

**FAITHFUL PRESENCE IN A CONTEXT OF CONFLICT: A MISSIONAL CASE
STUDY OF ELCSA IN TEMBISA WEST**

By

Thabani E. Mkhize

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Supervisor: Prof C.J.P. Niemandt

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

Full names	Thabani E. Mkhize
Student number	29500096
Topic of work	FAITHFUL PRESENCE IN A CONTEXT OF CONFLICT: A MISSIONAL CASE STUDY OF ELCSA IN TEMBISA WEST

Declaration

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ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval.

The author declares that he has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'G' followed by several vertical strokes and a small dot at the end.

ABSTRACT / SUMMARY

The focus of this research is the study of unity in mission and coping with conflict as a way of being faithfully present. Researching unity in mission in a divided congregation is important because it may relate, not only to the congregation, but also, in a broader sense, to the experience in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) and other denominations. While the review of literature provided background information on the theology of faithful presence including the theologies of place and place presence, a further review was conducted on the theology of mission as reconciliation as a way of being faithfully present. The study addresses this gap in literature and research by investigating the role of mission in helping congregants cope with church conflict and staying faithfully present in their situation. To achieve this goal, congregants lived experience of their congregational life in the midst of conflict was revealed and analysed using phenomenology as the most suitable method for data gathering, analysis and interpretation.

Phenomenological approach was chosen simple because of its capability of providing congregants' personal account of their experience. The question that needed to be understood was whether congregants still had time, space and motivation to be with the people God is sending them to. The primary goal is to understand congregants lived experience under the influence of conflict and how these congregants remained faithfully present in their situation. The secondary aim is to recommend ways and means of reconciliation most relevant to their situation particularly where subjects are not role players in the conflict. The researcher was interested in finding out if using mission as reconciliation can, in meaningful ways, move the reconciliation process forward.

The research found a direct correlation between conflict and the mission of the church. As the conflict continued to manifest, congregants developed a lack of trust in the leadership of the church, which motivated them to practice mission unilaterally outside the precincts of the church. As this unfolded, the congregation became irrelevant, its mission suffered and the congregational life became less meaningful. The congregation as a community of sent people, became too internally focused, losing its sting as a missional force in the neighbourhood.

KEY WORDS

Conflict, reconciliation, polity, space, place, identity, incarnation, commons, living above place, unity, lived experience, faithful presence, missional community

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1. The context of the research

The focus of this research is the study of unity in mission and coping with conflict as way of faithful presence. Currently, no one has conducted research to reveal congregants' experiences of faithful presence in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation. Without conducting such research, the relation between congregational crisis and mission may not be known. Researching unity in mission in a divided conflict-ridden congregation is important because it may relate, not only to the congregation itself, but also in a broader sense, to the experience in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) and other denominations. Thus, the purpose of this research is to reveal congregants' understanding and practice of mission as reconciliation as part and parcel of the congregation's missional existence, in other words, being faithfully present.

2. Background to the research

From about December 2016 to the period of this research, ELCSA in Tembisa West was plagued by conflict and disunity. The conflict was between parishioners, parish clergy, Congregational councils, Parish council and the Diocesan council of the Central Diocese of ELCSA. There were disagreements regarding the power and authority of the councils. Ethical and moral behaviour by some parishioners was called into question. Slander, power control, crowd mobilisation and dissemination of inaccurate information that appeared to deliberately misinform congregants was abound and the church leadership did not appear to have a coordinated system to deal with the situation. Legal proceedings were instituted and any chance of resolving the dispute amicably faded away as the battle for victory at all costs raged between the councils. It is common knowledge that disputes settled through courts

produce winners and losers, but God wants his people to live in unity with one another, joining together for the common purpose of carrying out His mission. Paul too, in his letter to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10) wrote: *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.* Paul was echoing Jesus's words in Luke 12:58: *When you are on the way to court with your accuser, try to settle the matter before you get there. Otherwise, your accuser may drag you before the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, who will throw you into prison.* Jesus was talking to the crowd that had followed him, urging them to strive for reconciliation and peace with everyone, avoiding the courts whenever possible. Courts exist to adjudicate legal disputes and the parties are forced to accept the court judgement whatever it may be. A court of law cannot enforce reconciliation between parties; it can only create conditions for making reconciliation possible.

Conflict in the Lutheran church in Tembisa West was not the first in the history of the church; there were divisions in the early church too. The Apostle Paul, having been made aware of the divisions in the church of Corinth about who they were to follow, wrote in the letter of 1 Corinthians 12:25-26: *that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.* Clearly then, the purpose of the church is to function in unity, loving one another, helping each other, and worshiping God together. Instead of dissension, the church should strive for peace, love and harmony wherever possible.

The church can only accomplish its mission by getting close to the people who need God the most, but this cannot be done from a distance. The church needs to incarnate itself in the community; it needs to be part and parcel of the fight against the injustices in its community. The church cannot love and serve those in need from a distance. This is what faithful presence is all about. It starts with understanding God's mission. Only if we understand our designated role to play in God's mission; if we understand that we are sent by God to be instruments for His mission, and are faithfully present with Him at all times can we be faithfully present in the world we inhabit. Our faithful presence in the world, as Hunter (2010:243) puts it, means that

we are faithfully present to each other, in everything we do, and in the areas we inhabit.

In his book *Foundations of education: A Christian vision*, Boyce (2014) recalls Hunter's description of faithful presence as meaning God being faithfully present to us; us being faithfully present to Him; and us being faithfully present to each other, to our tasks, and to our spheres of influence.

First, God is faithfully present to us. He pursues us, He chooses us, He draws us, He calls us, He invites us to come (80).

Secondly, God identifies with us. He remembers that we are dust and were born in the likeness of men. He identifies with us because He was God incarnate, and we know that He had compassion for those who were in need. Our Savior lived and walked among us (81).

Third, God is faithfully present to us in the life that He offers. He is the fountain of life, the source of life, the light of men, the bread of life. Christ said, 'I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly' (81).

Finally, this life is only offered because of Christ's atoning sacrificial love. Hence, God's faithful presence to us is marked by His pursuit of us, His identification with us, the life He offers, and His sacrificial love. This active, covenantal, purposeful love of us by the other is the purpose for which we were created, demanding a response to be faithfully present to Him, to our tasks, and to our sphere of influence (81).

In response this kind love of God and His never ending faithful presence with us, we in turn, are to return the same kind of love to Him, to our neighbours, to the people we worship with, to those we work with, to the spaces and places we inhabit, to the land and all of God's creation on it. Boyce (2015) recalls Hunter's description of what our response to God's faithfulness should be:

First, we practice being present with God in our daily living. As He is fully present with us, we are to be fully present with Him. We worship and pray God individually and corporately (81).

Secondly, we practice being fully present to God as we are faithfully present to each other, that is, to those within the community of faith. This means living a holy life within the body of Christ as well as serving and welcoming the stranger (82).

Third, we are to be faithful to our tasks. God placed us in the garden and gave us dominion over the earth. Work is part of our stewardship of the earth. We are to do our work as unto the Lord, not as unto men. We honour God in our faithfulness to our work, but our allegiance is not to our tasks, but our allegiance is unto God, the one and only, for whom we work as we worship Him through our daily work (82).

Finally, we are to be faithfully present to God in our sphere of influence. The power we have in our spheres of influence is to be exercised in conformity to the way of Jesus: rooted in intimacy with the Father, rejecting the privileges of status, oriented by a self-giving compassion for the needs of others, and committed indiscriminately to the good of all (82).

What this means is that faithful presence demands creating time and space to be actively involved in the lives of people we are sent to love and serve. Therefore, it goes without saying that a divided congregation will find it difficult to love and serve those in need when the focus is on internal conflict and division.

3. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to reveal congregants' understanding and practice of mission as reconciliation as part and parcel of the congregation's missional existence, in other words, being faithfully present. Congregants' understanding and practice of mission will be revealed through an analysis of the language and

meaning congregants use to describe their experience of living faithfully in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation. The research includes the examination of the context the ELCSA congregation in Tembisa West found itself, the examination of the missional purpose of ELCSA as church, the examination of ELCSA polity as cause and effect, a review of literature on the importance of mission as reconciliation, and the ministry of faithful presence as part of the missional identity of the congregation.

4. Basis for topic choice

The author of this research was an elected Parish Secretary of ELCSA in Tembisa West for the period January 2012 to March 2018. As Parish Secretary the author was at the centre of administration in the Parish, and the main liaison between the Parish and upper and lower structures of ELCSA on all matters affecting the Parish and congregations. As such, the author was privy to the correspondence and issues that gave rise to, and arose from, the conflict. On more than one occasion, the author attempted to facilitate the coming together of the two conflicting sides through a dialogue where issues could be debated and resolved. Whilst one party (the Diocesan Council) appeared willing to engage and discuss, the other party (the Parish Council) pushed back, declining meetings, advancing reasons for the dialogue not to take place. This prompted the author to suspect that there may have been undeclared personal or organisational issues between parties that were known only to those deeply involved with those issues. The author is aware that conflict experienced in Tembisa West is not unique in the history of ELCSA; that there were similar instances reported in other Dioceses, however this research is limited to the experience of Tembisa West congregants. It was a sad moment witnessing how conflict in the church of God almost brought the church to its knees, creating divisions even amongst congregants.

In order for the congregation to function effectively, members need to learn to put aside their personal interests and differences and work together with others, inside and outside the congregation, for the carrying out of God's purpose. Human beings are not perfect beings, therefore mistakes will at times be made, but when personal differences are prioritised over the interests of the congregation, fragmentation

erupts potentially undermining the congregation's united mission. The author hopes that the recommendations of this research and their application thereof will assist not only the ELCSA congregation in Tembisa West but the wider Christian community in their conviction to stay true to the call of Christ to be 'light' and 'salt' of the earth, as recorded in Mathew 5:13-16: *You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

5. The genesis of conflict in the Lutheran church in Tembisa West

At the core of the conflict in Tembisa West were disputes regarding the status of the self-supportive ministry which, according to the constitution of ELCSA (Part 111, Chapter 3, 3.3) consists of pastors who are ordained to assist in an identified congregation; who do not receive remuneration from the church; and do not appear in the election clergy roster. Only pastors serving in the full-time ministry, who receive remuneration from the church, can be assigned the role of Pastor-in-Charge of a parish. During the period of this research, ELCSA in Tembisa West had three self-supporting pastors and no full-time pastor. Consequently, the position of Pastor-in-charge remained constitutionally vacant until filled by a full-time pastor appointed by the Diocesan Council in accordance with the constitution of the church (Part 1X, Chapter 7, 7.4). When the Central Diocesan Council (CDC) attempted to fill this vacancy, the Parish Council together with self-supporting pastors in Tembisa West refused to allow the newly appointed full-time pastor to work in the parish. He was also prevented from occupying the parsonage (a church house built to be a place of residence for the serving full-time pastor). From the period about February 2015 to the date of this research, Tembisa West Parish was withholding money towards the Synodical Fund, i.e. monthly Diocesan Assessment fund. The Parish collected money from parishioners but did not send any to the Diocesan Office. This according to the CDC was in violation of the ELCSA constitution (Part VII, Chapter 4, 4.6).

Various meetings were called by the CDC to resolve the impasse and many of these meetings were either dishonoured or declined by Tembisa West leadership.

As a way of response, the CDC dissolved Tembisa West Parish Council, and attempted to remove self-supporting pastors from the Parish, promising to assign other responsibilities to them. Pastors defied this decision and continued with their usual pastoral duties in the parish. At one point the Bishop of the Diocese was prevented from officiating in the Parish and the newly appointed full-time pastor was prevented from attending what would have been his first Sunday service in the parish. Added to this, is the R40 million-rand that went missing from ELCSA's account after it was allegedly invested in a 'Ponzi-type' scheme. This created anger in the church nationally across all dioceses. As a result, trust in the leadership of the church deteriorated as it appeared that no one was being held accountable for this loss.

6. The congregation as a missional community

We learn in 1 John 4: 8 that '*God is love*'. Living in that love of God, as Mayer (2012:107) puts it,

The Church is called to be the first community experiencing this love, to become the good news for all and to offer to the whole of humanity and creation the fullness of life in reconciliation, justice and peace, as the ultimate objective of her existence.

The church is not people coming from far and diverse geographical areas to a Sunday morning gathering (Sparks *et al*, 2014:209). Newbigin (1989:119), in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* wrote:

The church in each place is to be the sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God present in Christ for that place; a sign planted in the midst of the present realities of the place but pointing beyond them to the future which God has promised; an instrument available for God's use in the doing of His

will for that place; a foretaste—manifesting and enjoying already in the midst of the messianic tribulations a genuine foretaste of the peace and joy of God's reign.

What this means is that the church in each place is a symbol of God's presence in that place; the symbol of hope in the midst of despair in that place. The church is 'salt' and 'light' in that place, a promise of a future that can only be hoped for, which God and only God, has promised. Roxburgh (2004:4) argues that the church is not a gathering of those who are finding their needs met in Jesus, but that:

The God we meet in Jesus calls men and women in exactly the opposite direction, to participate in a community that no longer lives for itself and its own needs but as a contrast society whose very life together manifests God's reign.

Berkhof (1979:410) wrote:

The church is positioned between Christ and the salvation of the world with the call to make good news to the world. Christ is mediated to the congregation as it gathers, and the congregation mediates Christ to the world. In this chain, the world comes last, yet it is the goal that gives meaning and purpose to the preceding links.

It is precisely because the church does not exist for itself but completely and exclusively for the world that necessitates the church not become the word, but to retain its own countenance (Lohfink 1984:146), If the church loses its own contours; if it lets its light be extinguished and its salt become tasteless; then it can no longer transform the rest of society (Wright, 2010:284). Such a church is no longer faithfully present.

Fitch (2016) says 'God is at work in and through His people to be a faithful presence in the world'. Fitch suggests that 'this sense of God's presence has been lost in our modern world, even among Christians' (24). Fitch says only when the church manifests and recognizes Jesus' presence in their midst, can it then participate in

Jesus' work in the world, and His presence becomes visible (26). The 2012 statement by the Working Group on Mission and Ecclesiology of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) entitled *The Church as Mission in Its Very Life* states that the Church exists to glorify God 'in liturgy, worship, spiritual life, social action, and in preaching' (123).

Thus, the role of the church goes far beyond the interest of its members to the needs and necessities of the community. It is not a gathering of people coming from far and diverse geographical areas to a Sunday morning event. The Church's mission is to be present, available and accessible to all in its neighbourhood.

According to Bentley (2009:43-47),

The church's first missional priority is to be the bearer of the testimony concerning God's self-revelation and salvific acts. The Church's mission is then portrayed in the way it interacts with those who do not form part of its community.

Looking at Jesus' character, teachings, relationships and activities can help Christians to see how to conduct themselves when engaged in God's mission in the world. Bender (2005:205) argues that 'as Christ's earthly life corresponds to the will and character of God, so also the community in its historical life corresponds to the life of Christ'. Wright (2010:26) says 'everything a Christian and a Christian church is, says, and does should be missional in its conscious participation in the mission of God in God's world'. Emmet and Bennet (2013:10) agree; 'Christian's speech and actions should match and the church's words and deeds should agree'. Accordingly, Dreyer (2016:5) adds 'to be church is to make Christ present in this world and requires the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity'.

Thus, politics of slander, crowd mobilisation, disunity and confrontation, disrespect of the leadership of the church, disregard of church procedures and processes can only serve to destroy the church. Jesus warned us about this in Mathew 13:38-39 that the enemy sowing the weeds is the devil. Jesus taught his followers: *the field is the*

world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

7. Research questions

In the light of the above introduction, the following questions will help to focus the research programme:

- What is the interrelatedness between conflict and the mission of ELCSA in Tembisa West?
- What does faithful presence mean in a context of conflict and division?
- How can the congregation's mission effort help the congregation in general and congregants in particular walk toward peace and reconciliation?

8. Research gap

Despite the presence of a plethora of literature on conflict resolutions for Christian churches, an important gap till now has been the absence of congregants' personal account of their experience and reflections on faithful presence in a context of conflict. Without conducting such research, the relation between congregational crisis and mission may not be known. What makes this research unique is the application of mission as reconciliation as part and parcel of the congregation's missional existence, that is, being faithfully present.

9. Research methodology

The goal of this research is twofold:

- The first and primary goal is to reveal Tembisa West congregants' lived experience of faithful presence in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

- The secondary goal of the research is the recommendation and the application of mission as reconciliation within the context of ELCSA in Tembisa West and how such application can serve the mission of the church in a wider context.

Since there has been no research on congregants' personal account of their experiences of faithful presence in a divided conflict-ridden congregation, phenomenology can be an effective methodology to provide such information. Christina Wilson, in her dissertation *Unshackled: A phenomenological study of the effects of holistic conflict resolution training on inmate self-efficacy*, states that phenomenological research attempts to understand a common lived experience among individuals by gathering narrative and written data and analysing the data in order to understand the experience (Wilson, 2016:25-26). John W. Creswell in his book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2007:58), states that 'the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences of a specific phenomenon to a description of the universal essence'. Accordingly, phenomenological research allows the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those people who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest (Cirt.gcu.edu, 2018).

Kafle (2011:183) concluded:

These definitions of phenomenology by different scholars, confirm that it is phenomenology that has the potential to penetrate deep to the human experience and trace the essence of a phenomenon and explicate it in its original form as experienced by the individuals.

Thus, in the context of ELCSA in Tembisa West, phenomenological research can provide congregants' personal account of their experience of faithful presence in a context of conflict. Revealing the essence of congregants' experience of faithful presence in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation, using mission as reconciliation, can serve to empower other congregations on how they can approach similar situations in their contexts.

9.1. Gaining access to research subjects and obtaining consent.

To gain access to research subjects requires that one must consider ethical concerns and potential risks to participants. Mack *et al.*, (2005:9) explain that Informed consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. Informed consent is one of the most important tools for ensuring respect for persons during research. In some cases, gaining access to research subjects includes obtaining consent from a higher authority.

Establishing rapport with study participants is another essential aspect to conducting good research (Creswell, 1998). Mack *et al.*, (2005:36,37) explain that obtaining superior data requires that the interviewer be well prepared and have highly developed rapport-building skills, social and conversational skills specific to the capacity of interviewer, and facility with techniques for effective questioning. The core skills required to establish positive interviewer/participant dynamics are rapport-building, emphasizing the participant's perspective, and accommodating different personalities and emotional states. In the light of this explanation, access to congregants of ELCSA in Tembisa West was obtained in the following manner:

- First, approval was obtained from ELCSA Central Diocese through a request letter with an explanation of the research purpose, research subjects, research authorisation by the University of Pretoria, Theology Faculty and the university's ethics committee. In normal situations, further approval would be required from Parish and Congregational councils but since, in the case of Tembisa West, there was no constitutionally elected and recognised Parish and Congregational councils it became desirable to skip this step to avoid compromising the validity of the research as such approval would have been obtained from constitutionally illegitimate bodies.

- Second, and upon receiving approval from the Central Diocese, each participant was contacted via telephone to give a brief description of the research, an explanation of what was expected from participants, and notice that participant would be furnished with the informed consent from the Diocese and the University of Pretoria. This was done to empower participants with adequate information prior to making the decision to participate in the research.

9.2. Selecting a sampling strategy.

The author of this research observed that the congregation in Tembisa West was divided into two groups. The one group being those who were active members of the congregation before the conflict started but left the church soon thereafter. These people no longer attended church in Tembisa West; some went to other Lutheran congregations elsewhere, or denominations other than ELCSA. The other group comprised those who persistently stayed in the congregation throughout the crises period. Thus, this research utilized criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling strategy that emphasizes having clear criteria in mind to determine who fits with the goals of the study and who does not (Creswell, 1998:118). Criterion sampling occurs when all study participants meet some predetermined quality or condition. The criterion for this research is that participants experienced life in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation of Tembisa West and either left, or remained in the congregation throughout the conflict period.

9.3. Determining collection method and interview technique.

There are two primary means by which researchers might collect phenomenological data, namely interview and observation (Creswell, 1998), but the consensus opinion is that the primary means of data collection for phenomenology is in-depth interview (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

9.4. Developing interview strategies.

To organize the interview experience Creswell (1998) recommends that participants develop an interview protocol that they will follow throughout the study. This protocol might include a selection of interview questions. However, Van Manen (1990) argues that due to the emergent nature of phenomenological interviews it is difficult to prewrite a set list of questions, suggesting that researchers ask questions of participants that are reflective in nature and drive participants to think of their experience with the phenomenon. In addition, Van Manen recommends that questions should cause participants to reflect on why they have done what they have done. To ensure that the descriptions collected are accurate, Moustakas (1994) describes a principle that applies to the accuracy of data collection. Specifically, researchers must strictly observe that interview questions do not influence or lead participants by asking questions that lead them to say what the interviewer wants them to say (Mason, 2012:120). With this explanation in mind, the starting interview question for this research was:

- Describe your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation of Tembisa West.

Depending on the response to the question above, the question below followed:

- What was the impact or the effect of the conflict experience on your actions?

9.5. Obtaining data.

As sample sizes are typically small in qualitative work, the researcher kept interviewing until, in analysis, nothing new came from the data, a point called 'saturation' or 'data sufficiency'. This was to ensure that data generated was trustworthy, reliable and valid (Bricki and Green, 2007:9).

9.6. Managing data.

To ensure that no step was missed in the data collection process, a data collection checklist was created, containing itemization of data sources by

participant. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed immediately after each interview.

10. Research structure

Chapter 1 gives a general introduction of the research together with a motivation for doing the research. It presents the context of the congregation as a missional church and a description of faithful presence as the basis of unity in mission. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research approach the study follows and research question(s) participants were asked.

Chapter 2 gives a detailed description of the congregation in the context of ELCSA as well as in the context of Tembisa, where the congregation is located. The chapter introduces concepts of 'space' and 'place' as contexts in the life of the congregation and concludes with an investigation of the identity of the congregation, thus answering the question, what it means for the congregation to be faithfully present.

Chapter 3 researches congregants' lived experience of faithful presence in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation. Congregants' understanding and practice of mission is revealed through an analysis of the language and meaning congregants use to describe their experience of living faithfully in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

Chapter 4 concludes literature research by looking at reconciliation as a model of Christian mission. The chapter concludes with an investigation of some of the concrete manifestations and practices that can move the reconciliation process forward.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, gives the summary of the reach findings, practical suggestions on how the congregations' mission efforts, in another sense, unity in mission, can help the congregation in general and congregants in particular, walk toward peace and reconciliation.

CHAPTER 2

A MISSIONAL CHURCH IN THE CONTEXT OF ELCSA IN TEMBISA WEST

1. Introduction

The introduction in Chapter 1 highlighted that church is not a location with buildings and property, but that church is a community of those who follow Jesus in and with the community every day. Chapter 1 also highlighted that to be church, all we do is keep our eyes and ears open to the people around us, to show them love in whatever way we can in order to make Jesus' presence in the world felt by those who need him most. It was concluded that the life of the church should correspond with the earthly life of Jesus Christ. But the church, argues Bentley (2009:39), is not the only body claiming devotion to God, nor is it the only movement that claims to be a response to divine revelation. The World Council of Churches' *Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism* (2012:250) concurs; 'the church lives in multi-religious contexts and is engaged with other religions to re-discover and witness God's mission'.

According to Sparks *et al* (2014:22):

When these faith communities begin connecting together, in and for their neighbourhood, they learn to depend on God for strength to love, forgive and show grace like never before.

Sparks *et al* (2014) refer to this collaboration with others in the neighbourhood as the new parish, meaning the relational network in which groups share encouragement, offer resources and collaborate together across places (12). The new parish church is a community of Christ followers living out their faith together within a specific place while linking with others beyond their place. In this setting, people begin to live life together as collective in ways they can't do as individuals. Sparks *et al* (2014:95) refer to this 'coming together' for the common purpose as the 'new commons' to mean all the dimensions of life which everyone in the neighbourhood shares a common concern.

According to Niemandt (2015:4):

The mission Dei defines the essence and substance of the church. The *missio Dei* is at the core of being church. The church focuses on the world and is directed towards the world because the church does not exist for the sake of its members or itself.

Moving on, Chapter 2 gives a description of life in the congregation lived in a context of conflict. The chapter investigates the concepts of space and place from a missional perspective with a particular focus on neighbourhood effect. The chapter ends with an investigation of the identity of the congregation in order to reflect missiologically on what it means for the congregation to be faithfully present. In order to understand this question in the context of this research, it is necessary to start by addressing the polity of ELCSA as an institutional church.

2. ELCSA polity as mission vehicle

ELCSA practices episcopal polity, with the day to day pastoral and administrative care of each Diocese in the hands of its Bishop and the Presiding Bishop exercising that role church wide. ELCSA is divided into congregations, parishes, circuits, dioceses and Church. The General Assembly is the highest decision-making forum with its executive function vested in the Church Council. The Bishop is the spiritual leader of the Diocese and an ex-officio member of all Councils in the Diocese. All Bishops are ex-officio members of the General Assembly and the Church Council. The ELCSA operational and governance structure is presented below, from lowest to highest level:

- *The Congregation*: each congregation, that is, a communion of saints in a certain locality, has a congregational council accountable to the parish council.

- *The Parish*: each parish, that is, a group of congregations within a defined area, has a parish council accountable to the circuit council.
- *The Circuit*: each circuit, that is, a group of parishes within a defined area, has a circuit council accountable to the diocesan council.
- *The Diocese*; each diocese, that is, a group of circuits within a defined area, has a diocesan council accountable to the diocesan synod.
- *The General Assembly*: this is the highest decision-making forum in ELCSA. Its executive function is vested in the Church Council.

At the lowest level, ELCSA is divided into parishes and congregations. A parish is a congregation or a group of congregations within a defined area. The parish is led by an ordained minister, referred to as the Pastor-in-Charge. Parishes are accountable to the Circuit; Circuits account to the Diocese; and Dioceses account to the General Assembly. ELCSA in Tembisa West is a parish of three congregations situated at Endulweni, Khatamping and Thitheng sections of Tembisa township.

Niemandt (2014:2) wrote:

Church governance and polity must reflect ecclesiology. The nature of the church provides the framework to understand the character of the church. What the church is determines what the church does.

This assertion by Niemandt suggests a clear linkage between church polity, congregational identity, and congregational context. The polity (of the church) is always contextual at a specific time in changing landscapes. Church polity must reflect these changing landscapes. Church polity needs to be historically justifiable and context relevant. The history of the church and current context must talk to each other.

According to the Constitution of ELCSA (Part 1, Chapter 2 and 3), the mission of ELCSA is to work towards the realisation of the oneness of the body of Christ and to advocate for justice, peace and reconciliation for the people of God. One of the core reasons for the existence of ELCSA is to witness Jesus Christ by being servant to

the world by word and deed in faith, love and hope (ELCSA Constitution, 2011:1)

The direct interpretation of this missional purpose of the church is that ELCSA is a church faithfully present with the people of God. The Constitution (Part V, Chapter 2, page 4) further stipulates that pastors as leaders of congregations are to preach and teach the Word of God and to lead fellow Christians in the Christian way of life, themselves setting an example. A consequence of this statement is that pastors are expected to live a life of holiness and to be exemplary when it comes to matters of behaviour and way of life. Pastors should avoid stirring trouble and negative words and avoid actions that hurt others. Pastors are to fight all forms of injustices for and on behalf of those they are called to lead. 2 Timothy 2:14 says: *Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words. It is of no value and only ruins those who listen.*

The most important issue is that those who are in leadership positions must submit to the authority of Christ and obediently follow his lead in accordance with the Scripture (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Christ is the Head of the Church, and if any system, individual leader, or congregation begins to displace Christ and the Word with their own beliefs and desires, then that leadership is no longer legitimate (Got Questions.org. 2020). The Bible says that pastors are accountable to God to manage and direct the church, thus, 1 Peter 5:2-3 says; *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.* The Bible also says that members of the flock are accountable to submit to the leadership of the church. Hebrews 13:17 says; *have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.* Consequently, congregants, as members of the flock, are to submit to the leadership of their pastor. The pastor, in turn, is to submit respectfully to the authority of the church leadership. This is not to say leaders should abuse their position of authority by pushing own agenda or pursuing personal vendettas against those they don't like. It also does not mean to say that pastors should keep quiet when abused by those in authority above them.

Wise (1970:10) states that:

A pastor is a man with a vision of common humanity which excludes the possibility of dividing individuals or groups into saints or devils, good guys or bad guys.

Wise points out that pastors serve all men alike as children of God. The Bible in 1 Timothy 2:23-24 says; *don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments because you know they produce quarrels and the Lord's servant must not quarrel. Instead he (the Lord's servant) must be kind to everyone, able to teach and not resentful.* Accordingly, pastors are to avoid causing arguments but are to preach troublemakers to repent. 1 Timothy 2:25-26 says; *those who oppose him (the pastor) he must gently instruct in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who's taken them captive to do his will.* The guiding principle is that pastors as leaders of congregations must be exemplary in behaviour and way of life. The point that is being made here is that pastors in Lutheran church in Tembisa West, as interested parties in the dispute and conflict experienced in the congregation, had a vital role to play either in perpetuating or resolving the conflict. However, their role as leaders of the congregation and the detail of their involvement in the conflict, falls outside the scope of this research.

3. Township demographics and their implications for ELCSA in Tembisa West

Tembisa is a large township situated to the north of Kempton Park on the East Rand in Gauteng, South Africa. It was established in 1957 when black South Africans were resettled from Alexandra and other areas in Edenvale, Kempton Park, Midrand, and Germiston (South African History Archive, n.d.).

Lester et al (2009:6) noted that:

Prior to 1994, South African townships operated and functioned in isolation from the mainstream economy and society and were associated with racial

segregation, exclusion and the marginal provision of services and economic opportunity.

After the collapse of apartheid, the situation improved but still far from being descent. Former President Jacob Zuma, in one of his first address on becoming President of South Africa highlighted the importance of Townships in South Africa: *Our townships need to have proper shopping facilities, proper roads, electricity, water and sanitation, quality schools and clinics, affordable public transport and all the basic services that are taken for granted in historically white areas. We will not rest until that happens* (Lester, 2009: 6). But not much has changed for many of the township residents, some live still far below the poverty line, while others have found some of progress and transformation over the years of democracy. One of the most important areas of concern is poor service delivery due to administrative, competency and corruption issues. A general lack of effective law enforcement, coupled with a culture of anarchy where people do not obey rules and laws, a spiralling crime rate, drug traffic, substance use and abuse, brutality and violence especially against women and children, have exacerbated issues. The church in South Africa, can never be happy about this situation.

Although Tembisa township population is ethnically heterogeneous, differences in native language constitute the basis of segregation of congregations in ELCSA in Tembisa West. The congregation at Endulweni is a Zulu congregation, Thiteng is a Sepedi congregation and Khatamping is a Setswana congregation. The findings of the 2011 South African population census reveal the following demographics in Tembisa:

One implication of segregation of congregations based on language ethnicity is that people travel decent distances to congregations of their native language. Quite often in such cases, connection to one's faith community, where one worships, is limited to Sunday morning services, leaving individual members on their own in their engagement with the rest of the world outside a Sunday gathering. These commuter congregants, as I prefer to call them, have little or no connection to the place where the church is located, neither do they have any faith connection with the community where they come from, that is, where they reside. I call such people 'disconnected Christians' in that they are neither here nor there. From Monday to Saturday, they live a life away from the church neighbourhood. They may take time after a Sunday morning service to visit the aged and infirm or those too ill to attend Sunday service. They consider themselves active church members in good standing, but in reality, they are no more than Sunday morning visitors. These people think of church as a building with a physical location and GPS coordinates, a place where they go to sing worship hymns, listen to sermons, baptize their children, attend weddings & funerals and share catch-up stories with their Sunday morning friends. According to Sparks *et al* (2014: 78), for these people, it is as if God is found and experienced only through a Sunday morning service. They live a life far away from the congregation's neighbourhood.

Sparks *et al* (2014:76) emphasize this point:

There is nothing wrong with people traveling far to get to congregations of their choice for a Sunday morning worship event; but there is something wrong with thinking this is what it means to be the church. In such cases, the church is missing one of the most important aspects of being the church: that is, participating together as a family or body in the real-life context of the neighbourhood.

Living above place' is a phrase that describes such people. It means a Christian person does not have a relationship with neighbours and most likely is unaware of neighbourhood issues that need attention. It could also mean the Christian person is rarely, if ever, in the homes of fellow neighbours; they also are hardly ever in the his/her home. This is usually so because they do not live in the same place.

According to Sparks *et al* (2014:25):

Not only does living above place disconnect people from the effects of their actions, it enables them to concoct visions regarding the welfare of others without ever being in relationship with them. Without a practice of being with diverse neighbours in real-life contexts, it is easy to forget that humans need reciprocal friendships and communities of genuine care if they are to flourish.

It is from this background that the missional concepts of 'space' and 'place' become fundamentally important for a faithful presence in the 'commons'.

4. A theology of 'space' and 'place' in the missional life of a congregation

In the geographical literature, place refers to physical and human aspects of a location with the physical characteristics defined by landforms, natural vegetation, animal life, and the like. Human characteristics being those defined by population density, language patterns, religion, culture, political systems, etc. (Keys-Mathews, 1998). In the humanistic geography space and place are important concepts that do not necessarily mean the same. Space is something abstract, without any substantial meaning. While place refers to how people are aware of or attracted to a certain piece of space, a place can be seen as space that has a meaning (Geography.ruhosting.nl, 2012). Tuan (1979) argued that place 'incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people; a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning' (387). Thus, from one limited point of view, places are locations that have visual impact. However, other than the eye, the world is known through the senses of hearing, smell, taste, and touch. These senses unlike the visual one requires close contact and long association with the environment (410).

Indeed, the bird's eye view of a location will give an instant visual sense of what a particular place looks like. But to smell the odour and feel the texture of a place, one needs to have a far longer period of contact with that place.

Wild *et al* (1965:47) distinguish between places that yield their meaning to the eye and places that are known only after prolonged experiences. The one type is called '*public symbols*' and the other '*fields of care*'. Wild *et al* argue that through place experience, that is, the daily activity of living in and moving through specific environments, people come to form attachments to places. Thus, on the one hand, a church building is exclusively a public symbol with an absolute location defined by its latitude and longitude and physical address; the neighbourhood, on the other hand, is exclusively a field of care. What this means is that if the church is not tied to its physical and human setting, we are likely seeing a church living above place, without adequate awareness of issues affecting its immediate environment.

Hunter (2010:243) wrote:

A theology of faithful presence calls Christians to attend to the people and places they experience directly; it calls believers to yield their will to God and to nurture and cultivate the world where God has placed them; it gives priority to what is right in front of us—the community, the neighbourhood, and the people of which these are constituted.

In Mathew 22: 37-39 Jesus told the crowd to '*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*' and to '*love your neighbour as yourself*'. Thus, first and foremost, we are to love God faithfully. Second and equally important, we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Loving neighbours as our ourselves means loving the public place, the place we and neighbours inhabit, as our own.

Hunter (2010:252) says:

It is here where we, as family, neighbours, co-workers, and community, find our authenticity as a body and as believers. It is here where we learn

forgiveness and humility, practice kindness, hospitality, and charity, grow in patience and wisdom, and become clothed in compassion, gentleness, and joy.

Faithful presence calls on the church to inhabit the world through an embodied and enacted commitment to human flourishing (Calo, 2012:105) The church, as Van Gelder (2007:18) puts it, is created by God through the Spirit, who calls, gathers, and sends the church into the world to participate fully in God's mission. In doing so, the church becomes a sign that God's redemption is now present in the world, a foretaste of that redemption and an instrument to carry that message into every local context.

Van Gelder says a congregation empowered with this understanding, begins to take seriously how it engages the community within which it is located (19).

Faithful presence, Sparks *et al* (2014:68-71) adds:

Means that we must be present to our situation, listening for what the Spirit is calling us toward. It means being truly with people in the moment, with no agenda except to be faithful to what a real relationship requires. For people to be living expressions of the church beyond a Sunday gathering, they need to have a profound connection to the cultural life of the place where the church is.

Spark *et al* say this is what it means to be a church together. The church cannot be reduced to a weekly worship event, divorced from the very life God intended for humans to experience.

Thus, the church building as a public symbol, becomes a meeting place for a Sunday gathering whilst the church as movement by followers of Christ is scattered in the field of care. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that it is easier to be a meaningful part of the church when one lives in the same neighbourhood where the church is located but very difficult when one has to travel long distance to get to

church. Commuter congregants visit the church once a week for a Sunday morning service with little or no part to play in the everyday life of the community.

Fitch (2016:401) argues that the great commission is fulfilled when *missio Dei* and incarnation come together in one concrete place. Hooker (2008:1,2) says the church is not a building or an institution but a community of witnesses, called into being and equipped by God, and sent into the world to testify and participate in Christ's work.

Niemandt (2012:3) concurs:

The church is those people of God who are called, gathered and equipped by the Spirit and sent to participate in God's mission by bringing the gospel of God's love and new life.

Niemandt says the missional church is an incarnational movement sent to engage its context. Being incarnational, continues Niemandt, entails listening to people and entering their culture; being with them where they are (4).

Hirsch (2006:133-134) describes four important elements of a missional-incarnational lifestyle:

- *Presence* – to become part of the fabric of a community and to engage in the humanity of it all.
- *Proximity* assumes not only presence, but also genuine availability – spontaneity as well as regularity in the communities the church inhabits.
- *Powerlessness* means servant hood and humility in the relationship with the world.
- *Proclamation* requires that we will be willing to share the Gospel story with those within our world.

James (2016:20) concurs:

Missional communities maintain a strong emphasis on face-to-face engagement, hospitality and communal life, and give attention to what it means to be rooted in a particular place and context. Mission is about a life lived as presence among and in relation to others.

James' argument is that the habit of attracting people to our turf (seeker service) or of going for others where they are, is being replaced by deep human personal and communal approach that can be described as being truly present

Niemandt (2012:39) argues that missiology, with its particular emphasis on incarnation, contextualization and inculturation must develop a vision of space, using this idea to describe commons as a space where life is shared with the lives of others. Sparks *et al* (2014:10) refers to the new commons as all dimensions of life for which everyone in a neighbourhood shares a common concern. Niemandt argues that the idea of the 'commons' provides fresh insights in a new approach to neighbourhoods and thus the concept of a vision of space.

James (2016:24), arguing for a theology of 'being with', which means 'presence', wrote:

Presence is rooted in a theology of incarnation and as such is not to be mistaken for passivity or imposition. It requires genuinely entering into the life of others and as such it is demanding, for presence means an encounter with the pain, messiness, complexity and joy of others. It takes seriously the culture and context in which churches are placed.

According to Niemandt (2019:3):

An important step in the establishment of the theological importance of place is a rediscovery of the 'commons. When we use what we own, the idea of the commons demand that we are obliged to think about our neighbours because we share life with these others.

Fitch (2016:13) argued that faithful presence (in the commons) names the reality that God is present in the world and that He uses people faithful to His presence to make Himself concrete and real in the world. Fitch re-interprets the incarnation and relates it to the *mission Dei*, and says when the church is faithfully present, God's kingdom becomes visible: 'it's how God has chosen to change the world.

Roxburgh (2004:6) argues that the missional church is about the formation of a people in the particularity and materiality of real contexts in neighbourhoods and communities where the 'I' is replaced by the 'We', that is, people who are willing to conform their lives to practices and habits of Christian life which, at their root, are about the willingness to give up one's personal needs and rights.

Niemandt (2019:2) agrees:

We enact faith in the reality of this world and the places we find ourselves in.
Life originated from the earth, and we cannot but live a grounded life and faith.
Land, place and faith go together.

Niemandt bases his argument for a theology of place on the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, that God is the creator of all spaces, thus each geographic location has a theological significance as it is God's creation. Christian life and a healthy congregational culture must be grounded in the surrounding context – the neighbourhood. Christians reflection and praxis must be grounded in neighbourhoods (1). The church needs to establish a faithful presence in the commons; in all the places that Christians find themselves (4).

Niemandt (2019) continues:

Faithful presence has a double ring: it is the kind of presence that establishes the good faith of people of faith. It is a presence that serves places, people and looks after the interests of the others (Philippians 2:4). It is also the kind of presence that shows Christian faith can be trusted and valued. It is a life true to Jesus Christ, the head of the church – a living and trustworthy witness that will facilitate faith because Christians are faithfully present (4).

Clearly, various authors agree on the importance of contextualisation of the gospel of 'place' and 'place presence' as the only way of faithful presence. God is present with us in our 'spaces' and 'places' made possible by His loving kindness. God does not generalise His love for us but tailors it to our unique needs as individuals and as communities. In return for this love from God we, in turn, are to extend the same kind of love to those we encounter in their spaces, taking full cognisance of the complexities of their spaces and places, loving then uniquely as individuals and corporately as communities. These may be the people we share our homes with, people in our neighbourhood, people we meet in our work places, people we worship with, or even strangers we meet ad hock in our daily walks of life, including those we may not have met face-to-face. We are called to be faithfully present with those in difficult situations. The gospel that promotes individual salvation and self-sufficiency without a meaningful presence in the neighbourhood is a false gospel. Faithful presence happens in the spaces, places and cultures of those we are called to serve by words and action.

That said, Saar and Palang (2009:15) caution against the bad side of place attachment arguing that when discussing place attachment and meanings also the possible negative side of place identity and attachment should be reviewed. Deciding who belongs and who doesn't belong is an important way of shaping social spaces and creating boundaries (Malone, 1999:19). Manzo (2003:55) points out that some people's sense of rootedness and belonging is obtained by excluding others. This kind of exclusion can exist over various levels. Fried (2000:202) has stated that the extreme commitment to culturally-identified territories can lead to the efforts to obtain hegemonic control. We see a lot of this in our politics in South African where those 'born in the struggle' are considered senior to those who joined the liberation struggle later in their lives, even though the latter might be senior to the former in terms of age. We also see the same kind of discrimination and segregation in our communities where the views and voices of those 'born here' is more powerful and superior to those who 'live here' but born elsewhere. Saar and Palang (2009:15) caution that 'all the members of community must be given a chance for active and full participation in place making policy. In multicultural society public debate and deliberation and rules that allow cultures to sustain themselves should be followed'.

5. The identity of the congregation and the neighbourhood effect

It is clear from the introduction in Chapter 1 that the situation in which ELCSA Tembisa West found itself was not just a power struggle between Tembisa West and the Diocese or a result of some disagreements among congregants and the leadership of the church. Problems ran deep; the very identity and self-understanding of Tembisa West as a congregation and ELCSA as an institutional church was at stake. To get a clearer understanding of the situation, it is of vital importance to get a deeper understanding of the identity of ELCSA and how this identity informs congregants' identity as individuals and the congregations' as communities of faithful.

The concept of identity refers to a person's self-conception, social presentation and the aspect of a person that make him/her unique, or qualitatively different from others (Jenkins, 2014:6). It is the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group (Johnson et al., 2006). It is the human capacity – rooted in language – to know who's who and hence what's what and it matters because it is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively (Jenkins, 2014:14).

According to Nauta (2007:46):

The identity of a congregation is determined by the attraction between people. It is the people who gather together who determine the identity of congregational life, people who have certain preferences and who share them with others. The congregation is in fact the religious assembly of 'our kind of people'.

The interaction and relationship between religion and identity is an important theme for congregations and their members. The provision of meaning and belonging are two important functions of religion and, therefore, also for the formation of people's

identity. Identity helps describe who a person is, and religion is part of this defining process (Greil & Davidman 2007:549).

According to Schoeman (2015:104), identity describes who I am and who we are: both are socially formed and influenced by religion. For Ysseldyk *et al.* (2010:61), religious institutions help shape the social identity, membership and belief systems of a group. As a social group, a congregation plays an important role in the formation of the religious identity of its members. Thus, congregations create spaces for the formation and development of religious identities.

Woolever *et al* (2006:53) elaborates:

Religious identity formation takes place within a specific context and, in this regard, the congregation is part of this context. Different aspects may be identified to describe a congregational identity: it is explicit and shared; it enhances loyalty and commitment; it gives direction to action, and it provides certain boundaries.

Tucker (2016:474) concluded as follows:

A congregation will only be able to develop towards becoming a missional congregation when its identity is found in the perfection of grace of God, since only then will it truly be reflecting the image of the God of all grace (1 Pet 5:10).

Since grace overflows in relationships (1 Peter 4:10), Tucker (2016:483) continues, 'a 'being' church (he equates '*being*' with '*identity*') is one where all share in being on the discipleship journey to discovering their true identity. As we live with others we learn and change others by example and being an example. It is not just a matter of being in a small group once a week and a worship service on a Sunday but of being informally in constant caring, contact with individuals and households in the congregation.

Arguing for the contextualisation of congregational identity, Stringer (2013:29). wrote:

Not only are congregations and their memberships clearly located within social structure, they are also dynamic entities within it, operating within the processes of social and system integration and differentiation

Schoeman (2015:106) concurred:

The social networks, relationships and interaction within a community impact on the way in which a congregation is functioning. This makes a congregation part of the local environment.

Brouwer (2008:46) says:

The social and cultural context in which a congregation is located, defines how the congregation perceives itself, determines its program of activities, moulds its symbolic and ritual discourse, and co-constructs the artefacts that give expression to the identity.

This identity formation process may be a deliberate, intentional adaptation by a faith community to an altering environment. But over the years most congregations gradually flow unconsciously and unreflectively into a different constellation of identity fragments, that, for that moment, composes who they are and what they do (Brouwer (2008:46).

The identity of a congregation is about who we are as a people with history, as followers of Christ, as members of a congregation, as members of a community of faithful, and as members of the universal church. The identity of a congregation is not based on the congregation's structures and strategies, or programmes and policies. Niemandt (2019: 12), sees church polity, organisational matters and leadership reflecting (I add *'rather than defining'*) the identity, calling, life and order of the church and ecclesiology as the architecture of the life of the church.

Ngong (2017:251) raises an important question of how Christian identity should be defined in the context of regionality. For example, should Christian identity be

defined by the country's vision of itself or by the vision of the vision of mission Dei proclaimed by the church? Ngong asks, in America for example, should followers of Jesus Christ be Christian first and then Americans second, Americans first and then Christians second or can they be both at the same time? The same question would apply to African Christians. Should African Christian identity be defined by African cultural commitments, Christian commitments, or both? In other words, what should be the relationship between Christian values and local values?

These questions become even more complex when one considers different cultural groups within a culture. For example, the African culture is a sum total of diverse cultures of different countries but also cultural diversity within countries. To this end, Ngong (2017:252) wrote:

The response in the literature of world Christianity seems to be that Christian identity should first and foremost be shaped by the cultural context in which Christians find themselves. World Christianity does not appear to recognize any specific Christian identity formed by a homogeneous idea of the church or Christianity (given that the culture of the church or Christianity is not monolithic either) but rather many Christian identities formed by different perspectives on the gospel as determined by the local culture.

The emphasis on local culture raises a number of questions for the African Christian. For example, what is 'local culture' in the rainbow nation of South Africa? Is it continental or sub-continental, e.g. sub-Saharan culture? What about the North African culture which is predominantly Arabic in nature? Is the South African culture as homogeneous as implied by 'the rainbow nation' or does it warrant consideration of individual ethnic and tribal cultures with their own unique characteristics? Consider as an example the black South African population; is there something like a homogenous black culture? Or does each language group have its own culture? What identity should Christians in these cultural contexts assume especially in a post-apartheid South Africa where residential areas are no longer segregated according to race or ethnicity?

Unfortunately, much of the Christianity we have in the non-Western world today is the product of the modern missionary movement which sometimes went hand-in-hand with colonialism (Ngong, 2017:255). To be a Christian person in Africa meant to take on a new identity which was completely different from what one had up to the point of conversion. African Christian converts had to be given European names as evidence of conversion. Additionally, traditional and cultural way of dressing was considered unchristian and had to be replaced by what was deemed to be acceptable Christian way of dressing. The good news is that Christianity today is no longer viewed through this lens of colonialism. The gospel is preached and understood, true as it is, in the context of prevailing cultures without changing any part of the gospel to suit the culture.

Ngong (2017:258-259) argues that the variety of Christian identities may also serve as an instrument of exclusion and isolation and the creation of ecclesial apartheid. This would be true where gender, race, or ethnicity is integral in the formation of identity. Missiologically, what image would a gender-based church, or a race-based church, or even ethnic orientated church portray to the world and how is this image conducive to spreading the gospel? What then are the implications for the three ELCSA congregations in Tembisa West segregated into Zulu, Sepedi and Setswana congregations? Are these divisions based on language ethnicity creating church apartheid? Are these divisions and segregation hindering the united mission of the church in Tembisa West, noting that all residential areas in Tembisa are heterogeneously mixed in terms of languages spoken? Whilst certain languages may be dominant in certain sections of the township, Tembisa township as a whole (and any township in South Africa for that matter) is ethnically heterogeneous. However, it is not the intention of this research to delve into these kinds of issues. These questions are raised purely as gaps in knowledge that may require further research.

Understanding a congregation requires understanding that it is a unique gathering of people with a cultural identity all its own (c.f. Schoeman, 2015:103). Naidoo (2017:4) wrote:

In understanding the identity of a congregation which is a complex set of beliefs and values held by its members, one has to understand what makes a

group 'us'. Congregants create strong emotional bonds together through close face-to-face contact Sunday after Sunday and throughout weekly events. Thus, congregations become important spaces of socialisation where social identities are learnt; which is an outcome of social, historical and political practices highlighting the tenacity of such identities.

Woolever et al. (2006:53) identify different aspects to describe a congregational identity, that 'it is explicit and shared; it enhances loyalty and commitment; it gives direction to action, and it provides certain boundaries. It includes values, a shared history and heritage, and is part of a congregational culture'.

6. Concluding remarks

At the core of Tembisa West congregations' identity is ethnicity. Place and location as they relate to physical and human characteristics in and around the neighbourhood, do not form a part of the congregations' self-definition and understanding. Congregations were given names that highlight their ethnicity, instead of place or location. The congregation situated at Endulweni, was given a Zulu name 'Enkazimulweni' which means 'shine' or 'in glory'. This congregation worships in IsiZulu. The congregation in Khatamping was given a Tswana name 'Ratanang' which means 'love one another'. This congregation worships in Setswana. The one in Thiteng has a Sepedi name 'Se bo Saka' meaning 'shelter / fortress'. Its language of worship is Sepedi. In essence, these three congregations are for Zulu, Sepedi and Setswana speaking people respectively, yet the population make-up in these areas is ethnically heterogeneous. Consequently, congregants travel descent distances (20km or more in certain instances) to congregation of their native language. Other than language, there is very little bonding congregants together for a common purpose. They live far apart in different communities and do not belong to the same group 'us' that identifies together for a common purpose in the congregations' neighbourhood. This renders congregations out of touch and out of reach to the people of the neighbourhood.

Drawing people from outside of the places where they live, based on ethnicity or language orientation, means that the congregation has no firm commitment to life in the neighbourhood. The only way to deepen congregants' relationship with one another is to be drawn out of their neighbourhoods to spend time together during Sunday services. There is no way for the congregation to develop the same kind of relationship they have with each other with those who do not belong to the congregation. And there is no way for the neighbourhood to experience the life of the congregation because members live in so many different places. A congregation without a firm commitment to life in the neighbourhood is not faithfully present.

CHAPTER 3

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF TEMBISA WEST CONGREGANTS

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the relation of congregational conflict and faithful presence in the context of the ELCSA congregation in Tembisa West. The chapter is not intended to address the nature of conflict, its origin or substance, but to offer a conceptual framework for further study and guidance on how congregations can stay faithfully present in environments where chaos, conflict and fear is abounding. The chapter is necessary because some people in the congregation think they no longer need the church to their situation. They believe they can fulfil the church's mission by being Christ-like in their neighbourhoods and that they can take care of their situation without the support of the church. To these people, it appears that Christian life and church life need not be one.

The immediate importance of this chapter is the highlight of the potential danger of the emerging culture of individualism among congregants, their loss of a sense of covenant community and the myth that Christian life and church life can be lived separately. This is the kind of faithful presence Hong cautions against; the attitude among Christians that people are saved as individuals into a private relationship with God, neglecting the idea that they have been added to the community of the church and that their relationship with God is meant to take place from within that community (Hong, 2012:91). Faithful presence requires people to think and act covenantal, to bear one another's burdens, rather than acting individualistic. This is Paul's command in Galatians 6:2, '*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*'

It has been mentioned that the ELCSA congregation in Tembisa West was divided. There was a group that left the church soon after the conflict started. These people left for other Lutheran congregations nearby or denominations other than ELCSA.

Others remained in the congregation throughout the crises period, though some stopped attending as frequently as they used to. This research therefore, utilized criterion sampling, a form of purposive sampling strategy that emphasizes having clear criteria in mind to determine who fits with the goals of the study and who does not (Creswell, 1998:118). The criterion for this research was that participants experienced conflict in the congregation and either left the congregation or remained throughout the conflict period. Van Manen (2016:9) explained that in phenomenological research, lived experiences are the main object of study, but the goal of such research, according to Lindseth and Norberg (2004:145-153) is not to understand individuals' lived experiences as facts, but to determine the understandable meaning of such experiences. Lived experience is not about reflecting on an experience while living through it but is "recollective", where experience is reflected on after it has passed or lived through (Lindseth and Norberg, 2004:104),

For the purpose of this research, four interviews were conducted. Creswell (1998) recommends 5 – 25 interviews for phenomenology, Morse (1994) recommends at least 6. These recommendations are a guide to help the researcher estimate how many participants they will need but ultimately the required number of participants will depend on when saturation is reached. Three respondents had remained in the congregation for the duration of the research. One responded left the church for another congregation close to his place of residence. The number 'four' was not predetermined, but arrived at after the researcher realized that nothing new was emerging from further interviews. The researcher was confident that saturation had been reached.

2. The interview processes

Respondents comprised three members of the Prayer Women's League (PWL), considered the backbone of ELCSA in terms of membership numbers, mission activity and financial strength. Of these, one participant was an office bearer of the league at congregational and parish level. Others were ordinary, non-office bearers

but long-standing lay members of the congregation. The table below describes membership status of the participants.

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Membership status</i>
Respondent 1	Male	Left for other congregations
Respondent 2	Female	Remained in the congregation
Respondent 3	Female	Remained in the congregation
Respondent 4	Female	Remained in the congregation

Interviews were conducted in a mixture of English and isiZulu to allow participants to express themselves freely. Statements made in isiZulu were immediately translated into English without changing words and meaning. This was achieved by going through audio recordings and translations more than once, ensuring that no word and meaning was missed and that the translation reflected the true interview given by the respondent and not what the researcher wanted to hear.

Interviews were conducted at the respondent's place residence or in a quiet area at a convenient location where no external influences could interfere with the interview process. Respondents were contacted via telephone to arrange the interview date, time and place. During the telephone call, the purpose of the interview was explained and verbal consent obtained to proceed with the interview.

At the beginning of each interview, the following checklist was explained to the respondent:

- Purpose of the research
- Purpose of the interview
- Limitations of the study, i.e. the nature of conflict, its origin or substance and people involved fell outside the scope of the research.
- Presentation of the consent letter from the approving authority
- Consent by the respondent to audio record the interview
- Assurance of confidentiality
- Consent letter signed by the respondent prior to starting the interview.

3. The description of congregants' experience

During interviews, participants described their experience during the conflict period, though they could not explain with certainty the origin of such conflict, needless to say this was neither the question posed, nor the purpose of the interview. All respondents stated that they were affected by the conflict which started as an open war between warring factions, characterized by militancy and hate speech, and later transitioned to a silent war where the impasse continued unabated. At the time of this research, differences had not been resolved and legal proceedings were ongoing. What follows next are general themes drawn from the lived experience of the study participants. Statements describing the experience are quoted, followed by an analysis of those statements. Themes that emerged are:

- (Fear of) Rejection
- (Loss of) Trust in leadership
- Faith and assurance
- Emptiness, hurt and emotional upset
- (Loss of) Hope and hope
- Unity in mission

All respondents were born and baptized in the Lutheran Church and were members in good standing, meaning that they complied with all church membership requisites such as the payment of church dues and other membership obligations. It also means that their membership status entitled them participation in church elections; to vote and be voted into office. Respondent 3 had packed and unpacked boxes many times from relocating often as pastor's wife and a member of the PWL. Respondent 1 had some knowledge of the history of ELCSA and the role played by the European missionaries in Southern Africa during the 19th and 20th century periods. Respondent 3 was an active member of the PWL and an office bearer of the League at congregational and parish level. Respondent 4 was also a member of the PWL

and a loyal Tembisa West congregant, who drove a descent distance every Sunday to get to her preferred congregation in Tembisa West.

Respondent 1 considered himself devoted and devout, committed to the standards, traditions, doctrines and policies of the Lutheran church. He attributed most of the challenges faced by ELCSA to how the church evolved from a religion defined by the culture and politics of Europe to the modern day South African context. In particular, he cited two scenarios to have been game changers in the history of ELCSA:

- the fall of apartheid and the rise in popularity and prominence of the Pentecostal Gospel (of prosperity) in South Africa.
- the introduction of self-supporting ministry in ELCSA around 1998.

Respondent 1 said:

The emergence of prosperity gospel and false prophets has confused those people whose faith is weak. The result is that those who have not fully understood the Gospel and are weak in faith, get easily excited to follow 'false' leaders without understanding issues and what the Word of God says. This has happened in our church too, where members just follow what leaders say without understanding reasons thereof. People are being misled by those who know better. The knowledgeable are standing in the way of the less knowledgeable. As a result, people are confused and the devil is victorious. This is the main problem. Hard work lies ahead for the church to correct these wrongs.

Togarasei (2011:339-341) when defining prosperity gospel in the African context wrote:

Pentecostal prosperity gospel emphasises prosperity as a fruit of faith. Getting rich is seen as God's will and an outward manifestation of his blessings. One only needs to have faith in God through Jesus and blessings will follow... To move from poverty to prosperity one needs deliverance from the spirit of poverty ... Prosperity is explained in terms of health. Being ill, like being poor,

is associated with demonic possession ... To get rich or to be healed of diseases, members of Pentecostal churches are taught to 'sow seeds' of prosperity. Giving to the church is equated to giving to God, so the measure you give is the measure you will get back. The churches therefore receive huge sums of money from members who expect financial and health breakthroughs in their lives in return. Because members are taught to be generous these churches have fat coffers that enable the founders and those close to them to live lavish lifestyles. They own several properties and many of them are chauffeur-driven in expensive cars. Some of the churches are even registered as private companies.

Respondent 1 believes that challenges faced by the Lutheran church are a result of its leaders' aspirations to match the material wealth of prosperity gospel preachers. He believes that members in main-line churches, are increasingly attracted to prosperity gospel by the promise of miraculous health and wealth promised by these churches. In his own words, *'the weak and less knowledgeable get confused by the powerful and more knowledgeable'*. Respondent 1 said:

Our walk and talk should witness Jesus. What we do should align with what we say regardless of what is happening in our church. The Great Commission says we are light of the world, not only of people inside the church. What hurts me is people in our church are being used by people with ulterior motives.'

In Paul's second *Epistle to Timothy*, his colleague and delegate for his ministry in *Ephesus*, he wrote: *A time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.* (2 Timothy 4: 3). In Jeremiah 23:23 God says, *'I am a God who is everywhere and not in one place only'*. The learning from Respondent 1 comments is that the need to move locations or change churches (to find God) in order to be faithfully present is neither here nor there. Faithful presence requires a sense of covenant community for the local congregation to be able to bear one another's burden as they are bound together in their situation.

Respondent 2 said,

In the beginning we enjoyed chaotic scene created by the conflict thinking it would pass quickly, but with the passage of time, we realized that there was no easy end in sight.

At this point Respondent 2 and others realized that a solution was needed, though they did not know where this would come from and in what manner. Respondent 2 went on to say,

People are asking where their money is going, but as leaders we don't have answers. People are asking us what is happening, but we do not know the truth'

She says a number of other congregants started asking questions about cause and effect, but no answers were forthcoming. Other respondents also highlighted the lack of adequate information regarding the origin of conflict and efforts to resolve. Even those in leadership positions (like Respondent 2) were simply told what to do without being fully apprised about reasons. Leadership in this context means the interim leadership structure constituted to act on behalf of the congregation on all matters pertaining to the conflict, including correspondence with the Diocesan office and lawyers acting for and on behalf of the congregation.

Respondent 3 indicated that they refrained from asking leaders for clarity on issues for fear of being reprimanded. She said, *'I do not want to be called igundane'*. Igundane is a Zulu slang word for 'sell-outs', referring to the betrayal of group interests for individual benefit, e.g. if you go to work when others are on strike or act in a manner that undermines the achievement of group objectives, it means you are not part of the collective and therefore a 'sell-out' or 'igundane'. During the early 80's South Africa's township unrests, there would be severe repercussions for amagundane (plural for igundane). They were seen in a very bad way; isolated from the main stream civil society life and often stoned to death when caught. It became clear from the interviews that some people in Tembisa West feared for this labelling

and exclusion from the congregational life if they did not heed leadership instructions.

3.1. (Fear of) Rejection

When confronted with stressful events, many people find comfort in the belief that friends and family care and are willing to provide assistance if necessary. When people think that others do not accept them as much as they would like, they become distressed. Langens and Schüler (2005:818-819) found that people who do not feel liked or supported by peers, family, or friends may be less able to cope efficiently with stressful events and that the one variable that is linked to low perceptions of social support is fear of rejection. They found that individuals with a strong (relative to weak) fear of rejection feel more insecure in social situations; feel more uncomfortable and anxious in social groups; believe they are less liked by peers and friends, and frequently anticipate being rejected by other people. Connor-Smith and Compas (2002) found that individuals high (relative to low) in sociotropy (i.e., individuals who place extreme importance on maintaining relationships and avoiding rejection) report being confronted with a higher number of social stressors. Sokolowski and Schmalt (cited in Langens and Schüler, 2005:819) found that among participants who imagined entering a social situation, those high in fear of rejection reported being more anxious and uptight and showed higher physiological arousal. An experiment by Pierce and Lydon (1998) suggests that fear of rejection may undermine an individual's capacity to cope efficiently with a stressful situation. Leary et al. (2001:162) found that the emotions of sadness, loneliness, hurt feelings, jealousy, guilt, shame, embarrassment, and social anxiety arise when people perceive that others do not adequately value relationships with them. Because individuals high in fear of rejection typically expect other people to be rejecting, critical, or distant, they seem to be less able to automatically adapt to stressful experiences (Langens and Schüler, 2005:818).

Respondents 2 and 3 indicated that they disagreed with the call to not participate in church activities such as Circuit and Diocesan events, though they feared voicing their disagreements openly, an indication of distrust of the leadership of

the church in Tembisa West. Some of the events and activities they were prevented from participating include:

- Not attending Circuit and Diocesan conferences. Respondent 2 and 3 indicated that this affected their spiritual well-being. Respondent 4 said *'it did not really matter to me'*.
- Withholding of money collected from congregants from the Diocese Synodical Fund. Respondents 3 indicated that they withheld their contributions as they were of the opinion that congregational leadership was using their money to pay lawyers acting for congregation against the Diocese. Respondent 4 indicated that she withheld her contribution as she did not want to contribute to the Diocesan Synodical Fund, as she had lost faith in the leadership of the Diocese. Most people either stopped or significantly reduced their financial contributions, believing that their contributions were used for purposes other than what they were meant for as well as not renewing their League membership fees as they were not allowed to attend conferences.

3.2. (Loss of) Trust in leadership

Hurley (2014:351) defines trust as a judgment of confident reliance by a person (a trustor) on a person, group, organization, or system (a trustee) where there is uncertainty and risk. Galford and Drapeau (2003:1-7) suggest three different kinds of trust in organisations. The first is strategic trust —the trust employees have in the people running the show to make the right strategic decisions. The second is personal trust —the trust employees have in their own managers. The third is organizational trust —the trust people have not in any individual but in the company itself. These three types of trust are distinct, but linked in important ways. If the personal trust is violated, for example, organizational trust will be shaken.

Ordinarily, trust is the expectation that a trustee will perform actions that are beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to a trustor regardless of the trustor's

capacity to monitor those actions. When we say we trust someone, we imply that we think that person will engage in beneficial, non-detrimental action so that we will consider cooperating with him. Participants in the research felt they were engaged in a conflict they did not understand with the hope that one day it will pass. Respondent 2 used the expression, '*We are prisoners of hope.*' She said:

We are not getting proper feedback from our leaders if things are coming right or not. It disturbs my faith. As women we go out recruiting members but conflict is hindering us. When we go out, women talk a lot about the conflict and now that we no longer attend conferences, it feels like something has been taken away from me. Conferences mean a lot to me. It gives me renewed hope. Others have expressed the same sentiment. As leaders (Respondent 2 is a PWL office bearer), when we tell people not to attend conferences, they look very demoralized. They wait the whole year for a conference hoping to go there to offload whatever burden they carry. These members do not have the choice to attend the conference or not, leaders decide on their behalf without asking for their input. People are asking where their money is going? But as leaders we don't have answers. People are asking us but we also do not know the truth.

Respondent 2 statement, '*people are asking (us as leaders) what is happening, but we do not know the truth*' indicates doubt in people's mind. Are they doing the right thing? Are they being misled and misinformed? Is there a solution in sight? These and similar questions come to mind whenever doubt or distrust exists.

Respondent 2 continued,

we are not getting proper feedback from leaders. It disturbs my faith. When we go out, women talk a lot about the conflict'. It (conflict) is hindering us.

For the moment, congregants are simply stuck waiting, wondering what will happen, when it will happen, and why it is taking so long. But faith calls them to live while they are waiting, to keep serving and try not to focus on the wait. Her statement, '*my faith is disturbed*' indicates a troubled state of mind, the

knowledge that something is wrong and uncertain; an indication of the gap between current faith (during or after the phenomenon) and desired faith (before the phenomenon). I want to think that 'disturbed a lot' means being troubled, confused and searching for answers one does not have. Respondent 3 needs to find answers quickly to reconcile with the situation and restore her faith. Until this happens, her faith will remain disturbed. Conflict experience resulted in confusion, distrust, fear and disturbance of her faith.

3.3. Faith and assurance

In his work on theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin wrote:

When we stress that faith ought to be certain and secure, we do not have in mind a certainty without doubt or a security without any anxiety. Rather, we affirm that believers have a perceptual struggle with their own lack of faith, and are far from possessing a peaceful conscience. On the other hand, we want to deny that they may fall out of, or depart from their confidence in the divine mercy, no matter how much they may be troubled (McGrath, 2012:163)

Calvin says faith is not simple the removal of doubt or disturbance. Faith is trusting that Christ will be faithful even in the times when we are not faithful to Him. For many in the congregation of Tembisa West, everything would have been long forgotten had it happened quickly, '*in the beginning everything was just a game*', *we thought it would pass quickly*' said Respondent 2. When the game did not pass as quickly as they initially thought, coupled with the fact that they did not have answers, they became 'prisoners of hope' waiting for something to happen. Echoing this state of affairs is Respondent 3 comment that '*we just don't know what is happening...*' but '*...we have hope*'. Hope and faith in God kept these congregants alive, serving and not focusing on the wait.

3.4. Feeling of emptiness, hurt and emotional upset

Congregants were no longer having fun but faced a painful reality of not being able to attend conferences. For women in the congregation, these conferences

are a much-needed revival of their spirituality. All of a sudden there was a direct 'cost' of the congregational conflict to these women. They felt 'something being taken away from them', the feeling of emptiness, of being deprived, helpless and demoralized, resulting in 'disturbed faith'. The prisoners of hope were now living hopeless lives.

Fogarty (2000:71) suggests the following formula for family therapy:
stimulus —» emptiness —» hurt —» emotional upset —» response.

A stimulus is any action or condition that will elicit emotional upset inside a person. The first reaction to this stimulus is a feeling of emptiness inside a person, followed by a feeling of hurt (pain, suffering, or distress). Then comes the emotional upset or anger and the reaction. Once the process inside of and between people reaches the point of anger, it will lead to nothing that is productive and much that is destructive. The relationship is on a downhill course from that point. It will be followed by argument, disagreement, distance and emotional turmoil.

3.5. *(Loss of) Hope*

Korner (1970:134-136) defines hope as a positive phenomenon necessary for healthy coping, its key purpose being the avoidance of despair, with the secondary function of permitting the individual psychologically to bypass ongoing unpleasant or stressful situations. Hoping is differentiated from wishing by hope's reality-oriented focus, and from expecting or anticipating by its intense affective component. On the one hand, hopelessness suggests the loss of all hope, the presence of great despair, and the cessation of all efforts to alter the threatening condition. Hopelessness means that an individual accepted the feared and threatening outcome as inevitable. On the other hand, hope induces the feeling of "assumed certainty" that the dreaded will not happen, that despair will not occur. A hope specifies that a future event will solve problems, give gratification, provide solutions. At its best, hope is a motivation-protecting device in the face of strong frustration. At its worst, hope fosters escape from reality, refusal to deal with the here-and-now, and the reduction of efficient coping.

The socio-political situation in South Africa is no different. For 25 years in government, the African National Congress (ANC) has been promising 'a better life for all', but the quality of life for ordinary South Africans has not improved much. A better life has only been brought to those within the ranks of the ruling party, while the majority of the country is kept waiting. Nonetheless, people have continued to vote ANC to power in the hope of 'a better life'. For now, they are stuck waiting, wondering when it will happen, and why it is taking so long. Hope keeps them looking ahead, anticipating and expecting 'a better life' from the ANC government. For us Christians what matters in the long run is not only that we put our hope and trust in God, but also that we act hopefully even in situations that appear to be absolutely hopeless. This is what it means to have Christian hope. This is what faithful presence is about: bringing hope to the hopeless and help to the helpless.

Respondent 3 said:

As PWL we are not split. We just don't know what is happening, we support one another. Even outside the congregation we are (still) united. We don't say because we don't attend things (Circuit and Diocesan events and Conferences), we are no longer united. People are unhappy but work is happening. We have hope.

She says she does not know the truth behind the chaos. People are affected, the church's mission is affected but they have hope that it will pass and order will be restored. God is the basis of their hope. In the dictionaries, hope is defined as 'a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen'. It is an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes. James (1859:25) describes hope as "the mainspring of human action; the lunar influence that keeps the tide of human affairs in perpetual and healthy motion. Without hope all things would settle down into an offensive and pestiferous stagnancy. Unlike in ordinary English vocabulary, where hope is generally distinguished from certainty, in the Bible hope is not wishful thinking. It is confidence that something will happen because God has promised that it will

happen (as in 1 Peter 1:13). When congregants say 'we have hope' it is because of their confidence that conflict will pass because God has promised it will pass. Hope is a longing, a desire, and an expectation of fulfilment. The restoration (of order, of faith) is what is being hoped for.

3.6. Unity in mission

Respondent 3 said, '*as PWL we are still united*'. People use the word 'united' to show the unity they share because of a common identity or shared purpose. Christians use the word to show the unity they share because of a common identity in the person and work of Jesus Christ and because of a shared purpose in the declaration of their Christian faith. Labour unions use the slogan 'an injury to one is an injury to all' to mean that, should you harm one person of the group, the entire group will raise to defend one another. There are many appeals for unity in our serving each other as leaders and in our following the way of love. When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he said: '*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one*'. When Respondent 3 says '*we are not split we support one another, even outside the congregation*', I am reminded of the classic definitions of the visible and invisible church. The visible church being the church we see, which includes different denominations and expressions of the Christian faith. The invisible church being the unified gathering of God's people over all time and places. Tembisa West congregants have remained faithfully present to God, to one another, and to their neighbours as an invisible church gathered outside the visible church that is defined by buildings, protocols, squabbles and conflict.

Sparks et al. (2014:18) wrote:

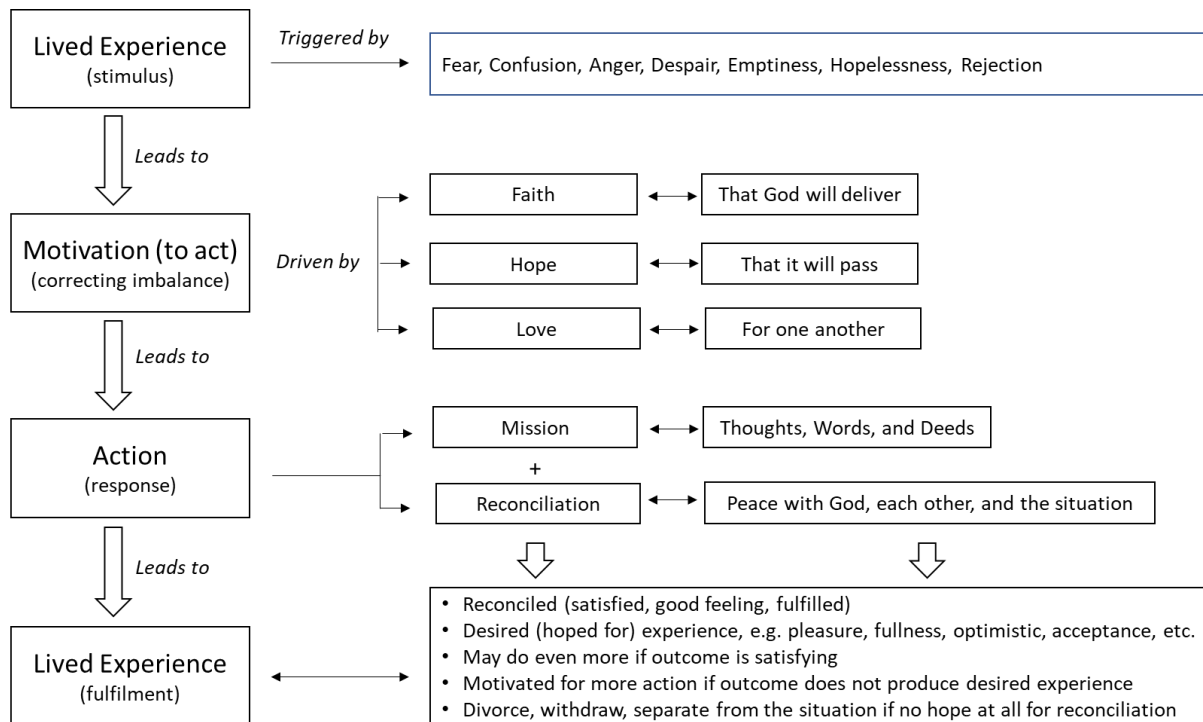
Humans are meant to share life together, to learn to fit together as a living body in relationship with God, with one another, and for the place to which they are called, and the church is a body that bears witness to this way of becoming human in Christ.

Respondent 3 use of the words '*we are still united*' suggests that regardless of the situation in the congregation, members have remained faithfully united with one another even though the visible church as an institution was no longer relevant. I concur with Bradosky (2017:351) when he says, 'once the church becomes mirrored in political agendas and activism it becomes less popular and increasingly irrelevant to the culture'. According to Sparks et al. (2014:59) when people get so caught up in producing outcomes that suite their needs and end up seeing everything and everyone as tool to accomplish their mission, they sacrifice faithful presence.

When people begin to say 'regardless of what is happening in our church', it means the church in Tembisa West has become 'irrelevant'. Irrelevant churches make almost no impact on the community around them and they too pay no attention to it. Baldwin (2009), was explicit when he argued that the modern (American) church has become irrelevant and more and more people are losing interest in the organised church. He says instead of finding Christian love and kindness in the church, they find the same kind of gossip, slander, petty bickering, favouritism, and selfishness that they might find at any other place. Responded 4 commented, '*we have lost the Christianity part of it. We have lost the church and the church in us is gone. People need to humble themselves and say sorry*'.

What follows next is the researcher's proposed Faithful Presence Model (FPM) drawn from the lived experience of the study participants, their statements describing the experience, and the analysis of those statements.

4. Faithful presence model



4.1. Explanation of the model

The model begins with a stimulus, an agent, action or condition that elicits emotional upset in the institution or inside a person. It can be a thought, a feeling, a tone of voice, an assumption, an implication, a hooked question, a memory, etc. (Fogarty, 2000:71). We learned with Tembisa West congregants that the stimulus was the conflict which triggered an emotional upset (fear, confusion, despair) in the congregation as well as within individual members. In any emotional problem, says Forgarty, the first reaction to the stimulus is a feeling of emptiness inside a person. I would like to add the feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and fear of rejection to this list. What follows next is a feeling of hurt, pain, suffering or distress followed by emotional upset or anger and then reaction.

The motivation to act (or react) in order to correct the imbalance is driven by faith that God will deliver and hope that the negative situation (stimulus) will pass. It is

driven by faith in God that He will not allow us to suffer. It is also driven by our love for one another as parts of the one body. This then triggers the reaction or action to correct the imbalance (the emotional hurt). When Jesus taught us to pray, '*... forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation*' he teaches that as we ask God for forgiveness, we should also confirm our practice of forgiving others. We live in a broken world, broken institutions, broken families and broken relationships. That's why Jesus teaches us to pray for forgiveness. We, ourselves, expect to be served by God and those around us with love. In turn, those around us expect from a service with love, but we cannot serve and be served if we are not able to forgive and love. This is what mission as reconciliation is all about. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbour as ourselves and to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mathew 5:43,44). We serve our enemies as much as we serve those we love.

We can never be at peace with God if we are not at peace with one another and the situation. This will not always mean that we always achieve our desired outcome, what we hope for, but that we are able to reconcile with the situation and accept that it is what it is, that there is no more animosity, and that we are parts of the same body and that our love for one another is what brings us together. This is mission as reconciliation at its best. Reconciling with the situation could also mean complete withdrawal from the situation. In Mark 6:11 Jesus commanded his disciples, *and if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.*' Jesus was telling His disciples that they were to preach the gospel to everyone. Where they were received with joy, they should stay and teach. But where their message was rejected, they had no further responsibility. They were free to walk away with a clear conscience, knowing they had done all they could do.

5. Concluding remarks

This chapter investigated congregants' lived experience of faithful presence in the midst of conflict. In the chapter we learned that the church is not a membership

organization people join and leave as they wish. We learned that the church does not exist to provide members' private faith; that a Christian is not an isolated individual and that the Christian life cannot be lived alone and the church life cannot be sustained in isolation from the neighbourhood. The chapter highlighted the danger of the emerging culture of individualism in ELCSA in Tembisa West; the loss of a sense of covenant community and the myth that Christian life and church life can be lived separately. This points to a need for further research in this area, as the church continues to bleed members in numbers and splinter 'churches' mushrooming all the time as if God is found only in certain places. We learned in this chapter that church members exist in solidarity, mutuality, interdependence, under and for the headship of Christ; that there cannot be autonomous Christians. We learned that hope that God will deliver carried Tembisa West congregants along. They did not focus on the situation, but continued to serve even outside the construct of the congregation. We concluded that this is what faithful presence is all about; that faithful presence cannot be about individualism.

The next chapter is the study of reconciliation as a model of Christian mission. The chapter will conclude with an investigation of concrete manifestations and practices that can move the reconciliation process along, drawing from the lived experience of the study participants.

CHAPTER 4

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION DRAWN FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDY SUBJECTS

1. Introduction

It was found in chapter 3 that lack of clarity from the leadership of the congregation caused confusion, anger and despair amongst congregants, but faith gave hope that God will deliver the congregation from this difficult situation. Whilst the beginning appeared temporal and soon to pass, with the passage of time it became clear that there was no easy solution in sight; each side to the conflict stood its ground and all efforts to resolve seemed destined to fail. Both parties were of the view that for the conflict to end, one party had to win at the expense of the other party, hence the litigation route deemed by both sides to be the only option to end the conflict. Adopting such an approach, known as the 'zero-sum mindset', can make disputes very hard to resolve, as Cohen (2015:427) points out:

When parties see conflicts as zero-sum, they are led quite naturally into combative tactics. If the parties believe that the only way for one side to get more is for the other side to get less, then they'd best prepare for battle. By contrast, when parties see conflicts as positive-sum, they tend to look for integrative solutions.

Baron (1990:199), after reviewing a number of recent definitions of conflict, concluded that although definitions are not identical, they overlap with respect to the following elements:

- Conflict includes opposing interests between individuals or groups in a zero-sum situation;
- Such opposed interests must be recognized for conflict to exist;

- Conflict involves beliefs, by each side, that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) its interests;
- Conflict is a process; it develops out of existing relationships between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the contexts in which these took place; and
- Actions by one or both sides do, in fact, produce thwarting of others' goals.

Rahim (2011:18) notes that whilst above 5 elements maybe present in all zero-sum conflict situations, in no-zero-sum (positive-sum or negative-sum) situations, some of these elements may not be present. To illustrate this point, imagine the following situation:

Members of the Board of Directors (BoD) of a company that is in deep financial distress disagree on a major issue facing the company. They agree that the company cannot continue to trade normally when it is technically insolvent and unable to pay its creditors. Half the board members recommend liquidating the company in order to absolve directors from personal liability for the losses suffered by the company. The other half prefers a business rescue process in order to avoid being held personally responsible for reckless trading. Whether the final decision is liquidation or business rescue is immaterial in that the net result will be a non-zero sum (positive sum in this case), as the outcome will be satisfactory to both sides, i.e. directors will have avoided personal liability for any losses suffered and the company would have been rescued. A negative-sum outcome would occur if, for example, some directors (accused of neglecting their duties) are discharged from their directorship roles and the company begins to perform better. This outcome is negative-sum in that something had to be taken away from some (removal from the BoD) for the betterment of the company and remaining Board members.

In negative-sum conflicts, the only way for one party to maintain the status quo is to take something from the other party (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015). A positive-sum occurs when resources are somehow increased and an approach is formulated in which the desires and needs of all concerned are satisfied.

During the course of this study, the author observed that Tembisa West parishioners were not in conflict with one another but were caught in the crossfire between warring factions. Consequently, reconciliation to them may not mean the settlement of disputes; but may mean the restoration of the status quo ante or the acceptance of the status quo as a new way of life, thus reconciling with the situation that has developed. This chapter will conclude with an investigation of some of the concrete manifestations and practices that can move the reconciliation process forward, drawing from the lived experience of study participants.

2. The theory behind the origin and manifestation of conflicts

Behind each conflict are ineffective histories, socio-political and economic factors, wicked human hearts and unjust systems. Spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12) may also be part of the problem (cf. Rice 2005:7). In each conflict situation there will be offenders and offended, bystanders and peacemakers. Certain conflicts will be characteristic of invisible perpetrators with own personal agendas. These perpetrators can be very difficult to ascertain, quite often pointing to a 'third force' of some kind. The 'third force' was a term used in South Africa during the late 1980s and early 1990s to refer to a clandestine force believed to be responsible for a surge in Black on Black violence in KwaZulu-Natal and some Gauteng townships. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa final report (Vol 2, Chapter 7, Subsection 2) found that the term 'third force' was used to describe random violence that could not be ascribed to political conflict between identifiable competing groups; rather it involved covert forces intent on escalating violence as a means of derailing the negotiations process (Truth and Commission, 1999:586).

Regardless of the underlying causes of the conflict, its manifestation and management go through several stages, from conflict formation to conflict resolution and ultimately, reconciliation. The process can be long and laborious or it can be as short as that of a blink of an eye; it all depends on the nature and underlying causes of the conflict, the personalities involved, the size of the reward and what success or failure mean to each side. If the reward is small and easy to sacrifice, the conflict can be short and reconciliation quick. However, if the reward is deemed too attractive to

forgo, and forgoing results in significant or permanent change of context favourable to the one party and unfavourable to the other party, then the conflict can drag for a long time. In such situations, reconciliation can become very difficult to achieve.

Noting that there is no universally accepted definition of conflict, Rahim (2011:18) defines conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities such as individuals, groups, or organisations. Sande (1991:29-30) defines it as 'a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires', arguing that disputes arising out of misunderstandings resulting from poor communication are the primary cause of conflict. Nürnberger et al. (1989:1-7) holds the view that conflict is neither 'positive' nor 'negative', neither 'good' nor 'bad', and that the genesis of conflict is humanity's separation from God. Consequently, a proper response is one that is based on an equally proper understanding of sin and its effects on the human nature. Wise (1970:8-9) sees human conflict as rooted in the very nature of man himself, as part of what human existence means, arguing that 'man created symbols of good guys and bad guys and projected these on to symbols and objects in the external world, explaining why it is so difficult to solve the problem out there. As long as we deny the hatreds in here, we will need our enemies out there.'

Given above definitions, it is the researcher's view that for reconciliation to succeed, the conflict resolution process needs to take into consideration the origin of the conflict, how it manifested itself, the stage of the conflict, a clear understanding of how people respond to the conflict (when it arises), and, equally important, an identification of the most appropriate mechanism for managing the conflict. As Christians, we are called to fearlessly become agents of reconciliation, naming and confessing the sins of the past and present, whilst encouraging others to do the same, and to live in ways of repentance and peace-making (cf. Rice 2005:7-8)

From the conflict management and resolution perspectives, initially the conflict might be addressed through a dialogue, spoken or written exchange of conversations between conflicting parties. The results from this initial process will determine if further action is required. If no resolution is reached, conflict can evolve to another level which will require a different approach to resolve (Chandrasekharan, 1997:

Stages of conflict, para 2). Depending on the nature and scale of the conflict, the magnitude and attractiveness of the reward, the conflict can develop into violence and/or a complete cessation of relationships. Resolving disputes where the reward, win or lose, is high can be an enormous task requiring patience and sacrifice from both sides.

Chandrasekharan (1997) argued that reorienting a conflict from a negative occurrence to one that could result in positive change requires recognizing the stage of the conflict, and selecting the appropriate mechanism for its management (stages of conflict, para 2). Rupesinghe (1995:13-18) gave the following distinction of the five different stages of conflict, or 'cycle of conflict':

- *Conflict formation* - at this stage the conflict is still a dispute and if addressed, it may not escalate and manifest itself.
- *Conflict manifestation* - at this stage the dispute evolves into a conflict that is manifested. Intervention at this stage is usually oriented towards preventing the conflict from escalating even further and possibly mitigating any destructive aspects of the conflict.
- *Conflict endurance* - at this stage the conflict is ongoing, as is the development of the process to address the conflict.
- *Conflict management* - at this stage the process for better addressing the conflict is started. This can include negotiation, problem solving, or round-table dialogue.
- *Conflict transformation* - this can be considered the implementation stage of the conflict resolution. This stage includes projects or programmes that assist in better addressing the conflict.

Conflict becomes more destructive as it increases in intensity. Leas (1985;17-22) has provided a framework for naming and identifying the different levels of intensity of conflict in a group. Leas' five broad levels of conflict intensity are designated as:

- *Level 1: Problems to Solve*. At this level there are real differences between people, but the people are problem-focused not person-focused.

Communication is clear and specific and the people involved want to sort out the problem. This is a normal and entirely healthy level of conflict.

- **Level 2: *Disagreement*.** At this level people are more concerned with self-protection than problem-solving and may talk mainly with friends about how to deal with an issue. Communication is more generalised and people withhold information they think may be used by those with whom they disagree. It is normal for most churches to experience this level of conflict.
- **Level 3: *Contest*.** At this level, people's objectives shift to winning the argument and coming out on top. There is a win-lose dynamic and communication becomes more distorted with personal attacks and emotional arguments overshadowing rational argument. It is not unusual for churches to experience this level of conflict – and this is the first level where people may name the dynamic as one of “conflict”, as negative elements become more evident.
- **Level 4: *Fight or Flight*.** At this level the parties' goal is to hurt or get rid of others, or to leave if they cannot achieve this. Factions have solidified, with identified leaders, and the good of the subgroup, rather than the whole congregation or wider Christian body, becomes their focus. Communication is characterised by blaming, negative stereotyping, self-righteousness and a refusal to take responsibility. It is less common for churches to reach this level of conflict, and once they do so they generally feel stuck, and normally need outside help if the group is to stay together.
- **Level 5: *Intractable*.** In a church context, this level is perhaps better referred to as “Holy War” since the conflict is out of the participants' control, and the goal of opposing parties is to destroy one another. In such situations people see themselves as part of an eternal cause, fighting for universal principles with any means justifying the all-important ends. Communication is characterised by outright condemnation of others, extreme emotional volatility, compulsiveness, an inability to disengage, and with the issues lost from sight.

This is conflict at its most destructive, and requires separation of the warring parties, some kind of peacekeeping rather than a peace-making initiative.

By identifying these levels of conflict, Leas helps us to understand some of the complexity that can be involved in working with conflict in the church. Whether we are in the midst of the situation or we are involved in intervening in the conflict, an accurate assessment of the level of intensity is critical. 'If you do not recognise the conflict level then it is likely that what you do will at best be ineffective and at worst be counter-productive. Misjudging the conflict level can do more harm than good.' (Boyd-MacMillan et Al, 2008:76)

3. The Christian view of conflict and how to manage it

Naturally, human beings have their own ways of resolving conflict, and these ways tend to leave God outside of the resolution process. The Bible however, tells us that God's ways are not our way (Isaiah 55: 8). Proverbs 16: 7 says: *when a person's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he even reconciles his enemies to himself*. In the Lutheran church in Tembisa West, it was found that the first point of departure for the Diocesan Office was always to point to the constitution of the church, focusing on maintaining good governance practices and addressing non-compliance and violations to the constitution, church rules and regulations. From the perspective of the Parish council, the immediate reaction was to always reject and oppose what was perceived to be unjust constitutional imperatives. In the process, the lower office appeared to undermine the authority of the higher office and, viewed from the opposite side, the higher office appeared to impose on the lower office. Sande (1991:19) says; 'many of the problems associated with the approaches to conflict can be prevented if we learn to look at conflict biblically'. He says the more we understand and follow what God teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people.

Sparks et al. (2014:47) cautions that:

Christ-like victory is not power over the other. It's not about our own success or accomplishment but about learning a way of love together that overcomes hatred and fear and brings about healing and renewal.

As Christians therefore, we have a solid foundation of resolving conflict with those we disagree with if our efforts are biblically focused and God centred. With regards to the mission and the church, Epperly (1988:25) wrote:

The mission of the church has always been to witness to the unity and reconciliation of God's grace through Jesus Christ. The challenge to the church is to transform conflict into blessing, such that conflict encounters become holy moments in which we discern God's presence.

Hong (2012:106) sees unity as the desire of God for the church, arguing that even necessary divisions of convenience, for reasons such as lingual or geographical distances, can be done in a spirit of unity. Niemandt (2010:7) concurs by saying 'missional churches embrace conflict in a positive and productive way and develop patterns and practices to resolve conflicts. Sande (1991:22) agrees:

Instead of seeing conflict in a negative light, conflict should be seen as an opportunity to solve common problems in a way that honours God and offers benefits to those involved.

Sande then sets forth *The Slippery Slope of Conflict*, which postulates three basic ways all people respond to conflict when it arises: *escape, attack, and peace-making*.

- *Escape responses* - 'people tend to use these responses when they are more interested in avoiding a conflict than in resolving it' (23). It shows up in three different ways:
 - Denial in pretending a conflict does not exist or refusal to do what is necessary
 - Flight by running away from a conflict

- Suicide when they lose all hope of resolving a conflict and taking their own life
- *Attack responses* is in relation to 'people who are more interested in winning a conflict than in preserving a relationship' (24). These also show up in three different ways:
 - Assault with different forms of force/intimidation whether verbal, physical or financial
 - Litigation by taking them to court
 - Murder by killing those who oppose them
- *Peace-making responses* is what is 'commanded by God, empowered by the gospel, and directed toward finding just and mutually agreeable solutions to conflict' (25), which shows up in six ways:
 - Overlook an offense in insignificant disputes
 - Reconciliation by confession, loving, correction, and forgiveness
 - Negotiation by dealing with material issues related to money, property, or other rights, and not just personal ones
 - Mediation by asking one or more objective person(s) outside the conflict to be able to communicate and seek possible solutions
 - Arbitration by asking one or more person(s) to hear the cases on both sides and make a decision that is binding (for material cases)
 - Accountability by involving church leaders to hold one responsible to the Word of God in seeking repentance, justice and forgiveness

However, not all conflict resolution efforts lead to reconciliation. The conflict can be resolved by settling disputes in a manner that is satisfactory to both parties. Whilst there may not be open conflict any longer, strained relationships may persist. A good example of this is the race relations in South Africa post 1994. Although apartheid officially ended on 27 April 1994 during the first democratic elections in the country and the adoption of the new democratic constitution for the Republic, silent conditions of division and separation between black and white South Africans have continued for more than 25 years into the democratic rule. Reporting on the Day of

Reconciliation celebrations in South Africa, The Citizen Newspaper online on 17 December 2019, quoted Prof. Daniel Malan of Stellenbosch university saying:

Reconciliation should not be a one-day event because South Africa continued to face huge and systematic challenges going beyond celebrating a braai or the Springbok World Cup win. Although it is a significant day for us to celebrate, it should be said that we have made very limited progress in instilling true reconciliation among South Africans over the past two decades. Given our history, we still live in a divided society. We have a tendency of going to so-called safe spaces, which signify divided suburbs and communities. While we cannot forget the past, we still have ultra-right-wing people among us who celebrate battles against black people, like the Day of the Vow.

Thus, to many South Africans, the rainbow nation, a term coined by the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, remains a dream still to come true. But for the Christian person, confession, repentance and forgiveness are not just options. Proverbs 28:13 say; *people who cover their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and forsake them, they will receive mercy.* When Nürnberger et al. (1989:1-7) proclaims the genesis of conflict to be humanity's separation from God requiring a response based on a proper understanding of sin and its effects on the human nature, he means that when we sin and confess to God and to those we have wronged, we will be forgiven and our guilt will be washed away. Our role as ambassadors of Christ is to be fearless agents of reconciliation in our very small part of the world.

4. Classification of conflict

Rahim (2011:22-24) in his book *Managing Conflict in Organizations* refers to two levels of organisational conflict that need to be understood; intra-organisational conflict (conflict within an organisation) and inter-organisational conflict (conflict between two or more organisations). Intra-organisational conflict is further classified as interpersonal, intrapersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflict.

- *Interpersonal conflict* also known as dyadic conflict, refers to conflict between two or more organisational members of the same or different hierarchical levels or units (23). This type of conflict occurs typically when a person or group frustrates another person's or group's effort at achieving a goal.
- *Intrapersonal conflict* also known as intra-individual or intra-psychic conflict happens when an organisation's member is required to perform tasks and roles that do not match his / her expertise, interests, goals and values (23). This can lead to emotional upset or even depression. Counselling, upskilling, on the job training, or any relevant professional assistance might help the affected individual.
- *Intragroup conflict* also known as intradepartmental conflict refers to conflict among members of a group or between two or more subgroups within a group in connection with its own goals, tasks, procedures, and so on. It can also occur as a result of incompatibility or disagreements between some or all the members of a group and its leaders (23-24).
- *Intergroup conflict* also known as interdepartmental conflict refers to conflict between two or more groups within an organisation. Conflict between line & staff, headquarters and field staff are examples of this type of conflict (24).

The classification of conflict into these four types based on the level of its origin, shows that analysis at different levels may be beneficial depending on the nature of the problem. On the basis of above classification, conflict experienced in the Lutheran Church in Tembisa West may be categorised into three types: *intrapersonal, intragroup and intergroup*.

- It is *intrapersonal* in that the conflict happens within the individual as a member of the congregation. Individual member wrestles between what he / she wants versus what he / she should do in light of the conflict situation on hand. This type of conflict occurs when the individual wrestles the temptation to leave the Lutheran church for other denomination or another Lutheran

congregation versus the inclination to stay on as a passive bystander or an active peacemaker in the congregation. This internal battle will last for as long as reconciliation has not been reached and is driven by the person's values, principles and emotions.

- It is *intragroup* in the sense that it comprised members of the same denomination, i.e. the Lutheran Church, in conflict with one another.
- It is *intergroup* in that disagreements were between the Diocesan Office on the one hand and the Parish Office on the other hand as the two groups at 'war' with one another.

5. The church and mission context

The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus's life, death and resurrection and what it means for every person and the whole of God's creation on earth. When Jesus was asked by a Pharisee which was the greatest commandment, he said; *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments* (Matthew 22:37–40). But quite often when we disagree on things, we consider important to us, we see each other as opponents or even enemies. But Jesus commanded us to love our enemies as well. He said, *But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you'* (Luke 6:27–28). This is the biblical mission that the church ought to follow in faith and works. In *God's Mission as Praxis for Healing and Reconciliation*, Isaak (2011:323-324) wrote:

In the midst of violence, memories that keep people bound, the hurt they nurse, the pain they harbour, and the weight of grief they carry, the church ought to proclaim and act to reconcile and heal. The focus is on the missional church and its missionary praxis or what God in Jesus Christ together with the

Holy Spirit is doing in the world to bring about healing, reconciliation, wholeness, liberation and salvation.

What this means is that as Christians we participate in God's mission not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses; envoys of peace; and ambassadors of the Lord (cf. Bosch, 1991:489). Thus, as ambassadors of the Lord, not dealing with conflict is not an option. Being passive bystanders refusing to become involved is against the Christian faith. God is not a passive God. God sent His Son Jesus to take on our sins, making peace between God and us, while He Himself was sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24). Rice (2005:8-10) agrees:

Christians must stand against any destructive or dehumanizing barriers built up by one person or group of people against another, whether they are Christian or not.

Rice (2015) says when Christians are passive bystanders and refuse to become constructive agents of reconciliation amidst such divisions and destructive conflicts, they are guilty of withholding love to a neighbour. Rice mentions numerous ideologies of escape that steer Christians away from reconciliation. He says the church must reject these at all costs (8-9). These include:

- Dualistic theologies which are silent about social problems, name enemies as solely non-human evil spirits, preach the sufficiency of individual salvation without social transformation, or the sufficiency of social involvement without personal conversion in Christ.
- Ethnocentrism, racialism, sexism, or nationalism which promote the fallacy of any ethnic, cultural, gender, or national group's self-sufficiency, and promote loyalty to and the self-interest of one's group as an end in itself. Ultimate loyalty is intended for Jesus alone, who calls us to love our neighbour as well as our enemies, and not only our own.

- A false belief in God’s creation of essentially different people groups, justifying permanent boundaries between them. This includes the Hamitic ideology, which teaches that God has cursed the descendants of Ham, Noah’s son, creating separate orders of peoples—some inferior and some superior. This is a heresy. Rooted in this ideology was racial segregation in the U.S., apartheid in South Africa, and genocide in Rwanda, which many Christians supported, along with believing in their underlying ideology.
- A spirit of individualism seen in Christian disunity, competitiveness, or deplorable schisms and splits which infect many denominations, churches, Christian institutions, and ministries. This disunity and egoism blind our ability to discern the world’s need for reconciliation and seriously harms the church’s ministry.
- Adopting numbers of conversions or church plants as a primary measure of Christianity’s growth, allowing churches or ministries to grow with superficial discipleship, homogeneously, or in ways that perpetuate histories and systems of separation and alienation. This tacit approval of permanent boundaries and segregated lives limited to ‘people like us’ falsely blesses the chasm between alienated groups and disables our ability to be self-critical.
- An underlying message of cheap grace which encourages shallow resolutions, a superficial discipleship powerless to engage social pain, and reconciliation without repentance. A biblical theology of the cross and suffering is needed to renew the church’s thinking and life.

Against these ideologies of escape, the church must formulate theological alternatives which encourage authentic reconciliation. The church, as a community of sent people seeking to make the kingdom of God a reality is to participate with God through Christ in accomplishing God’s purpose on earth which is to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity. Christians and the church, empowered by the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14) are required to live as peacemakers in their part of the world.

Guder (1991:21) defines the work of the church and the Christian as being the 'incarnational communities, where the formation of the communities of faith is God's strategy for making good news known to the world'. Hastings (2012:121) explores a few more communities that would enhance the healing processes in helping to facilitate the missional paradigm of reconciliation. Hastings defines these communities as:

- The church as '*Christocentric communities*' (122) – the church being the Christ-centred community that draws from their relationship in the centrality of Christ to become the community that can cope and deal with the planning and praxis of addressing the reconciliation processes.
- The church is called to be the '*the communities of shalom*' (126) – the church is the initiator and bearer of the shalom, peace. This peace must become the ministry of the church and the Christian in all and every aspect of life and living.
- The church as '*missional, open communities*' (128) – the church takes on the role of hospitality, as in caring, pastoral, healing, feeding, providing and ministering with its spiritual attributes.
- The church is the '*essential communities*' (131) – the church is essential and definitive of Christian salvation and life.

Ultimately, reconciliation must begin with each person accepting accountability for own behaviour. There must be an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, openness and honesty when conflict stories are told. There must be firm commitment to specific steps necessary to move the reconciliation process forward and concrete commitments not to repeat similar mistakes in the future. Becoming reconciled to God is a good starting point in our quest for reconciliation, as Paul exhorts; *we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God* (2 Corinthians 5:20). Thus, the Church as a community of many shapes and forms as defined by various

theologians, has the responsibility to live out the unity for which Jesus, in John 17: 21, prayed for his people: *'that they may all be one'*.

6. Biblical and theological foundations of reconciliation

Most of the earlier theological literature on reconciliation focused on the vertical dimension of reconciliation; that is, God's reconciling humanity to God's own self (Schreiter and Jorgensen, 2015:75). But reconciliation is also about bringing together what has been alienated, hence the so-called horizontal dimension (human-human) of reconciliation. Thus, God's reconciling the world has both vertical (God-humanity) and horizontal (human-human) dimensions. The vertical dimension is presented concisely in Romans 5:10: *'while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son,'* putting reconciliation at the heart of the *missio Dei* (Schreiter and Jorgensen, 2015:75). The horizontal (intra-human) dimension; that is, reconciliation between humans as individuals and as groups, is presented in Romans 12:18: *'do all you can to live in peace with everyone.'* What this does for a theology of mission as reconciliation is to integrate both dimensions (vertical and horizontal) under one biblical command and is affirmed in 1 John 4: 20: *'... for whoever does not love their brother and sister cannot love God.'* This verse declares that we cannot truly love God while hating other people. This of course may not mean a complete avoidance of all forms of conflict, as Sande (1991:30), observed:

As God created us as unique individuals, with different opinions, convictions, desires, perspectives, and priorities, we should learn to accept and work with people who see things differently than we do.

From a theological point of view, only God can bring about reconciliation, as set out in Romans 5. It is based on the very *missio Dei* of God in the world (Schreiter and Jorgensen, 2015:15). For us as ambassadors of Christ, our work for reconciliation occurs through co-operating with God's grace. Thus, the church as a community of sent people is challenged to provide space for perpetrators and their victims to reconcile with each other (cf. Jorgensen, 2014:266-267).

Schreiter (2009) provides five points as a summary of what the Christian understanding of reconciliation is:

- *It is God who initiates and brings about reconciliation.* What this means is that the sheer extent of what needs to be comprehended and to be overcome in the work of reconciliation surpasses human capacity.

As an example, understanding the full impact of apartheid on South Africa's social system is difficult for humans to comprehend. Apartheid laws forced people of the same nation to live and develop separately and grossly unequally, whilst preventing any form of inter-racial and social integration. The capacity of our leaders today, to think and act decisively for the betterment of all, instead of greed and self-enrichment, has to a certain extent, destroyed the gains of freedom and democracy so many South African fought for. The continued concentration of economic wealth and power in the hands of the minority whilst millions of poor people see little or no improvement in their lives, is beyond human capacity to comprehend. Whilst the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission promoting national reconciliation is commendable, true reconciliation seems to have eluded the South African society. The depth of the damage caused by apartheid is so deep, so much so that only God can comprehend its full extent. Acknowledging that God is the one who brings about reconciliation, we as Christians, participate in that ministry as ambassadors on behalf of Christ. We do this through prayer, listening and waiting for God to speak and act. Gobodo-Madikizela reporting for The Independent Newspaper Online on 1 December 2018, stated: *we should...rethink our notions of reconciliation, forgiveness, and other concepts that might imply a goal, an accomplishment. Dealing with the past will always remain unfinished business because much of what happens in the afterlife of historical trauma is enigmatic, muddy, elusive, and unpredictable. The words forgiveness or reconciliation fall short of adequately capturing this complexity.* This, however, is not meant to downplay the importance of strategies and tactics as processes towards reconciliation. What it means is that faithful

presence with God in prayer moves us faster in the direction of full reconciliation.

- *In reconciliation, God begins with the victim.* As important as it is for the wrongdoer to express remorse and apology to the victim, quite often this does not happen so easily for a variety of reasons; the wrongdoer may not come forward to apologise; the wrongdoer may not know the victim of his or her wrong doing (I add: some of the apartheid atrocities fall in this category where victims were black people in general; the state being the oppressor); or the victim may not trust the wrongdoer apology. The Christian response is that the victim is not left without recourse. Because God is the owner of reconciliation, God can and does begin reconciliation with the wounded heart of the victim.

Evidence of God beginning reconciliation with the victim can be found in The Washington Post Newspaper Online of 19 June 2015 where it is recorded that relatives of people slain inside the African American church in Charleston, S.C., on 17 June 2015, offered unconditional forgiveness to the killer. This happened without the killer apologising or asking for forgiveness. Nadine Collier, who lost her 70-year-old mother in the shooting, uttered the words, '*I forgive you; you took something very precious from me; I will never talk to her again; I will never, ever hold her again. But I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul.*' Nadine was just one of many relatives who delivered such powerful messages of forgiveness during the hearing of the killer, a 21-year-old white supremacist.

- *In reconciliation, God makes of both victim and wrongdoer a 'new creation'.* The experience of God's reconciling work in Christ is not a restoration to our former state but, through resurrection, is the dawning of a new humanity. Reconstructing broken bridges does not take one to former state of affairs but new place of new bridges that have been rebuilt.

Imagine a couple that reconciled their differences under a new covenant of respect for one another's weaknesses. This enables them to move together to

a new place they never experienced before. Though one can never forget, one can remember in a different way; the memory can now give life to the future rather than dwelling on the undeniable hurt of the past (Müller, 1997:380).

- *Christians pattern their suffering on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.* The struggle for reconciliation involves suffering, the experience of psychological and sometimes physical pain, feelings of abandonment and loss, and of any ability to bring about an end to suffering's torment through one's own will. This suffering frequently has a spiritual component as well, as previous images of God, self and the world are shattered. Christians quite often place their suffering on the framework of the suffering Christ. This enables them to face the hardships of trauma in a Christ-like way. Isaiah says '*he took up our pain and bore our suffering, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; and by his wounds we are healed*' (Isaiah 54:4 and 5).
- *Reconciliation will be complete only when God has reconciled the whole world in Christ.* But there will be wrongdoers who go unpunished

There are plenty perpetrators of violent crimes against humanity during the apartheid years that to date have never been punished. For some victims and their relatives, the pain has not disappeared, their loved one who were brutally murdered can never be brought back. Whilst reconciliation efforts are plausible and can lead to forgiveness and closure, full reconciliation will occur at the end of time, when all things are reconciled to God through Christ.

Schreiter's five characteristics of reconciliation presents a good framework of how Christians could carry the work of reconciliation by understanding that first and foremost, the beginning of reconciliation, i.e. the source of reconciliation, is God; the work of reconciliation is achieved through the suffering, death and the resurrection of Christ; and the end of reconciliation, i.e. full reconciliation, will be achieved at the second coming of Christ when God has reconciled the whole world to himself.

7. The theology of reconciliation

The theological essence of reconciliation is expressed in 2 Corinthians 5 which reads: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come! All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God!* (vv. 17-21). In his argument for a theology of reconciliation, Vorster (2018:2-3) lists several core characteristics of reconciliation that emerge when the topic is addressed theologically:

- *Firstly, God and God alone takes the initiative for the reconciliation.* Due to the total depravity of humankind, humans are unable to build a new relationship with God or to renew creation. They have nothing to appease God. Thus, reconciliation is a gift from God founded on the promises enshrined in his universal covenant.
- *Secondly, reconciliation, as an act of God, has an eschatological character.* The peace resulting from reconciliation is all about the removal of all the distortion brought about by evil. It indicates the eschatological reparation of all things. Reconciliation forms the foundation of a new creation. Reconciliation is thus linked to eschatology as well as history. Evil turns into good, enmity and hostility into peace, and hatred into love. In this way, a new relationship will be constructed between God and the totality of creation. The expectation of the new dispensation as an emergent reality gives new meaning to the present and is the foundation of hope in the present life.

- *Thirdly, reconciliation has thus a relational character.* The new relationship between humans and God, due to the death and resurrection of Christ, is described in the Pauline corpus as justification.
- *Fourthly, reconciliation has a cosmological character which entails that the whole creational order is renewed by the sacrifice of Christ.* The new order encompasses heaven and earth. God reconciles the totality of creation with Himself. The whole of creation becomes the kingdom of God which is realised in principle with the resurrection of Christ and which will come in its fullness and glory with the second coming of Christ.
- *Fifthly, reconciliation has to be ministered.* Paul says: *And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled with God.* (2 Corinthians 5:19–20)

The very last point, i.e. that reconciliation has to be ministered, suggests that in order to move people toward a reconciled relationship with God (vertical reconciliation) and with one another (horizontal reconciliation) there needs to be practical ways put in place to help Christians and the church pursue this ministry faithfully and fruitfully.

8. The ministry of reconciliation

Described as an end to a disagreement and the start of a good relationship again, reconciliation as a model of Christian mission has been one of the emerging areas of mission of the past twenty years (Schreiter, 2015:71). But reconciliation is not just bringing together two people or two groups in conflict, rather it means re-establishing each into love and letting inner healing take place (Jorgensen, 2014:269). To reconcile means 'to restore or bring back to friendship or union', from the Latin conciliate, 'to call together'. Its meaning is the same as atonement (at-one-ness, or atonement), to atone, 'to make at one', used in older translations of the bible (Bublitz, 1998: n.pag.). Reconciliation often denotes restoration, which suggests a return to

the status quo ante, the state of affairs before the wrong or conflict in question (Radzik and Murphy, 2015).

According to Rice (2005:20):

Reconciliation is God's initiative, seeking to reconcile to himself all things through Christ (Col 1:19). It is grounded in God restoring the world to God's intentions, the process of restoring the brokenness between people and God, within people, between people, and with God's created earth.

Radzik and Murphy (2015) use the term 'reconciliation' to refer to a process or an outcome or goal. As an outcome, reconciliation is an improvement in the relations among parties formerly at odds with one another'.

What is clear from these definitions is that reconciliation is a two-way process requiring participation from both sides; the offender's willingness to reveal (confess) wrongs done and the victim's willingness to forgive and work with the wrongdoer to make restorative changes in order to rebuild trust and friendship between the parties. Thus, when the church talks about proclamation and salvation, which Kärkkäinen (2013:368) considers to be an important and vital starting point for reconciliation, it must start with the individual Christian (cf. Niemandt and Pillay, 2019:37). To be at good with others, you first have to be at good terms with yourself, accepting your faults and lapses, ready to confess sins against others. This is the starting point for reconciliation. Its success depends on the extent to which the offended person or group is willing to forgive.

Reconciliation is always contextual, referencing the past or present; what happened or is happening. It is a process filled with concrete steps and actions that need to be taken for friendly relations to be restored. Rice (2005:7) proposes four interrelated dimensions of historical social conflicts that must be engaged in the reconciliation process: the past and its trauma; how that past is named and remembered; how the present is described and engaged; and how the future is imagined. A reflection on the events surrounding the Day of Reconciliation originally known as the Day of the

Vow, that is celebrated as a public holiday in South Africa puts these four dimensions in perspective:

- *The past and its trauma* – Reconciliation Day traces its origin as an annual religious holiday to the Battle of Blood River on 16 December 1838. The Voortrekkers took a public vow before the battle. In return for God's help in obtaining victory, they promised to build a church and forever honour this day as a holy day of God. They vowed that they and their descendants would keep the day as a holy Sabbath (South African History Online, 27 August 2019). During the battle, which the Voortrekkers emerged victorious, thousands of Zulu warriors died and, as a consequence of the war, the Zulu nation lost their land.
- *How that past is named and remembered* - The Battle of Blood River is the first historical event that took place on 16 December (in 1838). The Voortrekker victory was regarded by devout Afrikaners (and still is) as a sign of divine providence that justified racial oppression on the basis of racial superiority. It was celebrated by Afrikaners annually, first as Dingaan's Day and after 1953 as the Day of the Vow. The second historical event that took place on 16 December was in 1961, when Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) was formed. This was the military wing of the African National Congress (ANC), which was launched to wage an armed struggle against the apartheid government. Prior to its formation, the ANC had largely approached the fight against apartheid through passive resistance, but after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, where peaceful protestors were indiscriminately shot by police, passive resistance was no longer seen as an effective approach in bringing apartheid to an end. MK formation was commemorated every year since 1961.
- *How the present is described and engaged* - South Africa's first non-racial and democratic government post 1994 was tasked with promoting reconciliation and national unity. One way in which it aimed to do this symbolically was to acknowledge the significance of the 16 December in both the Afrikaner and

liberation struggle traditions and to rename this day as the Day of Reconciliation. Van Schalkwyk (2002), speaking at the Reconciliation Day celebrations said:

We come together on 16 December to celebrate the triumph of our present over our past. We come together to underscore the successes of our new South Africa. Above all we come together to remind ourselves and the rest of the world that difference, tolerance, and diversity must be celebrated as the keys to building a better future.

- *How the future is imagined* – Van Schalkwyk (2002) continued:

The Government of the Western Cape believes that the people of our province have a unique opportunity - to illustrate that different people from different communities can succeed best together.... Our communities continue to face hardships like crime, widespread poverty, and the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. The message of Reconciliation Day must be that these challenges are so much more important than our minor differences, and they must be faced together.

For South Africans, reconciliation brings hope that all forms of inequality, violence against women and children, rape and murder, violent attacks on immigrants, residential and commercial robberies, escalating unemployment affecting mostly young people, and the general decline of moral values in the country will one day come to an end through a collective effort of all South Africans regardless of race and gender. This will be testimony to the greatness of spirit in all South African communities that the symbols of division of the past can be symbols of unity respected by all South Africans.

Reconciliation can be of different types and can take place at different levels (Strupinskienė, 2017:453). The church needs to be involved in all these levels, guided and informed by spiritual empowerment and formation, theological discourse, and scriptural substantiations (Niemandt and Pillay, 2019:45). Strupinskienė (2017:454-458) maps out a comprehensive overview of various types (political,

social, and economic) and levels (individual, communal, and national) of reconciliation that must be considered:

- The first type is *social reconciliation*, which is reconciliation between the people as members of the same community who, once the conflict is over, have to find new ways to live side by side again. Such reconciliation can occur on various levels — individual, communal, or national.
 - At individual level, the process encompasses accepting one another as members of the same community, restoring communication, not seeing the past as defining the future, coming to see humanity of one another, and, finally, friendliness and forgiveness healing traumas of both the victims and the perpetrators of violence.
 - At social level, reconciliation can occur on the communal level as well when communities and their representatives express change of attitudes and behaviour and demonstrate the willingness to live peacefully and to restore broken relationships.
 - At national level the primary agents who reconcile are group representatives or politicians.
- The second type is *economic reconciliation*, that is, the economic relations among individuals and groups and economic growth and economic justice, examples of which are return of property, compensation for victims, reparations, equal employment in state institutions, etc.
- The third type is *political reconciliation*, which occurs when a community trusts its government, its institutions, and fellow citizens and is respectful to the principles of the rule of law and human rights. Political reconciliation can occur on the individual, communal, or national levels.

- On the individual level, a reconciled citizen is someone willing to participate in common democratic institutions with persons holding radically different political outlooks. Reconciled citizens are then sufficiently committed to the norms and values that motivate their ruling institutions, sufficiently confident that those institutions operate on the basis of those norms and values and sufficiently secure about their fellow citizens' commitment to abide by these basic norms and values.
- On the communal and national levels, political reconciliation means joint initiatives of the elites, group representatives, initially for the sake of protecting the interests of their groups (they participate in order to control, prevent, protect, etc.), irrespective of which group seems to get the most immediate benefits. Another very important aspect of political reconciliation on the national level is the formal and official acceptance of the past crimes, acknowledging guilt and accepting responsibility for what has happened on the part of the politicians.

Cox (2007:17-18) articulated eight core values for faith-based reconciliation.

Regardless of the context of conflict, whether it is interpersonal, intragroup or intergroup, these values represent an important contribution for developing a model of biblical reconciliation for the church.:

- *The pluralistic vision of community:* We seek unity in the midst of diversity.
- *Compassionate inclusion:* We seek to overcome hostility by the practice of unconditional love, even toward one's enemies.
- *Peace making:* We seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups.
- *Social Justice:* We seek the common good through transformation of the community.
- *Forgiveness:* We exercise forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create the possibility of a better future together.
- *Healing:* We seek to heal the wounds of history through acknowledgement of suffering and injustice.

- *Acknowledging God's sovereignty*: This is the bedrock of the faith-based perspective.
- *Atonement with God*: Ultimately, reconciliation is the process of finding peace with God and becoming a person of faith.

Cox continues:

At the heart of these eight core values [is] the Abrahamic concept of God's sovereignty or rule over societies and nations. In the New Testament Jesus taught that God's sovereign rule would establish the common good, namely, a society based on respect for the dignity of every human being, the economics of compassion, the politics of love, the power of truth, and stewardship embodied in voluntary sacrifice. This was an ancient, but radical moral vision in its day and it still retains its revolutionary, transformational character in our day. It challenges people of faith in every age to a fundamental reorientation of their personhood and to the implementation of this vision in their societies. The apostle Paul called this radical moral vision reconciliation (17-18).

These core values represent comprehensive guidelines in working with and through the faith-based reconciliation process. A reading of these values presents an informed understanding of the Christian and the church. It would certainly help communities to employ these values as part of the process and journey to achieving reconciliation (Pillay 2018:276). What this means is that the church as the body of Christ, needs to be involved in all these levels of reconciliation. This may require recognizing the type and level of each conflict situation to be able to select the most appropriate mechanism for dealing with it.

9. Emerging patterns of reconciliation in a context of ELCSA in Tembisa West.

Resolving conflict can be at individual level or at group level. At individual level, the affected person decides his/her own fate; at group level the actions of the groups in

conflict decide the outcome. At individual level, the author of this research proposes the following four routes as possible options for a successful reconciliation:

- *Reject (as is)* – the individual or group decide to reject the status quo that has developed and, instead, do all it takes to regain the former position, that is, the status quo ante.
- *Realign (Compromise)* – the individual or group decide to realign his/her or group position by adapting to the changing environment thus finding a compromise between the status quo ante and the status quo. This tactic involves give and take whereby both parties give up something to make mutually acceptable decision (cf. Rahim, 1985:85).
- *Accept (as is)* – the individual or group decide to reconcile with the status quo (the new situation that has developed) thereby accepting that the former state of affairs (the status quo ante) can longer be regained.
- *Relinquish* – the individual or group decide to file for divorce and permanent cessation of relationships, resigning and relinquishing all rights and privileges of belonging to a relationship, group or organisation.

At group level, reconciliation is dependent on the conflicting sides forgiving one another, making amends for the wrongs done and reconciling such that they are able to live in peace with one another. Any of the four routes mentioned above are also possible at group level. These will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

10. The ministry of reconciliation in the context of ELCSA in Tembisa West.

Since reconciliation is about building bridges and restructuring relations, there are steps to be taken for it to be genuine, visible and concrete (Jorgensen, 2014:266). For individuals, reconciliation might be seen as the restoration of their humanity; the restoration of their dignity; the rebuilding of broken relationships with self, with

others, and with God. For societies, reconciliation might mean coming to terms with a destructive past, assuring that the wrongful deeds in the past cannot be repeated in the future (Schreiter and Jorgensen, 2015:77). There are many approaches for dealing with conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation. (Pillay, 2018:173-176; see also Niemandt & Pillay 2019:39) suggests confession, repentance, forgiveness, restitution, and restoration as the five biblically guided steps to reconciliation.

- *'I or we admit'* – confession must be a voluntary commitment to achieve a better good. In Isaiah 1:18, God calls people to reason with Him and He would remove their sins.
- *'I or we are sorry'* – repentance must start with the individual or the responsible group. In Luke 5:32, Jesus said: “I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance”. This is the starting point, where there must be an apology or apologies to start the healing and reconciliation process.
- *'I or we forgive'* – forgiveness. Both the Old and the New Testament highlight the theme of forgiveness. Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of forgiveness for the church and the Christian.
- *'I or we will make peace'* – this aspect can only become a reality and a possibility if the concepts of confession, repentance, and forgiveness have been dealt with sufficiently and adequately. In paving the way for reconciliation, the church and the Christian must initiate restitution. Settling the issues of the past are crucial for the reconciliation process.
- *'I or we will give back'* – the last concept is to ensure that the vital aspect of restoration is the important action and intention at this stage. It is not easy to give back what is taken. With Jesus being the ultimate offering, we are encouraged and implored to act in the restoration process as was made possible by Him.

Since reconciliation is an ongoing quest, the challenge is to point out where we are and to mark signs of progress. Indications that reconciliation is happening can become the very signs of God's kingdom breaking into this world. Radzik and Murphy (2015: n.pag.) mention five categories of improvement in relationships that have emerged from the literature:

- *Changes in institutional structures* - examples include policies for reform, for building the rule of law, for overcoming alienation from the existing institutional order, and for renewed participation in shared institutions or practices.
- *Changes in external behaviours* - examples include a cessation of aggressive or insulting behaviours, increased ability to function in close proximity to the other party, and increased ability to cooperate with the other party;
- *Changes in belief* - for example, loss of the belief that the other party is inherently evil or of lower moral value compared to others, acceptance of a narrative of the past wrong according to which the other party once again seems predictable and coherent, and belief that the other party is no longer likely to pose an unreasonable danger to oneself;
- *Resolving negative emotions and attitudes* - examples include merely accepting what cannot be changed; overcoming resentment, fear, hate or anger toward the wrong-doing party; as well as managing shame or guilt.
- *Adopting or resuming positive emotions and attitudes* - e.g., mutual respect, compassion, love, a shared sense of identity or solidarity, mutual recommitment to a shared set of moral or communal norms, or mutual trust.

Suderman (2011:1) argues that:

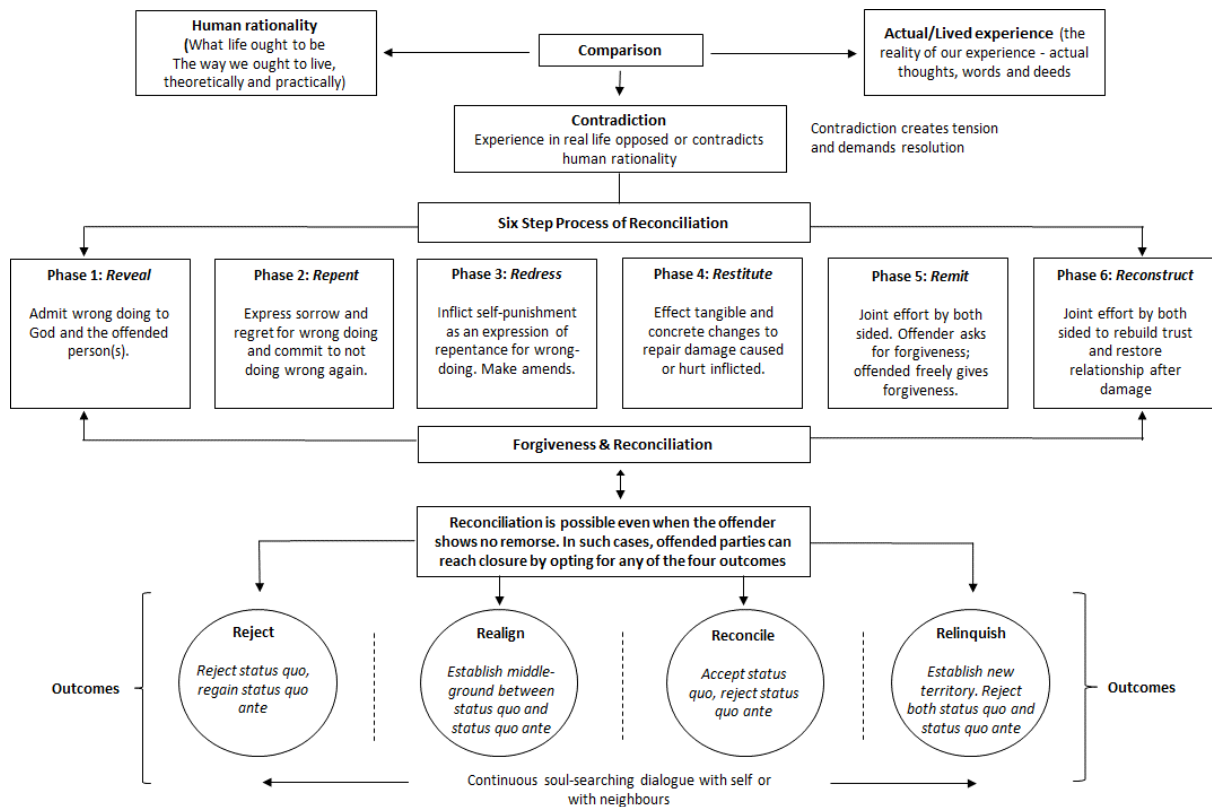
'In order to respond to violence, both subjective and systematic, we as the church need to create and be communities that embody peace, that is working to demonstrate, restore and reconcile right relationships. This pursuit,

however, requires us to overcome the individualistic tendency inherited from modernity so as to be able to be a community that embodies a different form of being.

The call to reconcile and restore lies at the very heart of the gospel – reconciling relationships between one another and between God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Col 1:19-20; Ephesian 1:10, 2:16). This restoration and reconciliation can serve to demonstrate how to live in loving relationship even in the midst of conflict (Suderman 2011:6)

In the context of the study participants and the ELCSA Church in Tembisa West, congregants could not remain bystanders at a time of destructive conflict in their church while their spiritual and holistic well-being was being affected. Reconciliation in their case could follow a different and previously undefined pattern and process. The question is: how do you reconcile with God and with others in the midst of a destructive conflict where you are neither the perpetrator nor the direct victim yet the inclination to remain silent is not an option? These are some of the challenging questions Tembisa West congregants faced in that they were caught in the middle of the conflict they did not start and were targets of neither side.

It is from this background that the author of this research proposes the following model of reconciliation:



For reconciliation to succeed, the decision on any of the four resolution outcomes must be a collective effort. The next section gives a detailed explanation of the model.

11. Explanation of the Model: the road-map to full reconciliation

Although there is no universally agreed sequence of steps for reconciliation, putting forgiveness ahead of restitution and restoration may not be logical. Forgiveness may not happen until restitution and restoration have taken place. Payment (not punishment) for the wrongs committed followed by tangible actions to restore and rebuild broken bridges is a prerequisite for reconciliation to succeed. Forgiveness then becomes the ultimate sign that reconciliation is happening and should therefore be the last step in the reconciliation process. Before we can forgive (or be forgiven), we first need to be shown remorse (or show remorse) and verbally offer (or be offered) forgiveness.

Drawing from the lived experience of study participants, where congregants experienced loss of hope, fear of rejection, loss of trust as well as feelings of emptiness, hurt and emotional upset, this research proposes the following model of reconciliation. It is presented as follows:

The starting point is the recognition of an on-going contradiction between human rationality and actual human experience. Human rationality represents the way we ought to live, what life ought to be. It is the essence of our being, the fullness of our ideal life. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines rationality as an opinion, belief, or practice. According to the Oxford and Collins English dictionaries, rationality is based on reason or logic. Reason being the capacity of consciously making sense of things, applying logic, and adapting or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information (de Balbian, 2017:264). Reasoning is one of many aspects of human life and God, through Scripture, governs our reasoning. We form judgments, conclusions, inferences about life in general based on what we read and believe to be true from Scripture, i.e. what we believe God wants of us. Contrast this to the actual experience of living, the reality of our life, the things we do and say versus what we ought to be doing and saying in order to experience and enjoy the beauty and fullness of life. The reconciliation process starts by acknowledging this comparison between human rationality and human reality. The comparison creates contradiction which in turn demands action. Action being a process of doing something to achieve an aim. Process being a series of action steps taken to achieve that particular aim. Aim being the desired outcome which, in this instance, is the attainment of reconciliation. According to this model, reconciliation happens in the following six action steps:

- The first action step is to **Reveal** or confess. This action is performed by the offender and involves revealing his/her sins to the offended person or group and to God. This is an important starting point on the road to reconciliation. After the penitent reveal their sin, they make an act of contrition (an expression of sorrow for their sins and a firm commitment not to repeat the same sin). The mere action of revealing without contrition may not be enough.

- The second action step is to **Repent**. This occurs when participants in injustice repent to God and to those who have endured the injustice, while the endurers work to forgive. Repenting requires visible and tangible actions by the offender towards, or for, the offended. In her book, *Dear White Christians*, Harvey (2014:97) lays out what someone seeking to repent and to be forgiven should do. It includes:
 - Communicating effectively what wrong the perpetrator did to the victim.
 - Communicating effectively to the victim why what the perpetrator did was wrong.
 - Communicating effectively to the victim the particular ways the perpetrator is actively committed to rectifying the wrong.
 - Offering the victim good reasons why the perpetrator will not harm the victim again.

- The third action step is to **Redress**. This action should not be confused with restitution. Redress in this context refers to the action taken by the offender to correct one's wrong doing by performing simple act(s) like spending quality more time together (in the case of a couple trying to come out of a strained relationship) or sharing ideas and projects plans before implementation (in the case of an organisational conflict situation). Redress is an action by the wrongdoer that shows clear intentions of making amends.

- The fourth action step is to **Restitute**. Reconciliation requires not only repentance but also restitution. Restitution is the payment made for the sin committed against another person. Restitution is different from revenge in that the latter refers to the payment the offended demand from the offender. Restitution is the payment that the offender volunteers to the offended.

- The fifth action step is to **Remit** or seek absolution. This would be a request by the wrongdoer to be released from guilt, obligation, or punishment. An offender cannot demand forgiveness; forgiveness can only be hoped for, prayed for, and received as a gift if offered. If we are to be forgiven by our heavenly Father, we must also forgive those who have wronged us. Jesus, in

Mark 11:25-26, says '*And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses. But, if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses*'. Forgiving others is a catalyst for our own healing from the wounds of trauma we have suffered.

- The six and last action step is to **Reconstruct** or restore. In this phase relationships are restored in a way that shows a commitment to never allowing the injustice to return. In this phase a new leadership structure may be sought in a way that dismantles the unjust power structures of the past, or a new communication model put in place in order to avoid future miscommunication and misunderstanding between the parties.

Reconciliation is a process essential for our well-being, but complete reconciliation of God to man, and man to man, will happen only when God has reconciled the whole world in Christ. For us now, Paul's instruction is: *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone* (Romans 12:18).

Paul's exhortations in verse 18 needs to be understood in the context of Chapter 12 as whole and its implications for the ministry of reconciliation. Romans Chapter 12 may be reduced to the three main headings of Christian duty: our duty to God, to ourselves, and to our brothers and sisters (Henry, 2010). This is precisely what is presented in Chapters 1 and 2 of this research as the description of what faithful presence is all about: worshiping and praying God, living a holy life within the body of Christ, serving the needs of others, and firmly committing to peace and the good of all. Throughout this research, it is repeatedly stated that the church cannot love and serve from a distance, the church needs to incarnate itself among those it is sent to be with. Paul's message in verse 18 exhorts all Christians to love and leave peacefully with one another including those they may consider their enemies. First, peaceful leaving requires that we acknowledge our wrongs and are willing to apologise to make things right again, and to forgive even where apology is not forthcoming. Second, peaceful leaving requires that we actively encourage others to settle their disputes with their fellow others. This means that remaining silent or passive observers when peace bridges are broken in front of us, is not an option for

God loving Christians. one is caught between opposing people arguing about something, making it difficult to remain neutral Third, peaceful leaving requires that when we are caught between opposing sides arguing about something making it difficult for us to remain neutral, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we rise above the challenge and to find peace within us. The exhortation to love in verse 10, and to manifest unity in verses 16 shows that our Christian life extends beyond the four walls of a church building to others within and outside the community of faith. This also means the way of life that prevails within the Christian community is to be directed outward in its relation to the world. The instruction to love others, even those who dislike us, and for our love to be directed outward to the world puts reconciliation at the heart of the *missio Dei*. The *missio Dei* is at the core of being Christian and of being church. We do not exist for ourselves alone but for the sake of others. Paul challenges Christians to be 'ardent in the Spirit' (12:11b). The renunciation of vengeance (12:17,19), the ability to live in peace with all other human beings (12:18), and finally the call to love even one's enemies (12:20) encourages the community of faith to allow the power of the Spirit to work without restraint in all areas of its life (Schnelle, 2005:355).

Paul acknowledges that there may be situations beyond our reach. He says '*as far as it depends on you*', meaning that we should never allow ourselves be the reason for conflict with others. We must seek to preserve the peace, to see that it is not broken and to put it back together when it is broken. This message is at the heart of reconciliation which is about restoring brokenness so that peace may prevail.

Tembisa West congregants, as non-role players in the aforementioned conflict, may not have been in a position to understand the intricacies of conflict between the two councils, nor being able to resolve it but as Rom 12:18 exhorts, as far as it depends on them, they must do whatever it takes (reject, realign, accept, relinquish) to reconcile and be at peace with everyone. He says '*if it is possible*' meaning there may come a time when battles have to be fought, and when this happens, the Christian person will not sit on the fence. We may be unavoidably fought against. Our concern must be to see that nothing is lacking on our part to preserve the peace (Ps 120:7) (Henry, 2010:2046).

12. Reconciliation is possible even when offenders show no remorse.

What is presented above are action steps and outcomes of a reconciliation process without any assurance that reconciliation will actually happen. Some offenders do not apologise or ask for forgiveness and may go unpunished for their sins. Without a confession and an apology by the wrongdoer, the offended person or group can still move on with life, reaching closure by releasing themselves from the burning wounds of the past. Drawing from the lived experience of study participants who were neither the perpetrators nor intended victims of the conflict, and thus did not owe anyone an apology, the following four routes would be indications that healing and reconciliation is happening in their case.

- *Reject* – the person or group reconcile to their positions held prior to the conflict, thereby rejecting the status quo that has developed. For Tembisa West congregants, simply demanding the return of the status quo ante (rejecting the status quo) can force warring factions to reconsider their positions and start engaging each other in a solution driven dialogue, knowing that a ‘no solution’ outcome is not an option to the congregation’s mass movement. The reject option, can enable congregants individually and collectively, as well as the two warring sides (the Diocesan Office and the Parish Office) to reconcile for the betterment of all. An honest dialogue that is about truth telling, confessing that wrongs by either side may have been committed and extending hands of apology is a prerequisite for reconciliation to be genuine.
- *Realign* – the person or group realise that their original positions can no longer be restored; that there has been an irreversible change of the context, and that there is no reasonable prospect of a win – win result which would be good for everyone, but all parties agree that restoration of order and relationships is absolutely necessary. For Tembisa West congregants, this is similar to establishing a middle-ground between the status quo and the status quo ante. For the two warring factions, there will be a need for reform, for new policies, as well as a new rule book. In realignment, both sides will be

required to make positive shifts from their original positions to accommodate each other.

- *Reconcile* – the person or group reach a compromise and agree to reconcile to the new status quo. Whilst the situation might lead to uneasiness in the beginning, it is hoped that over time the situation will normalise and past wrongs forgiven. The one danger with this option is the likelihood of winners and losers if the reconciliation process is not properly managed. Again, the congregation's mass movement, united in action, can force the warring parties to this kind of a solution, if it is deemed the most desirable.
- *Relinquish* – Here parties agree to differ and move separate ways (Church splits as practical example). For individuals leaving the Lutheran church altogether is one option. Reconciliation happens in the context of there being no more animosity between the parties. This is an acknowledgement of a house divided that cannot stand together any longer.

13. The rewards of reconciliation

Drawing, once again, from study participants' lived experience of rejection, hopelessness, trustlessness, spiritual emptiness and emotional upset, true reconciliation can bring forth the following benefits:

13.1. Reconciliation eases the pain of rejection

At the beginning of time, the Lord God said, '*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him*' (Genesis 2:18). This verse makes it clear that God gave us relationship. But sometimes relationships get broken for a variety of reasons, and when this happens, we may feel incomplete, isolated and without purpose. Seeking professional help might help, but human ability to completely understand how wounded spirits feel is limited. Proverbs 18:14 says: '*The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken*

spirit? The knowledge that Christ also suffered and was rejected by men, brings us closer to the healing and reconciliation we are seeking. Scripture tells us that *'He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; He was despised, and we didn't value Him'* (Isaiah 53:3). Further, scripture tells us that the first and great commandment is to love God, the second one is to love our neighbour (Matthew 22:36-40). Consequently, reconciliation to God goes together with reconciliation to other human beings. Matthew 6:15 tells us that if we do not forgive others their sins, God will not forgive our sins. In prayer, we ask the Lord to *'forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us'* (Matthew 6:12), yet sometimes we simultaneously bless God and hate those who have wronged us. Hatred, rejection and resentment must be overcome. 1 Peter 4:8 commands us to *'love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.'* This is the only way we can have the true reconciliation to our fellow men and women so essential for our well-being. Paul's instruction is: *'if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone'* (Romans 12:18).

Romans 12:18 exhorts us to love and leave peacefully with one another, even those we consider our enemies. Peaceful leaving requires that we acknowledge our wrongs and are willing to apologise to make things right again, to forgive even where apology is not forthcoming. Paul acknowledges that there may be situations beyond our reach and this is where the idea of "so far as it depends on you" comes into play, meaning that we should never allow ourselves be the reason for conflict with others. This message is at the heart of reconciliation which is about restoring brokenness so that peace may prevail. Tembisa West congregants, as non-role players in the aforementioned conflict, may not have been in a position to understand the intricacies of conflict between the two councils, nor being able to resolve it but Romans 12:18 exhorts us to, as far as it depends on us, reconcile and be at peace with all of life.

13.2. *Reconciliation rebuilds trust*

Reconciliation occurs when the victim and the wrongdoer exert effort to rebuild a damaged relationship, and strive to settle issues that led to the breakdown of that relationship. But rebuilding trust is not as easy as building trust in the first place. After trust has been damaged, there are two key considerations for the victim: dealing with the stress the violation imposed on the relationship, and determining if future violations will occur. The wrongdoer needs to make efforts at correcting the wrongs and give assurances that future violations will not occur whilst the victim works towards forgiving the offender. As long as the victim is willing to reconcile, rebuilding trust becomes possible. However, there are instances where forgiveness does not lead to reconciliation. An example may be an employee incorrectly accused of wrong doing and is summarily dismissed from employment. After several appeals an employee maybe found not guilty and the employer apologises for the error. The employee may accept the apology but decide that trust has been irrevocably broken and resignation is the only credible way forward. In this case forgiveness happened but without reconciliation.

13.3. Reconciliation engenders hope; hope engenders solutions

Reconciliation is based on hope, hope that the perpetrator will not harm the victim again. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines hope as a 'desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfilment', an 'expectation with confidence' and as 'trust'. Hope in the Bible means 'a strong and confident expectation' of future reward. The Apostle Paul argued that hope was a source of salvation for Christians: '*For in hope we have been saved...if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it*' (Romans 8:25). Reconciliation does not mean forgetting the wrongs of the past but it does mean that it is acknowledged within the framework of hope. The solution to the wrongs of the past does not lie in it but in a future that is hoped for. Reconciliation bring hope, hope for a better future.

13.4. Reconciliation promotes unity

The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches (2012:128) declared:

Humanity, as God's creation, is blessed with a great variety of diverse and complementary gifts that are expressed in a multiplicity of cultural and historical contexts. It is God's design that such diversity does not lead to separation and division, to opposition and hostility, but to interdependence and harmony.

When individuals or parties have reconciled, they are able to work together towards a common goal. Tolerance levels improve and respect for one another and of each other's views greatly enhanced. Whilst they may not always agree on each and every point, what drives them together is a shared common belief and a sense of common purpose. Agreeing on a strategy and tactic for the desired outcome, for example, the repair of a relation that has been ruptured, becomes much easier once parties have reconciled. Our role as Christians together with the church as the body of Christ and as his sent people is to promote such unity by being active agents of reconciliation instead of being passive bystanders or promoters of conflict. Echoing this standpoint, the Mail & Guardian Newspaper Online on 16 September 2019 reported that Pope Francis in his address delivered to an interreligious youth meeting in the Maxaquene Stadium, Maputo, on 5 September 2019 when he emphasised that *'we should not seek to divide and separate and so create conflict; rather, like a soccer team, we should be witnesses to unity, reconciliation and hope'*

14. Concluding remarks

We end chapter 4 with a definitive model to bring about reconciliation. In the next and final chapter, we shall demonstrate how this model can be brought to life through tangible and visible words and actions in order to move the reconciliation process forward.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

1. Background

When elephants fight it is the grass that suffers most, is an old African proverb meaning that the weak and vulnerable get hurt the most in conflicts between larger and powerful forces. The proverb is used to describe leaders whose disputes, divisions and confrontations end up hurting innocent and powerless people below them.

Abraham Lincoln in his speech of June 16, 1858 spoke the words; 'a house divided against itself cannot stand' (Lincoln, 1863). Lincoln was concerned about the future of slavery in the United States and pleaded for a united nation, rather than one bound for destruction through conflict. Lincoln's statement is a paraphrase of Jesus's words, '*If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand*' (Mark 3:25). Jesus used the parable of a divided kingdom and a divided house to show that a kingdom that is at cross-purposes with itself will fall. Any household engulfed in infighting will tear itself apart. By saying that a house divided cannot stand, Jesus is illustrating the fact that success relies on congruency. Things have to work together if anything is to be accomplished. Lincoln ended his plea for the abolition of slavery with these famous words: *The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but sooner or later the victory is sure to come* (Lincoln, 1863). If we deliver the message of reconciliation in loving actions and words, then through the power of the Holy Spirit, we shall not fail. Respondent 3 said, 'it will come to pass' echoing Lincoln's words, 'we shall not fail'.

Whilst there is a plethora of literature on conflict resolution and reconciliation for Christian churches, all have tended to focus on the resolution and reconciliation of disputes between two or more conflicting sides. Non so far has attempted to

understand the impact of such conflict on innocent congregants and how they are able cope in those situations. Faithful presence is a phrase that describe staying true to God, to oneself, and to those around us in all spheres of life regardless of the difficulties and challenges we may be facing.

Available research on conflict in general is focused on the reconciliation processes between the perpetrator (the offender) and the victim (the offended) or their immediate relatives. This was also the case with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa whose aim was to uncover truth about gross human rights violations and assist families of the victims in getting closure with the hope of uniting and reconciling all South Africans. There was not enough emphasis placed in trying to understanding the pain suffered by ordinary citizens who may not have been imprisoned, tortured or had their relatives killed, but who nonetheless were victims of apartheid who faced humiliation in many spheres of life. This was also the case with Tembisa West congregants in that the conflict was between two leadership structures (Parish vs Diocese) but most affected were ordinary congregants who had no role to play in the manifestation, management and resolution of the conflict in their congregation.

While the literature review provided background information on the theology of faithful presence encompassing the theologies of place and place presence, a further review was conducted on the theology of mission as reconciliation as a way of being faithfully present. The purpose of the study was to address the gap in literature and research; investigating the role of mission in helping congregants cope with church conflict as a way of faithful presence. To achieve this goal, congregants lived experience of their missional congregational life in the midst of conflict was revealed and analysed using phenomenology as the most suitable method for data gathering and interpretation. Phenomenological approach was chosen simple because of its capability of providing congregants' personal account of their experiences. The question that needed to be understood was whether congregants still had time, space and motivation to be with those people God sent them to. The primary goal was to understand congregants lived experience under the influence of conflict and how they remained faithfully present in their situation. The secondary aim was to recommend ways and means of reconciliation most relevant to their

situation particularly where the subjects are not role players in the conflict. The researcher was interested in finding out if using mission as a vehicle of reconciliation can in fact move the entire reconciliation process forward.

Although the dispute was between the two leadership structures, the congregation remained divided in that there were debates about who is right or wrong, and who to follow. One side supported the views and actions of the Parish Office and the other side supported those of the Diocesan Office.

2. Limitations of the study

This research is not intended to address the nature of conflict, its origin or substance, but to offer a conceptual framework for further study and guidance on how congregations remain faithfully present in environments where chaos, conflict and fear is abounding. The research did not attempt to apportion blame for the conflict, nor identify victims and perpetrators. Further, the recommendations contained in this research do not attempt to critique conflict resolution methods, instead the focus of the research is to develop a framework to help congregants and the church move towards peace and reconciliation. The two parties to the conflict, i.e. the Parish and Diocesan councils, are not subjects in this study.

Whilst it is quite possible that there may have been deliberate misrepresentation of facts by either side to the conflict, the impact of such acts of misrepresentation and misinformation on congregants' views and their understanding of the situation, was not considered in this research as such detail is not relevant to the purpose and objectives of the research. Including such detail would have necessitated a thorough understanding of what is 'fact' versus what is 'fiction', something beyond the scope of this research.

Though in terms of ELCSA polity, a group of congregations together form a parish, the situation in Tembisa West was such that the Parish operated as a congregation in terms of governance and day to day activities, hence the words 'parish' and

'congregation' are used interchangeably as they mean one and the same thing for the purpose of this study.

3. Summary of the research methodology and main findings

Chapter 1 gave a general introduction of the research together with a motivation for doing the research. It presented the context of the congregation as a missional church and a description of faithful presence as the basis of the congregation's united mission. The chapter clarified the purpose of the research in the following manner:

- To reveal Tembisa West congregants' lived experience of faithful presence in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.
- To provide practical recommendations on how the congregations' mission efforts, in another sense, unity in mission, can help the congregation and its members walk toward peace and reconciliation.

To arrive at this goal, the following research questions were formulated:

- What is the interrelatedness between conflict and the mission of ELCSA in Tembisa West?
- What does faithful presence mean in a context of conflict and division?
- How can the congregation's mission effort help the congregation in general and congregants in particular walk toward peace and reconciliation?

A phenomenological research methodology was chosen primarily for its ability to provide hidden meanings and essences of an experience, which in this particular case is Tembisa West congregants' account of their personal experience of a congregational life in the midst of conflict.

Chapter 2 provided a thorough investigation of the concepts of 'space' and 'place' from a missional perspective with a particular focus on the neighbourhood effect. In this chapter, strong arguments for a theology of 'place presence' as a prerequisite for faithful presence were advanced. It was argued that we cannot serve those God has sent us to from a distance and that the church is incarnate in the 'field of care' as

opposed to being a public symbol identifiable only by its physical address. The dangers of individualism were highlighted, where congregants, for whatever reasons and challenges they may be facing, think they can go it alone without the support and presence of the church. Also, in this chapter, the culture of segregating congregations along ethnic lines was criticised, especially in environments where residential areas are racially and ethnically heterogeneous. Such practise raises an important question: Could this segregation be tantamount to church apartheid?

Chapter 2 concluded with an investigation of the identity of the congregation, thus answering the question, what it means for the congregation to be faithfully present. It was emphasised that the identity of a congregation is not based on the congregation's structures and strategies, or programmes and policies. It was made clear that the identity of a congregation is about who we are as a people with history, as followers of Christ, as members of a congregation, as members of a community of saints, and as members of the universal church.

Chapter 3 covered the data gathering, analysis and interpretation process. During the interviews, participants described their experience in the midst of conflict. Statements describing the experience were captured, analysed and distilled into six main themes. Themes that emerged following the distillation process were categorised as follows:

- (Fear of) Rejection
- (Loss of) Trust in leadership
- Faith and assurance
- Emptiness, hurt and emotional upset
- (Loss of) Hope and hope
- Unity in mission

4. Research findings

The main findings of the research are summarised as follows:

4.1. Congregants fearing rejection were easily manipulated by others

People fear being alone, cut off and isolated, instead, they long to belong. People fear being seen in a negative way, but long for acceptance. It is common knowledge that some people prey on the insecurities of others, thus those who fear rejection are at risk of being manipulated for someone else's personal gain. The research found the following:

- Congregants were forced into a situation that they did not understand nor agree with but acted with fear of being judged and evaluated negatively by the leadership, leading to feelings of confusion, anger, despair, emptiness, hopelessness, and rejection.
- Some congregants refused to abide, opting instead staying away from church, withholding financial contributions, or joining other congregations nearby. Others didn't want to abide but did so fearing that they will be rejected if they did not abide. They 'toed the line' purely to avoid castigation. Respondent 2 said *'I do not want to be called a sell-out'*

4.2. The congregation lost its 'relevance' because of the distrust in the leadership.

In the midst of distrust, the church loses its 'saltiness', it ceases to be 'light and salt' of the world. The 'fight or flight' mechanism kicks in and the motivation to split or go it alone intensifies. The study found the following:

- Congregants became suspicious, fearful and distrustful. Confused by the situation, they were fearful of being hurt and misled further. They were unsure whether anybody in leadership, including pastors, can be trusted. As a result, the united mission of the congregation suffered as members decided to go it alone, pursuing their calling as ambassadors of Christ in their neighbourhood individually and in small groups, no longer as a united congregation.

- This distrust of the leadership produced many ‘disconnected’ Christians; the people who thought they no longer needed the church to their situation. The people who believe they can fulfil the church’s mission by being Jesus in their walks of life. These congregants go it alone, separated from the congregation. However, this research has cautioned against this culture of individualism that blinds our ability to discern the world’s need for reconciliation, seriously harming the church’s ministry.
- Distrust led to divisions and church split. Distrust of the leadership of the church caused by conflict, led to some congregants leaving the Lutheran church in Tembisa West for other Lutheran churches in other areas or other denominations where peace and stability prevailed.

4.3. Faith kept congregants’ hope alive

Hope can be described as a faith-based conviction that something will have a positive outcome. Where there is faith, there is a positive expectation, a joyful anticipation, that is hope. Hebrews 11:1 states that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Thus, faith keeps hope alive. Proverbs 3:5-6 states that people who put their trust in the Lord will be blessed in their paths by Him. In contrast to this, Jeremiah 17:5 states that anybody who put their trust on people or find their strength from them is cursed. Therefore, when we place all our hope on people with the expectation of a better outcome, be it acceptance by others, or prosperity in terms of money (wealth accumulation) and promotion, or healing from troublesome diseases, etc., we are guilty of distrusting our Lord, God. The study found the following:

- In the midst of adversity created by the conflict in their church, faith gave congregants the ability to remain positive and hopeful, steadfastly doing what they have been sent to do, because they serve a God who promised not to let them down. There is hope amongst congregants in Tembisa West that God will not fail them, that truth will prevail and life will eventually return to normal.

4.4. *There is apathy in the congregation*

Church should be a place of unity and fellowship—you shouldn't have to fear cliques, gossip, slander and backstabbing. Promotion of a culture of disobedience and disregard of the leadership does not belong in the church. When issues arise, they need to be handled in a responsible manner, not in chaotic ways. When congregants fear challenging leaders on important issues whilst believing that the truth is being withheld from them, they are no longer congregants; they are pawns. The study found the following:

- There is apathy in the congregation. The once united congregational spirit is no more. The united mission of the congregation is also no more. The spirit of individualism is mushrooming. Place presence is no longer meaningful. People scatter as soon as the service is over. Those who do not want to be complacent, have broken out to try mission on their own. Others terminated their members of the Lutheran Church Tembisa West.

Chapter 3 concluded with an introduction of the *Faithful Presence Model (FPM)* drawn from the lived experience of the study participants; their statements describing the experience; and the analysis of those statements

Chapter 4 introduced conflict to the study as the phenomenon and considered its description by various authors and theologians. The discussion on conflict had a particular emphasis on how it originates and manifests in various situations. The chapter steered away from delving into the management aspect of conflict as this part falls outside the scope of this research. It is important to clearly articulate how conflict manifest as well as its various levels and intensities, as this has serious implication for the ministry of reconciliation. Such an understanding laid a solid foundation on which to build the framework of reconciliation that was proposed in this chapter.

Literature review was conducted to understand how Christians view and respond to conflict. Special attention was paid to Ken Sande's *Slippery Slope of Conflict* which postulates three basic ways people respond to conflict: *escape, attack, and peace-*

making. It was found that conflict in Tembisa West is simultaneously *intrapersonal, intragroup and intergroup*. An important contribution of this research to the study of reconciliation as mission, is the identification of the emerging patterns of reconciliation. The following patterns were postulated as options congregants can choose in their situation:

- They can '*Reject*' the new situation that has developed do all it takes to regain the former position, that is, the status quo ante. For this to happen, congregants need to stop being passive bystanders in the conflict, and begin to play an active role to get to the desired outcome.
- They can '*Realign*, their position by adapting to the changed environment thus learning to live in an 'interim state' whilst actively engaging the warring faction to a lasting solution. For this to happen, congregants may need to forgo some privileges and luxuries of the previous lifestyle in order to find comfort in the new 'interim' way of life with the hope that a lasting solution will be found soon.
- They can '*Accept*' the new the status quo as is thereby accepting that the former state of affairs can longer be regained. This will compel one of the parties to the conflict to abandon its hard-line stance. This is more a peace-keeping than peace-making resolution.
- *Relinquish* – in this instance congregants may decide enough is enough and walk away from the congregation to join other denominations (or congregations).

The base from which these options build, is the acknowledgement that the status quo has been disturbed, thus what used to be the status quo is now the status of status quo ante; there is now a new status quo, being the new situation that has emerged. This situational change created discomfort and contradiction in the mind of congregants. Discomforts calls for action designed to correct the imbalance, the action is followed by an outcome, and the outcome is the choice of any of the four options above in order to come out of the disturbing situation. The underlying reasoning for this school of thought is that Tembisa West parishioners aren't

involved in the conflict themselves. They are honest bystanders caught in the crossfire and as such reconciliation for them follows a different pattern altogether.

It was also acknowledged that some offenders do not apologise or ask for forgiveness and may go unpunished for their sins, yet it is important for the victim(s) to move on with life. This approach was recommended drawing from the lived experience of study participants who were neither the perpetrators nor the direct victims of the conflict, and thus were neither owed nor owing anyone an apology. The researcher investigated a number of approaches dealing with forgiveness and reconciliation and put forth a strong argument that forgiveness cannot happen before restitution and restoration but that forgiveness is the ultimate sign that reconciliation is happening and is therefore the last step in the reconciliation process. This approach differs significantly to that of many theologians who have considered forgiveness as one of the steps leading to full reconciliation. This research proposed a new road-map of reconciliation which happens in six actions steps:

- *Reveal* - This action is performed by the offender and involves revealing his/her sins to the offended person or group and to God.
- *Repent* - This occurs when participants in injustice repent to God and to those who have endured the injustice, while the endurers work to forgive.
- *Redress* - Refers to the action by the wrongdoer that shows clear intentions of making amends.
- *Restitute* - Restitution is the payment made for sin committed against another person.
- *Remit* - This would be a request by the wrongdoer to be released from guilt, obligation, or punishment.
- *Reconstruct* - In this phase relationships are restored in a way that shows a commitment to never allowing the injustice to return.

Chapter 4 was concluded with a brief statement of the benefits of reconciliation which were stated as:

- Reconciliation eases the pain of rejection
- Reconciliation builds trust

- Reconciliation engenders hope and hope endangers solutions
- Reconciliation promotes unity

The major contribution of this chapter was the proposal of how neutral parties (people who are neither perpetrators nor direct victims of conflict) can move towards reconciliation and closure. This is an area open for further research.

5. Summary of main findings

Tembisa West congregants remained faithfully present with God, one another, and to their neighbours as an invisible church outside the visible church that is defined by buildings, protocols, squabbles and conflict. Congregants remained focused on their missional calling outside of the church regardless of what was happening inside the church.

The church in Tembisa West became irrelevant - When people say '*regardless of what is happening in our church*', it means the church lost its meaning. Irrelevant churches make almost no impact on the community around them and the community pays no attention to it either. It only exists to serve interest of those who have attachment to it. As the church became more irrelevant, mission suffered, unity suffered, and meaningful congregational life evaporated.

In simple terms the research found a direct correlation between conflict and the mission of the church.

6. Recommendations

For the congregation to regain its relevance, and for its presence in the neighbourhood to be felt once again, the leadership of the congregation needs to regain the lost trust. The following actions are recommended:

- Leadership at all levels (Tembisa West and Diocese) needs to come clean, acknowledge mistakes made (e.g. poor communication; imposing decisions on people; etc.) and apologise for not being upfront with issues, and commit not to repeat these mistakes again. This will require an action plan to be put in place with concrete actions and timelines in order to satisfy the congregation that mistakes of the past will not be repeated in future. The action plan must be evaluated at agreed intervals and remedial actions taken where necessary. For this to work well, the congregation may need to elect an interim oversight body, with clear terms of reference, to manage the transition process.
- The alternative is to elect a new leadership team altogether should congregants decide that the trust relationship between them and the existing leadership structure is irreversibly broken. For this to happen, due process will need to be followed in line with the constitution of the church.
- A worship service of healing must be held to foster forgiveness and reconciliation. This service is to be attended by the entire Tembisa West congregation, its leadership and the leadership of the Diocese. Neutral clergy from outside the Dioceses (preferably, the Presiding Bishop) should officiate on the day.

ELCSA should consider revising its polity, governance and structure with a view to giving congregations more authority to manage their affairs. This requires the dissolution of the existing parish structures, in a manner that empowers individual congregations to assume the status of a parish, accountable directly to the Circuit as a congregation. Pastors can then be appointed to look after a group of congregations instead of a parish. The existing Parish structure has become an unnecessary duplication of functions and can be a headache to manage at times. Doing away with existing parish structures will help streamline both the management function and the flow of finances between lower and upper structures of the church. Thus, the recommend structure is:

- Congregations account to Circuits;
- Circuits account to Dioceses, and

- Dioceses account to General Assembly / Church Council.

ELCSA should seriously consider a Reconciliation Ministry as one of the key ministries in the church. Practical ways and means of pursuing such a ministry will need to be defined.

The ethnic based segregation of congregations distorts the Gospel, creating unnecessary divisions in the church of Christ. ELCSA should distance itself from this form of 'church apartheid'. A congregation that serves a particular ethnic group in a heterogeneous neighbourhood is not a congregation but a social club. The priorities of the neighbourhood are the priorities of the congregation. The makeup of the neighbourhood should be the make-up of the congregation. If necessary, the use of interpreters should be encouraged so that in any community, there is one neighbourhood and one church for all.

ECLSA should seriously consider a theology of place as integral to the demarcation process of congregations, parishes and circuits. The theology of place should be deeply entrenched in the polity of the church and should reflect the flavour of the neighbourhood.

7. Implications for future research

This research has offered a conceptual framework for further study and guidance on how congregations can stay faithfully present in environments where chaos, conflict and fear is abounding.

Further, the research has raised crucial questions on the subject of identity. The question of local identity in the construction of Christian identity has raised crucial questions in the context of Tembisa West where congregations are divided along ethnic lines. The questions raised are twofold:

- Could this be a creation of church apartheid?

- What exactly is 'local' in this context?

This research has highlighted above areas as potential areas for further research.

8. Conclusion

This research has sort to uncover hidden meanings and essences of an experience (conflict in the congregation) as it relates to the congregation's faithful presence with a particular focus on neighbourhood effect. Drawing from available literature and congregants account of their personal experience, the research has put forth concrete preproposal on how unity in mission with a particular emphasis on place presence and the neighbourhood effect, can help the congregation move towards peace and reconciliation. The research has also come up with several recommendations for structural changes in the way ELCSA is set up, managed and governed, the ultimate goal being the attainment of a united church and a united mission. The reason to effect such changes is to empower the church (ELCSA) so that it can work towards a more authentic realisation of the oneness of the body of Christ advocating for justice, peace and reconciliation for the people of God.

It is the researcher's prayer and hope that the church ELCSA (and any other church for that matter) will find these recommendations useful and the people of God in ELCSA will genuinely witness Jesus Christ by being servant to their communities by word and deed in faith, love and hope.

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ANNEXURE 1: RESEARCH INTERVIEW - Respondent 1

Date of interview: 6 May 2019

Time of interview: 13h00

Place of interview: Respondent's place of residence

Interviewer: T Mkhize

The interview was conducted at the respondent's place residence in a quiet area at a where no external influences could interfere with the interview process. The respondent was contacted via telephone to arrange the interview date, time and place. During the telephone call, the purpose of the interview was explained and verbal consent obtained to proceed with the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the following checklist was explained to the respondent:

- Purpose of the research
- Purpose of the interview
- Limitations of the study, i.e. the nature of conflict, its origin or substance and people involved fell outside the scope of the research.
- Presentation of the consent letter from the approving authority
- Consent by the respondent to audio record the interview
- Assurance of confidentiality

The respondent voluntarily signed the consent letter granting permission to proceed with the interview.

Interviewer:

Describe your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

Respondent:

To me the problem goes back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when European missionaries arrived in Southern Africa. Missionaries came here to with good intentions to genuinely serve humanity by spreading the gospel of Christ as

recorded in Mathew 28 which we, the local people at the time, knew nothing about. They (missionaries) unfortunately shared the same skin color with those who had come with one intention - to colonize the region.

African people are the descendants of Noah. They originated in North Africa and migrated southward until they reached Southern Africa. From the time of Abraham to that of Christ, African people did not know much about God. Roughly 2000 years from the time of Abraham, God sent His son Jesus to rescue Israel. Jesus said all nations of the world must be taught salvation so that they can all be one and believe in one God. That is the reason European missionaries came to South Africa. Unfortunately, they were not well received, especially in the KwaZulu-Natal region because they came at a time when the Zulu nation was fighting serious wars with the colonisers. Missionaries also brought along false teachings about ancestor worship, teaching that it was a bad thing and unacceptable. This teaching exacerbated issues, making them disliked and distrusted by some. But missionaries remained committed to the Gospel regardless of the consequences of their endeavors. They were here as ambassadors of Christ sent to preach his gospel so that all the nations of the world could know about Jesus. They preached the message of salvation, built schools and hospitals (something colonisers were not interested in) in order to bring about material and social changes that would improve the quality of life among Africans.

What is happening in our church today is very painful to me. What makes me hurt the most is that I am witnessing the destruction of the good work that was started by the missionaries. These people (missionaries) were not interested in money, or reward of some sort, they just wanted us to get to know God and believe in Him. Things were beginning to get better until South Africa attained freedom (in 1994). Our freedom attracted 'clever' people from neighbouring states, people who could not make ends meet in their countries. Some of them came here without work permits and the only way to survive was to sell drugs or start own churches in order to make easy money. These 'false' prophets have a lot of following in our country; they live a good life, own airplanes, and have lots of money. They lure people to their churches by the promise of a good life. The church became business to them. The success and material wealth of these false prophets has attracted, in a wrong way,

the attention of some pastors in our church, who are now comparing themselves with the false prophets who came here only to make quick money. Everything is now about money, no longer about the gospel of Mathew 28. The good work started by the missionaries has been destroyed.

The problem started when Umphumulo Lutheran Theological Seminary was consolidated into the Lutheran Theological Institute of the KwaZulu-Natal University (in 2003). All of a sudden pastors came out with university degrees. This is when things started going wrong. They then they saw the ministry in a different way, comparing themselves and their degree status to those in the private sector, with the desire to earn same salaries and same standard of living. It became a problem. Today many of them are pastors not because of the call to serve but because pastoral training is free, it is paid for by the church. That was a mistake on the side of ELCSA. This is where it started going wrong in our church.

Interviewer:

How does this affect us as members?

Respondent:

The emergence of prosperity gospel and false prophets has confused those people whose faith is weak. The result is that those who have not fully understood the Gospel and are weak in faith, get easily excited to follow 'false' leaders without understanding issues and what the Word of God says. This has happened in our church too, where members just follow what leaders say without understanding reasons thereof. People are being misled by those who know better. The knowledgeable are standing in the way of the less knowledgeable. As a result, people are confused and Satan is victorious. This is the main problem. Hard work lies ahead for the church to correct these wrongs.

Interviewer:

In view of these challenges, what is your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation, taking cue from Mathew 28 like you said earlier?

Respondent:

The purpose of Jesus's message in Mathew 28 was for all nations of the world to know about God. But when we come to the issues we have right now in our church, i.e. the conflict in the church, we find God's work to have suffered - Jesus' work has come to a standstill. I remember when Jesus was responding to a question whether it was lawful for Jews to pay taxes to Caesar. The Pharisees wanted to corner Jesus, but he knew what was in their mind. He asked them whose image it was on the denarius and they replied: Caesar's. Jesus then responded 'give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God'. Now here is the problem. There are people in our church so clever that they want to confuse those below them; those who do not have enough faith, knowledge and understanding; they are being misled by those who know more. The knowledgeable are standing in the way of the less knowledgeable. Jesus knew everything as son of God, and it was not easy for the Pharisees to confuse him.

Interviewer:

Now when these people who are more knowledgeable confuse those less knowledgeable, what happens to the mission of the church which is the mission of God.

Respondent:

I think this where the problem is. The Devil is grabbing the opportunity created by the conflict. Those who have the knowledge have turned devil themselves. I am hurt by this. Jesus wanted us to be saved so that we can have everlasting life. We need a solution, and I think there are two things that have hurt us: Missionaries brought us the truth, but false prophets came and changed the message of the gospel. As a result, people got confused and it looks as if the devil is victorious. That is the main problem. Hard work lies ahead if this is to be corrected.

Interviewer:

So you say there are those who are confused and those who confuse them. My question to you is what is your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation, taking cue from Mathew 28 like you said earlier?

Respondent:

As an individual I cannot stop doing God's work, no matter what challenges we face. The spirit of the Lord touched my heart, and it is not easy for me to be confused, I rather die doing God's work. According to Martin Luther's catechism, the first great commandment is that 'you will have no other God's except me'. I was taught this during my confirmation class lessons when I was still very young. I got the Gospel message at a very tender age, and right now it's not easy for me to be swayed easily by those false prophets.

Interviewer:

Those of us who know the truth and have fully grasp the Gospel of Jesus, how do we enlighten those you define as less knowledgeable and confused? How do we do this as ordinary members, not pastors, not preachers, not elders. How do we enlighten people in and outside church? How do we assist them?

Respondent:

I think this is where we need to talk at length about the community we are part of. When in the community, first and foremost, the community needs to see and follow our footsteps meaning our footsteps should on their own witness Jesus Christ and what we do should align with what we say. Community should learn from us without us having to utter a single word. Our walk and talk should witness Jesus. What we do should align with what we say regardless of what is happening in our church. The Great Commission says we are light of the world, not only of people inside the church. What hurts me is people in our church are being used by people with ulterior motives.

Interviewer:

Does this mean you as a person you have not been deterred from the message of Mathew 28? That you are still light and salt of the world inside and outside the church?

Respondent:

What hurts me most is to witness people being confused and hurt inside the church, being used by people with their own agendas. I always refer to the bible when Jesus told his disciples that the time of his death will come. Simon Peter stood up and said: not in our presence, none of that will happen; we will fight tooth and nail. But Jesus knew that it was no longer Simon Peter speaking but the devil himself. Then Jesus said: 'Go away Satan' as if he was referring to Simon Peter but he was pointing to the devil who had entered Simon Peter's mind. This is the problem. When a person is possessed by demons, we may think that it is that person doing the wrong things yet in reality it is the demon that has taken over that person's spirit, just like we see with some pastors in our churches being controlled by demons. The problem with our church is that everything has become so easy. Quite often you find pastors bringing their own liturgical order that is unLutheran. I witnessed one day a pastor in our church conducting a service in complete darkness, lights off, except in the alter where he was standing surrounded by lit candles. I had never seen this before in a Lutheran church.

End of the interview.

The interviewer thanked the interviewee for her time and participation.

ANNEXURE 2: RESEARCH INTERVIEW - Respondent 2

Date of interview: 6 May 2019
Time of interview: 15h00
Place of interview: Pretoria area
Interviewer: T Mkhize

The interview was conducted at a convenient location in a quiet area where no external influences could interfere with the interview process. The respondent was contacted via telephone to arrange the interview date, time and place. During the telephone call, the purpose of the interview was explained and verbal consent obtained to proceed with the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the following checklist was explained to the respondent:

- Purpose of the research
- Purpose of the interview
- Limitations of the study, i.e. the nature of conflict, its origin or substance and people involved fell outside the scope of the research.
- Presentation of the consent letter from the approving authority
- Consent by the respondent to audio record the interview
- Assurance of confidentiality

The interviewee voluntarily signed the consent letter granting permission to proceed with the interview.

Interviewer:

Describe your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

Respondent:

My faith is disturbed a lot. Initially I took it (conflict) as a game, thinking it would pass. I saw nothing wrong with it but as it went on and on I realized its seriousness. A lot of people around me are also very disturbed. Some left for other denominations, others

to other congregations and still others like me stayed in the congregation. Those who stayed like me, are 'prisoners of hope'. We are telling ourselves that the things will come right eventually. In the beginning we enjoyed chaotic scene, but with the passage of time, we have realized that there is no easy end in sight.

Time is going and we are not getting proper feedback from our leaders if things are coming right or not. It disturbs my faith. As women we go out recruiting members but conflict is hindering us. They ask 'how do they join under these circumstances?' When we go out, women talk a lot about the conflict.

As women of the PWL we have conferences. These conferences mean different things to different people. For me the conference blesses me, so it does to other women as well. Conference mean a lot to me it gives me renewed hope. Now that we no longer attend conferences, it feels like something has been takes away from me. Others have expressed the same sentiment.

As leaders when we tell them we no longer attending conferences the get very demoralized. It feels like we are denying them something. Some of them wait for the entire year for the conference, and when it comes, they go there to offload whatever burden they carry.

Interviewer:

Do these members decide themselves or you as leaders tell them?

Respondent:

We tell them not to attend. These members do not have the choice to decide themselves whether to attend or not. Leadership decides on their behalf without asking them. We have just written a letter to the Circuit informing them that we are not attending the upcoming conference as long as our issues in the parish that are not resolved. We do not ask our members for their input, we tell them. Us too as leaders at league level, we are told by those higher up, they don't ask us they just tell us what to do.

Interviewer;

Now tell me about your life outside the congregation as part of the community. How has this been affected?

Respondent:

As women we had an outreach programme, now nothing is happening. We used to ask for contributions from members, but now they no longer contribute. As such we are no longer doing any outreach initiative

We continue to ask women to contribute, but they no longer come forward. Recently we were asking for sanitary towels for under privileged girls in the township, but the collection box is empty. If ever there is something in it, is from us leaders trying to motivate others. Even myself I have not contributed, but before the conflict I used to be exemplary and contribute first. This conflict affected us badly.

As a member individually, I also no longer participate meaningfully in any mission work. I used to love the chaos when it started I used to enjoy the hype and toyi-toyi because I thought it was for the time being. As time went on we realized it is serious. I also realized that those who look upon me as a leader get disappointed and confused when they see a leader toyi-toying. They see us as leading them astray.

People generally are affected. The month of February is when membership fees are paid (to renew membership). But for the last two years very few members paid for the renewal of their membership. Members are questioning where their money is going. But we don't have answers. Even myself as a leader I do not know the truth. I so wish someone can tell me exactly what is happening. What is the cause of all this and the solution? Recently I asked one of the elders at Parish level where is this actually leading us to, he also did not know. I asked this because in our recent meeting one of the pastor told us that by end of the year (2019) all will be sorted, but there is no progress. We are scared to ask why we should we wait for that long and what the reason is. We are afraid. We do not know the truth, we just follow. All we are told is that everything will be sorted by end of the year.

End of the interview.

The interviewer thanked the interviewee for her time and participation.

ANNEXURE 3: RESEARCH INTERVIEW - Respondent 3

Date of interview: 7 May 2019

Time of interview: 13h30

Place of interview: Respondent's place of residence

Interviewer: T Mkhize

The interview was conducted at the respondent's place of residence in a quiet area at a where no external influences could interfere with the interview process. The respondent was contacted via telephone to arrange the interview date, time and place. During the telephone call, the purpose of the interview was explained and verbal consent obtained to proceed with the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the following checklist was explained to the respondent:

- Purpose of the research
- Purpose of the interview
- Limitations of the study, i.e. the nature of conflict, its origin or substance and people involved fell outside the scope of the research.
- Presentation of the consent letter from the approving authority
- Consent by the respondent to audio record the interview
- Assurance of confidentiality

The interviewee voluntarily signed the consent letter granting permission to proceed with the interview.

Interviewer:

Describe your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

Respondent:

We no longer attend Circuit conferences and Circuit meetings. Even financial contributions to the Circuit are no longer happening. Everything stops at Parish level.

Interviewer:

What are your feelings about this?

Respondent:

We do not like it; it is not right. It is affecting us in a bad way. The only thing is that we have nothing to say. We can't say anything. In any case the parish is functioning. We have conferences in the parish; we have meetings going on in congregations as well as at parish level. But everything pertaining to the Circuit or Diocese has come to a standstill and will remain so until further notice. No one attend Circuit and Diocesan events for fear of being called 'igundane' (a 'sell-out'). But also even if you want to attend, you need to have contributed financially, but in our case our financial contributions are not sent to the Circuit, and thus we can't attend even if we wanted to. This is now the second year now Tembisa West PWL is not attending (Circuit and Diocesan) conferences.

Interviewer:

So what is the solution:

Respondent:

We don't know what the future hold for us. They say the matter is in court but we do not know what the end has in store for us. They said the court case was to be in March (2019), but it did not proceed. We don't know when it will sit again. Our leaders are quiet; they are not telling us anything.

Interviewer:

How is that affecting you:

Respondent:

We have a big problem as women in that we miss doing things but we are not divided. Especially in Tembisa West if there are events in other parishes we attend, and those others support us too during our events. We are united. We do not say just because we no longer attend conferences and other events we no longer support each other. We are united.

Interviewer:

Does this mean that even though people are affected the mission of the church is ongoing?

Respondent:

The work has not stopped. We have pastors and they are continuing. It would be worse if they also stopped. So everything at parish level is happening. Pastors rotate; we are not short of anything; we have Holy Communion. One day it will come right. We have hope that it will come right. As women we always ask ourselves why our elders are not raising issues with the parish council. We, the ordinary congregants, cannot stand up in front of the congregation and just talk. We must be obedient but when it comes to the word of God I don't know how to be obedient when things are right. We can't as congregants toyi-toyi. What are elders talking about when they meet all the time, we do not get any feedback. We have not had a congregational meeting at Enkazimulweni in over two years how are supposed to raise issues and suggestion when we are denied meetings?

As PWL we are not split. We just don't know what is happening. We support one another, even outside the parish. We support each other. We are still united. We don't say because we don't attend things we are no longer united. Though people are happy, but work is happening. One day things will be all right, but we don't know when. We have hope. Right now we don't know what is happening. We hope by end of the year; the situation will return to normal.

Interviewer:

Now tell me about your life outside the congregation as part of the community. How has this been affected?

Respondent:

We have lost a lot of people in the church. Some have decided to stay at home, others joined other denominations and congregations, other have left us for good. The work has suffered, nothing is happening.

End of the interview. The interviewer thanked the interviewee for her time and participation.

ANNEXURE 4: RESEARCH INTERVIEW - Respondent 4

Date of interview: 10 July 2019
Time of interview: 15h00
Place of interview: Respondent's work place
Interviewer: T Mkhize

The interview was conducted at the respondent's place of work in a quiet area at a where no external influences could interfere with the interview process. The respondent was contacted via telephone to arrange the interview date, time and place. During the telephone call, the purpose of the interview was explained and verbal consent obtained to proceed with the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the following checklist was explained to the respondent:

- Purpose of the research
- Purpose of the interview
- Limitations of the study, i.e. the nature of conflict, its origin or substance and people involved fell outside the scope of the research.
- Presentation of the consent letter from the approving authority
- Consent by the respondent to audio record the interview
- Assurance of confidentiality

The interviewee voluntarily signed the consent letter granting permission to proceed with the interview.

Interviewer:

Describe your experience of witnessing Jesus Christ by being servant to the world by word and deed in a divided, conflict-ridden congregation.

Respondent:

Honestly speaking, I still feel faithful to God maybe because I am grateful for things that have happened to my life through prayer. Then the part of belonging to a denomination I think maybe because was born a Lutheran, raised a Lutheran and I

have been to several churches even when I was still at school so I never had a church that was fulfilling to me like my church Sebosaka. Maybe I am biased in a sense that I am very faithful to Sebosaka maybe because it's my home church. I grew up there, I was raised there, I know the people around there, I am very comfortable and the type of work I do I think it also needs me to belong to a place where I will go and distress, maybe that's why I am so faithful going to church almost every Sunday. It's like I am starting my week with a Sunday. I am going to rejuvenate, I am going to revive my spirit for the coming week, that's why I don't even mind spending a lot of time during the day at church because that is what fulfils my spirit.

So what has this conflict done to me? it has not changed me in a way. It has not changed my faithfulness to the church. I see myself the same as I am. Am I taking sides? No. I am not really taking sides but I would like justice to be served. But I can't say it's not affecting some of my emotions. It evokes some of my emotions in the sense that if this is what is happening in the church then what? Where do we move from here? That is how I feel, but to me the church is my stress reliever.

Interviewer:

So when you say your faith has not been affected; you were born in the church and you remain faithful and loyal to the church, has this conflict not affected your relationships with others in and outside the church? By church I mean the Christian church in general, the Lutheran church as a whole, the church in Tembisa West. By those outside the church I mean the church neighbourhood.

Respondent:

It's a mixture of both but more on locality and loyalty because I am feeling more comfortable at Sebosaka and I relate very well with the elders and other congregants there. I visited other churches in other areas and, by the way, I am very close to these churches, it takes 15minutes to get there but I still drive 30 to 40 minutes to Sebosaka on a Sunday. So I think also maybe the loyalty to the denomination is such.

Interviewer:

And you said you are not taking sides so your relationship with Sebosaka congregation before and during the conflict, is it the same or has it changed?

Respondent:

To me it's the same, I view myself as still the same

Interviewer:

And you said you go to church to revive yourself

Respondent:

To me its spiritual fulfilment. The type of work I do, I don't think I will be able to survive if I do not have anywhere to go to for stress relief. I may not talk about it, but the fact that I am there I am worshipping it makes me look forward, and I think I would like to believe that I am humbled. It makes me treat people like people.

Interviewer:

Now tell me about your life outside the congregation as part of the community. How has this been affected?

Respondent:

The whole saga affected the missionary work that had been carried out prior to this conflict in the sense that projects that were initiated or planned, some of them staled, some of them never moved forward. In terms of me doing those projects I have never done projects on my own but it has always been done with other congregants but this whole thing has brought the morale down to an extent that fellow congregants some have pulled back some are no longer as committed as they used to, some of those community projects not being carried out, like visiting the crèche which we used to visit. We also had plans to visit the elderly but it's no longer happening.

Interviewer:

How were you visiting the elderly? As a PWL or as a congregation?

Interviewer:

I believe also that the leagues (PWL and others) have not been participating in Circuit and Diocesan events like conferences. Has this had any impact on how you feel and view things?

Respondent:

No, it has not. The only thing we do in conferences we worship. It did not really matter to me

Respondent:

As PWL at congregational level, So, we have not done any missionary work as such

Interviewer:

How did the conflict prevent this from happening, i.e. prevent the congregation from furthering its mission?

Respondent:

People are not as committed as they used to. There is also the issue of finances to fund these projects, so people are no longer willing to contribute money to fund these projects. There is also the belief that at some point this money will go back to the church that is also where the problem is. People pulled back and projects could not continue. I have visited a few elderly on my own but I do not believe that this is the correct approach – we need to do it as a congregation.

We are slowly reviving ourselves. We have decided to work in small groups, and to work with those who want to move. Those who want to move, let's move. Those who want to stay behind, let them follow. In life there will always be followers, so the few of us have decided to move on. Others will follow if they follow.

Interviewer:

Could this be because you are now accepting the status quo? Hence the decision to move on? At one point you all came to a standstill, but you are now regrouping and moving on. What is the motivation?

Respondent:

I think it's because we are saying let's live with this situation in the interim. We need to live. We cannot be stalling forever. If the situation gets resolved it will find us moving.

Interviewer:

What do you think it will take to get the situation resolved?

Respondent:

People need to humble themselves. People need to go back and be Christians. I think we have lost that Christianity part of it. People need to say, you stepped on my small toe, which is the most painful one, but I am going to forgive you. It's all about forgiveness. It's about people are pushing their egos. One says I am big I have power I will show you and the other says I might be small but I have power too and I will show you. Its Goliath and David now. People need to come to the same level and speak like Christians. I think we have lost that Christianity part of it, it's gone. We have lost the church. The church in us is gone.

Interviewer:

You have this conflict situation in church. Looking at what is happening outside the church in the communities, in the political space, in government, etc. do you think what is happening in our church is a reflection of what is happening out there?

Respondent:

I think it is the same. We are leaving a lie, everything is evolving, technology is evolving, we are in the era of ego centric, in the era of corruption. Everything is just a lie. I think we are in the world of living a lie.

Interviewer:

Faithful presence means that the church and the community cannot have separated, the church is the community and the community is the church. Sunday is only an event. The church as movement of Christians happens all the time. Has the situation in our church changed this view? Are we still faithfully present with God in our communities or are separating ourselves as a congregation and as church from the community out there?

Respondent:

We are living a lie. We are trying to separate ourselves, we have faith of convenience, hence all these things are happening. For example, it's convenient for me to say I believe in God when I go to church but when I behave in a certain way, for example, stealing money, I make excuses. That's why I say we are living a lie. I cannot be one person in church a different one elsewhere. That would be living a lie.

End of the interview.

The interviewer thanked the interviewee for her time and participation.