

Narratives of pastoral care, healing and transformation in a community of laity

a practical theological narrative study

by

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SUMMARY

This study's research approach shows the foundation of an epistemology that is taken from a postmodern, postfoundationalist theology. The research method is embedded in the narrative approach as established in social constructionism. The research method is also further upheld by the Seven Movements Model of doing research, which in this research also accommodates a participatory action research methodology.

This research is a study of the narratives of lay people in a local context. It shows and explores the actions of these people in a situation of care and support. Their local context expresses the journey of people who belong to the same church called the Family Trinity Church in Valhalla, Pretoria.

Their backgrounds go back to areas like the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape and are not originally from Pretoria. Their social relationships and church affiliation are compiled from a military background. Their narratives that relate to this research originate from a journey of care and support.

The narratives of my co-researchers discovered and recognized different themes as divulged from their stories in conjunction with their experiences. Some of these themes were related to the literature studies as part of the dialogues between interdisciplinary conversations in the process of research. Apart from the telling and re-telling of the stories, literature studies were used to open up a process of a deeper understanding of these narratives. Literature was used to critically discuss the narratives as to give more clarity on the actions of the co-researchers.

This research shows an open process of discussions and the input of other thoughts of beliefs and reason as presented by the involvement of the scientific community. The in depth discussions helped to clarify the aim and objectives as proved by the outcomes of this research. The outcome of this research is based on the experiences and the real situation that demonstrates a contextual framework.

The narratives and the unique research outcomes clearly support the fact that ordinary laypeople can lead and manage a church without the leadership of a fulltime minister. It shows the important relationship of care and support that transpired in a



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deepened spirituality, which brought about healing and transformation. The uniqueness of this research is based on the eagerness of people who journeyed with one another in a group and who also directed this kindness to others who did not belong to this group.



KEYWORDS

- Narrative research
- Social constructionism
- Postmodernism
- Postfoundationalism
- Seven Movements Model
- Six Calls Model
- Co-researchers
- Laity
- Minister
- Care and Support
- Spirituality
- Healing and Transformation
- Unique Outcomes
- Discovery Group
- Class system

TABLE OF CONTENT	PAGE
CHAPTER ONE	1
POSITIONING	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 The research as a journey	4
1.2.1 General background of “Journey to a New land”	5
1.2.2 The Six Calls Model	7
1.2.3 Background of the Trinity Family Church	9
2. OVERAL AIM AND OBJECTIVES	10
3. EPISTEMOLOGY, POSITIONING AND METHODOLOGY	11
3.1 A postmodern epistemological point of departure	17
3.2 Postfoundationalism	21
3.3 Practical Theology	25
3.4 Narrative Theology	31
3.4.1 The “Not-knowing” position of the researcher	34
3.4.2 The expertise of the client	37
3.4.3 The problem is the problem	37
3.4.4 Deconstructing the problem	40
3.4.5 Externalisation of conversations	42
3.5 The importance of language and meaning	44
3.6 Social Constructionism	49
4. THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE.	55
4.1 Description of a specific context	57
4.1.1 Historical background of the context	58
4.1.2 My relationship with the context.	58
4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to practical theological research	59
4.1.4 Positioning in terms of theological paradigm	60
4.2 The In-context experiences	61
4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers	61
4.2.2 Methodological implications	63
4.2.3 Ethical Guidelines	66
4.2.4 The effective move from “listening to experiences to” to “describing the experiences	67

4.3	The collaborative interpretation and description of experience	68
4.4	Description of experience and traditions of interpretations.	70
4.4.1	Valuable inputs from scientific community	71
4.4.2	Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research	71
4.5	Religious and spiritual aspects: God's presence	72
4.6	A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.	73
4.7	The development of alternative interpretations, that point beyond beyond the local community	74
5.	MY OWN JOURNEY AS PART OF JOURNEY TO A NEW LAND	75
	REFLECTION	77
	SUMMARY	78
 CHAPTER TWO		80
NARRATIVES IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY		80
2.1	INTRODUCTION	80
2.2	The Epistemology of "Untying the knot"	81
2.3	The Truth leads to Praxis	85
2.3.1	The action as praxis	88
2.3.2	The "now" is the crucial moment	89
2.4	Co-Travellers on a Social Constructionist Journey	92
2.4.1	Reconstruction	94
2.4.2	Story telling as Co-Construction	95
2.5	The journey with a New Story	96
2.5.1	The open door for the start of a new church	97
2.6	The Story of the new face of God	98
2.7	Experiencing a new beginning with a new story	104
2.7.1	This story identifies with the oral story-telling tradition	105
2.7.2	This story sensitised my co-researchers	108
2.8	Telling your story making your contribution	108
2.9	The metaphor of the "eye"	111
2.9.1	The Conversation between Priscilla and the researcher	112
2.9.2	"I would like to be the eye of this congregation"	113
2.9.3	The use of the metaphor in the story	114
2.9.4	The dream of care	117
2.10	Externalising Conversations	118
2.11	The fear of non-existence	122



2.11.1	The language of fear	124
2.12	Look around you and see what is happening	125
2.13	The Visionaries	127
2.14	The story of co-exploration	129
2.15	The risk to take a step in faith	131
2.16	God's church as the family of God	134
2.17	When the ears of people were deaf, God heard our cry	137
2.17.1	The story of the chronic asthma attacks	139
2.17.2	Listening to God Creates Room for introspection and research	141
2.18	The Church creates room for therapy and testimony	142
2.19	The youth should make a "reality check"	145
2.20	The story of spiritual upliftment and a new chapter in spirituality	147
2.20.1	The story of Craig	148
2.21	Interviews as conversations	149
2.22	Discussion of the stories	150
2.1	Moving towards thick descriptions	151
2.23	The story of love, care and support	152
	REFLECTION	152
	SUMMARY	153
	CHAPTER THREE	155
	PASTORAL CARE IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY	155
3.1	INTRODUCTION	155
3.2	Theology as a practical action	155
3.3	The stories are the foundation of pastoral care	157
3.3.1	Pastoral care as a journey	157
3.3.2	Pastoral care from a social constructionist perspective	159
3.3.3	Pastoral care as a group activity	161
3.4	The church as the family that communicates a family ministry.	162
3.5	The "self" in relation to others	165
3.5.1	Self as a consciousness or awareness	166
3.5.2	Care comes from the relational self	167
3.5.3	The church in relation to the self and others	169
3.5.4	Deconstructing the Self-Narrative	170
3.6	Togetherness is a challenge to reconstruct	172
3.6.1	Togetherness speaks about the presence of God	174
3.6.2	Recognition of God's presence does not always assure the	

smooth running of things.	176
3.7 Our faith motivated us never to look back	178
3.8 The caring community	180
3.9 Developing the new story of “Care Giving”	182
3.9.1 Structure of “Care Giving”	183
3.10 A community that connects	186
Reflection	189
Summary	191
CHAPTER FOUR	192
HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY	192
4.1 INTRODUCTION	192
4.2 Understanding of the biblical text	193
4.2.1 The Hermeneutical Paradigm	194
4.2.2 The text and reader comes together	195
4.3 A deepened spirituality in relation to the bible	198
4.3.1 My co-researcher’s interpretation of spirituality	200
4.4 Transformed lives through spiritual formation	201
4.5 There are no Quick fixes	202
4.6 Conversations initiated through Prayer	203
4.7 The imperative of spirituality as a God given opportunity of care	203
4.8 Wisdom speaks from a deepened spirituality	207
4.8.1 The three components of wisdom	208
4.9 The effectiveness of a healthy community	210
4.10 Professional identity in leadership and relationship	212
4.11 Diversity and conformity plays a role in healing	214
4.12 Accepting group Recognition	216
4.13 Acceptance sets you free to take a Risk.	218
4.14 The Voices of solidarity	220
4.15 Listening as a Component of Healing	221
4.16 Conversation as part of God’s Healing plan	224
4.17 Healing and Personal Accountability	225
4.18 Compassionate Ministry as an Enlightening Ministry	226
4.19 The New Story of ‘Care Giving’	227
REFLECTION	229
SUMMARY	230



CHAPTER FIVE	232
THE THEORY OF CARE AND SUPPORT IN RELATION TO THE NARRATIVE APPROACH	232
5.1 INTRODUCTION	232
5.2 The specific context as narrative	232
5.3 Historical background as part of a narrative journey undertaken	235
5.4 My relationship with the context as narrative	236
5.5 Epistemology as the narrative of understanding and knowledge	236
5.6 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm	238
5.7 The In-context experience as part of narration	239
5.8 The methodology as part of narrative analysis	240
5.9 The narration of ethical practice	241
5.10 A description of the experiences that I have heard	242
5.11 Narration is a two-way interpretation and description of experience	242
5.12 Descriptions of experience and traditions of interpretation	244
5.13 The narrative of the scientific community	244
5.14 Involvement of the co-researchers in the process of research	246
5.15 Their religious and spiritual aspects became a story of narrations	246
5.16 A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation	247
5.17 The development of alternative interpretations, that point beyond the local community	247
5.18 My new story as part of Journey to a New Land	248
REFLECTION	248
SUMMARY	249
CHAPTER SIX	250
REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH	250
6.1 INTRODUCTION	250
6.2 Reflection on Researched Topic(Title)	250
6.3 The overall aim and specific objectives	251
6.4 Reflection on the epistemological and theological points of Departure	252
6.4.1 Postmodern epistemological point of departure	253
6.4.2 Postfoundationalist practical theology	254
6.5 The Narrative Approach as a structured 'given'	256
6.5.1 The expertise of the co-researchers	256



6.5.1	The problem as storied	257
6.5.2	Deconstruction of the problem	257
6.6	Social constructionism	258
6.7	Feedback Loops	258
6.8	Reflection on the whole process of research	259
BIBLIOGRAPHY		261

CHAPTER ONE

POSITIONING

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 The research as a journey

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2.2 The Six Calls Model

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

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

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

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

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

1.2.3 Background of the Trinity Family Church

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. OVERALL AIM AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES.

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

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

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

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

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

3. EPISTEMOLOGY, POSITIONING AND METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following three conditions come from modernist knowledge:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.1 A postmodern epistemological point of departure

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

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

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

Postmodern theory rejects the following modern beliefs:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.2 Postfoundationalism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.3 Practical Theology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Narrative Theology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4.1 The “Not-knowing” position of the researcher

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I therefore maintained a consciousness about two realities:

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

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

(Rubin & Rubin 1995:12)

3.4.2 The expertise of the client

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

3.4.3 The problem is the problem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4.4 Deconstructing the problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4.5 Externalisation of conversations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.5 The importance of language and meaning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.6 Social Constructionism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

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

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

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

4.1 Description of a specific context.

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

4.1.1 Historical background of the context.

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

4.1.2 My relationship with the context.

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

4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to narrative practical theological research.

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

4.1.4 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm.

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

4.2 The in-context experiences

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

4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers

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

4.2.2 Methodological implications

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

4.2.3 Ethical guidelines.

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

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

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

4.3 The collaborative interpretation and description of experiences.

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

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

4.4.1 Valuable inputs from the scientific community

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

4.4.2 Involvement of co-researchers in the process of research

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

4.5 Religious and spiritual aspects: God's presence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.1 Description of a specific context.

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

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

4.1.1 Historical background of the context.

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

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

4.1.2 My relationship with the context.

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

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

4.1.3 Epistemological understanding with regard to practical theological research.

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

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

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

4.1.4 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm

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

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

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

4.2 The In-context experiences

4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers

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

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

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

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

4.2.2 Methodological implications

The method for this research entailed the following guidelines:

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

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

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

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

In doing this research I concentrated on the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.3 Ethical Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3. The collaborative interpretation and description of experiences.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4 Description of experience and traditions of interpretations.

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

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

4.4.1 Valuable inputs from scientific community

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

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

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

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

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

4.5 Religious and spiritual aspects: God's presence.

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

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

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

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

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

4.6 A description of experience, deepened through interdisciplinary investigation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVES IN A COMMUNITY OF LAITY

“UNTYING THE KNOT”

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 The epistemology of “Untying the knot”.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 The Truth leads to Praxis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.1 The Action as Praxis

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.2 The "now" is the crucial moment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 Co-Travellers on a Social Constructionist Journey

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.1 Reconstruction

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4.2 Story telling as Co-Construction

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

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

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

2.5 The Journey with a New Story

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

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

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

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

2.5.1 The opened door for the start of the new church

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 The Story of the new face of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.7 Experiencing a new beginning with a New Story.

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

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

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

2.7.1 This story identifies with the oral story-telling tradition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.7.2 This story sensitized my co-researchers.

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

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

2.8 Telling your story, making your contribution

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.9 The metaphor of the “eye”

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

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

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

2.9.1 The Conversation between Priscilla and the researcher.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.9.3 The use of the metaphor in the story

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.9.4 The dream of care.

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

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

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

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

2.10 Externalising conversations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.11 The fear of non-existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.11.1 The language of fear

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

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

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

2.12 Look around you and see what is happening.

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.13 The Visionaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.14 The story of co-exploration.

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

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

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

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

2.15 The risk in taking a step in faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.16 God's church as the family of God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.17.1 The story of the chronic asthma attacks

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.17.2 Listening to God creates room for introspection and research

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

What are the facts of becoming involved?

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

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

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

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

2.18 The Church creates room for therapy and testimony

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.19 The youth should make a "reality check"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.20.1 The story of Craig

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.21 Interviews as conversations

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

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

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

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

2.22 Discussion of the stories

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

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

2.22.1 Moving towards thick descriptions.

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

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

2.23 The story of love, care and support

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

REFLECTION

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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 Goolishian 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 become 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 of 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 (Foucault 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 some way 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. They 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 is 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 pseudofunctional 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 incomplete 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 Mental 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 quoted 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 worshipping 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 another 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.

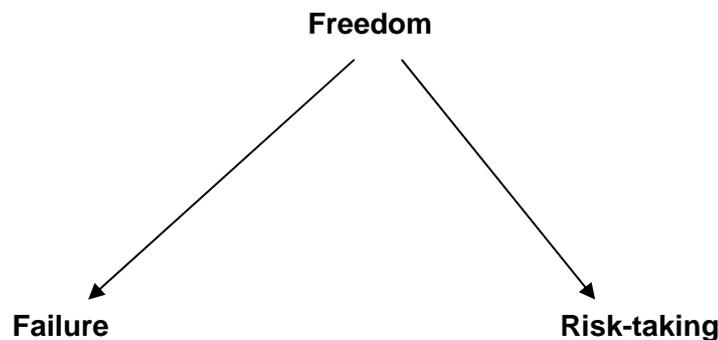
- Every member should play an informal participants role.
This point came from one of the members who felt that he has decided to give out grocery hampers at the end of December 2008 with any one in the congregation who feels comfortable to join him in this act. It also relates to Graham's experience 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:



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 without 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 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”.

CHAPTER 5

THE THEORY OF CARE AND SUPPORT IN RELATION TO THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

“THE SEVEN MOVEMENTS AS NARRATIVE”

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an explanation of how the methodology has been interpreted from a narrative perspective. The methodology describes the process of research as it transpired into the narrative of ‘Care Giving’. This action came from ordinary lay-people who were not trained in the tradition of pastoral care but did it from a perspective of love, care and support.

Chapters two, three and four consist of stories where the following were dormant. How people could offer or avail themselves, how they visited and listened to one another, how they invited one another for tea, coffee or sharing a meal, how they lent a car to someone in need, attending relatives’ funerals or give a helping hand or money in the preparation for the funeral, and watching the rugby match of the boys in the congregation (refer to chapter two, section 2.23). The previous chapters give evidence about a form of pastoral outreach or involvement that focuses attention on care and support with an outcome of healing and transformed lives. The previous chapters also illustrate talks of fear and disillusionment, misunderstandings and quarrels as opposed to the faith to survive. The chapters do not show any concrete problems being solved but illustrate the nurturing of caring relationships. The “narrative care giving approach” was a three-year research, which developed into a still standing narrative care giving family relationship. Together with the co-researchers we came up with a model with very specific themes which I, as the researcher, have merged with the narrative approach. As this research developed one identified it as an association that emerged from a communication of expectations, hurt, inadequacies, pleasure, happiness, contentment, encouragements and needs.

5.2. The specific context as narrative

As has already been said in chapter one, section 4.1 the ‘Seven Movements Model’ research procedure is from the specific context described from the perspective of a specific group of lay people in the Valhalla area of Pretoria. When I was invited to

write the story of this congregation I looked at it from a specific story of why people started to care for and support one another. My co-researchers were concerned about the writing of their story as a history for generations to come. My reason for writing this research in this style was to allow the readers of this research to keep track of a specific situation where the action of one character in this research called co-researcher could affect the others in the same context.

The specific context shows how the characters of the different co-researchers fitted into the past and present context of their story. I agree with what Emmott (1997:175) says that: "It is not necessary for the reader to only identify and monitor the context, but also to identify which version of the character is being referred to at any particular point in the text." The information concerning the specific context provided me with knowledge about how I as the researcher could group my co-researchers to add value to this research. In using a specific context I had to guard against making assumptions concerning my co-researchers experiences on their journey.

The description of the specific context shows aspects of where the research was located in history. For me the history was important because it helped me to locate the character of my co-researchers in a local context. In the different stories the location every time referred back to this specific context, which is the story of the Trinity Family Church. This specific context starts with the action of every co-researcher and was linked to the main action as it affected the other co-researchers. The actions of my co-researchers affected the involvement of other co-researchers. The historical background helped me to run the interview sessions with the feedback sessions from a specific background. With reference to chapter three which deals with the pastoral section of this research we realized that looking at the 'Six Calls Model' the co-researchers were confronted with their own stories and how they would go about understanding their mission. The stories of most of my co-researchers changed the knowledge or beliefs of the others who were present in the discussions. In doing this they together delved into a narrative of 'Care Giving'. If I could just refer to the first story of Priscilla and her husband in chapter two then one would see how their action involved a whole group of people. The description of the context is actually also a reflection of where they come from and where they are concerning their own narrative. Their reflection and interaction with the described context brought them to new themes as revealed in chapters three and four. To be able to determine the effects of the action on the other co-researchers I needed to concentrate on everybody who was present in the context. According to Emmott it is

important to note that physical actions by individuals have a direct physical effect on another person. “To judge the effects of an action on other characters, the reader needs to have a continuing awareness of who is present in the context.” (Emmott 1997:103) A description of the specific context gives the reader the details of the time and location and how to read the story or research from the information as it occurred in the narratives in the present and the past narratives which act as a “flashback”.

Emmott refers to the definition that narratologists give to narratives as events in sequence often with a causal link between them (Emmott 1997:105). This fact agrees with what Morgan (2000: 5) sees that a story can be associated with and understood within the context of events linked in sequence across time according to a plot.

According to Morgan stories are brought into the context of therapy, which according to my interpretation of step one of the ‘Seven Movements Model’ is that a specific context is described. I used the description of the specific context to understand the rest of the stories of my co-researchers and used it in the process of reasoning together as to why they are on this journey together. Emmott speaks about inferences that the reader needs to make about what is not mentioned when trying to understand a story. The inferences that Emmott speaks about are the conclusions that the reader should make or reach on the basis of knowledge or facts. The portrayal of the context gives the exact setting of the action of the research. (Emmott 1997:105)

The description of the specific context is used to give the reader information about each new context, as it occurs to hold this information in mind as specific events are described. The description of the specific context shows that all the stories should not be read in conjunction with every story in this research. Certain metaphors like “the eye” or themes could not be understood without the description of the context. The description of the context helps the reader to understand who the co-researchers are and how and where they are located in the research. For me as the researcher the explanation of the context helped me to identify the themes, which helped the co-researchers and me to move from one scene to another. The different themes helped me to introduce new topics or provided embedded discussion about the current topic. The depiction of the context is to orientate the readers into recognizing the context, interpreting events, and assessing the effects of the events on the

individuals present. Besides the individuals the described context will help the readers to understand the different ways of narrative comprehension.

The description of the context helped my co-researchers to listen to their background and history as they gave evidence of the setting of the action of the story. In the writing of this research I became aware that when two things are in the same context they can have an inferred effect on each other. The description of the specific context was important to set the scene for this research and to show how the co-researchers related to their context. I compare the description of the context with the contextual framework as defined by Emmott (1997:121) as the mental store of information about the current context, built up from the text itself and from conclusions made from the text.

5.3 Historical background as part of a narrative journey undertaken.

Vande Kemp (1991:182) says that the “core metaphor of contextualism is the historic event, not the past event but the one alive in the present.” People are historical beings and it is often from the history of people that we can understand them. As I understand Ricoeur (1991:66) if one wants to understand history one needs to look at a condition, which portrays a situation, which needs to be understood and interpreted from a certain perspective. I used the historical background of my co-researchers to help the readers of this thesis to orientate themselves in the situation of the co-researchers. I agree with Kleine Schriften as quoted by Ricoeur that people cannot remove themselves from historical becoming and cannot be distanced from it (Ricoeur 1991:73).

By making use of the historical background a picture is given of how the stories of my co-researchers occurred against a general and historical location and how it continued in their current context. The historical background is of great importance in how the rest of this research took place until the new direction occurred, although some of my co-researchers played a role in the action part of this research and others not. The historical background helped me to express in this research that the presence and the stories of the other co-researchers were important and that the overall context has changed. Emmott (1997:142) speaks about a contextual configuration and describes it as when one character is circled in a story by the author, it does not mean that the other characters are not present or important in that location. Contextual configuration actually tells the reader who is present in a location at a particular time and not affected. The description of the historical

background is in itself a narrative that explains the history and the way of thinking of the researcher. It links the action of the co-researchers to the precedent activities of other Methodist's in the past. The historical background is also a connection between my co-researchers' Methodist past in conjunction with mine but also in relation to their story and my current story as coordinator of the training of lay people in the MCSA.

5.4 My relationship with the context is a narrative.

The historical background of my co-researchers became the point of departure for my own reflection. I reflected on the historical background conscious of my relationship with the context. I realized that there is a connection between my co-researchers and me, which refers back to my Methodist roots and my relationship with them through this research. In my current position as coordinator for the training of lay ministries the stories of my co-researchers are stories that I continuously hear about congregations that cannot afford the leadership or services of a full time minister. It reflects the stories of laypeople who are not taken care of by the church and her leaders and how some laypeople just take initiative to take care of one another. It also reflects the stories of laypeople who have a calling on their lives.

Lay people are eager to learn more about their ministry in the Church. The "Six Calls Model" of Journey to a New Land as developed by the Methodist Church has been misinterpreted and the people called Methodist realize that their own situation and story continuously needs to be told and retold so that they can find new meaning for being involved in ministry. The old programmes and models for planting and managing churches need to be adjusted according to the context of a specific congregation.

5.5 Epistemology as the narrative of understanding and knowledge

As mentioned and explained in chapter one section 3 and 4.1.3 it was important for me to be clear about my understanding of epistemology as I progressed through this research because it anticipated the methodology and the way knowledge was maintained. Explanation and understanding brings about the epistemology, which actually shows an analysis of my way of thinking and talking about concepts and things concerning this research. I was sensitized by a postmodern postfoundationalist epistemology in which I accepted the narratives of my co-researchers as local knowledge and an understanding of the narrative story as the explanation of the narrative operation. In this research I could agree with Daiute and

Lightfoot (2004:x) that “Narrative analysis” is a place holder for different ways of conceptualizing the storied nature of human development.” My experience and understanding of the narrative through listening to the stories of my co-researchers was to look at all the narratives in the narrative of the research. I then understood what Daiute and Lightfoot described as the narrative that may be a metaphor for a life course, a developmental theory, a reference to cultural force, and/or the method for interpreting oral or written narrative discourse (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:x)

In analyzing the narrative I also understood it as a metaphor, which involves an explanation from a psychological event. It consists of information and comments about the implication of that information. I observed and agree with Daiute and Lightfoot (2004: x) that consistent with the previous information the narrative analysis relies on themes, mostly drawn from literary theory, to explain the change of circumstances in peoples’ lives or interpreted lives, which includes time, truth, beauty, character and conflict. The narratives of my co-researchers characterized their values and practices of care and support as they expressed what life should be like, and what should be announced or hidden. My knowledge of narratives helped me to understand the narratives not as separate but as specific discourse forms, occurring as visible forms and ideas of cultural values and personal subjectivity.

The description of the narratives of the co-researchers speaks about postmodern thinking with regard to the research, and how new experience could emerge from it. From a postmodern point of view the community life of my co-researchers was understood in the form of a family, and they claimed that their church relationships influenced the dynamics of family life. Their stories speak about an interconnectedness of church-family life with relationships anchored in the individual stories of the co-researchers. My co-researchers could only get to this perception of interconnectedness through their experience and their life together in the church as a family in a community. Through their situations my co-researchers became consciously aware of how they grew emotionally and spiritually. It is only through their experience that they could know what they know about how their world operates and the challenges they still need to deal with.

In the beginning of this research their understanding of a practice of care is to be mindful of people’s problems, struggles and how they could care and support people to enable them to cope with their situation. The story changed after they experienced situations when people who had been helped (refer to those who only come to fill

their baskets) left the church. They realized that people not only need the physical care and support but they need to be cared for spiritually as well. The reflection, re-telling and deconstruction of the stories helped my co-researchers to regard spirituality as an important dimension of care and support. The moment they looked at this important aspect in the discovery group people started looking at an internal change. This is the new understanding of an old story.

The narrative is an active process, which through analysis can be differently approached and defined by researchers to address the specific questions that could guide a research and reflection on it. My epistemology helped me to understand narratives as discourses with cultural meanings, and interpretations that guided perceptions, thoughts, interaction and actions. From the narrative discourses my co-researchers could re-organize their lives, with regard to social relations, interpretations of the past, and plans for their future. For me it was clear that they needed to be guided as to how they tell their stories which influenced how they perceived, remembered and prepared their future events. To understand the narratives I needed to understand that the meaning of discourse applied to all forms of human communication and symbolization – verbal and nonverbal alike.

My epistemological understanding helped me to guide my co-researchers in understanding their narratives, through interpretation, reflection and interaction on their narratives and they realized that their situation and their narratives are different and unique.

5.6 Positioning in terms of a theological paradigm

I found it very challenging but soothing to read the bible with ordinary people and was confronted with the pluralistic approach, which rejects 'one true theology'. I noticed the important role that the bible played in the theological reflection of my co-researchers who were not theologians. I was immediately challenged by the fact that to do theology in context was to take seriously the biblical understanding of my co-researchers. There was a constant movement between a trained theologian and individuals who understand the bible from what they heard in the past.

I was challenged with the question 'what do they want from faith, belief or religious convictions?' The bible studies brought many concerns about 'how and what to believe' to the table of discussion. When I spoke about 'theology' in a very simple way it felt as if I had opened an area or a space (like one of the co-researchers

Graham said, a treasure) in their lives, which they knew was there and if they could just have dug a little deeper they would have found it. I realized that for me to read the bible with them was to move into their worlds and to be converted to a sense of family-community consciousness. I guarded against the temptation to interpret the bible for them and had to accept their interpretation, which took long hours of discussion and explanation. It was together through the reflection of their experience in conjunction with the Bible that they found new meaning. I could sense this process was not easy for them because they realized that to understand themselves they needed to try to understand God and vice versa and even the understanding of the rest of the group. This narrative was deconstructed, as they could understand themselves in the image of God.

Through questioning I invited them to unpack their understanding of God and how God fitted into their stories. This moved into a moment of explaining and elaborating on their circumstances and how it fitted into the previous story or the general background as mentioned in chapter one section 1.2.1. The deconstruction of the faith stories helped them to be more open concerning their lives and the challenges they experienced. I can still remember the conversations around the “Fear of non-existence” and “The risk to take a step in faith” as discussed in chapter two section 2.15. This discussion opened my eyes to how they perceived their faith and the actions of God. As a practical theologian the deconstruction of their problem even helped me to guide the co-researchers to gain a wider perspective of their experience, which moved them into the narrative of healing and transformation.

5.7 The In-context experiences as part of narration

The In-context experiences could only be described from the narrative of those who were willing to participate in this research. When I started this research I only had pieces of information, which were disconnected fragments parts of what I heard from my co-researchers that I needed to bring together. From these small pieces of information, the beginning of a story located in a particular group of people was constructed. To bring these small pieces together I selected my co-researchers, but this was such an intense process because they were very firm and strict on what was important and what needed to be written down. In using the narrative approach the chosen participants became the selected co-researchers who brought us to the essence of this research. The in-context experiences became a journey of co-exploration where hidden talents and abilities became explored and known. The process of co-exploration became an intense listening process and the use of

questions that orientated them to open up opportunities that helped them to bypass the problems that had delayed them on their journey.

The problems that they had on the journey were:

- They thought that care and support was only a social need but in the deconstruction of the story they saw the spiritual dimension of it as well.
- They needed to accept one another so that each congregant could play a role.
- Although they were together did they lack the freedom to talk so that everybody's story could be heard?

It is true what Rubin and Rubin (1995:8) say: It is important to get further than everyday listening in what one hears and regards as meaningful. I agree with them that the process of intense listening to the discussions helped me to obtain more depth and detail on a narrower range of topics than what I would have received from ordinary conversations. This process is time consuming because people need to elaborate, present incidents and clarifications, and have lengthy discussions about certain events. To be able to describe these events I needed to concentrate on the “thick” descriptions, which gave more detail about certain stories. The richness of the stories in conversation revealed the complex interweaving of my co-researchers' experiences and memories with problematic issues, like imagination, fictional and factual stories.

In the narration of the stories I learned about the shared knowledge and beliefs of my co-researchers as an essential source of an educational and caring learning experience. The in-context experiences gave insight into the process whereby the cultural self emerged from memory reconstructions.

5.8 The methodology as part of narrative analysis.

The whole mindset behind this research was the telling or writing up of a story of a specific church congregation. As mentioned in chapter one 1.2.3 this group of people was concerned about the correct information in the form of a narrative concerning their congregation or church. They were mindful of real documentation based on sound knowledge as information for their generations to come concerning the origin and history of their congregation.

To hold on to the above mentioned I needed to select the five families as mentioned in chapter one, section 4.2.2. These five families started a story, which I had to arrange through conversational interviews and contextual bible studies. The telling or the writing of the stories became events of telling social stories, which in some cases became personal and unique. In the analysis of the narrative I appreciated everybody's story and agree with Dauite and Lightfoot (2004:115) that the social nature of narrating is often overlooked by research and education. These conversational interviews served their purpose because in the rereading of this document my co-researchers were thrilled and amazed that we together could come up with such a document. This showed them how much value they had added to certain stories and what they discarded as not important. For my co-researchers this, as they sometimes called it "conversational " exercise, became a medium of identity development, healing, learning and planning for the future. The use of the methodology as mentioned in chapter one 4.2.2 brought us to an activity and process of social unity involving interactions among individuals' values and actions. The process of narration involved bible studies and leaders meetings where people were allowed to speak, argue and interpret their journey of care and support. In conjunction with the literature a new story (the story of care giving) has been developed. This was an attentive process of listening to be able to capture the correct mindset and information in the process of narration. The methodology brought us to the point that narrative texts are inter-subjective because it belongs to the context as well as to the authors.

5.9 The narration of ethical practice

The ethics behind this research became a narrative that involved my own integrity in relation to the honesty and professional behaviour of my co-researchers. The stories also contained the unheard evidence that I could sense my co-researchers could not divulge. This became a process of negotiation of consent and putting some of the facts on the table. I regard this whole ethical episode as a story that is part of this research but guarded against my own will on how I would like to write the information. I totally depended and trusted on the information and contribution made by my co-researchers. They were also so ethically inclined and would not divulge information that would be to the detriment of someone in the group. For me this research was an ethical venture or activity. As we journeyed in this research people started creating sound relationships with each other and even I developed relationships with people I never knew before and those I knew but was not on a close footing with.

This whole research moved everybody into a moral commitment towards one another which changed their mindset concerning socialization. I am in agreement with Freedman and Combs (1996:265) that we witnessed how people could transform themselves and their lives in preferred ways within relationships. I could really delve into and experience what Freedman and Combs further say that from a postmodern perspective ethics focuses on particular people in particular experiences, without one-size-fits-all universal truth claims.

The ethical narration of the stories taught me that every story was told from a specific perspective because there are different and competing perspectives and judgments of a story.

5.10 A description of the experiences that I have heard.

The shift from listening to the experience in describing the stories was not easy one, and I stand in agreement with Sturges (1992:5) that every narrative is faced by the problem of creating narrative space for itself and thus demonstrating and testifying to its own narrativity. There are no rules for narrative construction in the way that there are rules for sentence construction. He further explains it by saying that one cannot speak of a grammatical or well-formed narrative in the sense that one can speak of a sentence (Sturges 1992:5). The “grammar of a narrative” is not about a set of pre-existent rules and definitions, which have to be carefully integrated and then cautiously applied. It is important to give a comprehensive account of the narrative but it is imperative for the main event to surface and to be understood. It was important for me to work within a framework of possibilities, which could not be determined by a set of rules or even grammar but have proved their worth on an empirical or conventional basis. To be able to present the stories I actively constructed the data that I heard. It is the narrative, which contains narrativity, and this narrativity will precisely include the process by which I as the researcher was encouraged to actively construct the story from the information given to me. In the stories I needed to identify which were narrative events and which were non-narrative. The non-narrative events were the events in the narrative that were accommodated as part of the narrative.

5.11 Narration is a two-way interpretation and description of experience

Muntigl quotes Garfinkel (1967:31) saying that the interpretive work used to achieve common understanding has an ‘inner’ temporal course. He continues by saying that our practical activities, reasonings and understanding are therefore dependent

actions that continuously evolve over time. “In this way, social actions are constantly reflexively constituting and reconstituting the activities that shape and are reshaped by them.” (Muntigl 2004:28)

When people speak to one another they are confronted with an object of perception. This object represents the world or a social action and people apply their common sense knowledge to understand or make sense of the object Muntigl (2004:29). says this does not mean that objects or perceptions are mapped out onto a pre-existing underlying pattern. He explains Garfinkel’s clarification that an object of perception (i.e. instances) constructs the pattern and is interpreted on the basis of some pattern. Patterns are not complete but instead incompletely specified categories of objects or experience. For a pattern to be applied a situated context needs to be interpreted.

In the interpretation and description of experiences I need to find more clarity in what my co-researchers meant in the telling of the stories. In questioning I could sometimes not find the answers or they could not respond in a clear fashion. In the process I needed to restructure some of my questions until they were comfortable with what they meant. I continuously found myself going back into the past of the story so that the important part of the story could surface. This helped me to get a more detailed analysis and descriptions of what my co-researchers’ social practices included. What was interesting to me was the competence of my co-researchers to describe and interpret their actions which again showed me that social action is contextual, because every time when we went back to specific information on which I needed clarity I realized that social action is shaped by the prior interaction. It was important for me not to give each bit of information, because social actions are spontaneous and are constitutive of the activities in which they occur. Social actions are not regulated by rules but, controlled by prior actions. Muntigl (2004:32) Riccer (1974:179) interprets the art of interpretation in comparison with Freud by saying that in any event there is a sort of comprehension, understanding, or production of intelligibility.

Any person could immediately see the deliberate attempts by the co-researchers as they enter into the worlds of one another in a way that will falsify the common tendency to blame either themselves or others for their troubles, fear and hopelessness. “Social constructionism focuses specifically on the normative

narratives, or social discourses, which both inform and are informed by the meanings people attach to their reality”. (Doan 1997:128-133)

Doan’s statement concerning social constructionism brings out an understanding that could link with what happened in the life of this church. Social constructionism consists of a libratory effect due to the existence of an extreme possible number of alternative constructions of events. The focus of these events is the different meanings with which people’s worlds become improved and they can move forward. The libratory message and action becomes clear in every event when people take themselves and others as constructions and not objective descriptions. Social constructionism helps people to try different avenues to interpret their lives. Parker (1998:13) states that social constructionism seems to offer the same basic message on a wider social scale because of its libratory connotation.

5.12 Descriptions of experience and traditions of interpretations

It is important to note that history plays an amicable role in the interpretation of traditions. In chapter one section 4.4. I mentioned Foucault as quoted by Van Huyssteen that when we enter an interdisciplinary situation we already consist of knowledge that has been influenced by history. Traditions also developed from social actions, which later became a meta-narrative. The narrative research as been understood and endorsed by Müller helped most of us to understand the tradition of interpretation. Our common knowledge has been formed by discourses, which have been understood as systems. In the interpretation of the stories we tend to use or relate this knowledge within a specific context.

5.13 The narrative of the scientific community

The scientific community were people who became interested in this research when my researchers and I invited them to a few meetings of discussion. They were the following people: Social worker, psychologist, two Methodist ministers who spent a day during a weekend seminar with my co-researchers, an educational therapist and a Commander in the Navy (SANDF)

The reason for inviting them was that this structure of social assistance is what my co-researchers were used to in the military and I also respected my co-researcher’s choice of a scientific community so that they could still feel part of this research as a journey.

The narrative of the scientific community was viewed in the form of a group activity, which shows participation in the action that has been researched. Valuable discussions and inputs arose from closer contact and discussions with the scientific community. The narrative of the scientific community was in the form of a group communication where intense meaning was given to the stories. It was a process of questions and answers and even a reflection and response at a later stage. Discussions and talks were facilitated and led by one of the members of the congregation and it was amazing how the essence of this research and the story of 'Care Giving' could surface right through the process.

As the discussion developed the research community became interested in the story of "the eye". They felt that this metaphor became a narrative of action, which formed the centre of a process that actually gave birth to a course of action for healing and transformation and developed into a new story of 'Care Giving'. This endorsed the fact that to be able to show or give "care" comes from the organ of the "eye". The social worker in the group made a remarkable statement in saying that: "What the eye sees is what will move the heart". The primary focus of "the eye" became a narrative of a mission in action.

The group activity of the research distinguished between an objective observer and the subjective subject. Through interaction and questioning my co-researchers could become the active listeners in reflecting on their own stories with the aim of transformation and a new story. The interaction of the scientific community also brought them into a narrative in which they form part of a church and military narrative of guidance and support. They felt that their "eyes" had been opened now to what they see as how lay people and sub-ordinates view a mission of care and support in church and military structures. They also became enlightened to a discourse on that they also have neglected others by not looking through the "eyes" of the community and how the community viewed them. The thoughts and ideas of the co-researchers opened up a new story and a new venture for the scientific community. Emmott (1997: 76) expresses the fact that the factors of the discourse should be taken into consideration to interpret sentences.

The statements that my co-researchers made spoke about a discourse that existed over time and represents the total of all written, spoken or recorded thoughts. The discourse of care and support opened up a new interpretation and ideas about 'Care Giving', that has been accepted by the scientific community. The narrative of the

scientific community helped the co-researcher understand that they are active participants in this research and not people on which the research is projected.

5.14 Involvement of the co-researchers in the process of research

According to the introductory sessions of this research my co-researchers are the forerunners and active participants of this research. Their involvement narrated the whole process of research. The process of action and reflection helped them look at their situation as a process and not a once off act. Their interaction came from a willingness to actively participate from a perspective of care and support. They really helped me to understand their stories as I grouped their responses into categories of similar ideas, concepts and themes. They have been very mindful of how I have interpreted their stories and corrected me and even themselves so that real evidence could become known.

The sessions with the scientific community helped my co-researchers to view themselves in a different light. Their interaction and answers to questions brought them to the conclusion that there is no “one-size-fits-all” model, relating to the ‘Six Calls Model’. The actual design for the mission of this congregation resulted from a journey of open-ended process and not as the product or strategy (as designed in the Six Calls Model) developed ahead of time. From a practical theological narrative perspective, their involvement centred around discovering, acknowledging and deconstruction of beliefs, ideas and practices of an all-embracing culture in which they live.

5.15 Their religious and spiritual aspects became a story of narration

My co-researchers’ knowledge about God was firstly sighted and acknowledged by the meta-narrative that we all grew up with as Christians. As they were confronted by their own story they realized that they are a people with a language, which could not be separated from their actions. It is so true, as mentioned by de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1994:204), that when a community is bonded they become mindful of the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit and use them in a mutual ministry for the good of the whole body. This action can only become sound through the language which shaped their consciousness to care and support. This has been allowed by an opportunity of hearing and understanding their religious and spiritual comprehension and experiences of God’s presence in their own language and use of language.

The language of wisdom moved them into an action of compassionate ministry as they experienced the presence of God. All their biblical thoughts and ideas concerning God changed. This moved them to understand that if God is a God of continuous action then their actions need to become visible (refer to chapter four, section 4.3 on prevenient grace). To be able to do this their spirituality took on a new dimension and they experienced a process of deep thought as they became sensitive to their own healing and transformation. The telling and re-telling of the stories further developed the process of healing and transformation.

5.16 A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.

The interdisciplinary investigation helped me to approach this research from specific conceptions. The merging of the postmodern postfoundationalist, narrative and social constructionist perspectives allowed me to describe the experiences of my co-researchers. The common language of these fields integrated the different perspectives that enhanced deconstruction and emancipation. A new way of interpretation has been developed and opened up new areas of research. The literature from modern and foundationalist perspectives helped me understand this research from a process where I could compare and argue my co-researchers stories in the process of development. Through the use of different interdisciplinary discussions could I determine and decide on a specific research structure. It also helped my co-researchers and me in deciding which themes to use in the interpretation of the stories. The different interdisciplinary approaches came from a scientific, religious and social background.

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

As the research developed the ideas and beliefs of my co-researchers changed and together we looked at a process of transformation, which gave them a new interpretation of a "Journey to a New Land". It was now about their journey of a new story of 'Care Giving'. Different stories emerged with an in depth discussion of the stories and as the new themes were analysed and interpreted.

Together with the co-researchers we engaged in a process of deconstruction and reached a holistic understanding of care and support through the process of social constructionism. The dissemination of the research was done through group discussions and seminars. This thesis can now become a document of important

information for use at church synods, training sessions for lay people, church council meetings and policy-making committees.

5.18 My new story as part of Journey to a New Land.

This research has told me that the deconstruction of the story of my co-researchers helped to find new meaning in their new story of 'Care Giving'. My interpretation of care is to move beyond one's own perception of care through narration and the process of social constructionism. This led to the perception of the laity as people with special gifts and abilities and the opportunity to voice their concerns with regard to mission in action. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa can still hold on to the belief that the ministry of the priesthood of all believers can continue between lay ministries and the ordained. The "Six Calls Model" can still affirm this partnership but with the acknowledgement that there is no "one-size-fits-all" method in ministry even if we come from the same background.

REFLECTION

The methodology has been explained as from a narrative perspective and how this gave evidence to a ministry of 'Care Giving'. The pastoral care given by the co-researchers showed how ordinary people could take care of one another without the necessary theory of pastoral care or counseling. Every step of the 'Seven Movements Model' are described in the form of a narrative which still expresses the essence of this research.

The written story also became a new narrative, which will later serve as a kind of historical background. According to the 'Seven Movements Model' every bit of information as mentioned in the different steps is very important. The information shows the plot, important scenes and the development of the stories into a unique outcome that affirms my co-researchers' plan, action, feelings, vision, thoughts, beliefs, abilities and commitment. "Unique outcomes can be the past, present and/or the future." (Morgan 2000:52)

The unique outcome shows that the mission has been accomplished in the form of a new story of 'Care Giving'. From the start this was the focus of my co-researchers concerning their vision and mission. The unique outcome could only transpire in a local set up that represented their story. To be able to enhance this achievement it was necessary for the historical background and the specific context to be taken into consideration with the help of interviews.

In the interviews the action part made it possible to consider all the stories as valuable information. The context and history of my co-researchers helped the reader to understand this research from the participation and activities of the co-researchers. This vision coincides with my relationship with the context and I could use the information as documented by the context to give more evidence in the stories.

The whole methodology in conjunction with the epistemology brought about a narrative interpretation of the stories and an intense development of the research. Narration is a two-way communication.

SUMMARY

The previous chapters explain the make-up of the whole structure and development of this research. The chapters one to four find essence and explanation of development in chapter five. Chapter five is written in a story form as this whole research speaks about the stories and interpretation of the narratives of my co-researchers.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings out the importance of this research as an in depth study of pastoral care as a ministry that is not only for the ordained ministry but also for the laity. It is research done from a specific tradition, which speaks about a Methodist background belief and development of a “Six Calls Model”. The stories of my co-researchers corresponded with the Methodist tradition of the “Priesthood of all believers” as discussed in chapter one, section 5.

The writing down of the stories took shape and developed into this research project and the introduction of a new story of ‘Care Giving’. The research shows a participatory event of people who are journeying with one another in a process of care and support. This chapter reviews the research narrative from a perspective of a postmodern postfoundationalist social constructionist narrative approach. This participatory research shows the participation of the researcher as a participant observer and not someone that looked upon the co-researchers as objects. The participatory action research valued the inputs of my co-researchers as they gave meaning to the process of this research. The narratives of pastoral care were interpreted and understood from a perspective of experience that was told through the process of re-telling, reformulation, reconstruction and co-construction.

This chapter shows the intertwining of the postmodern, postfoundationalist practical theology as practiced in a social constructionist narrative approach. It also reflects my experience of the research process as narrative, which resulted in a process of healing and transformation in my own life and ministry in the MCSA.

6.2 Reflection on Researched Topic (Title)

My co-researchers and I together formulated the topic (Narratives of pastoral care, healing and transformation in a community of laity) of this research. The reason for involving them was that they invited me to write down the history of their congregation which developed into a process of participatory action research. Although this does not divulge any traces of Methodism it does entail some of the memories and historicity of the Methodist roots of some of my co-researchers and my own. Although the aim of the research was clear, it still was very difficult to come up

with a suitable topic. Different titles were discussed but due to the experiences of my co-researchers this topic was decided upon. The topic was only accepted and thought through after the research had been in motion for almost two years and was finalised with the help of literature studies. The reason why it took us two years was that I wanted to make certain whether my co-researchers understood the process of research and that they were serious concerning the writing up of this research. At this stage my co-researchers were not sure whether this congregation would develop the way it has develop thus far.

The topic speaks about specific narratives which centre around the stories of my co-researchers and how we interpreted those stories. From my perception as researcher it speaks about my involvement in the training of lay people who serve the Methodist Church of Southern Africa at different church levels.

This topic can only be understood from the interpretation of the stories of how pastoral care was applied through the application of the methodology. At the end of this research the same topic could be used to evaluate the new story of 'Care Giving'. My co-researchers felt that the topic helped them to concentrate on their experiences as real and important as the research developed.

6.3 The overall aim and specific objectives

Narrative research is an approach that emphasizes the telling, listening, re-telling, deconstruction, re-construction and the co-construction of the stories of the research participants and helps the researcher to interpret and understand these stories. The overall aim and the specific objectives could only be developed after I had met a few times with my co-researchers concerning their journey.

The different times of meeting and talking about the writing up of their stories made me pose the following question to my co-researchers, which became the research question: Is it possible for ordinary lay people to start and manage a church based on love, care and support and what stumbling blocks could stand in the way of such a goal?

My co-researchers told their stories and together we listened to them as narratives of love, care and support. In the telling of the stories we went through processes of reconstruction, re-authoring and co-construction ultimately to understand their experiences, which were painful and had become a problem to them. The

methodology helped us to listen and explore the spiritual qualities of these stories and their connection, which brought about healing and transformation. The stories which were explored in the process of listening, were the stories that moved this congregation to interpret their understanding of care and support. Chapters three and four show evidence of unique outcomes that helped them to re-tell and re-construct these stories. This process was conducted through questions and answers until my co-researchers formulated the unique outcomes. This was an attempt from my side to take on a “not-knowing” position, which led to the development of a new story of ‘Care Giving’. The opening up of explanations and interpretations concerning the unique outcomes helped me to understand the things that they see as important for their mission. The adherence to the “not-knowing” position gave my co-researchers the freedom to develop their own perception of what their new story means to them.

The co-construction of the new story developed a new meaning, which was understood in the light of spiritual transformation and healing. The importance of healing in their context was further interpreted through the use of the literature. I feel that the essence of healing and transformation as objectives of this research has been dealt with in the light of re-telling, re-construction and co-construction. The discovery group meetings were used to re-tell all the stories in conjunction with the rest of the stories of the congregation. The discovery group was an opportunity for people to listen to their stories and even to my interpretation of it and to hear the interpretation of the scientific community. People expressed their feelings towards one another and how they moved into a process of spiritual transformation that through the processes of re-construction and co-construction could re-author their lives, which then brought about healing and spiritual transformation.

6.4 Reflection on the epistemological and theological points of departure

As the researcher I approached this research from the knowledge that was at hand, which I could only interpret when my co-researchers told it to me in the way they perceived their own knowledge. The field of knowledge from which I approached the research process was embedded in a pastoral postmodern postfoundationalist theological practice and is introduced from a subjective and personal narrative approach. In this approach I have focussed on an empowering and spiritual process of change, which involved the social constructionist concept.

Epistemologically I tried to interpret the narratives of my co-researchers through telling, re-telling, re-formulation, deconstruction and externalisation to understand their experiences. It was also a process through which they understood their experiences. Through discussions and reformulations we together looked collectively at their stories to find meaning in them. This process has been upheld with the interaction of foundationalist, rationalist, modernist and other theories to show how these theories supported or opposed the belief system of my co-researchers and me and how we formulated certain perceptions of experience.

6.4.1 Postmodern epistemological point of departure

This research took place within a framework of local knowledge, which refers to contextualization through the telling of stories. The local knowledge was interpreted from the postmodern paradigm that rejects the belief that knowledge is universally constructed. My co-researchers were invited to give accounts of their lives and of the meanings they derived from aspects of their experiences. We used the stories to uphold the postmodern idea that through the understanding of their experiences my co-researchers could find meaning and purpose in their lives. This could only happen when my co-researchers and I could put their realities together through social construction in a process of listening.

The process of research made it clear that the knowledge and experiences of my co-researchers have been influenced by a Methodist tradition and through reflection on their experiences we came to the conclusion that there are certain ways of doing things (refer to the “Six Calls Model”) but that they also have a story to tell through their own experiences. This was one of the unique outcomes that affirmed their mission and the belief that they can run a church without the assistance or leadership of a fulltime minister. The answer from a pluralistic approach or listening to other voices and ways of doing of things, rejected a “one-size-fits-all” model approach. The participation from the scientific community in the process of listening acknowledged the fact that postmodernism is an approach that discards an objective approach to knowledge and accommodates subjective and personal narratives and contexts of reality. The pluralistic approach was further enhanced by interdisciplinary discussions and reasoning from a psychological background in relation to pastoral theology and how my co-researchers understood their experience. Chapter three gives clear evidence of the interdisciplinary interaction through the use of literature and the scientific community. Through a postmodernist approach I was confronted with the issues of my co-researchers which made them feel insecure and fearful, but

in the process of re-telling and deconstruction we could together interpret their stories and describe their experiences. The insecurity and fears could be critically evaluated in the bible studies and other discussions. My co-researchers felt empowered in the co-construction of their new story of 'Care Giving', because they understood their situation from different angles of thought but could also give their own opinion. My co-researchers' togetherness in this new story implemented a reality that the emergence of their new experience gave meaning to them and can also give meaning to the rest of the world.

6.4.2 Postfoundationalist practical theology

When we look at theology as a discipline that critically reflects on people's experiences of faith in a specific situation one can say that this research adhered to the process of reflection and interaction from a theological point of departure. The intense move from an objective approach to knowledge represented a postmodern shift as characterized and reflected by the co-researcher's personal narratives. The postfoundationalist approach gave opportunity to speak and reflect from a personal faith perspective in conjunction with other disciplines. The epistemology of postfoundationalism recognizes the collective resources of human rationality in different modes of reflection which points further than the barriers of our own epistemic communities in cross-contextual, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 1997:4).

This research adhered to a local and practical condition, which affected our approach with regard to care and support and even changed our mindset. In this research we continuously focussed on the experienced knowledge and understanding that developed from the personal faith experiences of my co-researchers. These experiences have been told, discussed and evaluated and gave rise to a process of healing and spiritual transformation through the interpretation of other voices like those of the scientific community and those who criticised my co-researchers through the spreading of rumours.

My co-researchers explored the experiential and interpretive roots of their Methodist belief system, but on the grounds of commitment and how they have reflected and interpreted their experience they could discover that they related to a specific context or story. I feel that this research upholds a postfoundationalist theological view of faith as a condition, because in the process of reconstruction and reformulation of the stories my co-researchers could use their experiences of faith to rediscover their

spirituality. Through this they understood God differently and through interpreting their experiences could find God as someone that is actively busy in people's lives. Through practical theology as a means of pastoral care my co-researchers could understand their relationship with God and also how that understanding relates to the rest of the congregation and those who only came for help. Through dialogue they could see their actions and relationships with God and with others in a new way.

The practical theological position required from me was to listen to the conversations of my co-researchers from a perspective of how their experiences made sense to them and gave meaning to their lives. Their perspectives of faith made me curious to understand their understanding and experiences of God and I also questioned them on this. With the interaction between the literature studies and their experiences my co-researchers could understand their mission in the light of a God that is present in their situation and the fact that God is a God of action in which their actions are portrayed.

Their human experience also presented us with a language, which could be related to a Christian tradition. Through language my co-researchers could go back into the memory and tradition that communicated and connected practical reason and practical wisdom. My engagement in the conversations helped me to understand this language as co-participant and co-author of their narratives to understand and handle problems in relation to their relationship with God. This language supported a dialogue structured through questions and answers in a discourse that could develop into a new way of gaining knowledge. My co-researchers could no longer see their actions and participation in this research as separate, but as an integrated vision of human life. My co-researchers everyday or ordinary concerns became a positive intention to practice 'care giving' through the implementation of practical theology. Their understanding of God through a language could help them to understand their concrete situation. This language was further developed through the interpretation of the biblical text. My interpretation is that their own mission became a step towards and a process of transformation in their lives.

The involvement of my co-researchers in this research showed that they could reason about their perceptions of their situation and how the outsiders (those who only came to fill their baskets) and even the visitors interpreted their actions and accept this as a challenge which tests how they reason and conduct their mission. With this they acknowledged and appreciated the literature in the bible studies and

other meetings that helped them understand their context which at the end of the day gave meaning to their life.

6.5 The Narrative Approach as a structured ‘given’.

Although postmodernism does not justify the use of meta-narrative my co-researchers were attached to a biblical story of how they felt connected to God. The narrative approach helped us to acknowledge the contextuality of the interpretation of my co-researcher’s story and the way their Methodist tradition shaped their understanding of care and support. The interpretation of the stories, which brought out a specific language made it easier for us to understand their narratives in relation to the biblical text. The re-telling, reformulation and deconstruction of the stories helped my co-researchers to understand that they deal with their own life story, which gave meaning to them.

Different narratives have been told as part of a participant’s journey with the same story. The stories of my co-researchers, which were drawn from the reality of their contextual encounters with God and those they cared for, justified the fact that their personal faith was embedded in the history of their experience of being part of a community. The actions of my co-researchers became a text as mentioned in this thesis and can now be used in a Methodist context or any other context that speaks about pastoral care.

The use of language in how my co-researchers explained their context and experiences was understood from the re-telling and deconstruction of their stories. Words like “a mafia operation” brought light to the explanation of a painful and intolerant situation that my co-researchers experienced.

Listening attentively to the stories and how the stories developed made me take on a “not-knowing” position as the co-researchers described and dealt with their stories from the position of being experts of their own lives. Most of the time I allowed them to understand, interpret and explain their own stories without the influence of theoretical information. Their practical wisdom was not taken for granted but used to open up new dimensions especially from their spiritual endeavours.

6.5.1 The expertise of the co-researchers

Respecting them as the experts of their own lives brought out the assurance that my co-researchers knew how they wanted to perform a ministry of care and support.

They were the authors of their own stories and the opportunity in the discovery groups caused them to understand their stories differently and to explore new dimensions in their spirituality that brought about healing and transformation. Through this process the aims and objectives of this research have been accomplished. Everybody's story was taken seriously and this process guided me so I did not see my version of this research as more authentic and indisputable than theirs. I respected their expertise and never regarded my knowledge as the dominant source of information.

6.5.2 The problem as storied

The problem has been narrated as seen from the different interpretations of my co-researchers. They interpreted the problem from how they experienced and perceived it, and how they listened to their own voices in conveying the impact of it on their lives. The narration of the problem helped my co-researchers to concentrate on the positive aspects of their story. The stories communicated precious memories and interpretations of actions and events that influenced or affected their lives in situations where care and support was given to my co-researchers. The informal and formal telling of the stories was influenced by the social context in which my co-researchers lived and understood their experiences. The re-authoring of their lives was an engagement of all of us in the problematic stories of my co-researchers and constructed a new reality. The setting of the correct question helped them to stay with the description of the problem and to elaborate on it.

6.5.3 Deconstruction of the problem

The problem is the perception of people who thought that lay people could not manage and sustain a congregation in the absence of a fulltime pastor or minister. This perception created a problem for them, which made it almost impossible for them to be recognised as a church. This also adds to the sensitivity of outsiders or visitors (those who only come to fill their baskets) that a church building seems to be more appropriate as a place of worship.

This perception caused confusion and complicated their expectations of running their own congregation. The process of re-telling, listening and deconstructing the problem helped them to discover their unique outcomes and not to be distracted by the perceptions of people. Deconstructing the problem led to long and continuous hours of discussion and construction. This process did not need any academic cleverness or theoretical skilfulness. My co-researchers were led by their desire and

eagerness to perform a deed of care and support. Listening deconstructively to my co-researcher's stories and experience meant I needed to listen to the many possible meanings that emerged from the discussions. I concentrated on the uncertainties of what their spirituality meant to them and how their thinking was transformed. They bravely said that their perception about God is that God listened to their cries when they went through difficult moments (refer chapter four). Deconstruction of the problem helped me to evaluate whether I had interpreted their experiences in relation to the problem correctly.

6.6 Social constructionism

The group discussions revealed the incidents and events that were explained in the form of stories by my co-researchers. My co-researchers could through the help of social theory (literature that I brought to the discussions) reason about incidents (like the rugby matches of the boys and the borrowing of the car) that made them feel together and supportive to one another. In the social interactions with one another the interpretations and construction of the events expressed how they used their take-for-granted commonsense knowledge in the composition of new knowledge. This led to hours and hours of dialogue and interpretations that led to the construction of a new story. The composition of knowledge also gave evidence of how they interpreted and regarded certain realities on their journey and how it coincided with the unique outcomes. The unique outcomes were used to co-construct, describe and discover their new experiences and understandings. The co-construction led to reconstruction of knowledge and social interaction and showed that we were all participants in this research and no one was an object.

Their genuine behaviour or attitude helped them to relate to one another from a perspective of social change that was affected by a spiritual transformation. They acted upon their common understanding of their situation as a real and unique condition, which helped them to focus on their vision and mission and become stronger and more supportive. Through social interaction they could discover and describe their new story.

6.6 Feedback Loops

The process of discussions was an intense process of telling, interpretation, reflection, re-telling and deconstruction with the involvement and interactions of the co-researchers, scientific community and myself. I led some of the discussions and feedbacks through the use of the literature which helped in the process of the

understanding of the stories. This process helped with the interpretation of unclear events that might have brought confusion and misunderstanding amongst us. It was also a process of co-exploration and emancipation and helped all of us to understand the research process.

For me it was a process of writing down the stories and some important evidence that surfaced at unexpected moments. I reflected on the information and the interpretation given by my co-researchers and then organised another meeting or discussion session. This was also a time to listen again to other interpretations and to bring them inline with the story of research. The unclear evidence was put together and sometimes dismantled to get the finer detail and interpretation when the co-researchers felt we misinterpreted their story. This was an open opportunity for consultation to put things straight. To be able to understand all the data from my co-researchers I needed to understand the title as a guide with which to approach this research. Although the title was finalised and researched there is still room for deconstructing the process of spirituality.

Although the new story of 'Care giving' has been developed the aspect of spirituality was not interpreted for further developments. I would like to understand the process of spirituality and transformation in the new story.

6.8 Reflection on the whole process of research

I think it was during the final stages of this research that I started to delve deeper into the topic, but was overwhelmed by the stories of the co-researchers. I was also concerned about their understanding of their stories and if they would survive as a congregation because there was a period of almost six months when we did not have any discussions. Academically I feel I could have done more. Although I read most of the literature concerning the research method it was very difficult for me to grapple with the concepts. I found the narrative approach very interesting and would like to do some more research in this approach. The narrative approach will always be of help in my current job situation as the coordinator of the training of lay ministries in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

This research was a period of intense and continuous growth and reflection on the narrative way of listening to people's stories. The narrative approach helped me to understand the difficult concepts of postmodernism and postfoundationalism. It took hours of reading, reflection and restructuring of my own perceptions in relation to a

meta-narrative. This whole process helped me to wait for the moments of surprise when I thought that we would not reach the aim and objectives of the research. Academically I have grown through hours of reading and interpretation of the stories and the literature. Research is an ongoing process that every time opens up new avenues for research.

What transpired from this research is that there will always be meta-narratives due to person's perceptions of their own story and how others could use this story in a process of learning. My co-researchers even feel that their story could become a meta-narrative as a story that could be used by the rest of the Methodist Connexion and even other churches. I feel I can use this story to develop training manuals for lay people in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

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