted them to understand their relations with
one another and how to reconstruct their experiences while still being able to interact
with one another and to concentrate on their mission. My co-researchers valued this
discussion from the perspective that story telling and interpretation gives
understanding and meaning to unexpected problems, which brings one back to the
main problem.

The story of care emphasizes the listening, relational and cultural factors of human
beings. Listening in relation to care is to listen for something in particular.
Deconstructing the self-narrative means listening and questioning, which are not
based on preconceived assumptions. According to Brunner and Kalmar in Ferrari &
Steinberg (1998:310) the "self" is a product of the narrative involving events and
circumstances that shaped it. It means exploring how cultural significance and
cultural proposition were performed and how the self-story and the problem were
influenced by it. "It also means listening "radically" in a way that defines
"authenticating" – a way that is respectful, accepting, and welcoming; a way that

searches for the unsaid as well as the said, the invisible as well as the visible"
(McGoldrick 1998:31)

It is important to note that the self-narrative is influenced by many conflicting cultural narratives in the same family, receptive to divergence in levels of acculturation, admission to new cultural narratives, generational differences, and many other influences. Self-narratives are rooted in larger social discourses, discussed over time within relations of knowledge and power (Foucalt 1980), which gain acceptance as "truth". These narratives can be subjugating they can cut us off from a fuller range of possibilities for our lives and ourselves (Carter and McGoldrick 1998:32).

Self-narratives can be mirrored in larger social discourses and used to challenge these discourses. Self-narratives can be used as strengths nurturing against the self-defeating ones. I feel that the self-narratives of my co-researchers helped them have a clear vision concerning their responsibility of care towards one another.

The co-researchers and I looked at the self-narrative from a group perspective. They all re-told their stories of why they felt neglected and not taken care of in the previous congregation. Even the event of the departure of Andries' family in relation to others who felt taken care of were discussed in relation to the self-narrative. They used their individual self-narratives to construct meaning out of the events of their lives that led to the start of their ministry. The self-narratives became the central part of each session of talking about their ministry and the development of it. As the stories were told and re-told they changed their concerns, problems and goals concerning this congregation. The telling of the self-narrative helped them to organize their experiences in sequence, which gave meaning to their lives. The self-narrative of the group helped them to move towards a deeper spirituality, they started to experience healing and transformation. The self-narratives helped them to put new emphases and new connotations to certain events and they could take in new roles as they re-storied their experiences. Together we came to the understanding that the basis of the self-narrative was grounded in their historical context. As a group my co-researchers could see themselves through the eyes of Andries and his family. This helped them to respond to their ministry of care and support with a new motivation and they valued their new behaviour. The historical event could only be understood when they located it in the context of time and space. To understand events is to place those events in the contexts of preceding and subsequent events (Gergen and Gergen 1988:25).

3.6 Togetherness is a challenge to reconstruct

This section is a reflection of step 4 in the "Seven Movements Model" and it compares the experiences of my co-researchers with a church or military tradition. Through the telling and interpretation of the stories my co-researchers faced challenges in the beginning which made it difficult for them to set up a structure. It was very difficult and a struggle to start because they all came from different backgrounds, races, and denominations (Andries and his family did not belong to the Methodist church before), which influenced certain decisions to be made. Difficulties arose when the responses of the group placed them in roles that were not corresponding with their own internal sense of self. There have been several personality clashes as they were used to a military culture, which was influenced by a rank system. This situation brought its own conflict and pain, as some would play power games, pull rank, were arrogant and resorted to an attitude of spite and pride as well as mannerisms which were not acceptable for true Christianity. This came out in the discussion concerning the loss of a wonderful couple and son (Andries and family) and led to hours and hours of talks, consultations and spiritual guidance to decide how they would survive as a loving, healthy, caring and growing church.

In this conversation Willie and Graham put it directly but with caution to the group that people have different perspectives about church and spiritual growth. Graham and Willie grew up in the same church in Cape Town and find this congregation meets their spiritual needs. They feel that there is a close link to what they experienced in their past (relating to their church background in Cape Town) and what they experience now in this church. Bennie brought his interpretation to the mind of the group and said that those who grew up in a military environment find it difficult to survive without a ranking structure in an organisation. He made it clear that in this church people meet one another on a spiritual level that speaks about equality, and so is different from a military autocratic style of serving people. The whole group felt that they had failed Andries' spiritual expectations and that they need to accept the fact that he left the congregation. This situation was one of the most painful experiences of this congregation because Andries played a crucial role in the leadership. Priscilla made a firm decision that she would start taking up her position as the "eye" as she had promised to do in chapter two, section 2.9.2.

When people construct their lives in the discourse of crisis, they bring into play boundary metaphors. According to Derrida people listen "deconstructively'" to one another's stories, and their listening is guided by the belief that those stories have

many possible meanings (Freedman & Combs 1996:46-47). The boundary metaphors were voiced like: "I was confused and did not know whether I should stay or leave this congregation … I am only visiting and have not yet made up my mind to stay." From a pastoral care perspective the following descriptions were heard: "I am not strong enough to handle my life therefore I need this togetherness of people who support me." The challenge of the togetherness demanded full participation in the local discourse. The process of care and support had a therapeutic effect on the lives of the co-researchers in the way that they could participate in a process of reconstruction.

Reconstruction referred back to the self in relation to the selfhood in others as a means of togetherness. Taken together they can function in a team of operation in compelling self-indicators. I concentrated on the following self-indicators as mentioned by Ferrari and Sternberg (1998:110)

- *Agency:* I have noticed that my co-researchers acted voluntarily out of free choice, when they embarked on a journey in search of a goal. To determine these indicators one needs to look at the language that was used, signs of movement and indications of conflict.

- *Commitment:* the steadfastness of my co-researchers to continue this journey and the action they took which demonstrated a loyalty that went beyond impulsive behaviour, the sacrifices they made and uncertainty that occurred.

- *Resource:* This indicator shows the "inner and external" powers: the sources of information, privileges, and goods that an agent seems willing to bring or actually brings to bear on his or her commitment. This indicator also singles out patience, forgiveness, persuasiveness, etc.

- *Social reference:* My co-researchers looked to one another to share, evaluate experience, goals, commitments, and resource allocation.

- *Evaluation:* Shows signs of how people value one another, whether progress is made, the intended outcomes are achieved, or whether there are certain things or behaviours that are satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Evaluation made a big impact on the feelings, well-being and spiritual growth of the congregation.

- *Qualia:* This indicator signals the "feel" of a life – mood, speed, enthusiasm, weariness, etc. These signs can be subject to contextual interpretation.

- *Reflexive:* Speaks about the meta-cognitive side of the Self. To have introspection in self-examination, self-construction and self-evaluation.
- *Coherence:* Refers to the visible integrity of people's behaviour in relation to others.
- *Positional:* Shows how a person locates him or herself in the togetherness of the social order.

The above mentioned indicators helped my co-researchers to focus continually on the common goal that brought about healing and transformation. It also helped them to see some of their acts as determined by circumstances and how to deal with conflicting situations. In the process of observing one another through these indicators my co-researchers could construct their reality and their assumptions according to the ways in which people construct their reality. For constructivists, "the entire therapeutic venture is fundamentally an exercise in ethics – it involves the intervening, shaping and reformulating of codes for living together" (Efran & Lukens 1985:270) as quoted by Van Meygaardten (2005:16). Social constructionism understands reality as a construction that functions in relation to the belief system people bring into a specific situation and according to which people function. The postmodern perception perceives the self as not isolated but constructed in relationships. Bevcar & Bevcar(1996:23) together with Freedman & Combs (1996:16) agree that in stories people could live out new self-images, new possibilities for relationship, and new futures.

3.6.1 Togetherness speaks about the presence of God.

This section refers to Willie's question as to whether they would exist as a body of Christ. It was always a sensitive topic because people needed the security and conviction to belong somewhere. As God showed them every month (they celebrate the Holy Communion once a month) through the availability of different ministers that His presence is with them. Many times they felt small and inconspicuous, but through the fact that someone could be sent out to minister and celebrate the Lords Table, with them they felt the presence of God. The presence of God has been interpreted from their acts of being there for one another, but with the consciousness *'if it wasn't for God…'* This spoke to and showed them that God in a special way kept them together and cared for them through their own actions. The presence of God taught them to stay under the cloud of His beauty and to open their eyes to the needs of others.

The presence of people also speaks about their present situation and how they care for one another to be able to stay together. The present enabled them to let go of their constant anxiety, and give their lives wholeheartedly in support of other people so that people could become healed and transformed. As researcher I immediately sensed the presence coincides with the physical presence and the spiritual presence. Hudson makes it very clear as he writes that this presence speaks about: "Involving far more than being merely physically present, important as this is, it's about becoming aware, alert, awake to the fullness of the immediate moment." (Hudson 1999:33) I am thrilled with what Hudson sees as togetherness. It means to be with another person, to engage with him or her with your whole heart, soul and strength. What I like and respect of Hudson is that he speaks about compassionate caring as an attention that requires patience, time and disciplined effort. This is a gift that everybody has when one looks around you and sees your suffering neighbour. This is closely related to the "theory of presence" of Baart (2001 – 2003) Baart's theory of presence operates without a predetermined pastoral identity, agenda or focus of attention and concurs with the focus of my co-researchers in this research as based on their involvement in the life of this congregation. Although my co-researchers enter into the lives of one another in a journey that has historical background their mission is not yet towards the Valhalla neighbourhood residents.

Their perspective of care concentrates on people who are not from Pretoria, although a few of my co-researchers do stay in the Valhalla area of Pretoria. The scenario of this congregation could in someway be related to Baart's theory of presence that: "In the course of this slowly developing association emerges an articulation of hopes, pain, shortcomings, satisfactions and needs." (Baart 2003:2) The ministry of presence of my co-researchers has the same value as Baart's "theory of presence" which concentrates on helping with concrete tasks and problem solving and also to celebrate special moments or journey with one another in moments of grief and pain, as mentioned in the story of Craig (section 2.20.1). They could only journey with each other because of an intense discerning spirit of God who is journeying with them. The fundamental issue that came to their attention was how they experienced God's own "pure unbounded love" in such a way that their capacity for loving in return becomes active and predominating in nature. They referred to God's presence as the new face of God, which they have experienced in their association with one another. God's face is used as a metaphor to refer to their religious experience that is developed from communication and practical deeds. Closely

related to the face of God as presence, is the biblical interpretation of God's Word, which will be discussed in section 4.2.

3.6.2 The recognition of God's presence does not always assure the smooth running of things.

It was at some stage during this research that my co-researchers felt a deep concern as to why people like Andries, who was such an encouraging person and who grew spiritually, decided to leave this congregation. Andries was the one who initiated bible studies with Bennie and his family and there were always inspiring testimonies that came from this group. People were invited to join them but what we later understood from a conversation with Bennie is that he felt that spiritually he (Andries) had grown and for the sake of his family he needed to move on and join another church. At this stage the whole congregation had accepted their move but people still felt that uncertainty was a reality and one cannot stop people who find greener pastures. I read about the same feeling in the book of Brackney (1997:x) called *Christian Voluntarism,* that sometimes people need to gain a clearer understanding or view of what lies ahead and that it is important to look at the road that has brought them to the point where they now are. I mentioned earlier in chapter two that Brackney uses the word *'horizon'* as a reminder that change of position or perspective can bring a new view not seen before. A new view can bring new *"just round the corner"* insights that could go beyond the horizon and a new vision can give a new suggestion to people of faith. This view helped my co-researchers understand that their journey is based on faith, and that they could still see God acting on their behalf, which actually supports the physical and spiritual and these conversations helped them to remain a faithful, hopeful and loving community.

Brackney's statement corresponds with Lartney (1996:76). When people gain new hope they actually use their understanding and encounters with God as an affirmation of their faith which can limit their perceptions but should not deter them from the attempt to see clearly. At this stage I allowed their faith perspectives to question their encounters with God and also the question "Why did Andries leave their congregation if this congregation is such a supportive and caring group." My main aim was to check whether they have a communal vision and how they relate to it.

In doing this, I raised the following questions and the group explored the answers.

- What questions and analyses arose from your faith concerning what you have experienced?

  Their engagement came from a personal perspective with reference to their Christian faith. They were very clear in understanding that they have made a decision and taken a position that links to a tradition. The activities that enabled them to get to know one another became opportunities to share their personal experiences and journeys. Their interaction was not heavy and inclusive and they openly and honestly confronted one another if there was a difficult problem and negotiated any conflict situation. They were clear on responsibility and accountability and they set time aside for communication, listening and working towards a common goal. They realised that the formation of a community takes time and should be worked at constantly if they wanted to sustain it. They learned that they could only sense the presence of God if they are clear on their goals and objectives, prioritise their mission and convert decisions into actions. They feel they are running an effective church because there is evidence of care and support. Their decision-making is aimed at discerning the guidance of the Spirit in response to the Word of God. There are crucial differences between a meeting which gathers only to do church business and one which meets to engage the gospel. They were clear on who they are and what they do. For them a leaders meeting is more than a business meeting and it holds conversation on the work of God. The essence of the meetings upholds the fact that they are Christians. It is the task of every church meeting to depend on God's Word, and to comply with God's will in the matters allocated to its administration.

- How has Christian thought witnessed to their actions?

  They started to recognise who they are and where they are at this point of their ministry. They regarded worship as the centre of their gatherings. Their worship has been seen as an event that sometimes stood alone but is always central to their acknowledgement of the presence of God. Their worship was to acknowledge the gifts that God gave them by giving back to God what God has granted them. Worship was an expression of their unity and the life they share in Christ. "Worship creates fellowship with God and one another and this is far more effective than anything else in enabling people to formulate

vision, resolve problems, find solutions and make correct decisions."   (Olivier 1996:30)

- Is it important to review and evaluate?

  To be able to keep track of the mission or assignment of this congregation it was important for my co-researchers to have a closer look through discussion and evaluation as to whether their mission was still effective, to discover unintentional and uncontrolled consequences and to rectify their mistakes. They used the minutes and the outcomes of every conversation, whether planned or unplanned, or kept records which reflected the decisions that they have made and the distribution of responsibilities. This was also the process that they used to see whether they could still see the hand of God upon their ministry. For them this is part of God's presence in their lives and the fact that they are there for one another.   According to Andries Baart the presence approach was recognition of people being involved in one another's lives where they also experienced great uncertainty and fear. The fear of marginalisation enables people to listen to the negative vibes and even to see the giants that could destroy them. It was through serious talks and consultations to empower one another spiritually as well as socially that my co-researchers came to the conclusion that their existence, love and care for one another and their continuous acknowledgement of the presence of God, should keep them together. They have experienced the existence of love and care as the foundation of truth, because only the truth could make them survive together.   This truth has been built on the foundation of love and trust and the faith that they would stay a happy family. I can still remember the words of one of the congregants, Barnie Links: *"Yes indeed we are happy as we believe that the road we have taken and what we are doing in the Name of Jesus Christ is the right thing and most important to gather those in need of salvation."*

3.7   Our faith motivated us never to look back.

It was not always easy for my co-researchers to feel the presence of God or to find assurance that they were on the right track. The narrative approach to faith helps a person to look at many things. In this group faith became a story that is narrated to the gain of those who needed care and support. There were two issues that really worried this group. One was that when people had overcome their problems they would leave the church (this is what Willie means when he said that the congregation

became a supermarket where people just come and fill their baskets and they leave after some time). Secondly, that the membership of this congregation does not grow. The things that prevented them from breaking up were the opportunities to minister to people; to help people in need and to see the results. They have witnessed so many miracles of healing and couples who were reconciled and did not have to go through a process of divorce. Until today they still play the same role of care and support and they still receive requests to pray for people in need and who are sick and they still see results of healing. They started questioning their existence from a perspective of faith.

Most of my co-researchers feel that they get opportunities to minister to and help people, which would have never happened if they belonged to a church with a specific structure. For them their church structure is open and accommodates one's interest according to your gifts. Their mission field made them grow spiritually and they have a different view of what it means to manage a church. Their mission field made them reflect constantly on their own lives as individuals and as a group. My co-researchers voiced this as their unique outcome and the concern was no longer about church building and church growth, but that in the interim these two facts should still be part of their dream. The unique outcomes were discovered in the process of how they could respond to the needs of people at a crucial moment. The unique outcomes are mentioned in chapter four, section 4.2.2.

My reflection on their spirituality and interaction with one another opened my eyes to the following interpretation: They understood their faith in relation to their experiences with God and how God answered their prayers. It is amazing how they as a people grew in their faith and commitment towards the church. When they started this congregation their vision of care and support included a desire to erect their own church building, because the church where most of them came from belonged to the military. One of my co-researchers voiced the memory that when he was a leader on the church council of the previous church they always had to hear that the military might come and claim their building. Some of them who came from this history immediately pushed for the raising of funds to build their own church, which for them was a step in faith. It is amazing how this thought filtered through the whole congregation to embark on this vision. People committed themselves to the building fund and soon they would procure a piece of land in the near future so that they could start with their building project. They are very positive about this and it is just awesome how people committed themselves to this dream that they would start

building their church in the next two years. They became more eager because they witnessed God's operation in the lives of people who joined their church and saw change taking place, spiritually as well as in outer appearances. By looking at this they are positive about moving forward and not looking back. The primary concern at this stage is still care and support with the hope and vision that one day they will build their own church due to a growing membership.

3.8   The caring community

The faith of my co-researchers motivated them to become a more caring community. One can only define a caring community by the closeness of the people through their relationships and by underlying beliefs and values, which formed the most important motivation in the spiritual formation of this community. A communal life involves the ritual expressions of belief and values that are kept uppermost in the minds and hearts of the inhabitants of the community and who are constantly reminded of why they are there (Ericker and Ericker 2001:211).

In looking at the different stories as they transpired I realized from their experiences with one another that my co-researchers needed clarity about who they were in this group. They acknowledged that they are co-travellers on this journey in which they did not have any knowledge concerning co-travelling. Their journey's point of departure was the tradition of care with a destination of growing spiritually so that healing and transformation could take place. They recalled that the route of taking this journey was based on a "Six Calls Model" for a Journey to a New Land, which was prescribed by the Methodist Church of South Africa. Although they had the "Six Calls Model" they could only use it partly as a guideline. Before they could undertake this journey they needed to learn about their relationships with one another. Andries (while he was still part of this congregation) voiced it like this: *"In a caring community one receives the kind of unconditional love that helps us to trust ourselves and others enough to venture out in relationships."* All the co-researchers spoke about the kind of support and comfort that they have received and given out that enabled people to recover from their hurts, which changed into relationships that obviously brought and gave them the moral strength to deal constructively with problems. On this route they quickly found that they needed to be led by the map of their own experiences. We had a lengthy discussion in agreement with what Mouton (1996:25) says that on a particular road no-one can decide on a particular route or on the appropriate means of transportation without any knowledge of the destination. Their destination was

originally to care and support one another in moments of darkness, but also to grow spiritually.

In the description of the "Six Calls Model" as written in chapter one section 1.2.2, my co-researchers soon realized that this is their journey and not the one described in a "Six Calls Model". In the beginning they could use it as a guideline but later being confronted by the reality of the unknown and where the journey would lead them, they came to an agreement that in counselling and journeying with one another there is no 'one-size fits all' model or method. Their model of route agreement is unique and fits their situation.

Their existing knowledge about the destination and the route was not enough to plan ahead and they had to listen to one another and follow a trail. The trail was laid and represented a struggle in the process of thinking, doing and decision-making. This relates to what Müller (1999:5) sees that through our stories we not only discover our identity, but also build identity. Each story conveys the rigidity between that is experienced in the present on the one hand, and the past and future on the other. My co-researchers agreed with Müller (1999:5) that life becomes a journey when people take their past experiences and organize them into a story, which then in turn becomes a map of the unknown area that lies ahead.

My co-researchers put all their stories together and found that it is not their bad or sad experiences that constitute the focal point but the story that leads to their spirituality, healing and transformation. Their painful story of not being taken care of by the church or the military became the foundation of how they think and take decisions concerning their responsibility in a situation of care and support. Their story of healing and transformation made them look differently at their individual stories and it became a new experience to them. They concluded that care and support is a nature of service that is encapsulated in their ministry to one another in a voluntary style. In finding one another they identified their togetherness and involvement in one another's lives as a voluntary theology that associated them with the identity of God. They agree with Brackney (1997:23) that in the bible God's self-disclosure is of one who is acting both out of self-interest and for the benefit of creation. This identity results in the openness of affirming their companionship on this journey and the recognition that they are all broken travellers in solidarity. Müller (1999:5) expresses this identity in a very encouraging manner. Whenever experiences are organized into story form, they develop meaning. They either

become a destructive story, which does not flow through to the future, or an encouraging story which offers future hope.

3.9 Developing the new story of "Care Giving"

I led a discussion with my co-researchers concerning their eagerness to care for and support people. From my perspective their own stories were very ordinary compared to what their intentions of care and support are. What I noticed during that time was that some of my co-researchers really experienced difficult moments in their marriages, which opened their eyes to the marriages of others. Despite their own struggles they were willing to journey with others even 'baby sitting' their children so that the suffering couples could have time to spend together. This led to the organizing of a weekend camp for the families of this congregation. What impressed me in this act was that they even invited families who did not belong to this church that were experiencing struggles in their marriages.

The following transpired in a debriefing session after the weekend camp:
- They acknowledged that their mission is about co-traveling with those who suffer to their advantage.
- They realized that their experiences and stories led them to journey with others.
- Although their mission is about care and support they themselves need to do some introspection to continue on this journey.
- It is only through spiritual transformation that they can use their stories to become a "Care Giving" community.

They have reflected on the above mentioned information and came up with a definite story in looking at the following facts.

1. They looked at a "Six Calls Model" as written by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, which was meant for people who had specific thoughts concerning mission in the Methodist Church.

2. They studied the "Six Calls Model" but realized that they have a unique story that is their story, which made it difficult to implement the "Six Calls Model". They came to the conclusion that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model.

3. Their story is about the neglect of pastoral care for people who needed the support and help of the church.

4. Their story is about a new way of listening to people and helping people who are in need.

5. For them it was an intense process. Through the sharing of their stories they realized that they needed to be mature to cope with all situations.

6. They understood they did not have the spiritual capacity or sometimes not the physical capacity due to their own job situations and responsibilities. This challenge was the one that moved them to act and to be fervent about care and support. This negative became a positive move.

The above-mentioned conclusions took them almost a year to reach and come to the unique outcomes that they are only a congregation of "Care Giving" due to the following realities:

- They are dependent on one another and need to have the capacity to journey with each other and other people.

- The aim of the group is to make certain that everybody is taken care of even those who only come to "fill their baskets". This point led to hours and hours of discussion because this was a painful situation for them to accept.

- They should be open to criticism, because it would help them to grow in faith and become mature Christians.

- They should not look at things like a fulltime ordained minister and the erection of a church building at this stage.

- They should go through continuous discussions and re-authoring of their stories.

- They must listen to everybody and should have a leader or leaders among themselves. (At this stage of the discussion Fabian's story (chapter two, section 2.19) took priority.

- They need to look at sound relationships.

- They must implement their own structures for doing mission, but for now their story is about "Care Giving".

3.9.1   Structure of "Care Giving".

It should be a priority to journey with open eyes, hearts and hands with one another. This is a journey of accepting who they are and how they can journey with one another. They are open to the needs of people but also open to the fact that to care and support means to walk an extra mile with people. Their interpretation of care is about genuine human actions when people are in need and relationships. My co-researchers tend to agree with White (1976:5) that to perform a pastoral ministry is to

journey with people genuinely and not because of cleverness. In the reconstruction of their story they agreed that they could only assist through reflection, understanding and compassion, endurance and wisdom. "Care Giving" is about a spiritual maturity through acknowledging their own hurts and feelings and moving beyond them to help others. They had to learn to trust God as the pastor of spiritual care and to make use of God's wisdom in the process of giving care. "Care Giving" is to make time even in a busy program to listen to the inner life of individuals. They need to be mindful of their weaknesses and faults but the primary focus should be the care of everybody in the ups and downs of life. "Care Giving" is about moving together and some times acting individually on behalf of the group so as to uphold the importance of the togetherness of the group.

My co-researchers realize that to care and support others they need to find and answer to their own failure and shortcomings. They realized that care and support is about dealing with other people's problems, confessions, bad habits, needs, failures and secrets. These things reminded them constantly of their own secret temptations, inadequacies and sins. They started to listen with inward honesty, acknowledged that they themselves behaved stupidly sometimes and became annoyed, resentful, immoral, disloyal, disobedient and dishonest. Their structure of care and support involved counselling and due to the above mentioned acknowledgments they came up with the following structure of "Care Giving".

i. The person must make the decision.

My co-researchers realized that to care and support is to co-travel without telling someone which direction to take in his or her life. The onus of the decision lies with the one who has the problem. The decision making section was not about my co-researchers and their help but the respect to allow the person in need to make the decision. My co-researchers realized that this journey is not about giving direction, solving problems on condition that they can give predictable answers to confidential questions, or to know God's will in someone else's life, but to only to journey with sympathy and empathy. The bible studies became the means of discussion and self-reflection.

ii. "Care Giving" is not personal advice.

My co-researchers soon realised that they stand outside the circumstances of those that they journey with. They acknowledged that they are participant observers, observing from a very different background with different experiences and a different

sense of right and wrong. The noticed that the persons they journeyed with gave a different description in language than they would have given. The language given gave clear indication of what the problem was and how it affected the person. They learned to explain their personal understanding of the problem as portrayed by the person and never to give advice as they feel the situation needs to be addressed or solved. Together they admit that it took them almost three years to realize that their new structure of "Care Giving" was to listen and to journey sometimes with the unspoken word. Many a times they found evidence in the result that to retell the story and to understand it from the perspective of the person brought more clarification than giving advice.

iii.   "Care Giving" is not about conducting a declaration of guilt.

To my co-researchers this was a learning curve.   During a few sessions the bible studies became a time of telling stories that were highly confidential.   The freedom of sharing these moments became moments of healing but were wrongly interpreted by those who did not play the same role as my co-researchers.   My co-researchers as a team used their wisdom to discourage open confession for the mere fact that the bible studies were open to everybody.   My co-researchers were concerned about the genuineness of people's relationships with one another and guarded against the destruction of it through insensitivity and gossip.   Soon they realized that in a "Care Giving" situation God should also be seen as the party to whom people can confidentially confess their wrong doings without mentioning it in the bigger group. "Care Giving" is also about divine wisdom, guidance, healing and transformation. They realized that "Care Giving" is about a silent confession to God and never to take advantage of other people's troubles and suffering, pain or sorrows for the sake of developing converts and gaining new church members.   A person's only justification for intervening in others' lives it that he or she does it from the virtue of love.   People have been commissioned by God to love and care for one another.

iv. "Care Giving" is about spiritual formation.

While my co-researchers were conscious about their way of taking care of one another were they also mindful of development in their own spiritual life. The achievement was personal spiritual development in harmony with spiritual models, being formed spiritually after the likeness of Christ. This achievement came in memory of their Wesleyan roots where spirituality was the foundation of Christian growth.   My co-researchers viewed spiritual formation as the lived-out process of keeping spirituality as a magnificent tool in their experiences of care and support.

Spiritual formation helped them to become and stay committed, disciplined and in action towards their mission. Stranks, as quoted by Stanger (1989:15) says that the purpose of spiritual formation is to discover the plain way of holiness and to walk in the vision of God, so that the grace of God can lead us into the fullest service of our neighbour. Spiritual formation leads to spiritual well-being, which is the authentication of life in association with God, self, community, and surroundings that cultivates and commemorates unity.

3.10   A community that connects

This theme comes from my co-researchers in a process of moving beyond their fears as they found their new mission. My co-researchers talk about being or feeling "spiritual" with the stories as their anchor, which shows a deep spirituality. They found meaning and purpose in their connectedness and nurturing through their stories, which brought about beauty and truth. Their connectedness goes back to Methodist tradition, which took them back to their roots and spiritual upbringing.

Their spiritual connectedness was affirmed in the narration of the stories during the process of group counselling and spiritual formation. From the discussions of the stories my co-researchers felt connected in a way that made them feel that they are a community of laypeople that has a passion to understand their situations and to respond to them as a calling from God. They viewed themselves as a 'family of faith', that is a setting for nurture and sustenance in a physical and spiritual manner. The interconnecting of their stories became a horizon, which reminded them that there is a change in their position or perspective, which opened up a vision that they had not noticed before. Derrida calls it the *l' invention de l' autre,* the incoming of something that no one expected or saw, that takes people by surprise and tears up their horizon of expectation (Caputo and Scanlon 1999:3). This new vision indicated their faith as they see new understandings and perspectives of their spirituality, healing and transformation. This new vision also challenged them to commitment and risk taking as an integral part of living together in a community. "Sometimes, to gain a clearer understanding or view of what lies ahead, it is important to look at the road that has brought people to the point where they are now." (Brackney 1997:x)

My co-researchers quickly learned that the social problems that had an impact on their lives and their social behaviour are the same social problems that also influenced their lives as a group. It was easy for them to understand this principle: "It is impossible to be part of a society and not be influenced by the cultural

influences, the media, the value system that pervade society, as they work at being objective." (Abels and Abels 2001:38) In their decision to journey with one another my co-researchers started to understand the pressures of a leadership that needs to guide or lead a congregation and also develop their congregation. It took them two years to understand and accept the narrative of care and support so that healing and transformation could take place in order to evolve into the congregation they want to be. They also gained knowledge in accepting and understanding that the power of social problems helped them shape and tighten up their ministry as a community and not individuals. In this situation both the leaders and the co-travellers needed each other to meet their mutual purpose, and to transform the actions of institutions that impact their lives.

The stories that shaped this congregation are stories that persuaded them to respond to the situations of the people. The stories that made them connect and journey together are stories of rejection, divorce, death and dying, sickness and disease, children, alcohol and drug abuse, care and support and fear of non-existence and survival. The stories that tighten their connection are the stories of hope, spirituality, healing and transformation. Abels and Abels (2001:83) quotes Martin, (1981) who says that: "When people can no longer find meaning in their situation – whether because some crucial attachment which gave purpose to life has been lost or because the interpretive structure has been overwhelmed by events it cannot grasp or contradictions it cannot resolve – the loss of any basis for action causes intense anxiety and searching, from which new meaning has to evolve." This quotation was fully understood by my co-researchers in the group discussions and they saw their need for care and support, which gave new meaning to their journey of a deepened spirituality that developed into a process of healing and transformation. The experiences of the past rekindled their hope of togetherness in a future of healing and transformation. For them this was the unique outcome that served as a motivating factor in helping them to re-author their lives toward preferred outcomes. "The re-authoring comes out of the social context of the person's lived experiences or to what White has often referred to as the total landscape of the person's life." (Abels and Abels 2001:83)

Bion in Browning (1991:113) followed the theory of Evans and Reed (1983) in analyzing a congregation. Their approach is not to evaluate but to describe a congregation according to three recurring basic assumptions, each of which gives

rise to characteristic patterns of relatedness between members of the group and between members and leaders. He identified the assumptions as follows:

- *Dependence:* is the unconscious perception that the continuation of the group depends on the guidance of a powerful leader, institution, or ideal.
- *Expectancy:* the group's survival depends on producing a new leader who will deliver the group from its present plight.
- *Flight-fight:* the group's survival depends on defeating or keeping away from an enemy, institution or idea that threatens it.

These assumptions may have an emotional effect on the group, which could develop into the styles and attitudes that group adopts to meet their needs. These assumptions were related to the functionality of religion. Their observation concludes that healthy religions are functional because they meet human needs. Reed and Evans see Bion's observation differently because their standpoint affirms that these needs are socially persuaded and not basic. It is argued by Evans and Reed that one should distinguish between "pseudofunctional" religion and "functional religion". Pseudofunctional religion concentrates on the imitation, non-basic and socially induced needs. The functional religion is twofold: It meets more surviving and basic human needs, and it appeals to an insightful process in the minds of its supporters. Evans and Reed verify that when religion is pseudosfunctional it meets false emotional needs and fails to create a thoughtful process that would expose the phoney (not genuine). Browning (1991:116) does not discard this observation and regards their work as excellent but he has a concern that all psychologists and all social scientists are located within a tradition that they are fully confined to.

My co-researchers observed and agreed to a "functional religion" but in their situation rather declared it as a faith based action. This research, which is a reflection of their situation and ministry, describes the above-mentioned description of a congregation as follows:

- *Dependence:* the continuation of the group depends on the inputs of everybody even the visitors who could bring about change. Everybody's voice is respected and the group is open to learn. They have continual meetings among leaders and the rest of the congregation and in every gathering can learn a lot from the mouths of different people. They are even open to criticism because they feel that critique helped them to be on the alert for tunnel vision. They feel that the dependence of a group changes as the

group matures. In journeying with one another in a group my co-researchers learned that re-authoring helped them to accomplish certain life tasks. They started their experiences as part of a family (from here the name Trinity Family Church) where they were offered security and opportunity in which their thinking as individuals was shaped. They used this as a tool to connect with their visitors. The group became the resource or tool that people could use on their own behalf and for others in mutual support. The point of concentration of this group is the care and support that must be done to accomplish the desired future that the group members find as a common ground to help each other   (Abels and Abels 2001:109).

- *Expectancy:* This group's survival depends on group effort but also with the future vision of having a full time lay pastor or leader to further develop it. The leaders of this congregation play an amicable role in the development of the group. They are sensitive towards the needs of the whole congregation but no one claims authority of leadership. They continuously mentioned that they lead the congregation with the valuable inputs and wisdom from the congregation. This helped them to become more and more liberated. Abels and Abels (2001:109) quotes White (1995a) who recognizes the importance of the group as the team that could reflect on the well being and effectiveness of the group. My co-researchers have noticed that the congregation can give account of lived experiences of individuals and can confirm changes that took place in the church.

- *Flight-fight:* My co-researchers were mindful of need for the positive behaviour of the whole group to be able to survive. They did not entertain negative rumours of the previous congregation and also did not invite people from that congregation. Their whole ministry was in care and support of those who are part of their own congregation, and even though they in the beginning feared the risk of taking the step to form a new congregation and even with the threat of non-existence they continued to meet as a group, until everybody was at peace with who they are.

REFLECTION

Chapter two gave us evidence of how the stories have been told and what motivated the co-researchers to hold on to their vision. Chapter three walked with us into the importance of care and how the spiritual aspects of my co-researchers transpired.   I

found great comparison between the Family system and a congregational system. Every congregation is likely to reflect conflict and anxiety from peoples' personal struggles and situations that they experience in groups. Freedman in Shawchuck and Heuser (1996:276) says that problems have more to do with relational networks and how individuals function within those networks. Members whose roles become dysfunctional serve as a role for others in a common situation. Mutual roles become habitual overtime and develop into normal and conventional attitudes among members. These dynamics may add towards an incapacity of the congregation to move in the direction of relating to each other, spirituality and success.

From a narrative perspective a researcher is always curious about "how did people get where they are?" It is at this stage that I listened with full attention to the truth of the stories, which sensitized and satisfied my curiosity of what the answer or story would be. As the stories were told to me there was a move from an idea of how a church structure works to how they themselves find the importance of a church structure. As the stories unfolded the web of meaning and connectedness to events showed a clear picture that people fall in with the plan as things happen in their lives, because it takes place in the moral aspects of their lives. This made sense to my co-researchers and me as we talked about spirituality, connectedness or togetherness and even the act of becoming involved in the church. This brought a change in their perception of what church is all about and it coincides with what, White and Denborough (1998:3) mean when they say that people always look for therapeutic intentions, or their intentions fail to measure up to their aspirations.

Existence and success for my co-researchers became crucial and a means of spiritual survival. From the success stories the narratives became conversations that speak about the dramatic ironies to which intentions were affected by their aspirations. Different people in the same situation came out with different stories, which linked to the bigger story of healing and transformation. Their stories became like a mirror to them in which they and other readers would discover themselves, their problems and their tasks. This journey was like an examination they had to write and which they did not prepare for.

When listening to these stories I have been sensitized by the boldness of these congregants and their enthusiasm to still continue in this manner and build their own church. Although they are small in number and they do fear that they might cease to exist as a congregation. Their only fear is the sometimes negative talk of people who

want to speak in a derogatory manner of their name. The negative vibes caused disruption and uncertainty in some of the congregants and despite the positive things that had happened some people did opt out and went back to where they came from or joined other congregations. Their vision still continues despite the negative comments of people and they still see their connectedness.

SUMMARY

The themes developed from the interpretation and explanation of the stories. These themes played a role of interaction and participation among the co-researchers and me as we journeyed together through these concepts. These themes also guided them to acknowledge their problems and reconstruct their vision and mission. Some of these themes that have not yet been mentioned become evident in chapters four and five. Chapter three explores the moments of a deeper spirituality and the means still to continue.   This leads us into the themes of the hermeneutical understanding and the process of healing and transformation that took place.

CHAPTER FOUR

HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapters two and three described and explained the stories, lives and involvement of people who have been identified as caring and supportive. In chapter four the spirituality of this community is expressed and is characterised according to their Methodist affiliation or background.   Chapter four broadens the fifth step of the "Seven Movements Model" as also partly displayed in chapter three.   This chapter takes a deeper look into the religious and spiritual aspects of my co-researchers in experiencing the presence of God.   The people in this community are trying to work out what healing and transformation is which is so difficult to define, and what it means to live their lives accordingly in the momentary experiences with attention to the realities of religious and social affairs.   Most of the people in this congregation live lives which are obviously spiritual and religious, which oblige them to perform a duty and take the responsibility of care and support.   This research led them to do some kind of introspection and reflection.   This gives some insight to what Ericker and Ericker (2001:224) mean when they say that: "Some people may of course have a religious faith, which gives them a context in which they can feel spiritual, and perhaps a weekly opportunity to practise that feeling in a communal and liturgical setting."

The church is always defined as a community within a community, which means that a specific group of people plays a role in a bigger group, which has the same norms and values. The theology of care is integrated into a social system that speaks about care from the perspective of feelings or emotions, the self in relation to others and God.   The caring practices of this church equal the practices of the community. Socialization is a process that concentrates on different dimensions of upholding the community and as it circles out everybody becomes interacted with it. The identification of the dimensions starts with the perceptions of human life and the stories connected to it.   These dimensions and the connectedness in communities are only visible when one looks at the experiences, expectations, assumptions or shared attitudes and language used in communities.   This chapter recognizes that need is not only a social affair but that people also have a need for spirituality, healing and transformation.

4.2   Understanding of the biblical text

The stories of Bennie and Graham (chapter two) show how the experiences of my co-researchers gave them perspective in their understanding of God.   My co-researchers heard and understood their religious and spiritual knowledge from their experience of the presence of God in their situation.   The bible became a resource for in depth study to understand their experiences in relation to God.   Acts chapter 18 (refer to chapter two section 2.9) was one of the scripture readings that was concentrated on as evidence that spirituality and praxis go hand in hand.

Brueggemann (1993:26) makes it quite clear that the bible radically reconstructs and recontextualizes reality.   It is the biblical text and stories that move people to establish (as Brueggemann calls it) an "infrastructure" which is a system or network of signs and gestures that make social relationships possible, significant, and effective.   People are connected to one another through support systems, which consist of stories, sacraments, and signs that give a certain meaning, shape and possibility to human interaction.   The weekly bible studies made my co-researchers experience the bible not as a book that only reveals (as they call it) heavenly secrets but which communicates practical information about the world.   One of the co-researchers said that she now realizes that the bible conveys messages that involve us in God's artistic authority; God's saving love and God's inclusive vision for the world.   These messages together with an "infrastructure", become a means of mediation and operate in ways that heal, restores and transform.   Brueggemann uses the term "infrastructure" to refer to something more comprehensive and fundamental than belief or a moral code.   He goes further in explaining that when this "infrastructure" is rooted in the bible it gives coherence to a construction that is done over time because the study and understanding of the biblical text takes time. The study of the biblical text helped my co-researchers to understand the self in relation to God and others.   The biblical stories opened their understanding to the fact that when people are in need they turn to God and God responds to their cry. The understanding of God's response to a cry is taken from Willie's story that people only come to fill their baskets and when they are helped they leave the church.   My co-researchers agreed that God answers people's prayers in spite of their own agendas.   My co-researchers felt that people treated God the way they treated my co-researchers and his statement finds meaning and is further explained in section 4.6 of this chapter.

Through the Word of God they experienced the power of God and hope for their future. It could also help them to work through their guilt feelings and show them how to reconcile their differences after an argument. As they related their stories to the bible they realized that God's intention was to restore God's creation to its fullness. They understood God from the perspective as the One who does the restorative work and the creatures become involved in the process of reconstruction. Nürnberger (2004:27) explains that people approach the bible in different ways and so the bible will speak to them in many different ways.

Their own stories in relation to the biblical history have a concrete message for specific people in distinct circumstances. They found the study of the biblical text precious, because it expressed God's redemptive intentions. As they read the bible in relation to their life stories they gained confidence, commitment, strength, happiness and hope for their own situations. The power of the Word of God is acknowledged with authority, because it laid down new foundations in their lives, created new relationships and through the word they could build their community. This statement relates to what Nürnberger (2004:2) says of, the Word of God "It motivates and empowers those with perceptive minds to tackle the predicaments of their social and natural environments."

4.2.1 The Hermeneutical Paradigm

"Hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of the texts." (Ricoeur 1991:53) Nürnberger defines Hermeneutics as the task of interpreting the biblical witness for contemporary situations (Nürnberger 2004:27). Hermeneutics is located in the written language and is characterized by polysemy, which means that our words have more than one meaning when considered outside their use in a determined context. I agree with Ricoeur that the text is any discourse fixed by writing. Ricoeur concurs with Nürnberger (2004:28) that the biblical message speaks to its readers, who come to the text for different reasons and with different expectations guided by different assumptions, and motivated by different interests. Hermeneutics helps people to understand their being through the biblical text and how people can relate to their situations in the fundamental understanding of their position within the context. As the co-researchers study the bible they come to it with certain pre-understandings and through a to-and-fro engagement with the subject matter attempt to develop an appropriate interpretation.

"Gadamer's hermeneutics have implications for the human sciences, because he positions the human sciences within the broader theory of understanding as an exchange of ideas and conversation." (Browning 1991:81) If all knowledge is dialogue, then historically situated dialogue, which forms the wider context of its particular focal point, should also be acknowledged by any specific human science.

Roy Schafer makes a comparison here between the understanding that there is no objective, autonomous, or pure psychoanalytic data and Freud's saying that one is compelled to draw certain conclusions. The simple experiential information and techniques of psychoanalysis are indivisible from the investigators practical and unified assumptions concerning the start, consistency, entirety, and clearness of personal action. For Schafer the human sciences disintegrate into hermeneutics, explanation into interpretation, theory into narrative and all of it becomes knowledge, interpretation and narrative (Browning 1991:82 - 83).

Browning shows interest in Gergen's (1971:310) perception that the values of society are developed by social psychology. Social psychologists had a very good reason to hold on to the conclusions that they made concerning society, but people have nullified these interpretations. Gergen developed a hermeneutical view of social psychology that the natural sciences cannot characteristically convey knowledge to the subjects of studies so that the behavioural dispositions are adapted; where in the social sciences such communication can have a fundamental influence on behaviour.

4.2.2   The text and the reader come together.

To understand and reconstruct stories is to listen carefully to what the co-researchers or story-tellers say and to interpret these stories from their perspective. The original meaning of a text can only be understood when we locate it in a specific cultural context and reconstruct it and the text becomes the medium through which we understand ourselves. The stories divulge that my co-researchers are readers of the bible and interpret their stories and experience from a biblical perspective. I could see clearly also how they reconstruct their stories according to history and how the biblical text led them to the historical critical method. "Meanings are not simply recorded within a text to remain there motionless until they are extracted by readers, and not something independent from actions." (Lundin et al. 1999:66)

Narratives with the biblical interpretations convince us that they provide a web of meaning and connectedness to events, which teaches people that situations happen

as they do because they take place in a moral set-up. These narratives are also in-complete stories of the past, which in the new set-up people can re-author toward preferred outcomes. "As a reflection on the religious claims embedded in stories, narrative theology indeed touches the nerve of theology." (Van Huyssteen 1997:184) It was obvious for my co-researchers themselves to discover their own unique outcomes:

Clues in discovering of unique outcomes
- They are a group of people that is hurting due to their own personal struggles.
- If they should stop existing what would happen to those who only hold out their baskets to receive good deeds?
- These struggles opened their eyes to the needs and struggles of other people.
- They meet monthly and called it a discovery group session.

It was a moment of excitement for my co-researchers to discover their own unique outcomes:

- They are a community that connects (refer to chapter three, section 3.8 and 3.10). They could listen to one another and interpret one another's stories. Their connection was deeply rooted in their understanding of what it means to care for and support one another. As the discovery groups tapped deeper into their stories and the meaning of care and support the stories actually told them that they are a group of people that can relate to one another and who is willing to journey with one another. They are a group that connects because of their spiritual growth and commitment. They have decided to continue in this way until God gives them new direction.

- The re-telling and reconstruction of their stories brought new thoughts and visions of ministry. In the re-telling of the stories the co-researchers selected Graham as the counsellor of the congregation. This had never happened to him before he joined this congregation. His old story spoke about a passive congregant who could only depend on the guidance and support of a minister. My co-researchers are in a period of spiritual transformation, because their existence depends on God.

- Without the leadership of a fulltime minister they managed to care for and support each other. Their mission and abilities have counteracted the perception that laypeople cannot manage their own congregations. They are not a growing church but do have the capacity to journey with those who come and join their church even if it is only for a short while.

- Their connection brought a new story of 'Care Giving', which speaks about their story.

The above-mentioned unique outcomes connected the relationship between the real or experienced story and the biblical story. My understanding of Nürnberger (2004:14) is that the bible is a multifaceted body of literature and therefore it is practically impossible to base one's faith and life on every verse found in the bible.

The above-mentioned unique outcomes actually indicate a potential alternative 'storyline' running alongside the congregational story being told. This congregational story named 'Care Giving' became significant for further exploration of the co-researcher's experience of care, healing and transformation. Together we came to these unique outcomes through linking the points like e.g. how does the "eye" see her own needs in relation to what she can do for others? How does the "eye's" operation link to the stories of Willie, Graham and Bennie and theirs in relation to the rest of the congregation and those who only come to "fill their baskets". Before I went to the co-researchers for more conversations I reflected on these stories and tried to link them but did not set up questions before hand. I used these links to guide me in the process of their re-telling of the story in the process of listening. There were times when it was as if I misunderstood them because it was very difficult for me to understand their eagerness to continue in this way. I realized that these unique outcomes were unique to them and their history. It was in the re-telling and re-structuring of their stories that I could understand what Payne (2000:77) means as he comprehends White: "This bringing out of significance for the person occurs through gradually formulating and thus telling an unfamiliar and 'new' story in response to the questions about unique outcomes, and then, also in response to questions that consider what this richer story means for the person."

The unique outcomes made my co-researchers look deeper into the text and use it to bring about a profound spiritual transformation. People select texts, which will make sense to their choice of spirituality and discard the ones that do not fit the purpose.

This resulted in different doctrines and patterns of behaviour as influenced by biblical texts. The question repeatedly came up as to whether it is possible for people to build their faith on the bible and implement that as valid or binding? This links to the postmodern question as to whether the bible is the only reliable source to guide the Christian faith.

4.3 A deepened spirituality in relation to the bible.

The understanding of the biblical text brought much understanding to my co-researchers concerning their vision and mission in relation to their personal life story. From a Christian point of view Sheldrake (1998:10) questions whether the postmodern culture offers people an opportunity for spirituality. Like other theologians he criticizes the postmodern theory for deepening faith and feels that it does not present any spiritual depth. They argue that the postmodern approach to the possibility of 'truth' conveys a dispute between two contradictory viewpoints of knowledge.

- On the one hand postmodernists affirm that human context, history, culture and language are fundamental to all knowledge.
- On the other hand postmodern critics want to continue to confirm a perspective that can speak of truth in a definitive rather than a contingent way.

Sheldrake agrees that from the view of Christian faith and spirituality, postmodernism offers an important counteractive measure to the tendency to believe that particular words are capable of saying what the reasoning about God in definitive ways is. He communicates his concern that in reality people can only seek to express, tentatively, the inexpressible. People will never be able to fully understand God and there will always be things concerning the depths of God that will baffle people's understanding about God. He continues to find consolation in the lesson that postmodernity taught him that spirituality is needed to discard a harmful separation between the sacred and the worldly. This theme of a deepened spirituality came from the painful issues that my co-researchers had to deal with in taking the risk to take a step forward in faith. They engaged with their spirituality from a situation of care and support and with the hope that they would be listened to.

The sensitivity of the painful stories related to other stories, which they realised became quite clear when they read and discussed the bible. People understood clearly that they needed to acknowledge their own pain in order to hear the voice of

God so that they could hear the cries of their own community. These cries relate to marriages which are in turmoil, some suffered from the misconduct of their children. At this stage the story of Fabian's (chapter two, section 2.19) concern that the youth needs to make a reality check came under discussion. My co-researchers felt guilty because some did not even conduct house meetings and bible studies with their children. In the next meeting they came and discussed their own house meetings and the hurts of their children, who suffered from the absence of their parents. They acknowledged that it was difficult for them to counsel their own children and gave consent to Bennie who is the youth leader to deal with these matters. In this meeting Graham was chosen to look into pastoral matters and to counsel people individually.

It was in the bible studies that the factors of spirituality were thoroughly interpreted and showed the eagerness for a true journey with one another. My co-researchers were eager for their spirituality to find its centre in Christ. This is the only way that they could find and settle themselves in their new situation. They admitted that they had recognized their social experiences of care and support, but that they had overlooked their spiritual dimension. In their situation of change, care and support their spirituality only played a role when they identified and understood their caring and supportive needs. Kenneth et al. (2006:121) interprets spirituality as something with the potential to harm or help people. For my co-researchers spirituality became a positive resource for growth that they used as a stepping, stone to venture into the unknown future. They claimed that their spirituality groomed them for worship, which gave them comfort, a responsibility towards one another and a superb connection with God. I agree with Kenneth et al. that: "The search for the sacred refers to the processes of discovery of the sacred efforts to conserve or hold on to the sacred once it has been discovered, and attempts to transform the sacred when internal or external pressures insist on change." (Kenneth et al. 2006:122)

Together with my co-researchers we became sensitive to the reality that they could not start this journey if their spirituality was 'not in order'. 'Not in order' to them came from the guilt feelings of why people leave their church after they have been helped. Is it possible that people were looking for something deeper than ordinary care and support? Do people see a lack of spirituality in them? These questions came from my co-researchers in the bible studies and these questions need to be answered. Again through re-telling and reformulating their stories they came to the following interpretation and understanding concerning spirituality:

▪ Their vision and mission should coincide with their spirituality.

- Their spirituality is not a dimension of their life; it is their life.
- Their spirituality is found in their Methodist tradition of taking care of people.
- For my co-researchers tradition is an answer from God, to God and for God.
- Spirituality speaks about the presence of God in creation.

My co-researchers' interpretation of spirituality

Their spirituality transpired from their experience with God and was very constructive and beneficial to their spiritual growth.

- Their relationship with God and the imitation of Christ compelled them to be in active participation in all spheres of the church.
- Their lifestyle is characterised by a purity of heart and enthusiastic love.
- They understood their status in the congregation as one in Christ regardless of their status in life, sex, or even denominational affiliation.
- They have a desire for God and experience a fundamental human-divine relationship.
- They nurture their relationships with God through prayer.
- They emphasise awareness and condemnation of sin.
- They are mindful of their love of their neighbour.

This conversation relates to the "class system", which is a Wesleyan (refers to John Wesley founder of a Methodist Tradition) tradition, which sees 'care' as an act of grace. They quoted Hulley (1987:72) in saying that Wesley interpreted love as central to spirituality. They agree with Wesley that people cannot do any good before entering into a relationship with God. My co-researchers believed that one could have no proper love for one's neighbour unless it was built on love for God. Their discussion and questions on Wesley brought them to the conviction that they could give love because God first loved them. They experienced this love in and through Christ. Their understanding of God is a God who is continuously active in people's lives and that their actions need to become more visible. People's ability to respond to the love of God is due to prevenient grace, which is grace that relates to "free-will". Wesley believed that there is a measure of "free-will" supernaturally restored to every person, because "free-will is unaided grace" (Hulley 1987:68). My co-researchers felt that prevenient grace is there for everybody, it does not matter who you are. They voiced their interpretation through their experiences and said that their

spirituality is produced because of grace and to understand grace is to be in a personal relationship with God.

The awareness of grace and their understanding of spirituality came from a Christian tradition and their experience of the presence of God. For them this was a definite sign of transformation because their perception about God is not to please others because of good works. Their spirituality unfolded in their social context of love, care and support, even when everybody did not easily accept this context. Some became attracted and took hold of it but others would not become engaged in it and went their own way. Most of my co-researchers felt that the move brought about positive change in their views about God. My co-researchers and those who decided to stay became more involved in one another's lives and adopted the passion to tell their stories, which led to a process of healing and transformation.

4.4 Transformed lives through spiritual formation.

When the topic of transformed lives appealed to my co-researchers in the form of spirituality I realized that religion and spirituality played a major part in a person's central world. The question arose why spirituality rather than religion became the term of choice for my co-researchers. In the re-telling of the stories in conjunction with the bible studies my co-researchers tried to find sacred paths in their new story because they did not want to carry the "baggage" that comes from traditional religion. Gary Hartz in his book "Spirituality and Methal Health" explains why this topic of spirituality caught fire among mental health professionals. Mental Health Professionals recognized the limitations of psychotherapy and medication in helping their clients to cope, change and flourish. He acknowledges the inputs in the research studies (of Powell, Shahabi, and Thoresen, 2003: Smith, Mc Cullough and Poll, 2003; and Ellison and Levin, 1998) showing that religious activity has a positive association with physical and mental health, though these associations do not prove that religion causes better health. I agree with Hartz (2005:2) that people became dissatisfied and let down with traditional religions and institutions. My understanding of traditional religions and institutions is that people think and expect that they would be cured for ever from what ever disease or situation they suffer from. He quotes Spilka et al. (2003) who proved evidence that some people acknowledged that they are spiritual and but not religious and could voice strong antireligious feelings concerning their spirituality. According to Spilka et al. (2003) people who claim their spirituality are more likely to draw upon mystical and transcendent experience as the essence of their spiritual path (Hartz 2005:2). Hartz (2005:4) distinguishes between

"Spirituality" with the capital "S" and "spirituality" with the small "s".   Spirituality refers to the holy and the freedom to create one's own concept of the sacred or ultimate reality.   The other spirituality speaks about the psychological experiences that do not relate to the sacred or ultimate reality.   Spirituality as with religion, involves the search for meaning and purpose in ways related to the sacred or to ultimate reality. My co-researchers expressed that their spirituality involved the question: How does my view of the sacred or fundamental reality give meaning to my life? They firstly acknowledged that they are individuals who experience the unique characteristics of spirituality with the emphasis on inspirational experience.   They believed that as individuals they developed their own spiritual beliefs and practices, particularly as they are informed by personal spiritual experience in conjunction with testimonies and prayer.

4.5   There are no Quick Fixes

The re-telling and reconstruction of the stories brought my co-researchers to the point that there are no quick fixes to becoming a transformed human being. A transformation of the soul can not be related to a stomach ache where one can use pain killers to ease the pain, or to a break down in marriage where one can file for a divorce or if your car is faulty one can take it to a motor mechanic. The spiritual transformation is one of the most difficult and traumatic experiences to deal with.   At some stages they did not know how to deal with certain areas of their lives.   They acknowledged that through continuous delving into the word, prayer and the re-telling of the stories they realized that some dissents needed to be confronted and deconstructed.   These conversations were also enhanced and informed by other people (who sometimes joined the bible studies), discussions on contexts and other experiences.   They became conscious about their human vulnerability which had an impact on their feelings and thoughts.   When they discussed their feelings and thoughts they experienced a spiritual restlessness in their soul and tenderness of the heart. This restlessness brought recurring feelings, but helped them ask questions that persuaded them to allow God to change their hearts.   Klein (2009:22) views this as a conversation which nurtures a process of spiritual cleansing and has the potential to bring to the surface skills, competencies, creativity, experiences, resources, co-travellers, courage, commitment, confidence, and direction.   This whole process as mentioned by Klein who helped the co-researchers to understand that unhealthy norms, conduct and attitudes resist change and can destroy good intentions.   After a thorough interaction and communication and continuous retelling of their stories my co-researchers realized that they could not fix other peoples'

problems but talking through it together they found out that with the help of the interdisciplinary team they could embrace one another and solve their problems through interaction and guidance. They acknowledge that they are committed to a journey and that those who commit to the journey experienced transformation.

4.6 Conversations initiated through Prayer

The people who were committed to the journey reflected on their spiritual growth and what triggered their inner being to change. Their individual and collective conversations with God helped them to do introspection and to deconstruct their dream of care. Their interaction with one another made them aware of the essence of prayer on a journey of spiritual transformation. Prayer became the foundation of their vision with the realization that God is at the centre of their mission. Klein (2009:23) states very affirmatively that people are so often engaged in the vision of God that they forget to concentrate on the God of the vision. I agree with Klein that the primary focus should be God and not the dream. They experienced the same feeling of Klein that when God is at the centre people need to be quiet, learn how to listen to the voice of God and allow God to give the direction. My co-researchers emphasized that when they learned to be quiet and how to listen to God and one another they could move forward in faith and deed. Their spiritual transformation helped them to evaluate their wisdom and make spirit-filled decisions. From this wisdom came the strategies, plans and procedures which they could assess against their common goal for this congregation. Prayer encouraged them to take a step in faith and gave them guidance to participate in one another's stories in co-partnership. Through prayer their plans could materialize, their efforts be accomplished and the combination of their relationships brought transparency to their vision and mission. Prayer is to turn away from the impossible to the possible and it is the essence of healing and transformation. (Klein 2009:23)

4.7 The imperative of spirituality as a God given opportunity for care

This section upholds step six of the 'Seven movements Model' which speaks about a description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation. (Browning 1996:52) gives clear evidence of the vital importance of the local Christian congregation as the basic context within which persons of all ages and circumstances receive care from their fellow Christians. He acknowledges that the person-to-person care that people receive from the pastor is important but that the informal care and counselling that fellow believers within the community of faith give carries far more weight and provides help to the person who suffers. I entirely agree

with him by saying that the care of persons within the congregation means something larger and more comprehensive than the care given by an ordained minister. The early Methodist tradition appointed a Lay Preacher to lead services of worship and to preach in a group called a 'circuit' (refer chapter one, section 1.2.3). Today the Lay Preachers are called Local Preachers, which refers to a preaching appointment only within a specific circuit. The lay person can serve any position in the church and includes the leading of a 'class group', to be a youth pastor, Bible Women or Evangelist, Sunday School Superintendent, Sunday School teacher, president of a Women's organisation, president of the Young Men's Guild, president of the Men's League, etc. A Layperson cannot preside over the sacraments such as Holy Communion and Baptism because only an ordained minister can administer these sacraments.

When people care for one another they delve into the deeply rooted issues of the problem because people relate to one another in their daily struggles. (Browning 1996:54) further affirms this statement with which I agree that it is the work of all members of the community. The people called Methodist will support this statement as they believe in the priesthood of all believers. This statement carries a lot of weight and authority for lay people in the Methodist Church and empowers lay people to feel called to a non-ordained ministry or position (refer to chapter one section 5, paragraph 2, on the discussion of the priesthood of all believers).

The Methodists believe (this statement also refers back to the discussion about the priesthood of all believers) that when they are called they respond to the voice of God or they are moved by the Holy Spirit to offer themselves to God's mission in whatever capacity they are needed. Seeing that most of my co-researchers have a Methodist background we studied the book (A Plain man for plain people) of Hulley, who wrote about John Wesley's history. According to Hulley (1987:53) Wesley expected people who feel called to show evidence of some intellectual ability, theological understanding and the ability to communicate freely and clearly. The study of this book of Hulley answered the willingness and the need of Bennie in his story (refer to chapter two section 2.17) that one needs to do some extra reading. All my co-researchers agreed with this statement because they realised that their "response to God's voice" was not only to "care and support" but it was a move towards a spiritual transformation. This statement shows evidence of re-telling and co-constructing their new story of 'Care Giving'. Transformation was all about re-framing in the process from telling to interpreting their spiritual experience. They

agree with Wesley as qouted by Hulley (1987:53) that the fruit of spiritual experience should be evident in people's life-style. This gives more evidence of step seven of the 'Seven Movements Model' and recognition to their statement that "spirituality is not only a dimension of their life; it is their life". For me this is an alternative interpretation of their stories that moves beyond the local community.

My co-researchers' understanding of transformation in their spirituality and how they relate it to their mission field is to understand the biblical text, to communicate it to one another and others and then to engage in the work of God. They acknowledged the fact that for them to understand their story of care and support was to feel a change of heart. They studied Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 to 10 and came to the conclusion that their 'good work' is not enough to speak about the grace of God. When they experience grace they need to give it to the person in need as well.

They realised that their new story of 'Care Giving' is more than an act amongst them but that their story has opened them to the wider community. For my co-researchers this is an improvement in their spirituality that opened their eyes beyond the local community. This statement was illustrated in December 2008 when they made 'hampers' or food parcels for people in need. These food parcels were delivered to people as far away as Cape Town. This is evidence of a new story that is no longer about "them", but about all those who are in need of God. They agreed that they cannot change the hearts of people, but God can. Their duty is to perform a deed in need, which will make the difference in someone's life that feels rejected or abandoned.

Capps (1998:10) wrestles with the distinction between pastoral counselling, which allows an experience that is integral to the life of the congregation and pastoral care. He sees pastoral counselling as a systematic effort for people who are involved in the storytelling event to interpret their stories so that new understanding of the stories will occur. On the other hand he views pastoral care as the listening to the told story in response to its basic factualness. My co-researchers immediately discovered that storytelling is not only about taking the other person's story at face value but to connect the present story to an unspoken story. Their curiosity and eagerness led them to listen, understand and interpret their own stories, which enabled them to see things others could not see. "When our stories about ourselves are interpreted, we feel that we ourselves are being interpreted." (Capps 1993:11)

My experience with care and counselling in a congregation set up is that some people do not want the minister to know certain things concerning their lives. The laity is empowered to avail themselves in certain positions. Sometimes training of laypeople to assist the minister in the work of care and counselling is lacking in certain congregations. People still have the belief that it is only the minister that can perform such duties. The problem starts when crisis situations become so many that the minister cannot give adequate attention to the everyday aspects of care within the congregation. In my own ministry I have experienced that ordinary friendly relationships are mutually helpful and can become therapeutic when dealt with from a narrative perspective and wisdom. There is some symbolic gesture given to such behaviour and people commonly express it in terms of fellowship, communion or "this is home for us". When these terms are used by the laity one should understand it from the perspective of things that they can literally do for one another like, to give flowers, to perform a handy man duty when the father or husband of the family is not physically at home.

My co-researchers and I recognized the experiences of care as they came out in the telling of the stories. It expresses the fact that the caring functions of a community that claims that their spirituality is a gift from God, can only become practical when they act in faith through the means of grace and care. They also acknowledge that it is only through wisdom and practical involvement in one another's lives that they can become well acquainted with most of their congregants. This makes me think again and find myself with the same mindset as Demasure and Müller (2006:410) as they acknowledge that meaning is constructed or finds its expression in stories.

For my co-researchers, the term "meaning" means "wisdom" that acts in spite of their knowledge or skills of care and counselling. The theme of wisdom was closely connected to the 'caring' skills and as an act on behalf of God to others in need. The theme of wisdom (refer to section 4.8) only came out in the reflection on the stories. For them the love and support that they can give to one another is enough to make people realise that God is in control of their lives and that God is the one that sustains them when they think they will not make it as a congregation. They are excited that their stories could be written down because these stories shaped and constituted their lives. Narrative ways of working are based on the idea that people's lives and relationships are shaped by the "stories" which individuals and communities of people develop in order to give meaning to their experiences (White & Denborough 1998:3).

I needed some clarity on how my co-researchers interpreted their spirituality in relation to religion. I took this question from Graham's story that they were searching for a church and when they found this church they felt settled. My co-researchers defined in their language that religion is the faith that they have been born into something that they have inherited from their parents. Religion made them mindful of who they are (I understood it as personal selfhood) and due to what they believe they can reason about it. Religion links them to a biblical history and faith through which they can relate their past and present experience. Spirituality in relation to religion is something deeper that speaks to and about the inner self. For them religion is a given but spirituality is a 'treasure' that one can only find when one reasons about religion.

This statement is clearly revealed in the stories told and the metaphors used by my co-researchers. The larger Christian narrative of what God's purpose for our existence in this community was clearly seen and understood as my co-researchers narrated their experiences in this community.

4.8   Wisdom speaks from a deepened spirituality

The theme of wisdom transpired in the ongoing discussions and the reformulating of the stories. I noticed a common language as I listened to the eagerness of my co-researchers to tell their stories which are based on their situations. As they opened up these stories I clearly heard the metaphor of wisdom, which only comes from the language of a particular community's language in speaking about life. This language gives a connection to this community which gives them a sense of deep spiritual growth and a sense of belonging. The sense of a deep spiritual belonging speaks about the need to support and nourish one another spiritually and gives them the assurance that they are not alone in their ordinary difficult life situations. It is from the perspective of this deep spiritual belonging that the theme of wisdom has been acknowledged by my co-researchers.

The theme of wisdom brings out the consistency of the nurturing of relationships, which hold this community together through care, worship, counselling and support. This sensitized me to the fact that ordinary lay people have a passion to journey with one another in spite of the involvement of a full time or ordained pastor. It makes me ask the question 'what wisdom and skilfulness is among the non-ordained that still gives to people the confirmation that they should continue in this way and that they do grow spiritually?"

4.8.1 The three components of wisdom

By having a closer look at the theme of wisdom and what it means to my co-researchers I realized that they believe and admitted that wisdom became an integral part of the life of this congregation through social and spiritual transformation. Wisdom became an instrument of even personal transformation that led to intense and sincere changes in attitude, approach and way of life. My co-researchers repeatedly discerned and claimed that there was clear evidence in the lifestyles of congregants of an ever-deepening commitment to the expectations of a Christ-filled life.

They have experienced wisdom in three ways: Relating Experiences, Reflection and Spiritual Transformation.

a.   Relating Experiences

My co-researchers viewed wisdom as a personal encounter and interaction of peoples' problems and handling of these problems. The context of this congregation is the habitat in which they spend time and where people struggled to break free from their personal encounters with problems. This was where they were introduced to the God who deals with people and their painful experiences appropriately. When people find hope and consolation they can resist any further infliction of pain and can even escape from their detention centres of hopelessness and despair. At this church people are given the opportunity to voice their painful experiences with the assurance that the hands of faith, hope and love will touch them. One of the co-researchers calls this congregation his haven of safety and care. When he breaks loose from his house situation, he knows that he will arrive at church with the assurance that he will leave this haven with hope for a new tomorrow.

b. Reflection

Encountering wisdom as a personal experience challenged my co-researchers to examine their own faith responses in relation to their lives and the setup in their congregation. The metaphor of wisdom has led them to see hope in the future, and that their lives can make a creative difference in a caring community which has been established by the vision to care for and support one another. Reflection on their experiences constituted an ongoing relationship of care and support among members of this congregation. The moments of reflection on their experiences opened a wide range of emotions and circumstances that led to them care for one another. They openly acknowledged that if they did not reflect on their situation they

would have run the risk of losing those insights that could transform them. I took the opportunity at this crucial moment also to give space to my co-researchers to reflect on what is happening within and around them in doing this research together. Integral to this reflection process is their weekly gathering for prayer meetings where they meditate on the bible in the light of their love, care and support system as relocated people in a new setting. Apart from the prayer meetings there were also moments of getting together as part of the research where my co-researchers wrote down their reflections where they expressed their feelings, which they were too shy to voice in the prayer meetings and this was an open opportunity to clarify the issues with which they wrestled. In this they could articulate clearly their desires and fears for future growth and actions of obedience that could enhance their wisdom.

c. Spiritual Transformation

The act of transformation did not happen easily as people had to be guided in the re-telling of their stories as to how and why they interpreted certain ways of thinking and doing things. It came out clearly that the old way of doing things was always difficult to break loose from. It was easy for my co-researchers to use the metaphor of wisdom to relate their experiences and even to reflect on them but the act of transformation as a reconstruction of spirituality, which will make them open to the Holy Spirit, was difficult to attain. My co-researchers admit the difficulty of breaking away from tradition in contrast to the infiltration of the Holy Spirit. One of the co-researchers voiced that one Sunday they invited a preacher from one of the charismatic churches and when the spirit moved in ways that most of the people in the hall fell down some of the members joked about it and said he thought it was a massacre. This joke was not accepted by every-body, which actually brought discomfort to some of the members.

Some of the members felt insulted and argued openly that the level of spiritual maturity was absent in some of the members. This openness among my co-researchers caused havoc for a few weeks but when the leadership stepped in and addressed the issue through reflection things went smoothly again. To some of the leaders it was divine intervention, which gave birth to more caring and spiritual deeds. The changed hearts began yearning for a congregation where there was compassion, love and care for everybody. The fact that this could happen in their lives was the testimony of all the co-researchers. They realized that a change of heart is symbolic of a calling into an ongoing engagement with those who are in need. This statement reminded me of Hudson (1999:24) who says that: "To be a

disciple of Jesus we are called into an ongoing engagement with our suffering neighbour, continued reflection upon our lives in the light of scripture and a never-ending process of growing into Christlikeness." Hudson goes further in saying that transformation is a gift to those who are open to the Holy Spirit and they move into a greater Christlikeness. For my co-researchers the moment of transformation started with the re-telling of the stories.

As my co-researchers reflected on the three principles of wisdom they discovered that wisdom goes along with the usual activities of silence, bible study and reflection, and worshiping together with care and support. They experienced their support system as a regular spiritual transformation of a journey with God. The co-researchers started sharing their ideas from the pulpit and in the meetings with the congregation, which changed the people in such a manner that they responded to this call in the positive manner of compassionate and concerned people that journey with one another in love on the basis of care and support. People learned that to become caring and supportive is an act of obedience and plays an important role in the process of wisdom. They realized and acknowledged that the theme of wisdom brought reconstruction of their story and effectiveness in their community.

4.9   The effectiveness of a healthy community

To continue as a caring and supportive group my co-researchers discovered that the new world that they are living in is constantly changing from digging deeper into their life situation and exploring new experiences. They can only be a caring community and care for their members when they themselves are in a state of wholeness or health. My co-researchers feel that they are a healthy community because they are a community in transition, which is self-motivated and developing. In this statement I took on the "not-knowing-position" and tried through questioning to understand what they experienced and interpreted as a healthy community. In this process I did not guide them with any theory or introduce any preconceived questions. I drew the questions from their perspective about their experiences of healing and how healing coincides with their spirituality. This was a very sensitive process to them because they also tried to deconstruct their story of why people easily quit their congregation after they have been helped. It was very difficult for them to convince themselves that they were the actual experts of their story. Their answer to their understanding of a healthy community was that when people live together they make new discoveries concerning themselves and their environment. What keeps people together is the common vision of a healthy society as their main goal even if they

differ in their approaches to achieving the goal. Willows and Swinton (2000:151) perceived life as a movement where people's activities gain meaning by leading them towards their vision, or more or less away from it. My co-researchers put this statement made by Willows and Swinton in this way: "Life is movement that because of external influences puts pressure on a group, and people's actions improve their meaning by directing them more or less towards the vision, or away from it." They feel that for them their situation was a positive move because the capacity that the whole group had gave them a sense of direction and provided them with a measurement along which they could assess their lives and actions. The tool (as discussed in the sections that follow) that they used was their commitment, listening with empathy and sympathy, and problem-solving as a means of response. In the process of transformation in the area of healing, healthy communities try to endow the process with an agreement on the most favourable values. James Mathers in Willows and Swinton (2000:151) makes it clear that it is a shared vision of what should be achievable rather than what is currently within reach that allows hope and progress towards its realization. A community where everybody is included and shares the common vision sees goals as attainable and recognizes it as conditional.

People live in a complex society and sometimes have to deal with abnormal or difficult members of society to find a common ground to the advantage of everybody. When problems arise they deal with them in relation to ethics and areas in which people feel it appropriate to make moral choices or decisions. Mathers compares relationships in society to Darwin's principles of cultural evolution that as human beings have physical intercourse with members of other societies, they also communicate with, and learn new ideas from, even those societies they are intolerant of (Willows and Swinton 2000:152). Mathers brings out a very striking statement that people are biologically and ethically committed to recognizing people as one society.

The effectiveness of this group is based on the relationship between laity and laity. My co-researchers declare it in this way: "The one giving help is just as broken and vulnerable as the one seeking help." Although they are a small congregation there is a deep interaction amongst members and even those who only come to visit the church. They do not have any professional education to counsel others but in an informal manner they counsel people and they have testimonies of people who visited this church and got healed through conversation, prayer and the care and support given by this group alone. The relationship between "laity and laity" is the

result of the caring and sympathetic and empathetic attitudes between the leaders and the rest of the congregation. This unique relationship is the evidence of a distinctive reaction and acceptance into people's lives, homes and hearts that many pastors sometimes do not have. Klein (2009:32) remarkably also emphasises this statement saying that: "The positive perceptions in the minds of members of the community create a unique ministry opportunity for the existence of a very effective and powerful Counselling Ministry in the local church." The excitement of being part of such a counselling ministry brought much joy to my co-researchers as they perceive this opportunity as the basis from which to meet the essential and basic needs of individuals. That the effectiveness of the ministry of the priesthood of all believers, the involvement of the community as encouraged by the local mission will also reach those without a church is also affirmed by Klein. He emphasises that the church is anointed and called to meet the needs of the context in which it exists and serves (Klein 2009:32).

4.10   Professional identity in leadership and relationships

This theme came up when my co-researchers talked about the way forward and having a church structure. The theme of wisdom reminded them that they need leaders to give structure to this congregation. The stories of Willie and Graham were at some stage the focus of discussion for a family church, which needs to be guided by leaders who could serve as shepherds to their flock. The professional identity of the leadership established sound relationships among people who have been without a shepherd. In these stories I have been sensitized by the professionalism of the leaders as heard from the narrators. What I have noticed and heard is the professional identity of the leaders. Although this congregation is constantly aware of and acknowledges their family interrelationships they still value their leaders' professionalism very highly. What I heard continually was the caring style of the leadership. This seems to be different from a military way of professionalism, which is actually surprising and awesome to the narrators as well. It is not an ordinary involvement or care but something where they feel they have experienced the love of God in a special way. This made me listen to the roots of change, which lie in the re-examination of the real lived experiences these narratives provide, the hope for change, and the exploration of desired futures. I feel that congregations are shaped in part by culture as well as contextual life experiences.

From these stories I could detect that the tellers of the stories feel and behave within the framework of their continuous developing life narrative, who they are, what they

think, how they learn, how they relate to one another. They gave me the idea that what they feel and what they do are the ingredients forming the landscape of their life narrative.

Graham whose story was told in chapter two of section 2.20, says he was conscious of his wandering from church to church, which left him for some time churchless and without a shepherd. He mentioned that during this time many things went wrong in his life. It was as if the wandering made a sudden attack on their spirituality and that in a moment of doubt things could strangely go wrong. This also stands against the fact that this congregation did not have an ordained minister, as people expect for spiritual growth. As I questioned and asked him to elaborate more on the "shepherds-less" congregation and I asked him to describe what a shepherd is. He answered very convincingly that when he became settled in this congregation he realised that to feel at home does not always depend on the 'parenting' but on the togetherness of the family although the parents have passed on. He regarded the leaders in the role that they play, as of the older brothers and sisters who take care of the rest of the family after the death of the parents. What comes out strongly is the togetherness of the family through the study and diligent interpretation of scripture. This family relationship speaks about sound knowledge, principles and disciplines they need to adhere to. What makes the family stay together is the continuous mode of reflection and action. It is not an action that takes place on the spur of the moment in response to happenings or problems but an action that seeks to identify the problem before it arises.

He answered my question on the "shepherd-less" with a positive *"Yes the fact that we do not have a fulltime and ordained minister does create problems like administration and continuation and delegation and execution of assignments."* Sometimes the leadership questions and blames one another about whose job or duty it is to perform certain tasks, because all the leaders stand in their own fulltime capacity at their employer's departments. He realised that things will not always run smoothly because certain tasks always get dumped on someone who feels it is unfair. This does not say that he feels shepherd-less because the level of responsibility that comes from the leadership is phenomenal. I agree with Brackney that wrote about Christian Voluntarism as he says that: "Nobody is born a member of any church…no person is bound to the nature of any church, but joins voluntarily a society in which he or she believes him or herself to have found religion." (Brackney 1997:36)

In having a closer look at the above, statement I became inquisitive about how the rest of the congregation felt about being without a shepherd. It was on this note that I decided to consult with the rest of the congregation to talk about being "shepherd-less". I also wanted to hear more about how being "shepherd-less" impacts on the spirituality and life of the congregation. Does this congregation really need a shepherd to keep people together and even to guide them? Can the laity guide one another and does it have the same impact as when a congregation has a fulltime minister? This new chapter in the life of an individual also has a link to the life of all the other members as they together journey through this process. What the one member experiences is what all the others witnessed to.

4.11   Diversity or conformity plays a role in healing.

This theme came up when the scientific community joined all of us in a conversation. My mind was boggled by the question of the scientific community. "What keeps a church together without the assistance of a fulltime minister? My co-researchers were honest enough to admit that they do not feel skilled in the area of counselling but what they can do is to care and support and to manage their church in a way that people still feel the necessity to stay together. I regarded this answer as one of the feedback loops and wanted to check whether my co-researchers also understood their togetherness and mission. They re-told and reframed the discussion as we went back to chapter three sections 3.2. to 3.3.3, and together we found answers in the literature as given below as taken from an interdisciplinary discussion.

The needs of the church cannot be met in an approach that is distant or isolated. The church in a ministry of all believers shows evidence of a thread of a collective life experience. According to evolution species only survives as long as there is adequate inconsistency among its members to endure the changing ecological pressures, which compose the development of natural variety. In view of the fact that all natural surroundings are themselves developing and altering, species whose members all correspond to the same constitution would be destined to disappearance when metamorphosis takes place. The age, group and continuation of a group of inconsistency are an organic necessity. Seeing that people can only depend on the distribution of views through the lenses of generations as well as genes, their capability for dissimilarity becomes extremely increased. Willows and Swinton mentions (2000:153) Rene Dubos (reference untraceable) who views the cultivation of diversity as important, because the growth will ensure the survival of society.

According to our evolutionary history people respect the traces of traditionalism with which most people stand in agreement for the consistency of our future. There is a distinction among species who conform to a certain pattern of behaviour and which divides people into 'us' and 'them'. Theoretically a healthy society only sees someone as healthy when one conforms to the world-view of that society, but does not acknowledge the aspects, which are unique to that person. When a person is different from other people there is a certain connotation, which gives more meaning to the well-being of that person than when the person is similar to others. People have inherited this perception to draw lines between the 'us' and 'them'. Erikson (1968) in Willows and Swinton (2000:153) regards it as our tendency to distinguish *pseudospecies* which means our class, tribe, nation or religious association is seen as the only one, all others are grouped together as outcast. The modernist who is the cultural spokesperson will attempt to impose the cultural constructions that contribute to *pseudospecies.* To be able to maintain this false impression of agreement in unity of thought of our own pseudospecies, we expect some conformity from one another in connection to tradition and law, but have only a limited open-mindedness towards diversity. This gives an identity to who one is and a sense of belonging towards others in society, which discards the crippling effects of self-doubts and feelings of estrangement. The therapeutic context from a relational position very often tends to construct the trivial as central by legitimating the behaviour within the approved discourse. According to McNamee and Gergen (1992:193) therapist-client conversations support, create and maintain a crisis for clients by attending to interpretations that are more approved by culture. Postmodernists differ by rather challenging and questioning the cultural beliefs that have assisted the problem to come into the person's life, and the beliefs and ideas that are assisting in sustaining the life of the problem." (Morgan 2000:45)

Erikson's in (Willows and Swinton 2000:153) also sees our response to difficult situations, which seem to be unhealthy, as a restructuring of experience, which has a transient nature. The shift from wholeness to totality may therefore have survival value in that it sharpens our sense of identity when it is threatened. It is clearly put by McNamee and Gergen (1994:193) that therapeutic conversations often provide the reasoning sphere in which clients can know the world in a different way, which is controlled by the ideas established according to law or standards and advantaged within a modernist therapeutic situation.

4.12   Accepting group Recognition

The discussion in the previous section developed into a moment when my co-researchers understood the fact that the broader community (referring to those who only come to fill their baskets) might see themselves as different due to their needs or spirituality.   I picked up the familiar terminology among my co-researchers which were the terms acceptance and recognition that are actually just synonyms of each other.   My co-researchers and the members have been attracted to their congregation because of its freshness of approach and because of its openness to different points of view.   They welcomed the dialogue that developed when they feel their doubts were openly dealt with and when different perspectives are encouraged. In one of the meetings with my scientific community someone made a comment and asked them a critical question: *"If you as a Trinity Family Church should stop existing in this area, how many people would know that there was once a church situated in this area?"*   I felt it was a valuable question and could sense that my co-researchers were not comfortable with this question.   After a moment of silence one of my co-researcher answered very bravely and said: *"Well this group is established from the perspective of care and support. We have accepted the fact that people are a bit reluctant to join us because we do not have a fulltime or an ordained pastor to guide us, and we do not worship in a church building. For us as a group it is no longer about us but about the grace of God that is still upon us in helping us to care for and support one another. Yes we are also proud that this our congregation has living testimonies of people who came to us when they were critically ill and through our prayers and moral support to their families they became healed. At the end of the day it is their prerogative to worship wherever they want to, as long as we know what God did and what our relationship with God is."*

After the meeting my co-researchers told me that this was a question for them to reflect on very deeply, but they still came to the conclusion that outsiders will always be sceptical towards them and misused their kindness, but that these are the challenges that they need to face and live with. They also realized that they might never grow as an ordinary congregation but that they have accepted who they are and acknowledged God's favour upon their lives. They came to the conclusion that they are a family in the form of a church and might not be a "real" congregation. This was a hurting and sensitive issue to them. My co-researchers felt like a family because everybody knew everyone and they attracted one anther through intimacy and fellowship. They are grateful for the freedom and unique identity that they have discovered, because their congregation celebrates humanity rather than condemning

it. This unique identity made them decide on a monthly talk discussion, which they named a discovery group session. The co-researchers themselves felt that this discovery group discussion was a unique outcome. These discovery sessions are free talks to find one another and to affirm their togetherness in the re-telling and reformulation of their stories. This group is different to ordinary congregational meetings. One of the congregants said that the discovery group helped her to reflect on her own life and to accept herself as she is. She could evaluate herself in relation to the rest of the group and how she experienced an internal change. She even noticed that others have changed and that this monthly discovery session is of great help.

They talk about salvation as healing and wholeness and rejoiced that people could rise above their sickness and broken lives. They feel attracted to their congregation because they feel free to be who they are. Their acceptance has transformed them, and sensitized them to serve others. According to Smith (1981:49) acceptance in some congregations is clearly a way of freedom to be one's self in terms of dress or manner or life-style, and that there is an evident support and an informal atmosphere and warmth to which they respond. The acceptance of group recognition was thoroughly dealt with in the process of questions and answers and re-telling of their story and they came to the following requirements of their congregation.
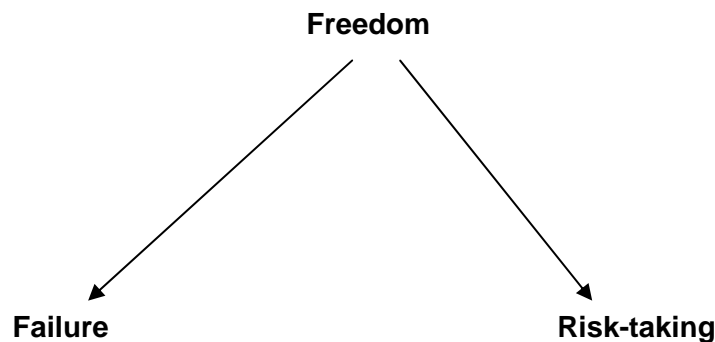
- Every member should play an informal participants role.

  This point came from one of the members who felt that he has decided to give out grocery hampers at the end of December 2008 with any one in the congregation who feels comfortable to join him in this act. It also relates to Graham's experience of how he was given an opportunity to preach in this church and to play the role of pastoral counsellor. He confirmed that most of the time he finds himself performing his role from a caring perspective and does not first have to consult with the leadership. He automatically acts on behalf of the congregation.

- Every member has the right to speak his or her mind.
- Every voice needs to be heard and interpreted.
- The speaker is given the opportunity to voice serious concerns.
- Everybody is important and any painful matter or obstacle that has a negative impact on the congregation should be dealt with immediately.
- People are not forced to perform a ministry but it should come voluntarily.
- People could join a prayer group or cell group where he or she feels comfortable to be part of such a group.

- Every congregant should try to attend at least one talk session of the discovery group. This group's agenda is not in the form of a meeting but a moment that every congregant could tell and relate his or her story.
- The congregants should become mindful of a spirituality that transforms for the assurance of spiritual growth of everybody.

4.13 Acceptance sets you free to take the Risk

Graham was one of my co-researchers who felt called to take a risk in becoming a member and a year later became a leader at this congregation. The discovery group conversations helped him a lot to find him spiritually, which he regarded as a freedom he never before knew.

He defines freedom as having two legs:

Freedom

Failure   **Risk-taking**

In this congregation he was not accepted as an old military general but someone who was accepted for who he is in Christ. He noticed that he could be used to show God's majesty over His people and not to become self-centred. This coincides with the statement made by Klein (2009:37) who says that counselling has little to do with qualifications, status, titles, position, credentials and honours of the one in charge, but has everything to do with the calling of that person's life. He elaborates further in saying that if position, titles, credentials, qualifications, status and personal achievements are directed by God's call they will automatically be used to empower and not to disempower. Everything needs to be done for God's glory and not self glorification. The metaphor of acceptance already moved everybody to risk staying on as a member of the congregation because of care and support. The fact that they invited Graham to preach opened a shut door of possibilities, which he had never explored. One of the possibilities was that he could afford to fail, because if he failed there would be no rejection because everybody was at risk of failure.

Acceptance through grace in a situation of taking risks allowed people in the group to make mistakes regardless the outcome. Everybody knows that their journey is one which is also liable to failure. This was a journey taken in love regardless of what the outcome would be.   Acceptance brought healing because no one felt threatened to start something new, and this was where everybody wanted to be.   Acceptance of a risk opened the door for those who wanted to fellowship in a healed and liberated community.   The liberation factor allowed people to become members who seriously considered their membership as a potential to grow in faith and to care for others. Risk-taking is part of accepting people for their potential. The narratives permitted the leaders of this congregation to guide the members to serve one another because they had so much to give.

At some stage I was haunted by the question "how do people become enthusiastic about risk deep-caring relationships?"   In questioning my co-researchers on this I realized that this question was not easily answered. They accepted one another from the reality that there is a common need among them.

- The common ground was that they do have problems.
- They need to accept one another as individuals.
- They need to care, interact and support one another.
- They can only journey with one another through face-to-face interaction of person with person.
- They are a community that needs to be nurtured by spiritual intervention.

They agree with Smith that a caring community is made up of people who take risks and allow the Holy Spirit to act on their lives to enable them to help one another to discover the meaning of reconciliation and to be faithful to their calling as servants of Jesus Christ in the world (Smith 1981:82). My co-researchers echoed this statement in a conversation saying it was only through trust and mutual support combined with close personal relationships that empowered them to take the risk and become a caring community. Close personal relationships and mutual trust were the essential elements that formed the basis for people to share their vulnerability. It is from this caring practice of my co-researchers that we could come up together with a "new story of 'Care Giving' for the broken healers" which emerged out of the deeds and relationships of people.   The story of 'Care Giving' is discussed in section 4.19.

Smith (1981:83) quotes John Harris in saying that "the local church is a dynamic field of personal interaction meant to have the effect of making us more caring, more self-searching, and more conscious of the riddle and mystery of life than most of us normally ever is." This research shows evidence of people who felt free to take a risk in relationships in response to meet a human need. I agree with Smith (1981:67) that caring communities are more than a sociological or psychological phenomenon, as was portrayed by my co-researchers. Their lives could only become transformed through acceptance and the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. This is a clear recognition that they would not have been able to do it with out their experience of God. Bonhoeffer says: "God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother or sister, in the mouth of man or woman. Therefore the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's word to him or her." (Smith 1981:83)

4.14 The Voices of solidarity

With reference to the "eye of the congregation" I see this metaphor of someone who is looking at healing in her community from a voice in solidarity with those who suffer and need healing. She becomes mindful of the role that she can play in the lives of others and also that suffering needs to be limited by support in a moment of need. According to Peukert and Arens in Tilley (1995:133) to be in solidarity is to recognize the other and hear their voices even if consensus is not reached. (Welch 1985:46) as mentioned by Tilley points out the memories of communities are comprised and characterized by the specific and confined practices of solidarity. Solidarity receives the position of a conservative perception of emancipation as it has been enabled by God's grace and is the confirmation and outcome of God's personification to the completion of creation. Communities who adopt these perceptions create theologies, which not only explain the experience of the members but come up with extremely different opinions that diverge from the domineering views. People are freed by configurations of academic practices to identify their experiences and shape their own world. People in marginalized communities are empowered by solidarity which gives them vision and a voice. Tony Bambara as quoted by Tilley (1995:138) summarizes the process that leads to the healing of communities. He describes three aspects of persistent joyful communal resistance to structural evil: an abiding love for other people, an acceptance of the need for taking risks in political action, and an active commitment to the "ancient covenants" with life (Bambara 1990:95).

4.15   Listening as a Component of Healing

In this section I took all the stories of my co-researchers together and asked them to concentrate on each story.   As each story was re-told most of my co-researchers saw this act and what they heard and interpreted as voices which need to be heard. To be responsive to the voices in solidarity my co-researchers had to learn how to listen. They confessed that in the beginning they did not have the capacity to demonstrate through response that they had listened and addressed the problems of the people. With hours of talk and practice of how to listen to people we together came up with a definition of listening. "Listening is an intended and attentive way of obtaining wisdom about people's way of thinking and position, judgment and views concerning themselves, and understanding of their life experiences." It was also in the discussion of deep hurts and pain that we tried to understand listening as a component of healing. Through the process of listening, which goes together with questioning me as the researcher was able to persuade my co-researchers to mirror and specify events they had experienced. The questioning tries to give clarity to the answer previously given so that the next question can be set. In the process of healing the researcher should develop listening skills that will indicate what thoughts, subjects and arguments, or further destroying issues are to follow in later questioning. Rubin and Rubin are clear in saying that to listen is to hear the meaning of what is said and listening skills develop when one listens carefully, sentence by sentence and word by word   (Rubin & Rubin 1995:6).

What makes sense in my understanding of Rubin and Rubin is that I realized that listening in relation to healing is an intensive process of focusing on the taken for granted assumptions of the other person or counselee, and understanding the experiences that have produced these assumptions. In the process of listening I became conscious of how my co-researchers used words of healing and how these words' meanings have been understood from examples.   Listening gives direction to the central issues of healing and how the hurting events could be deconstructed. I relate to Rubin and Rubin's listening with empathy as a kind of involvement that the researcher is mindful of the negative things that come with the responsibility and should mention them to the counselee or interviewee.   I found the literature information of Louw very helpful and explained it to my co-researchers regarding how I understand their experiences. Louw (1999:331) describes empathy as a loving listening-relationship.   "In die empatiese respons speel die aspek van gevoel, intimiteit en sensitiwiteit 'n groot rol."   In the psychological sphere the response of empathy is seen as an answer to the frequent authoritarian and directive relationship

of the response of the counsellors. This also shows a strong junction between Roger's non-directive and client-centred approach with the understanding that that the client is treated as a unique individual with very specific questions and issues that will shape the counseling. I understood Rogers to mean that to listen with empathy is to place oneself in the situation of another person by means of communication that shows emotion and feelings. Empathy means that one can only understand another person's world of feeling from your own internal frame of reference. This does not say that the feelings of the counsellor should be identical to the counselees, but places the counsellor within the counselees' internal frame of feelings. Counselling also makes use of the term "sympathy" as an indication of the unconditional character of the Christian agape (Louw 1999:332). Sympathy is an indication of the pastor's condolences, which could be associated with the identity of Christ and His suffering on the cross, in relation to the pain of the sufferer. My co-researchers identified themselves with the perception of Louw (1999:332) in his explanation of sympathy as an intense identification and replica of the sensitivity of the Christian love that is a composition of the following three principles:

a. **Willingness to make sacrifices:** Love is built on the foundation that people can exchange places with the other person so that the person could come into contact with the reconcilable love and mercy of Christ. This statement is linked to the text in (1 Corinthians 9: 20 – 22): *"To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews … too the weak I became weak, to win the weak."* The pastoral situation communicates a transfer in the direction of the other person the sympathy that has been granted by the High Priest who has compassion with our weaknesses.

b. **Unconditional acceptance:** Love is not demanding but fulfills the concerns and interest of the person in need.

c. **Complete forgiveness:** The warmth and compassion of human love is communicated through the kind-heartedness and friendliness of the pastor. Christian love communicates the message of God's grace and mercy, which liberates people from any signs of guilt. The meaning of the loving empathetic response within a conversational procedure is to show a comprehensive understanding of the person's own situation, and to show a relationship of trust and intimacy. This is an indication that the counsellor reflects his feelings for the counselees situation which means that the counsellor cares and tries to understand within his or her own intention (Louw 1999:332).

Jacobs (1993:28) agrees with Rogers that it is not enough for a counsellor to have good technical skills, but he or she needs to develop qualities of genuineness, empathy, congruence and non-possessive love. Rogers is from the Humanistic school where the focus of counselling is on the here and now and not on people's past. Humanistic Psychology is open to issues of values and spirituality but one needs to understand that it is not correct to equate pastoral counselling with the Humanistic school, as there are significant areas of difference developing. Capps (1998:14) views attentive listening as the process of hearing the counselees' stories in all their observed intensity and complications. The researcher must learn to identify with different and contradictory points of view, which is not always an easy assignment (Rubin & Rubin 1995:13).

In understanding Capps I came to the conclusion that in the process of healing many times our own hurt and feelings may make us doubt to whether we are capable enough to listen with genuine empathy. Intimidation also comes from our fears and uncertainties as to whether one may listen and find that the life story of the other person makes you feel unusually vulnerable.

Louw (1999:333) also considers the "reflection of feelings" which does not always point at the communication of the feelings of another person. Louw feels that subject matter is also an important part of feelings and emotions. He quotes the definition of listening as defined by Taylor (1991:22) "Listening involves grasping the content of parishioners' statements – understanding what they mean by the words they use and the way they organize those words."

In the group meetings my co-researchers had ample time to listen to one another. I was impressed with their observation that it was not always about understanding the problem but how people were given the opportunity to talk about their problems. There were not always solutions to the problems but some felt that the 'talk' opened up new avenues of direction as to what the outcome could be. There were moments that someone would cry and I could sense the discomfort or uneasiness that moved someone else to grab a tissue or handkerchief or to speak about a situation when he or she felt the same. In a further discussion my co-researchers noted that 'listening' was not a kind of magic that worked for everyone. It was in this same situation that Bennie wanted to know how one should listen before you ask a question. My co-researchers replied after a deep conversation about listening that one needs to listen patiently until you find the 'knot' to ask the next question.

4.16 Conversation as part of God's Healing plan

In the process of listening my co-researchers dwelt upon the moment when they became sensitized to the needs of the people. They reflected upon specific moments when they felt that this was the time God spoke to them. I see this moment as the moment of insertion, which placed my co-researchers in a position to understand the pastoral responses in the lived experiences of the people in this congregation. They responded to what the people felt they were going through and how they perceived it. They say that being constantly in conversation with God has sensitized their perception of God and in God's intervention they could gain wisdom as to how to go about caring and supporting others. They reflected on their first intervention when Johan Heunis (who died of cancer) became ill and was hospitalized. For them this was the most difficult situation of pastoral care because the doctor only gave Johan six months to live. Willie described it as a response to a human pain that he could not cope with because he struggled with the perception of death and dying. He regularly visited Johan with one of the other members and the congregation trusted God to heal Johan. The process up to his death was very traumatic and confusing and they felt helpless because no one could do anything other than praying to God. They pondered on the moments when Johan looked so healthy and even went back to work, but then the next moment he was back in bed. They confessed that the times he looked well they were absent and at these moments they feel they could have done better not to leave him comfortless. A whole episode of guilt and negligence started to unravel because they mentioned how Johan everyday in his critical moment still had to take his wife to work and church, because she could not drive a car. They became aware of their inability to lend a hand of care. They re-called moments and ways of how they could have made it easier for him so that his body could rest.

In analyzing this social context I agree with de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:19) in quoting Hollard and Henroit that: "Social analysis emphasizes that any community which seriously seeks to understand what is happening within the society of which it is a part has the ability to begin the process of social analysis." As they searched for more critical answers they questioned whether healing as in terms of death and dying was the moment of being in conversation with God. Most of them felt they gave Johan false hope because they believed God would heal him. They found meaning in the fact that a critical moment like suffering was the "moment of insertion" for them. When Johan died the journey continued with his wife and children. Today the only memory they have is a message from his wife, thanking the congregation for

journeying with her in her darkest hour. They started to look differently at death and dying, because healing became the point of departure, the direction, and the framework within which the pastoral theological task is undertaken.

In making statements like these my co-researchers understood their role of their prior commitment of care and support to a particular way of being in this world. This whole understanding of healing became a holistic pathway of a self-awareness of what their commitments are, on what it is based and how it affected their entire approach to pastoral care. To make these things explicit for oneself is to become not only self-aware, but also to allow for being self-critical, and to open oneself up to questioning by others. They started to see their journey as a process of their own healing and personal accountability.

4.17   Healing and Personal Accountability

In the discussions my co-researchers discovered that a healthy community encourages the acceptance of reality when they are healed and fine to continue in this way. For them their responsibility refers to the healthiness of their own spirituality and how much they grew in their thinking of spirituality and responsibility. Clinebell (1984:43) considers the emotional climate of a religious group as more important for mental health than its teachings. Personal responsibility grew from the dynamic virtue of a love that is in action. Members have a strong sense of belonging to a caring group. Repeatedly when I asked my co-researchers why they are involved in this ministry they say: "We are a family church. If one cares the whole group cares." They have this perception that one has experienced so much love and care from others in the family that everybody feels obliged to reach out in love. Every time I heard them saying: "We are members of this family and care for one another. We look after and support each other." They firmly agreed with one another that they grew when they could gain from an atmosphere of love and grace; which actually changed their personality and acceptance of one another. Clinebell (1984:43) also encourages a religion that is matured: "an exercise in bringing one's life into harmony with the orderly principles of spiritual reality. We pondered for a while on the theme of accountability that actually helped them to be optimistic in their faith and not to deny their intolerable realities. They recognized the fact that some of them still do not practice a religion that is healthy and have some misunderstandings and "cattish" behaviour among one another.

4.18   Compassionate Ministry as an Enlightening Ministry

As my co-researchers journeyed through the conversations of 'how to listen' to one another in the revelation of the stories they became conscious of the creative participatory role that they play in the interpretation of the stories which actually brought forth liberation and restoration in the process of healing. They dealt very deeply with the theme of compassion, which together saw as a relationship with God that engendered creative participation in God's liberating acts.   My interpretation is that my co-researchers' compassion is anchored in the presence and activity of a compassionate God.

This theme of compassion is exposed by the distinctive witnesses to Jesus as understood from the biblical text of the kingdom of God which is a new order on earth that we receive and in which we are creative participants, co-partners in an act of liberation and restoration, a kingdom that is the gift and demand of community (Stone 1996:84). It is through Jesus that this inheritance of creative participation in God's liberating community is grounded in the very companionship and action of a compassionate God.   This pictures a God who is with people, who takes sides against partiality and inhumanity and in a surprising manner reveals himself through new creative possibilities for our lives. In Jesus people experienced God in human nature and discovered that people were called to be human. I refer again to Howe (1995:27) who explains what it is to be human in an understanding taken from the Jewish Christian theology and sees it as the affirmation that human beings are created in the image of God (with reference to chapter two, section 2.6).

Howe (1995:34) also agrees with Stone (1996:84) that people are created in accordance with God's image and therefore can imitate it and participate in it. It is in looking at the stories that the "being human" element protruded from a ministry of compassion. The co-researchers became involved in the life issues of their fellow congregants and actually 'forced' them to act and to respond to people's cries. Their own stories of sickness, fear, issues of divorce and separation made them look closely at their world and to come to the conclusion that their existence made them only human. I agree with Stone (1996:44) that compassion is not one of our most impulsive and natural responses as human beings. Compassion is to enter into a community with the intention to journey with those who suffer and work liberation. It is not every person that has the passion to intervene or to journey with someone who suffers. It is important that one needs to understand a situation logically in order to understand how one's ministry and the mission of the church is affected, and how

this specific situation is affected by the ministry of people and the mission of the church. It is from this perspective that one needs to understand that to be able to care for people does not come naturally but depends on one's relationship with God, who is both the source and the hope of an effective and liberating practice of compassion. It is at the edge of what we believe and what we do when we start to explore who God is. It is by reflecting on our relationship with God and trying to clarify our social context that one starts to take a positive step towards bridging the gap between faith and practice, thought and life, theology and ministry. Stone (1996:4) makes it clear that we need to move from theology towards ministry, and de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:26) say this is what we mean by the "social context of ministry". Their statement clarifies the reality of the gospel that does not only speak to the inner person, but is also socially situated and points at the micro-level that refers to family life, rearing, friendships, direct authorities and macro-level that entails the community, society, nation, international, global. By interpreting the sayings and parables of Jesus we can critically understand our social context in the light of the values of the gospel. It is from this perspective that I understood the eagerness and enthusiasm of my co-researchers to participate in a ministry where a theology of compassion truly informed and shaped the practice of a new story of 'Care Giving'.

4.19   The New Story of 'Care Giving'

In the discussions I found meaning in the spiritual life of my co-researchers as embedded in this community. This made me see the practicality of creation and that the safeguarding of a community is often achieved with difficulty. The quality of communication among my co-researchers was dependent on the practical capacity and effectiveness of the group to reach their achievements. The achievements actually opened their eyes to a process of liberation and this research illustrates this point in a number of ways.   The community was dependent on its attitude towards their mission, because practical communication is no surrogate for interrelated engagement of a more physical or sensory kind. This opened my awareness to the fact that spirituality could become habitual or liturgical fellowship. Ericker and Ericker (2001:113) describe this kind of spirituality as: "a sense of real presence and support, a striving together towards a common purpose which, at a spiritual level, mitigates against the variation of experience, which includes suffering and loss." From a religious perspective my co-researchers could determine something beyond or transcending them.   This transcendence moved them further than the concern of human dignity and the change of mind that the church acts to liberate.   Stone (1996: 84) identifies a liberating ministry as a positive response to the path that Jesus

walked and this summons makes us become more fully human and calls us to participate in the humanizing process identified in the story of Jesus. I like and agree with this explanation of Stone because the practicality of pastoral care lies in the acknowledgement that character and praxis is an extension of God's character and praxis.

For me the liberating factor is the way Erricker and Ericker (2001:113) articulates that this dignity is preserved by ownership of a particular identity contextualised in the narrative of a tradition, which gives a sense of belonging that brings with it the responsibilities of commitment to loyalty and faithfulness. Through-out this research the factors of liberation moved my co-researchers not only to demonstrate dignity to their co-partners, but to contribute to the welfare of others which they identified as 'caring'. Liberation is also seen as the openness to acknowledge everybody as eligible for care, and that care is a journey that stops at death or when the individual feels that he or she can now take on or continue the road without any dependence on the group. Independence is critically explored and evaluated as a step in faith but from the angle of liberation one needs to envisage ones own humanity and how this understanding is preserved in the future. In the stories I found that liberation is not a force but a gentle move from being involved and responsible for to restoring the character of others to the image of God. This helped me understand that the ministry of the church embraces not only its own process of being consistently self-critical but also its participation in the liberation of others. The participation in the liberation of others represents the faith perspective of my co-researchers as a compassionate ministry, which made them respond to situations of care and support.

My co-researchers reasoned that a liberating faith is a faith that looks at humanity that can also have differences, while challenging it to live with differences without causing unavoidable damage. In this situation their differences enriched them through the re-structuring and reformulation of their story. The congregation is continuously aware of the fact that they do not always know what to do and use their continuous communications and interpretations of their life narratives to talk about issues that could probably destroy their togetherness. In taking this approach they became aware of the problems of interpretation and of the need not to idealise the reality. The facilitation of this process was to listen carefully to the liberating stories that were produced during the interviews or conversations by the co-researchers themselves. We together realized that what was liberating was not a proposed or prescribed model (like the Six Calls Model) but a transition from theory to practice

and back again. From this they learned that 'Care Giving' is understood and justified as a means of communion with God combined with action in what they can do for someone in need instead of 'waiting' on God. Liberation is not what many people would call it in using the Afrikaans saying "soos die Gees ons sal lei" (being led by the Spirit). Liberation is to act on God's behalf so that people can witness that God is a God at hand and not a God afar off. Liberation is to perceive one's self in a situation of need and the spiritual practice of 'Care Giving' is to become aware of the social context in which it takes place. Liberation for them was to continuously look at the relationship between spiritual practice and social responsibility. My co-researchers, who are part of this congregation, regarded their spirituality as expressed in their location as the liberating factor. They have reflected on the stories of 'Care Giving', and looked closely at the decline in church attendance not as disappointing or discouraging but as upholding care and support as the main concern. Liberation is based on a shared identity, the experience of trust in the relationships they form, the family as the tradition they hold fast on.

Trust as a liberating factor has been identified in a variety of forms. Trust was explored in the conversations that communicated the belief in their own rationality, and their progress, which was anchored in their religious or spiritual values. They related trust back to terms like self-esteem, self-confidence, mutual-respect, group responsibility and caring. Within this research one could identify these terms expressed in the beliefs they held and the practices they performed and the spiritual moments they hold dear including the worship, celebration, meditation, reflection, death and dying, mourning, suffering, loss, divorce, hope and aspirations. For them it is a new challenge as they realize it's not only about them but also about a community where they live and where their congregation is situated. Care is not only about themselves but also about the outside world.

REFLECTION

It is from a narrative postmodern practical theology that I reflect on this chapter, knowing that people found healing in the ministry that they have performed. This chapter shows clear evidence of what transpires when people look holistically and biblically at a ministry of care and support that resulted in healing and transformation. There is clear evidence, as stipulated in the unique outcomes, that my co-researchers understood their congregational context and were able and willing to continue with their mission of 'Care Giving'. Their destination of care and support

became an inward journey of their own healing and a process of transformation. A "Six Calls Model" sensitized this journey but they realized that there is no "one-size-fits-all model" and came to the conclusion that it is their own journey. The fact that people could become spiritually transformed helped them to look at their situation from a new encounter and understanding of God. This was not only an understanding of God but also understanding their relationships with one another. The co-researchers could develop their own language (relate to discovery groups) and this showed progress in their spirituality and on their journey of transformation. From the in depth discussions they understood that their social need and awareness became a journey of social transformation and spirituality. The interaction of the co-research brought them to a new understanding of the importance of telling a story, which makes a contribution to a new story (refer chapter two, section 2.8). The experience as reflected in the stories taught them that to tell your story in the process of co-construction opens up new avenues of understanding.

Long and thorough moments of conversation took place, which led to a moment of discovery that built their identity. Their new story of 'Care Giving' evolved from a process of re-telling, re-framing and co-construction, spiritual growth, healing and transformation.

SUMMARY

This chapter shows clear evidence of the link between chapters, one, two and three. The stories as mentioned in these chapters take shape in chapter four as an understanding of how they responded to the needs of others. This chapter gave new meaning to the stories of rejection, divorce, death and dying, sickness and disease, children, alcohol and drug abuse, care and support and fear of non-existence and survival and became stories of hope, spirituality, healing and transformation. The whole spiritual dimension of care and support comes to fulfillment in chapter four as it becomes grounded in a ministry of 'Care Giving'.

The previous chapters show how this action developed into a ministry that brought about healing and transformation. These chapters show also how this approach enjoys a sufficient rate of success and therefore has significant social value and has developed into relationships of "family care". Chapter four gives evidence that this approach was not to solve problems, but to care and support one another. This research shows only traces of a ministry that has been performed in a congregational set up that did not cross their borders to serve the community. Together with the co-

researchers we decided on the narrative of a 'Care Giving' approach which has a close link to the "intervention approach" and the "presence approach".