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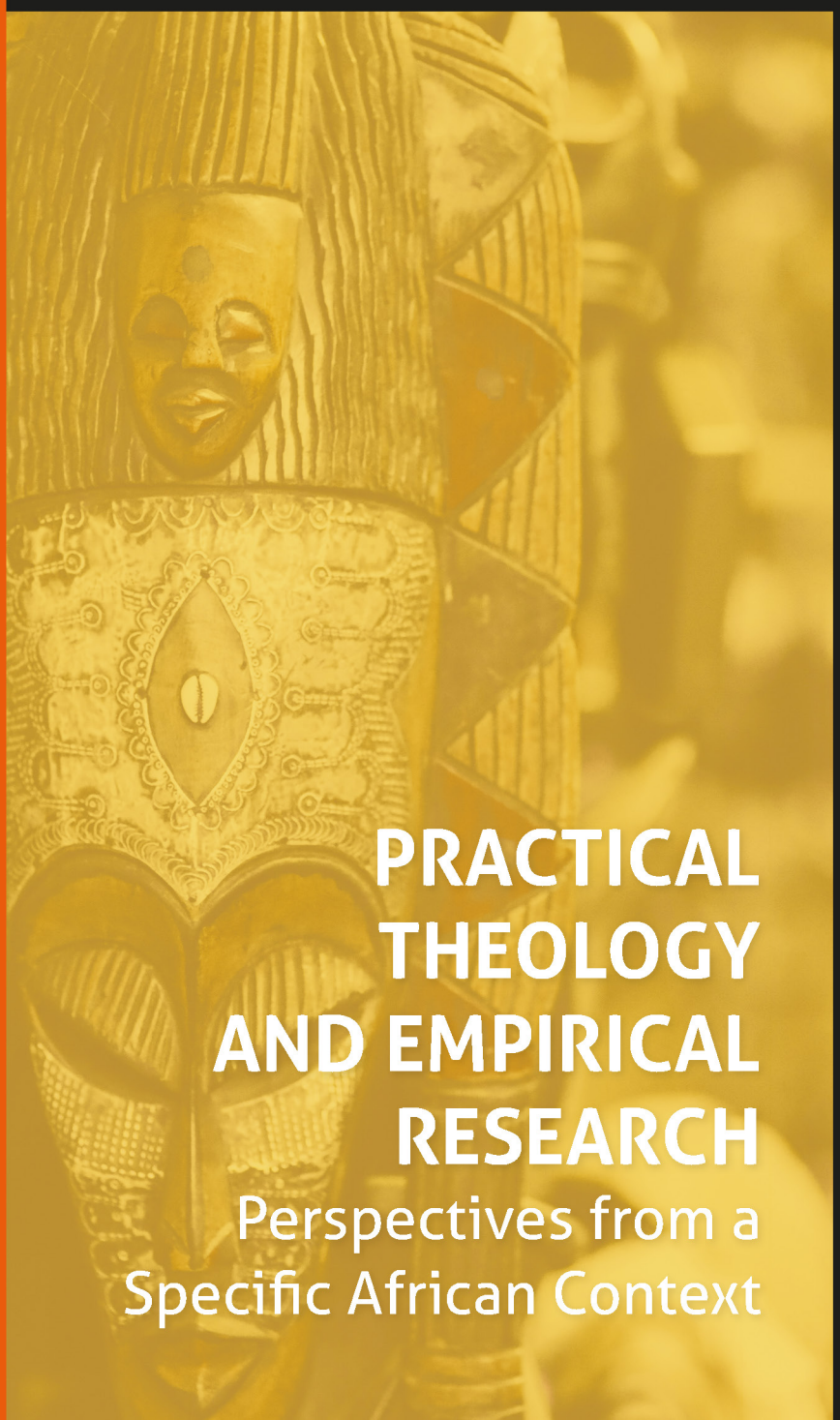

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Perspectives from a Specific African Context

K.J. Pali &
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EDITORS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The ***UFS Theological Explorations series*** is an initiative of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State (UFS), situated in Bloemfontein, South Africa. History, both in South Africa and worldwide, has shown that solid academic research is vital for stimulating new insights and new developments, not only to achieve academic progress, but also to advance human flourishing. Through this academic series, the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS hopes to contribute to worthy causes such as these.

The university wishes the research conducted by its staff to be relevant and innovative within the South African context. In addition, the research should have an international impact and visibility and should encourage national and international collaboration. The type of research published in this series is focused on achieving these goals. Accordingly, *UFS Theological Explorations* publishes only research that is of a high academic standard, has been thoroughly peer-reviewed and makes an important academic contribution to fundamental theological issues on both national and international levels. Furthermore, we maintain that good research should not only be aimed at creating significant new academic knowledge but should also be a deliberate attempt to include various and even opposing perspectives. Finally, we believe that it is especially important that research takes into account the social context within which we generate new knowledge.

This series contains both monographs and collected works. In the case of the monographs, one or more researchers work on a particular topic and cover the subject matter extensively. In this way, the monographs make a significant contribution to original research. In the case of the collected works, a group of researchers from various theological and other disciplines work together on a particular topic. The collected works contribute new insights on the research question from different perspectives and thus advance scholarship collectively.

The Editorial Board trusts that *UFS Theological Explorations* will have a positive and lasting impact on theological agendas all over the world! A special word of appreciation to Prof. K.J. Pali and Prof. W.J. Schoeman, the editors of this volume, for his hard work and dedication in seeing this project through.

Prof. Lodewyk Sutton
Series editor: UFS Theological Explorations

Introduction

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The empirical research that is the focus of this volume aims to critically reflect on the role of congregations and their leadership in the community through a critical discussion that contributes to new perspectives, with specific reference to the South African context, to enhance the field of congregational studies.[1] The aim is to be significant, transformational, and relevant to the context and its challenges in developing contextual ecclesiologies within congregational studies. The contributions to this volume have a specific empirical, methodological aim to map markers to conduct empirical research within the context of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.[2] The research question in this volume focuses on the following: In conducting practical theology and empirical research within an African context, what methodological markers could be identified for this specific context?

1 This focus aligns with the values formulated on page 2 of the "Engaged Scholarship Strategy" (2020) of the UFS.

2 The Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality is a metropolitan municipality that governs Bloemfontein and the surrounding towns in the Free State province of South Africa. Mangaung is a Sesotho word meaning "place of cheetahs".

The research is grounded in the field of "Congregational studies and leadership".[3] The academic endeavours of practical theology and the department during the last decade developed towards a more hermeneutical-focused discipline emphasising the context and working inductively.[4] A hermeneutical approach[5] profoundly impacts the understanding and practising of engaged scholarship. The research is strongly inclined towards a hermeneutical and inductive approach and takes the local context seriously.

As a University of Free State (UFS) strategy, engaged scholarship and research seek to build a partnership between academic scholarship and the community to generate and integrate new knowledge for all partners' mutual benefit.[6] In the case of this volume, the research focuses on congregations and their leadership and contextual relevance; in other words, their involvement within society and the local community, the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. The context of the research is the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality metro, and all the congregations participating in this research project are from this metro, either in the township or in the suburbs of the metro.

The research aims to bridge the gap between the academy and the pastoral ministry by creating opportunities for academics and the congregational leadership to share the researched knowledge and pastoral experiences to enrich each other.[7] Academic research should be part of the ministry; hence, there is

3 See Schoeman, W. J., 2015. Exploring the practical theological study of congregations, *Acta Theologica*, Supplementum 22, 64–84.

4 See Schoeman, K. et al., 2012. Practical theology at a public university: The road travelled and the road ahead at the University of the Free State, in Venter, R. and Tolmie, F. (eds.) *Transforming theological knowledge. Essays on theology and the university after apartheid*. Bloemfontein: Sun Press, 123–139.

5 Kim (2007:430) defines the hermeneutical approach as the interpretive activity of Practical Theology that attempts to understand our concrete situation and discern God's will through a hermeneutical circle that develops an understanding of the text through the interplay between text and context. Ganzevoort (2009:5) says that in Practical Theology, the hermeneutical approach helps to construct the meaning of lived religion through conversations with other human beings, and the traditions that model our lives

6 Refer to the "Engaged Scholarship Strategy" (2020) of the UFS page 5.

7 See pages 13 to 15 of Osmer, R. R., 2008. *Practical Theology. An introduction*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

a need for interconnectedness and mutual empowerment of each other with the interconnection of academic knowledge, students, and religious context and to explore unique and good ministerial practices and challenges in the township ministry.

From an epistemological perspective, practical theology is understood as a hermeneutical discipline, where learning is conducted through an indicative and contextual discourse broader than the academic space. In conducting empirical research, a mixed methodology is used, and the congregations and their leadership are seen as co-researchers.[8]

The bigger demographic picture of the South African religious landscape is a valuable reference point for positioning congregations within their communities and enhancing the role that they may play in the development of society. The General Household Survey (GHS) 2013, for the first time since 2001, included religious affiliation and adherence as a question. The GHS is an annual household survey conducted by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) since 2002. The 2013 GHS helps congregations to position themselves within the macro–South African religious landscape.[9] The Community Survey 2016 looked further into the denominational diversity within South African society. The bigger South African picture gives congregations important contextual and unique information about their societal role and position. Both these surveys indicate that about 80% of the South African population adhere to the Christian religion and that more than 50% attend a worship service every week.[10]

This research project aims to critically describe and evaluate, from a contextual and practical theological perspective, the role of township congregations as faith communities within their communities and broader society. The focus is

8 See Schoeman, W. J. and van den Berg, J. A.,2016. Practical Theology exploring interdisciplinary practices: The quest for engaging with lived religion in the South African context', in Venter, R. (ed.) *Theology and the (post) apartheid condition: Genealogies and future directions*. Bloemfontein: Sun Press, 213–231.

9 Schoeman, W. J., 2017. South African religious demography: The 2013 General Household Survey, *HTS Theological Studies*, 73(2).

10 Refer to the Statistics South Africa reports on the General Household Survey 2013 and the Community Survey 2016.

also on practice-orientated research as a framework for empirical research; in this instance, a multi-cultural congregation and congregation within a context of poverty are also analysed from an empirical perspective. The empirical research is conducted using quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The following is a broad outline of the chapters of this volume. Chapter one introduces the research being conducted in this volume by reflecting on practical theology and empirical research in an African context. The importance of context in performing practical theology and a relevant methodology is the focus of the first chapter. The second chapter describes township congregations using a quantitative empirical lens.

The following two chapters (three and four) use a qualitative methodology to evaluate congregational leadership in the township. Chapter three is a practical theological reflection on the leadership of the pastors in the township of Mangaung, and Chapter four is an empirical exploration of leadership approaches in African Independent Churches in Mangaung. Both chapters attempt to develop a new understanding of congregational leadership within a township context by utilising empirical data and reflection.

Chapter five focuses on post-colonial preaching in a township: Discovery and critical reflection on an African sermon. This chapter aims to use a post-colonial theoretical framework and empirical data to reflect on a sermon in a township context.

The following two chapters use practice-orientated research (POR) as a methodological framework. Chapter six refers to POR in service of the study of multi-cultural congregations, and Chapter seven reflects on Congregational research in a context of poverty: Methodological markers for performing POR.

Chapter eight focuses on Children's ministry in the Mangaung Township with special reference to early childhood development. The early childhood ministry of three Charismatic / Pentecostal congregations is discussed in this chapter.

The last chapter of this volume, Chapter nine, provides a methodological reflection on engaged research within a specific context as an overview of the research that was reflected on in this volume. The chapter evaluates engaged congregational research from an "engaged outsider" perspective.

Chapter 1

Doing practical theology and empirical research in the African context

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1. Introduction

Practical theology has the responsibility to analyse the actions of believers in the praxes of God, church and society (Dames, 2014:49). According to Smith (2013:106), these actions of believers are analysed in the context of the scripture, tradition, and other authoritative documents to understand what they imply about Christian action in this context. Then from a theological perspective, practical theology develops a theory of action to guide believers in churches and society on how to live the values of the gospel as active disciples of Christ.

Is there enough development of relevant theories that guides Africans in churches and society on how to live the values of the gospel as disciples of Christ? On one hand, one can say that the development of theories like *Ubuntu*, African Humanism and communalism and others, is enough proof that there was some critical thinking applied by African Christians to theorise the validity of the received theological knowledge and practises from the Western missionaries. On the other hand, there is still a need for more critical thinking to review the relevance of available African theories and produce other theories that can guide African Christians through the contemporary challenges. The need is urgent if we consider the concern raised by Speckman (2007:xxvi), when he said that churches have no

theory of social intervention because of the received religion from Western missionaries and empowerment programmes that promote dualism and dependency. It must be noted that in African Christian context, the social intervention theories that are developed need to prioritise and embrace spiritual freedom if it needs to achieve true political freedom and authentic socio-economic transformation (Kakwata, 2022:5). Furthermore, it is the church's responsibility and theological institution's mandate to facilitate critical reflection on believers' actions and provide guidelines of a reflected practice for a spiritual freedom. But the tendency of the theological institutions and churches in Africa to focus on practice at the expense of intellectual reflection leaves the Christian religion in Africa with a stigma of religion with many believers but less social impact (Magezi, 2019:117).

This research focuses on conducting practical theology and empirical investigation within an African context, specifically in the townships of Mangaung, Bloemfontein, located in the Free State province of South Africa. The first objective of this chapter is to reflect on the contextual understanding of the nature, field and identity of practical theology in the township. The second objective is to identify methodological markers of conducting research in the context of the township.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: First, I discuss the methodology, theory, engaged and decolonised theological education, and context of Africa, with special reference to the township. Then, I reflect on the definition, nature, field and religious identity of practical theology. I conclude by identifying methodological markers of conducting practical theology in Africa through a discussion of the challenges of practical theology and the relationship between practical theology and empirical research.

1.1 The methodology and theory

The methodology followed in this chapter is an in-depth literature study of the current and previous literature on the study of practical theology and conducting research in the context of Africa. Data collection in this chapter was obtained through observation and analyses of documents

such as journal articles, scholarly books, online sources, dissertations, and general articles.

The main theory of this chapter is the hermeneutical theory which is about understanding and interpreting God's acts of salvation and the implication of salvation within the church and the world through history and trying to make sense to human beings through faith. Its purpose is to develop appropriate and relevant Christian practises that discern God's will and can engage in a given situation by interacting with the text, context, community and action (Van Gelder, 2007:105). First, in the hermeneutic activity, the scripture is essential, together with theology and historical confessions because they shape the life, choices, and practises of the congregation. Second, more significant is the social context of the congregations which could usually be clarified and analysed through social science research. The social context of this research is Africa, in particular congregations in South African townships. Third in importance is the community as Christian believers that has to discern God's will, confess and practise their faith. In this chapter, the community is the Christian community in South African townships. Fourth and lastly, are the strategic actions of the believers in each context that reflect their normative understanding of the scripture, insight into the context, wisdom from the shared practises within the community of believers, and in the end, transformation of the context. Strategic actions will be in the form of recommendations given within the discussion of the chapter.

1.2 Towards decolonised and engaged theological education

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to contribute to the holistic development of society by mobilising the intellectual and creative energies of all people towards addressing the challenge of societal transformation (DHET, 1997:3, 10). During the colonial era, higher education in Africa elevated the superiority of Western education at the expense of African values and knowledge. The consequence was a production of the indoctrinated black elites who were alienated from their own identity and culture but servants of the colonial masters (Michael, 2020:368; Smith, 1999:64). Practical theology as one of the theological disciplines taught at higher educational institutions even during the

colonised African and apartheid South African times perpetuated the superiority of Western education that alienated black elites from their own identity and culture. This was possible through a practical theological confessional approach and applied theological practises that lack a transformation agenda and radical social intervention methods and theories (Van Wyk, 1995:88). The confessional approach and applied theological practises promoted clergy-centred ministry that paralysed active lay ministry and ignored radical societal involvement by the lay people. To address the above concerns, practical theology must be concerned with the practises of the pastors and congregation members within and beyond the borders of the congregations. To be relevant in Africa, practical theological ontology, epistemology, methods and theories must be transformed to contribute to the holistic development of society.

Furthermore, this chapter contributes to engaged scholarship as required by the recent strategic plan of the UFS, Vision 130. According to the UFS (2022:1,3) engaged scholarship is the purposeful sharing of academic scholarly work and professional expertise for the mutual benefit of academics and members of the community beyond the academic institution. A few years ago, some academics from the UFS realised that there was a disconnection between the academics from the Faculty of Theology and congregations in the township. They established a partnership that led to the establishment of an NGO (non-governmental organisation) that serves to link congregations and pastors from the township with academics and the Faculty of Theology. The purpose was to share academic knowledge and professional competence and learn about ministerial experience and challenges of the pastors from the township. The partnership further led to an academic township research project that involved various scholars and aimed at the mutual generation of knowledge and learning and contribution to the transformation of the congregational ministry in the township. The research project was empirical and used mixed methodology for data collection and this chapter is the product of that partnership of the academics and congregations in the township.

This chapter contributes to the recognition and mobilisation of the African community towards facilitating the implementation of some of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (UN, 2015), African Union

Africa Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013) and South African National Development Plan 2030 (NPC, 2011). The discussion in this chapter of social justice, community development and education relate more to the programmes mentioned above.

Decolonisation of practical theology is the other area that this chapter is contributing to. Decolonisation in the African context is undoing the process of colonisation by liberating the African mind, spirituality and the body from the lingering forces of colonisation. Western education with its knowledge, methods and theories has been used as a tool to colonise the indigenous people (Porsanger, 2004:106). Many African theological institutions teach vast amounts of knowledge generated from this Western education system and we wonder why the products of such education suffer from dependency instead of being self-reliant. African theological education needs a radical change of theological knowledge, methods and theories to be culturally and ethically acceptable to the study of African people. Decolonising African theological education requires centring on the concerns and worldviews of Africans whilst striving to understand research theories and methods from African perspectives and purposes (Smith, 1999:39). Decolonised theological education must empower local people and engage their context and knowledge to address issues of social justice and transformation of the local people, societal structures and churches (Namsoon, 2010:39). The role of the higher theological institution in the decolonisation process must be to provide people with ideas, methods, habits of the mind to critically evaluate their societies, appreciate what makes life and of other valuable and reject whatever dehumanises them and others (Moulder, 1980:183)).

1.3 The context of Africa

Practical theology in Africa must make a deliberate decision to confront societal injustices and address the existential needs of Africans. This chapter engages with the context of Africa, which in many ways is distinct from other contexts like America, Europe, or Asia. The discussion on how Africa is externally and internally perceived cannot be adequately addressed in this chapter, but a brief discussion on this can be provided. Adeyemo (1995:3-4) states that there are three ways that one can view Africa and discuss its

context. The first one is a pessimistic view of Africa, which he associates with a view from below that takes as a point of departure the human undesirable socio-economic-political situation. Often those who adhere to this view are critical of religion. They view religion as a problem for Africans to be poor and a tool used by Western nations to control the minds of the gullible. They critique Christianity as a religion that describes God, heaven, and angels as white and the devil as black, thus inculcating low self-esteem and self-hatred of those with dark skin colour. Some of the adherents to the pessimist view of Africa describe life as better under colonial rule, but under the African nationalists, the development of Africa regressed, thus moving Africa from crisis to horror story (Sichone 1994:1, 2). The consequence of this worsening situation of Africa has earned it malignant labels such as a weak, dark, bleeding, and retarded continent as compared to others (Adeyemo, 1995:1). The blame for this worsening situation is attributed to religion characterised by dualism, development programmes that promote dependency and leadership conflicts in Africa (Speckman, 2007:xx; Koopman, 2022:343).

The second is an optimistic view of Africa which Adeyemo (1995:3, 4) associates with those who live in the past and are uncritical of the national faults and instead shift the blame to the outsiders like the colonial rulers. This view is associated with utterances that romanticise mineral wealth, political achievements, cultural and religious legacy of Africa and instead of blaming the national leadership for failing to use the wealth of Africa for the benefit of Africans they shift the blame to external actors like the colonial powers, and macro-economic policies.

The third view is a realist view, which Adeyemo (1995:6) states is where one confronts the context of Africa with faith, love and hope guided by the word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit but does not romanticise the challenges of Africa or withdraw from them. On one hand, this view seeks to engage and understand the deplorable context of Africa regarding socio-economic-political context. On the other hand, it seeks to acknowledge the potential, and the wealth of Africa and use them to rewrite the history of Africa to reclaim its potential, transform the present context and prepare for the future of Africa that God wants. This view recognises the presence of God and the active participation of humanity as agents of transformation

in Africa. It is the goal of this chapter to align itself with the realist view of Africa.

1.3.1 Township in the context of (South) Africa

Apartheid South Africa was famous for its separate development ideology and from the period of apartheid we inherited a human settlement segregated into white suburbs and townships. White suburbs were well-developed human settlements for white people with well-developed infrastructure. In South Africa, township refers to a human settlement designated for black, coloured and Indian people during the previous apartheid regime and still exists in the new democratic South Africa (CoGTA, 2009:6)

The concept of township is very much controversial in South Africa and many of the intellectuals in democratic South Africa no longer prefer to use this concept. Briefly, a township in the context of pre-1994 and even beyond refers to a human settlement in South Africa that was an underdeveloped, racially segregated urban area designated for black, Indian and coloured people (Manyaka-Boshielo, 2017:3). The other common names that referred to townships were shanty towns or locations (CoGTA, 2009:5). The townships during the apartheid era were separated and often situated far from the white settlements which were more well-developed and with better infrastructures (Kabongo, 2019:1). In the township, the majority of the African tribes were placed according to their ethnic groups and language, meaning the Basotho, Venda, Xhosa and coloured people were separated into their ethnic group within the township.

The challenges in the township are that many of the townships in South Africa are underdeveloped and infested with high rates of crime, poverty and unstable socio-economic context. Township has been one of the neglected research areas in the previous regime (CoGTA, 2009:14). Most of the research conducted in the township by the previous South African regime was beneficial to that regime and did not bring any transformation for the black community in the township. However, presently there is a gradual increase in students and theologians conducting research in the context of the township issues. This chapter contributes to the research about the

township in South Africa. In this chapter, township is viewed as a situation within the context of Africa, both the township and Africa at large mutually influence and relate to each other.

The significance of this section was to highlight the impact of how Africa is viewed by others. Practical theology has a role in understanding this background and designing its knowledge, methods, theories to assist African people towards self-determination, self-reliance and self-actualisation.

2. Approaches, and definition and nature of practical theology in Africa

The academic, pastor and congregation members have various perspectives, and approaches to practical theology. There are various approaches to practical theology discussed by Don Browning, Louis Heyns and Hennie Pieterse, Jurgens Hendriks, Richard Osmer (Smith, 2020). However, I will engage the one discussed by Lartey as it relates more with the discussion in this chapter. Lartey[1] (2000:129-131), in his discussion of various approaches to practical theology, mentions the first approach to practical theology as a branch approach whereby practical theology is practised as a theological science with specific content and methods. The second one is the process approach which is concerned with generating viable and workable methods that will enable practical theologians to deliver their goals. Third and last is the way of "being and doing" approach, which strives to utilise faith to transform the practice and context. In my observation, the first two approaches have the privilege of being practised by practical theologians in higher theological institutions and the third one by pastors or lay leaders in congregations. It is possible that the practical theologian who either practises a branch or process approach integrates the "being and doing" approach in their approach to practical theology. In contrast, it is possible that the pastor may integrate the branch or process approach in the being and doing of practical theology. Furthermore, each of the above approaches must

1 Prof Emmanuel Lartey is leading African scholar in the field of practical theology and his home country is Ghana and he taught and held various academic positions in theological institutions in England and USA.

complement each other and their weaknesses need to be worked on for the sake of achieving transformed practice relevant to gospel values.

In my observation, pastors from the township are performing practical theology from the "being and doing" approach. The reason is that few have formal training and undergraduate qualifications, whilst most of these pastors lack formal theological training and are from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Hence, the majority do not have a conceptual understanding of practical theological content, methods and theories but in practise, they are performing a lot of practical theological activities like preaching, faith formation, mission and leadership. Hence, in this kind of context, the interaction of the pastor as religious practitioner and the theologian as an engaged scholar is indispensable to complement one another through critical reflection on practise and relevance of theory in the ministry of the church.

2.1 Definition and nature of practical theology

Various theological institutions in Africa do not use the specific concept of practical theology in their theological disciplines (Magezi, 2019:116). Some Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church institutions prefer to use pastoral theology instead of practical theology. Porumb (2017:1) argues that the pastoral theology in Orthodox institutions is still male-dominated, focusing on the empowerment of the clergy separate from the lay people. This chapter will focus on the practical theology rather than pastoral theology.

Ganzevoort (2009:3-7) defines practical theology as a hermeneutics of lived religion. By hermeneutics, he understands it as a discernment of interaction between text, doctrinal structures and the praxis of the studied religion. Concerning lived religion, Ganzevoort (2009:4) mentions that it is "the actions and meanings operant in the ways humans live, interact and relate to the divine". In contrast, Ikenye (2010:38) understands practical theology as a theological discipline descriptive of African lived experience. African lived experience could be traditional narrative, influenced by the internal relations of African tribes, imperialist forces like slavery, colonisation, apartheid and interaction with religions such as Islam and Christianity. Considering the above, practical theology in Africa must acknowledge

and strive to understand the background of African Indigenous Religion, interreligious dialogue amongst African Indigenous Religion, Islam and Christianity, the history of imperial forces, and African culture if it intends to bring about genuine and relevant solutions to African problems. Practical theology in Africa must address domestic challenges of Africa through critical engagement of the social structures and institutions whether secular or ecclesial (Campbell, 2000:77).

Anderson (2001:22), states that "Practical theology is a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God's purpose for humanity and carried out in the light of the scripture, tradition and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge." Dames (2013:9) says that practical theology is a critical, hermeneutical, participatory action and reflection study within the praxis of God for the missional praxis of the church within the praxis of society. Critical enquiry into the praxis of the church in the world implies relating to the context genuinely and asking honest, hard questions about the purpose of the church in the world (Frambach 2007:20). Practical theology as a hermeneutical discipline is about interpreting God's acts and implication of salvation within the church and the world through history and trying to make sense to human beings through faith. Practical theology as participatory action involves collaborative action in the research that promotes social construction of knowledge and offers multiple ways of knowing (Mekoa, 2017a:181). Practical theology as a reflective study requires a deep thought of the theological and ethical validity of the practise within a specific situation. According to Dames (2013), the critical, reflective, hermeneutical and participatory action of the practical theological needs to be performed within the praxes of God, church and society.

Heyns and Pieterse (1990:6) explain practical theology as an encounter between God and humanity concerned with actions that propagate the gospel and promote God's coming to this world. In contrast, Magezi (2019:131) defines practical theology in Africa as about understanding, communicating and living out the Christian faith. The encounter between God and humanity relates well with lived religion and experience, as discussed above. The actions of believers that propagate the gospel may refer to acts of understanding, communicating and living out the Christian faith.

The description of practical theology discussed above implies that the nature of practical theology is a hermeneutical discipline of lived religion and experience; it is critical, reflective, communicative and participatory discipline of theology. Practical theology is inquisitive about the actions or experience of believers in a specific context. In the context of Africa, practical theology must be concerned with the struggles of the Africans regarding legacy of imperialist forces, holistic development of Africans and transformation of social structures. Because of the legacy of imperialist forces which distorted history, culture and identity of Africans, practical theology must help Africans to reconstruct their culture, identity and history. Holistic development of Africans is a historical problem, and it must contribute to the spiritual, social, behavioural and intellectual transformation that will facilitate physical restoration of Africans who can actively and creatively utilise societal structures for the well-being of the community.

Practical theology is essentially a subversive activity that applies theological reflection to solve real-life problems (Aldous, 2019:25; Smith, 2008:203, 204). This implies that practical theology is disruptive and confrontational to bring about a required deep change of the context. Practical theology as a subversive discipline must confront racism, violence and all injustices that transgress human dignity and rights. It must not only identify or highlight problems, but it must bring about relevant critical theories and pedagogies of intervention to transform the context and humanity. It must help people to be truth-tellers and seekers for justice, agents of change, and active disciples of their own context (Dames, 2020:305). Practical theology is a lifestyle; it is a way of communicating, being and doing as informed by human-divine experience within a specific praxis.

Practical theology has three elements: practice, theoretical reflection and returns to practice (Magezi, 2019:119). This implies that practical theology in its critical reflective practises has its point of departure as the practises or actions of believers then theological-theoretical reflection with an intention to bring about relevant, concrete and normative practise in line with the scripture, tradition, or ethics.

In this chapter I will approach practical theology as a critical inquiry into the praxis of the church (as believers) in the world (Anderson, 2001:22),

a study of the field of lived religion and experience (Ikenye, 2010:38; Ganzevoort, 2009:2-9). I understand practical theology as the study of the actions of believers and their faithful communication and demonstration of the gospel message in a specific context, by means of an inductive and critical approach (Schoeman et al., 2012:129, 131). Furthermore, I believe that practical theology in Africa is a theological discipline that must engage in the praxis of religions such as Christianity, Islam and African Indigenous Religion. As part of its mandate, practical theology must focus on the relations between the church and society, interaction of theory and praxis between human and divine being, and between lived religions and experiences and eventually contribute to the reconstruction of culture, identity and self-reliance of an African being.

2.2 Field of practical theology in Africa

In the first half of the 20th century, the field of practical theology was confined to the religious actions of the clergy and the Christian church (De Roest, 1998:19; Ganzevoort, 2009:7, 8; Miller-McLemore 2012:511). According to Dames (2013:5) these paradigms promoted systemic and hegemonic leadership practises within the congregational ministry. In the course of time, the scope of practical theology expanded tremendously from clerical and ecclesiastic paradigms to Christian practises in society, known as praxis (De Roest, 1998:19; Cilliers, 2000:33; Dreyer, 2010:3; Miller-McLemore, 2012:511). In the context of Africa, practical theology has a responsibility to critically reflect on the knowledge of the culture, the experience of African spirituality and the impact of the traditional cosmology of Africans in their spiritual and public life (Kasambala, 2005:321-320). By contrast, Ganzevoort (2009:7-9) mentions that the field of practical theology ranges from Christian phenomena to a broader view of religions and worldviews. Therefore, the field of study in practical theology involves the study of ordained ministry, Church, Faith, Religion, Culture, and Society.

Although there is a shift in practical theology from clerical and ecclesial paradigm, there is a concern about the lack of transforming and concrete evidence to justify and celebrate that shift. Dames (2013:5) states that evidence from empirical research that he had conducted indicates that

there is little evidence of the reality and impact of the shift from clerical and ecclesial paradigm. This lack of shift or lack of concrete evidence of this shift is confirmed by other scholars. Naidoo (2015:172), in her study of theological institutions in South Africa, confirmed that many theological institutions still engage in clerical paradigms to provide skills relevant for ministers to practise ministry in their own different denominations. Magezi (2019:130) laments that it seems that in many African countries, scholars in practical theology predominantly prefer to utilise clerical and ecclesial paradigms, rather than lived religion approach. If the above is true, practical theology in Africa, including South Africa, is still trapped within the figure of the pastor and the walls of the congregations, despite the calls that it must mobilise both the pastor and the congregation members to be active disciples in society.

2.3 Religious identity of practical theology

Ganzevoort (2009:3-70) and Dreyer (2010:3) state that practical theology has shifted its religious identity from a reformed and Christian-oriented discipline to a more ecumenical and multi-religious discipline. This implies that it is now studied and researched by students from other denominations like Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Furthermore, being multi-religious practical theology has moved in some countries to incorporate other religions and cannot be limited to Christian religions as in the past. For example, countries like United Kingdom, and Netherlands, scholars already explore the possibilities and experience of doing practical theology from other multi religious perspective (Ganzevoort 2009) non-religious (Lynch 2024) and non-confessional (Stuerzenhofecker, 2016) perspectives to shape their students' orientation and future actions regardless of their position in religion. In South Africa, I observed that there are already students from African Indigenous Religion and Islam who enrolled for practical theology studies in Faculty of Theology and Religion. Some of these students while preparing for assessment approached me to enquire if they can use their own faith background to do academic assessments in practical theology. This kind of experience made me enquire about whether practical theology as it is offered in many of the universities in South Africa, is it ready to accommodate students from non-Christian background? In

light of the above, there is an urgent need to find out how this shift affects teaching, research and practise of practical theology. Since the establishment of theological institutions in the late 19th century, practical theology in Africa has gradually taken the form of African identity through the design of contextual analysis approaches and implementation of critical pedagogics and theories to reconstruct the culture, spirituality and traditional cosmology of Africans to direct the way that practical theology should be shaped and applied in every context (Kasambala, 2005:321–320).

Emmanuel Lartey (2000:132) and John S. Klaasen (2014:4) designed contextual practical theological approaches named "pastoral cycle" and "Critical engaged practical reasoning." More recognition must be directed to African scholars who designed Afrocentric practical theological approaches rooted in the African world, values and culture. The first one is the African theology of reconstruction of the life of an African who suffered slavery, colonisation and apartheid (Gathogo, 2007:99). The second one is deep grassroots African theology that strives for human empowerment, development and transformation (Sales & Liphoko, 1982:167). Third and lastly, is the quest for wholeness which involves holistic human development for the purpose of promoting new Christendom (Ngong, 2006:519). The above contextual and Afrocentric approaches to practical theology are relevant to contribute to the reconstruction of African consciousness, identity and culture (Mekoa, 2017b:190). These contextual and Afrocentric approaches need to be tested and applied within the African context for the sake of their improvement and contribution.

Anderson (2001:39) argues that within the Christian context, the identity of "Practical Theology is grounded in the Trinitarian ministry of the Father towards the world, the Son's ministry to the Father on behalf of the world and the Spirit empowering the disciples for ministry." Venter (2005:340), in his studies on Trinitarian Theology remarks that our understanding of the Father as the Creator, influences humanity to develop ecological sensitivity, which encourages good relations with other creations such as plants, animals, and land. Son motivates and influences the attitude of humanity, to embrace self-gifting and self-donation. Holy Spirit (Ac 1:8, 2:4) endows humanity with charismata, known as the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8-10), which make believers more spiritual and missional, with the

mandate to proclaim the kingdom of God and point people to the kingdom of God, not their own. In adopting and adapting the above understanding of Venter within practical theology, I understand the Trinitarian identity of practical theology should enlighten believers about ecological sensitivity, self-gifting and discovering our spiritual gifts to serve the Kingdom of God and his creation.

3. Challenges of the contemporary practical theology

The wider field of practical theology has created enormous challenges for the practise of practical theology. I shall address only those challenges that relate with this chapter. Dreyer (2010:3, 5) raises concern about the minimum use of empirical methods in practical theological research or adaptation of empirical studies from other disciplines. In my observation, the majority of the theology students do not have relevant knowledge of research epistemologies, theories and methods. Hence, UFS and other theological institutions introduced research method modules both for undergraduate and postgraduate students. My observations reveal that the epistemological theological discussion of the researched knowledge lacks integration of the understanding of the African indigenous knowledge system. There is a limited engagement of critical theories and pedagogics and engagement of participatory action research methods. Hence, I conclude that most of the empirical research conducted in practical theology highlights the societal problem without an in-depth discussion of the theory of action that will be used to guide the kind of social intervention that needs to be implemented.

Furthermore, conducting empirical research study is time-consuming. In my previous empirical research that I conducted within the congregations in the township of Mangaung, Bloemfontein, there were some congregations that cooperated well and appreciated empirical practise as it helps them to understand the context. In contrast, others still treated the empirical approach with suspicion of fear of exposing the weakness of leadership and sensitive information of specific congregations. As a result, the leadership of the congregation delayed granting permission to perform an interview with their leader. This happened in one of our township research projects when the church council refused an interview with the senior pastor on the pretext

that he is a holy man of God and can't be interviewed; instead, a junior pastor was recommended.

One more challenge for practical theology is the grounding of practical theology as the critical, reflective enterprise in the distinctive identity of the Christian community without eliminating its scholarly contribution and relevance to the common good (Osmer, 2010:13). It is the privilege of the theological education institutions to practise critical reflection on the ministry and amongst the Christian community members. It is the mandate of theological education institutions to empower pastors with critical thinking through the engagement of critical pedagogies and theories. The remaining challenge is that practical theologians of a more reformed background are still dominant as compared to those with other backgrounds like the African Independent Churches (AIC) and Charismatic Churches.

Magezi (2019:117, 119, 120) discusses the following practical theological challenges: practical theology has three moves; that is, practise, theory, and practise. Both practise and theory have the significance of refining and informing each other for the purpose of improving the quality of each other. However, the situation in Africa tends to emphasise practise over reflection. The consequence is an unreflected practise which is a result of a gap between the faith and the action of the believers and how theory failed to inform and refine the praxis.

Furthermore, Magezi (2019:130) states that the other challenge of practical theology in Africa is that because of enormous societal challenges in Africa, many practical theological scholars have opted to adopt social science theories to address societal challenges in Africa at the expense of quality theological reflection. If this practise pervades it will make practical theology become a bad theological science and a bad social science at the same time.

The other challenge is about the societal impact of the Christian faith. Christian faith is experiencing numerical growth in Africa, but the impressive numbers of Christians fail to act as agents of change to transform their context (Adeyemo, 1995:5). Speckman (2007:xxvi) attributes this failure to make societal impact to a lack of transformative theory of social intervention. Practical theologians as well as higher theological institutions in collaboration with pastors and congregations need to develop means

of inspiration and mobilising believers to be active disciples who seek to transform their own context. The designed societal intervention theories must be shared with the African pastors, or revised to be easy to use and implemented. Some academics at UFS through the engaged scholarship initiative and as part of the contribution of the township congregations research project, have regular workshops with the township pastors to share knowledge, skills and challenges of how believers may be mobilised towards active discipleship.

The last challenge is the problem of human development. On one hand, Speckman (2007:xxvi) mentions that modern development policies focus on economic growth and technological development instead of holistic development. On the other hand, Ramphele, (2008:18) states that material freedom without spiritual freedom is meaningless. Because of misguided human development in Africa, Africa is now struggling with dependency, loss of morality and lack of intellectual freedom to come up with creative solutions to African problems. Because of the adverse impact of imperial forces and macro-economic policies in Africa, true development is when scientific thought and technological development contribute to the reconstruction of the African culture (Mekoa, 2017b:189). Through its knowledge production, theories and methods, practical theology has the responsibility to ensure that it contributes to holistic human development.

4. Practical theology and Empirical research

It is more than half a century since empirical methods were introduced in practical theology but there is still minimum use of empirical research in practical theology. This has the potential to affect the quality concrete contribution of practical theology to address the challenges of Africa. The empirical approach is used with the intention to describe and explain what really happens in a specific context to avoid subjective projections or unrealistic speculations of the situation (Van der Ven, 1993:20, 78). It helps to support a realist view of Africa with facts that can be used to develop concrete solutions to the challenges of Africa. In most of the African churches, including the township congregations, the use of empirical methods to analyse the congregations is still a new and difficult process that needs specific skill and patience. Nel and Schoeman (2015:86, 87) argue

that the significance of congregational analysis is to help congregations to discover their missional identity and integrity. The use of empirical methods in congregational analysis helps to bring the voice and context of the local religious congregation into play. My recent Congregational attender survey is part of data collection method in a research project called Congregation vitality research project. The above mentioned research project focused on congregations and church leaders in the township. The first round of this research project started in 2018 and 28 Congregations in Mangaung (Bloemfontein) participated in the research project and the second round in 2023-2025 whereby 25 township congregations participated. This research project will close at the end of 30 November 2025. The information was used by the participating congregations to develop a strategic plan to transform their ministry.

Mekoa (2017a:169-182) performed an intensive study about indigenous knowledge in Africa and its relations to Western scientific research and knowledge. Mekoa (2017a:169, 170, 178) argues that indigenous knowledge in Africa is acquired in the context of one's relationship with the spiritual and natural world and human interaction and is reflected in the language, social organisation, values, institutions and laws. For empirical methods to be relevant and useful for African people, the empirical research methods must value Africans and their indigenous knowledge. African indigenous knowledge is developed through experience of the natural and spiritual world and interpersonal relationships. Considering the above, I learnt that to conduct empirical research in the township congregations, one needs to establish a relationship with the relevant leaders of the congregation. The knowledge that you will acquire from the township congregation is spiritual, practical, and experiential. This I realised when I observed that in the African Independent Churches, healing is addressed through active participation of the body, mind, and human spirit that are integrated in the process of running, clapping hands and prayer. Furthermore, African indigenous knowledge is integrated within the language, social organisations, values, institutions and laws. Hence, it is important to conduct interviews in the local language, know the protocol to follow to meet the leader, and enquire about institutional laws and cultural

customs that one needs to observe before one can conduct interviews with the leadership and members of the congregation.

Mekoa (2017a:170, 177) states that African indigenous knowledge is transmitted to generations through oral traditions and cultural practices such as rites and rituals, unlike Western science, which is academic and transmitted through the literature. It must be noted that many African phenomena are not yet documented but are still transmitted orally. Many township congregations do not have a documented history of their church, the life and ministry of their founder, the church order, and the teachings of their church. I have several congregations that approached me to assist with documentation of the above information and that is an enormous project that one needs to seek funding for and perform it either as a formal research project or an engaged academic citizen project.

Mekoa (2017a:158) states that research in Africa needs to value the local people and their knowledge by embracing Afrocentric paradigms, contributing to the emancipation of Africans and involving collaborative action to bring about new knowledge and societal solutions. Research in Africa needs to engage the research paradigms that promote human dignity, insight and responsibility. Shawn (2001:175) mentions paradigms that can accommodate indigenous knowledge as critical theorists and constructivist theories because they are context-based, work on ethics of research and strive for social change and participation. By adopting collaborative research approaches, empirical research in Africa must develop Afrocentric societal solutions that contribute to healing, reconstruction of African culture and consciousness, and transformation of African lived experience of ideas and struggles for communal development and self-determination (Rigney, 1999:118, Smith, 1999:116; Mekoa, 2017b:189).

Research methods like qualitative, quantitative or both are still relevant as tools to generate new knowledge provided that they do not undermine and dominate African values and knowledge systems. Mekoa (2017a:180, 181) says that when conducting empirical research in Africa the qualitative methodologies preferred are such as narrative enquiry, storytelling, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups. Qualitative methodologies collaborate well with African indigenous knowledge because they create opportunities for personal relationships, conversations and observation. The quantitative

method does not fit well with indigenous methodologies (Shawn, 2001:178) but Mekoa (2017a:180) suggests that it can be used to create numerical empirical data. In our township research project, we used qualitative methods by conducting individual and focus group interviews. The qualitative interview questions were asked in the language preferred by the participants. The quantitative method was used through an attender survey conducted in various township congregations. To avoid many challenges related to the survey, the participants were allowed to fill in the survey form immediately after the worship service and the research assistant provided leadership on how to fill in the survey form.

Data collection is an essential process in research because the quality of data collected has an impact on the quality of research, analyses and applications. Mekoa (2017a:180, 181) mentions that relevant data collection methods in African indigenous knowledge can be through human experience of the spiritual and natural world and building relationships with people. The second one is through conversation (interviews) with people through storytelling and interactions. The third one is by empirical observation within the natural setting where the interconnectedness of the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects is maintained. Lastly, in the modern era, one may include consulting archive documents which may include written primary sources, photos, art and archaic tools.

Some of the empirical research design methodologies preferred are ethnographic and participatory action research or practise-oriented research. The choice of these research design methodologies is attributable to their nature to develop insight of culture, and participatory nature and encourage mutual relationship of both the researcher and the participants towards the contribution of the solution to the research problem. These empirical methodologies are essential because they promote the social construction of knowledge and change, offer multiple ways of knowing, and align with axiological beliefs (Shawn, 2001:178).

Empirical research in practical theology must take leadership in intra-, inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches to the production and learning knowledge (Schoeman et al., 2012:129). The implementation of empirical methods in theology is not anything new; it has been in use since the mid-20th century (Van der Ven, 1993:1). However, the way that the empirical

methods were implemented in theology was gradual and cumbersome. It was gradual in the sense that the process of implementation developed from mono-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary to intra-disciplinary (Van der Ven, 1993:89-102). It is not that the process was linear, but these were the developmental stages that could be observed through the history of empirical methods in practical theology. Various higher theological institutions in South Africa encourage scholars to practise interdisciplinary research for the purpose of generating integrated knowledge that can be useful to various sectors of society. The research conducted so far in township congregations is more of an intra-disciplinary nature but we are open to other scholars' input and we hope in the future to conduct inter- and multi-disciplinary research.

Some of the African mainline churches have the advantage of pastors trained from higher institutions and some of these pastors are theologians and researchers recognised by the church and are helpful to guide and advise the church with their skill and research. However, most of the pastors from African Independent Churches and Charismatic churches whom I work with do not have formal training. In pursuit of qualifications, many of them are victims of bogus and unregistered theological institutions that offer unaccredited qualifications. In short, I observed that many of the congregations in the township do not have recognised theologians and researchers as part of their leadership to help and guide the leadership of township congregations to make appropriate decisions in the ministry of the congregations. Furthermore, they do not have partnerships with relevant higher institutions like Faculties of Theology to train their pastors and share resources and skills concerning ministerial challenges and research.

Considering the above, the partnership of UFS academics and pastors from the township led to some of the township pastors developing an interest in studying with the UFS's Faculty of Theology and Religion (FTR), other pastors were co-opted to be part of the advisory board members of the FTR, and most importantly some participated in the township research project and recurriculisation of an undergraduate degree. This partnership has grown to benefit congregations beyond Bloemfontein to other parts of the Free State.

In my observation I realised that congregations in Africa, in particular township congregations, are under-researched. Lack of investment in research in congregations in Africa, in particular township congregations, will lead to new theories not being developed for the township congregations' ministerial challenges and conventional ministerial practises not being questioned. This will confirm what Speckman (2007:xxvi) mentioned when he said that many churches (in Africa) lack a transformative theory of social intervention; hence, churches cannot engage many of the societal challenges. There are various theories developed for social intervention within practical theology and social sciences, but are they relevant to congregations in Africa and township congregations? Are they shared with the pastors and congregations in the township? Some of these social intervention theories are complicated and many of the pastors in the township do not have formal education to understand such complicated theories. It was mentioned above that the situation of practical theology in Africa tends to emphasise practise over reflection. There is a need to challenge some ministerial practises to enhance the ministry of the congregations in Africa, in particular, the township. For example, many congregations in the township have been established by African pastors and these congregations do not have church order to guide in matters of discipline and leadership succession plans. Often, when a leader commits an offence, or the founder passes away, there is much conflict and division which could have been resolved through the church order.

Lages et al. (2015:10) mention that other challenges encountered with research in Africa are low participation rates, respondents' suitability, and quality of primary and secondary data. The above is also a challenge to many of the congregations in Africa, in particular township congregations. In our initial stages of the township congregations research project a few years ago, we encountered reluctance of congregations willing to partake in our research. Some pastors could not be interviewed because of their apparent status as holy men of God. Other congregations wanted to be paid for the data collection in their own congregations. Some participants were not suitable for interviews as they could not offer relevant and required information. Lastly, other congregations were suspicious of research and viewed it as invasive in their ministry whilst others delayed giving

permission for research in their congregations. Many of the challenges above can be resolved by forming partnerships and building quality relationships with congregations to share the significance of research for the enhancement of ministry. To resolve the issue of suitability of the participants, one must understand that many of the pastors in the township have no formal education and may not understand the theological concepts as perceived in higher theological education institutions. It is better to use simplified wording of the academic concepts or perform observations of the phenomenon that you intend to research.

5. Conclusion

This chapter was about conducting practical theology and empirical research in the context of Africa, and in particular, the township in South Africa. Africa, and in particular, churches in Africa, including those in the township are under-researched. There are many African phenomena, practises and theories that need to be researched and subjected to theoretical analysis for continuation or discontinuation within the African context. Practical theology as a critical, hermeneutical, participatory and practise-oriented discipline has the potential to empower Africans and engage their context through its methods, theories and knowledge that it produced. But for practical theology to contribute to the well-being of Africa, it needs to view Africa and its citizens as potential agents of transformation, co-producers of knowledge, and partners in the research that strive to integrate African culture, values, indigenous knowledge, identity in its research agenda.

Practical theological research in Africa must prioritise ethical protocol and its initial stages must plan for when to perform report-back after collection and analyses of data has been conducted (Porsanger, 2004:109, 111). Many of the workshops that we conducted with the township congregations were in the context of report-back of what was learnt from collected and analysed empirical data. The understanding of the African indigenous knowledge is imperative if research in Africa, in particular, the township, has to be relevant and authentic. Although both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to research African indigenous knowledge, qualitative methodologies collaborate well with indigenous methodologies rather than the quantitative method. Not all research theories fit well with indigenous

research, but critical and constructivist theories relate well with indigenous methodologies. Since indigenous knowledge is practical, relations and spiritual, data collection procedures do require relevant approaches like personal conversation, human experience, empirical observation, and consulting archival material. Data analyses and interpretation of research data from African indigenous people is valid when it integrates the views and participation of the local people who participated in the research.

In conclusion, practical theology as one of the theological disciplines that perpetuated the Western research and knowledge that undermined African people, their indigenous knowledge and culture, has the responsibility to embrace engaged scholarship and the decolonisation process that provides African people with ideas, methods, habits of the mind to critically evaluate their societies, and reconstruct their culture and consciousness for the well-being of African communities.

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Chapter 2

Describing township congregations through a quantitative empirical lens

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1. Itroduction

The aim of this chapter is to assess the congregational ministry within a township context through a quantitative empirical lens. The context of congregations was described in more detail in the previous chapter. The focus is now to provide an empirical description of township congregations in the Mangaung context. An empirical analysis of the congregation is not the complete picture of the congregation but provides a perspective on congregational life. A theological and theoretical analysis would provide a more comprehensive description of congregational life but the focus in this regard is on a quantitative empirical lens.

2. The selection of the congregations

The objective of the selection of congregations is to select through convenience sampling (Bryman, 2012:201) between twenty and thirty township congregations from the Mangaung metro from the following religious traditions or denominations: Mainline, Pentecostal or Charismatic and African independent or initiated churches. A short description of the three traditions would assist in understanding the religious diversity

within the township context and enrich the quantitative discussion on the congregational ministry in the township.

Mainline congregations have a more formal and structured belief system, doctrinal documents, and church order. They have a well-defined hierarchy and bureaucratic system with their historical roots in Western Christianity and most probably a missionary background. Mainline congregations are mainly from the following traditions: Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Reformed, Catholic, and Anglican.

Charismatic or Pentecostal congregations are an important part of congregational life in the township because of its growth in South Africa and sub-Sahara Africa. "The Pentecostal churches are centred on the workings of the Holy Spirit as a powerful force among believers. It is frequently said that while the broader evangelical revival movement emphasises Jesus as the focus of faith, the Pentecostal movement emphasises the Holy Spirit. At its core is usually a re-conversion experience called 'baptism in or with the Holy Spirit', harking back to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christians in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, or Shavuot (Acts of the Apostles 2–4)." (Schlemmer, 2008:10). These congregations include the Assemblies of God, Born Again Church of God in Christ, Rhema Church, and Apostolic Faith Mission.

African independent or initiated churches (AIC) have congregations with a very specific focus on the interaction between the Christian and traditional African religion. "All churches that are rooted in the local context and that explicitly seek to bring Christianity in conversation with African realities of whatever kind might be considered indigenous." (Müller, 2018). Knoetze (2016) gives the following description of AICs: "The African independent churches include a wide variety of churches, from very close to the African traditional religion (ATR) and therefore very syncristic to, at the other end, very Biblical and Reformed churches." Some of the more well-known AICs include the Zion Christian Church; Apostolic Church; African Nazareth Baptist Church/Shembe.

The following township congregations were selected through convenience sampling and participated in the research project:

Township congregations	N	%
AIC	4	15,4
Mainline	12	46,1
Charismatic/Pentecostal	10	38,5
Total	26	100,0

It is important to note that this is not a representative sample or voice from township congregations in the Mangaung metro. The aim is to listen to the different voices of congregations from different traditions within a specific township context. This could assist in the evaluation of the relevance of quantitative research in understanding the congregational ministry is this context.

3. The empirical methodology of the township research project

The research project is undertaken by using the following two surveys:[1]

3.1 Congregational survey

The congregational surveys (called Church Mirror surveys) used a quantitative empirical methodology to describe the ministry of the congregation (see Hermans & Schoeman, 2015) and give a comprehensive description of the functioning of congregations. The original surveys included congregations from the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) family (DRC[2], DRCA[3], and URCSA). The township project used a shortened format of the Church Mirror surveys but still enquired about the functioning and ministry of the local congregation. The questionnaire asked about different aspects of the congregation and was completed by

1 See Hermans, C. and Schoeman, W. J., 2015. Survey research in practical theology and congregational studies, *Acta Theologica*, Supplementum 22(2015), 45–63.

2 See Schoeman, W. J., 2011. Kerkspieël – ĥ kritiese bestekopname, *NGTT*, 52(3&4), 472-488.

3 See the doctoral dissertation of Dr Pali: Leadership and transformation in the African church: A practical theological study of one denomination.

the leadership and administrative staff of the congregation. All twenty-six congregations that are part of the township project completed the congregational survey.

3.2 Attender survey

The attender survey is a quantitative research instrument that contributes towards the understanding and evaluation of congregational vitality and was developed by the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) in Australia. The NCLS is an international survey focusing on denominations and congregations with the intention to give a voice to congregational members. An SA-CLS Pilot Project was conducted in 2014-2015 to evaluate the suitability of NCLS in the South African congregational context by using the NCLS attender survey to take a snapshot of the health and vitality of congregations.[4] The survey was completed by worship attenders during a worship service of a specific congregation. This is not a representative voice of all the members of a congregation, but the voice of key informants to listen to as it provides reliable information about congregational life from an attender perspective (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015:60). The pilot project provided valuable information for congregations and denominations and the NCLS attender survey was repeated in 2018-2019, also amongst township congregations.

Denomination	N (attenders)
Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)	6985
Nederduits Hervormde Kerk in Afrika (HKA)	1823
Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)	169
Township Congregations (TPC)	568
Total	9545

4 Schoeman, W. J., 2010. The Congregational Life Survey in the Dutch Reformed Church: Identifying strong and weak connections, *NGTT*, 51(3 & 4), 114–124. Schoeman, W. J., 2020a. The South African Church Life Survey 2014: An exploration of congregational health. In: W. J. Schoeman (ed.) 2020b, *Churches in the mirror: Developing contemporary ecclesiologies*, 141–159. Sun Media.

4. Township congregations: Findings from the congregational survey

This section gives a description of the 26 congregations from the Mangaung Metro that completed the congregational survey (see also Schoeman, 2020a:110). The aim is to look at the functioning of the congregational ministry and leadership during the lockdown in 2020-2021.

Most of the congregations report that they see their congregational vitality (Table 4.1) as stable (38,5%), but a majority of mainline congregations (58,3%) are struggling but were still viable; and 50% of the AIC congregations are thriving and growing.

Table 4.1: Congregational vitality

Describe the overall vitality of this congregation	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
This congregation will not survive much longer	0	0	0	0
	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
We are struggling but are still viable	0	1	7	8
	0,0%	10,0%	58,3%	30,8%
We are stable	2	5	3	10
	50,0%	50,0%	25,0%	38,5%
We are strong and steady	0	1	1	2
	0,0%	10,0%	8,3%	7,7%
We are thriving and growing	2	3	1	6
	50,0%	30,0%	8,3%	23,1%
Total	4	10	12	26
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The majority of the congregations in the township (Table 4.2) have a team of leaders that include both ordained and lay leaders. The mainline congregations seem to make more use of lay leaders in their congregational ministry.

Table 4.2: Leadership of the congregation

Which of the following best describes the leadership of this congregation?	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
Single ordained leader (minister, pastor, priest)	0	1	1	2
	0,0%	11,1%	8,3%	8,0%
Single lay or non-ordained leader	0	0	1	1
	0,0%	0,0%	8,3%	4,0%
Team of ordained leaders	2	1	0	3
	50,0%	11,1%	0,0%	12,0%
Team including both ordained and lay leaders	2	6	7	15
	50,0%	66,7%	58,3%	60,0%
Team of lay leaders	0	1	3	4
	0,0%	11,1%	25,0%	16,0%
Total	4	9	12	25
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

During the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic lockdown in 2020, most congregations (72%) conducted outreach activities in the local community. This was achieved by all Charismatic/Pentecostal and 75% of the AIC congregations (Table 4.3). The congregations demonstrate an openness towards the needs of the community that they are part off.

Table 4.3: Outreach activities in the local community

During the lockdown in 2020, has this congregation conducted any outreach or support activities in your local community?	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
Yes	3	9	6	18
	75,0%	100,0%	50,0%	72,0%
No	1	0	6	7
	25,0%	0,0%	50,0%	28,0%
Total	4	9	12	25
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

A digital ministry became an important aspect of the congregational ministry during the pandemic. The findings (Table 4.4) indicate that the congregations struggled to have a digital ministry; 23,1% started during lockdown and are continuing it, but 23,1% started but stopped their digital ministry again. Most of the AIC congregations (75%) don't have a digital ministry. A critical question would be about the post-pandemic role of a digital ministry in the congregation?

Table 4.4: Digital ministry of the congregation

The digital ministry of the congregation	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
We don't have a digital ministry	3	4	3	10
	75,0%	40,0%	25,0%	38,5%
We started with a digital ministry during the lockdown and continued with it	0	4	2	6
	0,0%	40,0%	16,7%	23,1%
We started with a digital ministry during the lockdown and stopped with it again	1	0	5	6
	25,0%	0,0%	41,7%	23,1%

The digital ministry of the congregation	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
We intensified our digital ministry during the lockdown and continued with it	0	1	2	3
	0,0%	10,0%	16,7%	11,5%
We intensified our digital ministry during the lockdown, but reduced it now as previously	0	1	0	1
	0,0%	10,0%	0,0%	3,8%
Total	4	10	12	26
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Most of the congregations (61,5%) don't post their sermons weekly on social media, while half of the Charismatic/Pentecostal congregations do this on a weekly basis (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Sermons on social media

Do you post the weekly sermons on social media?	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
Yes	1	5	4	10
	25,0%	50,0%	33,3%	38,5%
No	3	5	8	16
	75,0%	50,0%	66,7%	61,5%
Total	4	10	12	26
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Coming out of the lockdown, most of the township congregations (36%) have a declining financial basis, and 24% experience their financial situation to be a serious threat to their ability to continue as a viable congregation (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Financial situation of the congregation

Which of the following best describes this congregation's financial situation?	AIC	Car/Pen	ML	Total
We have an increasing financial base	0	1	2	3
	0,0%	10,0%	16,7%	12,0%
We have an essentially stable financial base	1	3	3	7
	33,3%	30,0%	25,0%	28,0%
We have a declining financial base	1	3	5	9
	33,3%	30,0%	41,7%	36,0%
Our financial situation is a serious threat to our ability to continue as a viable congregation	1	3	2	6
	33,3%	30,0%	16,7%	24,0%
Total	3	10	12	25
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The following may be stated as a conclusion reflecting on the findings from the congregational survey regarding the township congregations:

- In terms of vitality or growth, many of the congregations see themselves in a stable position after the lockdown and pandemic.
- Most of the township congregations have a team of leaders that include both ordained and lay leaders.
- Township congregations remained in contact with the community during lockdown.
- The digital ministry during and after the lockdown were problematic; most of the congregations do not have a digital ministry or post their sermons on social media.
- Most of the congregations struggle post-COVID-19 with their financial position. They are situated in poorer context in society and this would also have an influence on the financial position of the congregation.

5. Township congregations: Findings from the attender survey

Congregational vitality is a complex concept and the focus in this regard is on the internal and outward core qualities of the congregation life of the membership. The internal core qualities refer to the relationship between the membership and God and the outward core qualities to the interaction between the membership and the community.[5]

5.1 Inward core qualities

The inward core qualities reflect on the faith, worship and belonging of the attenders.

5.1.1 Alive and growing faith

5.1.1.1 Growth in faith

Attenders were asked about the growth in their faith over the last year (Table 5.1.1.1). All the attenders experienced much growth in their faith (42,6%) through the activities of the local church (congregation). The attenders in township congregations (TPC) experienced it in 59,0% of the cases. Growth through their own private activities played a more significant role in DRC, NHKA and URCSA congregations, while the congregation played a more significant role in the case of township congregations.

Table 5.1.1.1: Growing faith

Over the last year, do you believe you have grown in your Christian faith?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
No real growth	373	88	16	28	505
	5,5%	5,0%	9,5%	5,1%	5,5%

5 For a more comprehensive discussion of the core qualities, see Powell et.al., 2012.

Over the last year, do you believe you have grown in your Christian faith?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Some growth	1530	267	53	78	1928
	22,6%	15,1%	31,5%	14,1%	20,8%
Much growth, mainly through this local church	2660	909	51	327	3947
	39,3%	51,4%	30,4%	59,0%	42,6%
Much growth, mainly through other groups or churches	677	126	19	65	887
	10,0%	7,1%	11,3%	11,7%	9,6%
Much growth, mainly through my own private activity	1534	378	29	56	1997
	22,6%	21,4%	17,3%	10,1%	21,6%
Total	6774	1768	168	554	9264
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.1.1.2 Private devotional activity

Private devotional activities, time spent in private prayer, Bible reading and meditation, play a significant role in the daily spiritual lives of DRC and NHKA attenders. This is valid to a lesser extent for the TPC attenders, where a few days a week will be allocated for private devotional activities (Table 5.1.1.2).

Table 5.1.1.2: Private devotional activity

How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (e.g. prayer, meditation, Bible reading alone)?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Every/most days	4916	1328	67	292	6603
	70,4%	72,8%	39,6%	51,4%	69,2%
Few days a week	1026	264	29	165	1484
	14,7%	14,5%	17,2%	29,0%	15,5%
Weekly	136	39	28	44	247
	1,9%	2,1%	16,6%	7,7%	2,6%
Occasionally	681	153	37	49	920
	9,7%	8,4%	21,9%	8,6%	9,6%
Hardly ever	157	30	7	10	204
	2,2%	1,6%	4,1%	1,8%	2,1%
Never	69	9	1	8	87
	1,0%	0,5%	0,6%	1,4%	0,9%
Total	6985	1823	169	568	9545
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.1.1.3 The importance of God

God is the most important reality in the lives of NHKA and DRC attenders and to a lesser extent, in the lives of the TPC attenders (Table 5.1.1.3).

Table 5.1.1.3: The importance of God

How important is God in your life?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
God does not matter at all	20	3	1	10	34
	0,3%	0,2%	0,6%	1,8%	0,4%
Fairly important, but many other things are more important	200	29	7	5	241
	2,9%	1,6%	4,1%	0,9%	2,5%
God is more important to me than almost most anything else	1484	359	66	180	2089
	21,3%	19,9%	38,8%	32,2%	22,0%
God is the most important reality in my life	5256	1412	96	364	7128
	75,5%	78,3%	56,5%	65,1%	75,1%
Total	6960	1803	170	559	9492
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.1.2 Worship service experience.

Attenders from different denominations report different experiences during the worship service. They were asked about their experience of the presence of God (Table 5.1.2.1), a growing understanding of God (Table 5.1.2.2) and if they are challenged to take action during the worship service (Table 5.1.2.3):

- Attenders from TPC always (80,6%) experience a sense of God's presence;
- they also have a growing understanding of God (81,2%) during a worship service, and
- they are also challenged during a worship service to take action; 51,2% indicated that this is always the case.

The responses from TPC attenders indicates a different worship experience than that of the other denominations.

Tables 5.1.2.1: Experience of God's presence

Experience during the worship services of the local church – sense of God's presence	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Always	4280	1239	107	444	6070
	62,8%	70,8%	64,8%	80,6%	65,4%
Usually	1882	424	38	70	2414
	27,6%	24,2%	23,0%	12,7%	26,0%
Sometimes	559	77	18	33	687
	8,2%	4,4%	10,9%	6,0%	7,4%
Rarely/Never	95	9	2	4	110
	1,4%	0,5%	1,2%	0,7%	1,2%
Total	6816	1749	165	551	9281
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.1.2.2: Understanding of God

Experience during the worship services of the local church – growth understanding of God	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Always	3233	976	98	441	4748
	48,0%	56,4%	58,3%	81,2%	51,7%
Usually	2754	639	49	75	3517
	40,8%	36,9%	29,2%	13,8%	38,3%

Experience during the worship services of the local church – growth understanding of God	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Sometimes	665	107	18	23	813
	9,9%	6,2%	10,7%	4,2%	8,9%
Rarely/Never	90	10	3	4	107
	1,3%	0,6%	1,8%	0,7%	1,2%
Total	6742	1732	168	543	9185
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.1.2.3: Challenged to take action

Experience during the worship services of the local church – being challenged to take action	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Always	1606	517	59	274	2456
	24,4%	31,1%	35,3%	51,2%	27,5%
Usually	2524	682	59	96	3361
	38,4%	41,0%	35,3%	17,9%	37,6%
Sometimes	2030	390	39	127	2586
	30,9%	23,4%	23,4%	23,7%	28,9%
Rarely/Never	409	76	10	38	533
	6,2%	4,6%	6,0%	7,1%	6,0%
Total	6569	1665	167	535	8936
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.1.3 Belonging – strong and growing

The third inward core quality focuses on the involvement of the attenders within their faith community, asking about their sense of belonging to the congregation and about their frequency of attendance of the worship services.

5.1.3.1 Sense of belonging to the local church (Table 4.1.3.1)

The attenders from TPC have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation and this is growing (80,4%). The other denominations have a lesser indication of a growing sense of belonging and indicates that it is about the same as the previous year.

Table 5.1.3.1: Sense of belonging

Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this local church/ congregation?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Yes, a strong sense of belonging, which is growing	3134	961	77	451	4623
	45,2%	52,7%	45,6%	80,4%	48,8%
Yes, a strong sense – about the same as last year	1863	456	28	36	2383
	26,9%	25,0%	16,6%	6,4%	25,1%
Yes, although perhaps not as strongly as in the past	789	164	36	44	1033
	11,4%	9,0%	21,3%	7,8%	10,9%
No, but I am new here	264	56	8	6	334
	3,8%	3,1%	4,7%	1,1%	3,5%
No, and I wish I did by now	292	55	11	5	363
	4,2%	3,0%	6,5%	0,9%	3,8%
No, but I am happy as I am	461	88	6	12	567
	6,7%	4,8%	3,6%	2,1%	6,0%

Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this local church/ congregation?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Don't know/ not applicable	127	43	3	7	180
	1,8%	2,4%	1,8%	1,2%	1,9%
Total	6930	1823	169	561	9483
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.1.3.2 Frequency of church service attendance (Table 4.1.3.2)

The attenders of all the denominations have a high frequency of church service attendance. It is usually every week, or at least two or three times a month, this account for more than 88% the worship attendance across all the denominations.

Table 5.1.3.2: Frequency of church service attendance

How often do you go to church services (worship services) at this local church?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
First time	75	11	5	17	108
	1,1%	0,6%	2,9%	3,0%	1,1%
Hardly ever/special occasions only	60	17	2	13	92
	0,9%	0,9%	1,2%	2,3%	1,0%
Less than once a month	167	27	11	4	209
	2,4%	1,5%	6,5%	0,7%	2,2%
Once a month	307	73	18	13	411
	4,4%	4,0%	10,6%	2,3%	4,3%

How often do you go to church services (worship services) at this local church?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
2 or 3 times a month	2271	555	46	133	3005
	32,4%	30,0%	27,1%	23,2%	31,3%
Usually every week	3938	1110	78	342	5468
	56,2%	60,1%	45,9%	59,6%	57,0%
More than once a week	188	55	10	52	305
	2,7%	3,0%	5,9%	9,1%	3,2%
Total	7006	1848	170	574	9598
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The following conclusions regarding the inward core qualities for township congregations may be noted:

- A growing faith is to a lesser extent a private activity for TPC attenders because they focus more on communal activities in their congregation.
- Worship services are experienced by TPC attenders in a more positive way as the experiencing of and understanding God.
- Belonging to the congregation plays an important role, and there is a sound involvement with the activities of the congregation, especially the worship services.

5.2 Outward core qualities

The outward core qualities pay attention to the interaction of the congregation with the community and wider society. The following aspects will be in the focus:

- Practical and diverse service
- Faith sharing – willing and effective
- Inclusion – intentional and welcoming

5.2.1 Practical and diverse service

Congregations from the township (TPC) have a stronger involvement that engage with the wider community (Table 5.2.1.1). The TPC attenders are involved in evangelistic or outreach activities (44,3%) and community service (35,5%). Attenders from the DRC indicated that they are not involved (65,3%) in activities that engage with the wider community.

Care for the environment is an important aspect of the congregational responsibility towards society (Table 5.2.1.2). Attenders from TPCs are very active to care for the environment (52,7%), while attenders from the DRC are less or little active (41,4%).

Table 5.2.1.1: Involvement in church-based service activities

Do you regularly take part in any activities of this local church that engage with the wider community?		Denomination				Total
		DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Evangelistic or outreach activities	No	6183	1678	142	309	8312
		91,2%	93,9%	86,6%	55,7%	89,5%
	Yes	598	109	22	246	975
		8,8%	6,1%	13,4%	44,3%	10,5%
	Total	6781	1787	164	555	9287
		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Do you regularly take part in any activities of this local church that engage with the wider community?		Denomination				Total
		DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Community service, social justice or welfare activities	No	5252	1306	118	358	7034
		77,5%	73,1%	72,0%	64,5%	75,7%
	Yes	1529	481	46	197	2253
		22,5%	26,9%	28,0%	35,5%	24,3%
	Total	6781	1787	164	555	9287
		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
No, we don't have such activities	No	6354	1685	124	525	8688
		93,7%	94,3%	75,6%	94,6%	93,6%
	Yes	427	102	40	30	599
		6,3%	5,7%	24,4%	5,4%	6,4%
	Total	6781	1787	164	555	9287
		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
No, I am not regularly involved	No	2350	645	103	417	3515
		34,7%	36,1%	62,8%	75,1%	37,8%
	Yes	4431	1142	61	138	5772
		65,3%	63,9%	37,2%	24,9%	62,2%
	Total	6781	1787	164	555	9287
		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.2.1.2: Care for the environment

Do you believe that Christians have a responsibility to actively care for the environment?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Yes, and I am very active	1288	326	47	294	1955
	18,6%	18,1%	27,6%	52,7%	20,7%
Yes, and I am a little active	2863	706	36	114	3719
	41,4%	39,2%	21,2%	20,4%	39,4%
Yes, but I am currently not active	2560	706	63	123	3452
	37,0%	39,2%	37,1%	22,0%	36,6%
No	51	16	13	6	86
	0,7%	0,9%	7,6%	1,1%	0,9%
Unsure	149	45	11	21	226
	2,2%	2,5%	6,5%	3,8%	2,4%
Total	6911	1799	170	558	9438
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.2.2 Faith sharing – willing and effective

Inviting others to the church and worship service here is an important outreach activity of congregational members (Table 5.2.2.1). Attenders from TPCs are actively involved in inviting (58,6%), while the other denominations have done less. The TPC attenders are at ease to share their faith (Table 5.2.2.2) and are looking for opportunities to do so.

Table 5.2.2.1: Invitation to worship service

Would you be prepared to invite any of your friends and relatives who do not currently attend a church to a church service here?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Yes, and I have done so in the past 12 months	2370	702	76	330	3478
	34,7%	39,5%	44,7%	58,6%	37,3%
Yes, but I haven't done so in the past 12 months	3308	790	63	179	4340
	48,5%	44,5%	37,1%	31,8%	46,5%
Don't know	749	186	25	31	991
	11,0%	10,5%	14,7%	5,5%	10,6%
No, probably not	351	92	6	17	466
	5,1%	5,2%	3,5%	3,0%	5,0%
No, definitely not	49	6	0	6	61
	0,7%	0,3%	0,0%	1,1%	0,7%
Total	6827	1776	170	563	9336
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.2.2.2: Readiness to share faith

Which of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
I do not have faith, so the question is not applicable	26	1	5	5	37
	0,4%	0,1%	2,9%	0,9%	0,4%

Which of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
I do not like to talk about my faith; my life and actions are sufficient	531	156	15	45	747
	7,8%	8,9%	8,8%	8,3%	8,1%
I find it hard to talk about my faith in ordinary language	718	140	35	45	938
	10,6%	7,9%	20,6%	8,3%	10,1%
I mostly feel at ease to talk about my faith if it comes up	4580	1209	74	253	6116
	67,6%	68,6%	43,5%	46,4%	66,1%
I feel at ease to talk about my faith and look for opportunities	918	256	41	197	1412
	13,6%	14,5%	24,1%	36,1%	15,3%
Total	6773	1762	170	545	9250
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

5.2.3 Inclusion – intentional and welcoming

Inclusion in this regard refers to the likelihood of attenders to follow up if someone is drifting away from the church (Table 5.2.3.1), and attenders welcoming new arrivals (Table 5.2.3.2). TPC attenders are certain to follow up on drifters (35,1%) and they always seek to welcome new arrivals (55,7%).

Table 5.2.3.1: Follow up on drifters

If you knew that someone was drifting away from church involvement, how likely is it that you would take the time to talk with them about it?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Certain	460	182	44	196	882
	6,8%	10,3%	26,0%	35,1%	9,5%
Very likely	386	132	23	157	698
	5,7%	7,5%	13,6%	28,1%	7,5%
Likely	1526	393	28	109	2056
	22,4%	22,2%	16,6%	19,5%	22,1%
Hard to say	2768	665	60	75	3568
	40,7%	37,6%	35,5%	13,4%	38,3%
Unlikely	1666	398	14	22	2100
	24,5%	22,5%	8,3%	3,9%	22,6%
Total	6806	1770	169	559	9304
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.2.3.2: Welcome new arrivals

If you know someone who is a new arrival here, do you personally seek to make them welcome?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Always	760	248	67	311	1386
	11,1%	13,9%	39,9%	55,7%	14,8%

If you know someone who is a new arrival here, do you personally seek to make them welcome?	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Mostly	1244	357	21	97	1719
	18,2%	20,0%	12,5%	17,4%	18,4%
Sometimes	1968	483	54	97	2602
	28,8%	27,1%	32,1%	17,4%	27,8%
Rarely or never	1560	353	18	36	1967
	22,8%	19,8%	10,7%	6,5%	21,0%
Not applicable (I don't meet new arrivals)	1303	343	8	17	1671
	19,1%	19,2%	4,8%	3,0%	17,9%
Total	6835	1784	168	558	9345
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The following conclusions regarding the TPC and the outward core qualities may be made:

- their involvement in the wider community is more profound.
- they are more prepared to be inclusive and talk about their faith, and
- they are more open and welcoming drifters and new attenders.

5.3 Church and society

Two more general aspects regarding the role the church and religion might play within society are investigated in the attender survey; the first regarding race relations (Table 5.3.1) and the second about reconciliation (Table 5.3.2). In both instances TPC attenders have a stronger attitude; they strongly agree that the churches should play an important role to improve race relations (48,8%) and they strongly agree that progress was made in reconciliation since the end of apartheid (19,7%) than the other denominations.

Table 5.3.1: Church and race relations

Churches play an important role to improve race relations in our country	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Strongly agree	2179	386	53	272	2890
	31,8%	22,1%	31,4%	48,8%	31,0%
Agree	3001	669	76	201	3947
	43,9%	38,4%	45,0%	36,1%	42,4%
Neutral/Unsure	1122	434	21	60	1637
	16,4%	24,9%	12,4%	10,8%	17,6%
Disagree	410	161	14	23	608
	6,0%	9,2%	8,3%	4,1%	6,5%
Strongly disagree	130	93	5	1	229
	1,9%	5,3%	3,0%	0,2%	2,5%
Total	6842	1743	169	557	9311
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Table 5.3.2: Reconciliation since the end of apartheid

We as citizens have made progress in reconciliation since the end of apartheid	Denomination				Total
	DRC	NHKA	URCSA	TPC	
Strongly agree	512	103	22	110	747
	7,6%	5,9%	12,9%	19,7%	8,1%
Agree	2223	365	58	197	2843
	32,8%	21,0%	34,1%	35,4%	30,7%
Neutral/Unsure	1623	452	35	134	2244
	23,9%	25,9%	20,6%	24,1%	24,3%
Disagree	1605	490	41	86	2222
	23,7%	28,1%	24,1%	15,4%	24,0%
Strongly disagree	817	332	14	30	1193
	12,1%	19,1%	8,2%	5,4%	12,9%
Total	6780	1742	170	557	9249
	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

6. Conclusion

The empirical research focusing on congregations within a township context is an important development towards the formulation of a research framework within the enhancement of engaged scholarship. Both the congregational and attender surveys point towards differences from mainline congregations in a different context. The descriptive analysis should be developed further in doing an inferential statistical analysis to understand more about the different contexts that congregations find themselves in. There is also a need for a qualitative analysis for example in the form of

interviews and focus group discussions to enhance the understanding of the differences between congregations in different contexts and traditions.

In conclusion, the following empirical markers may be identified to map the road ahead:

- There is a need for the development of a relevant mixed methodology to understand congregations form different contexts.
- The further development of an engaged scholarship framework is important with the focus on the leadership of the congregation.
- An ecclesiology from below is an important starting point for an interaction with and interpretation of the empirical findings and the development of a contextual ecclesiology.

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Chapter 3

A practical theological reflection on the leadership of the pastors in the township of Mangaung.

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1. Introduction

A township in the context of South Africa is a human settlement built during the apartheid era on the boundaries of towns and cities for previously disadvantaged communities. It is characterised as an urban human settlement that was often underdeveloped, racially divided, and reserved for non-white people. The apartheid government established townships according to the Group Areas Act of 1950 when non-white people were removed from the suburbs designated as 'whites only' settlement areas. Townships still exist in the contemporary South African democratic era. There are some developments that the South African democratic government tried to implement, but corruption and poor service delivery hindered and delayed many of the developmental projects in the township. As a result, the current situation in democratic South Africa still depicts townships as under-developed areas that settle most black, coloured, and Indian people. The majority of the citizens in the township were settled according to their race and ethnic groups. Churches were also divided according to race and ethnic groups, though in democratic South Africa, some churches united to form a multicultural denomination. However, some of the congregations in the township still reflect the relics of apartheid

and are dominated by specific ethnic groups and under-resourced. Presently, township churches in Mangaung[1] have black people as the majority and coloured people. Mangaung township is situated in the south-eastern part of Bloemfontein, the capital city of the Free State province. The city of Bloemfontein[2] has more than half a million population, and many of its residents are black people who primarily reside in the township of Mangaung.

Definitions of leadership are numerous, but how one understands leadership influences its practice and impact on those on the receiving end of such leadership. The role of leadership in a Christian context can be classified into the contemporary and ultimate roles of leadership (Plueddemann, 2009:159, 172). Often, the ultimate role of leadership is ignored or undermined, thus exposing leadership to all faults and errors of focusing on the needs of the self-serving leaders. The practice of congregational leadership tends to take influence strategies and the impact of leadership for granted. Many pastors are not clear on the appropriate influence strategies to use within their congregational context; hence there is no appropriate impact from leadership in the congregations; instead, there is a concern about leadership and congregations that are unable to bring about a profound change in the community. For example, congregational leadership has a mandate to facilitate spiritual transformation (Ramphele, 2008:18) of its congregation members and beyond. However, many pastors are yet to learn how to achieve that kind of transformation. As a result of this failure to understand their mandate, congregational leaders and their congregations have a long way to practise responsible involvement in their communities. This chapter will explore and reflect on how leadership in the township congregations understands and experiences leadership and its impact in

1 Mangaung is a South Sotho name for place of cheetahs. During the apartheid era and even in the current democratic South Africa, Mangaung is mainly a human settlement (near Bloemfontein) for black, and coloured people. Before the municipal elections of 2011, Mangaung was a local municipality under the Motheo District Municipality in the Free State province. After the 2011 municipal elections Mangaung became part of Mangaung Metro Municipality within the Motheo District Municipality which initially served towns like Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu but now serves other towns like Dewetsdorp, Wepener, Van Stadensrus and Soutpan.

2 Bloemfontein is an Afrikaans name for fountain of flowers

their congregations and community of Mangaung township (Bloemfontein). The chapter will use qualitative empirical data to address the above aim, and the hermeneutical phenomenological approach will be implemented in this research.

The chapter contributes to the decolonisation of researched knowledge in the sense that it focuses on the context of South Africa and Africa for the purpose of learning, and research. It also incorporates the local epistemic perspectives, knowledge and thinking from the African continent and place them in critical interaction with the currently hegemonic Eurocentric scientific knowledge.

In this chapter, the researcher views the participants and himself as co-creators of knowledge; hence, collected data was shared, and discussed with the participants in this research. As a result, this chapter contributes to engaged research because it incorporates reciprocal community engagement practices into the discovery, teaching, integration, application, development, and mobilisation of knowledge to the mutual benefit of community and academic interests. This chapter is the product of the partnership of the pastors in the townships and some academics from the UFS, Faculty Theology and Religion. The partnership started a few years ago and grew to a township congregation research project which used mixed methodology to collect data. In this chapter, I will share some of the qualitative data collected.

The following discussion will focus on theological reflection on the Africa-centred leadership, definition of leadership, role, influence, and impact on the community. Then there will be a discussion on methodology and empirical data and a conclusion and recommendation.

2. Understanding of Africa-centred leadership

The participants in this study identified themselves as black in terms of South African race classification and African in their culture, and their age range between 35 and 60 years. Some of them lived and experienced life in apartheid South Africa and as Africans they observed, listened, lived and experienced the narratives of African cosmology, culture and African struggles with life. I believe that participants' leadership as pastors

was practiced and influenced by the African context. Hence, this section discusses the understanding of Africa-centred leadership. Khoza (2006:109) describes Africa-centred leadership as leadership practise putting Africa at the centre of its existence and consciousness. It is a leadership that strives to genuinely comprehend the history, contemporary and future of Africa and its people. Furthermore, it is a leadership that contemplates about the solutions to the struggles of African people and celebration of the flourishing of life of African people. It is the leadership that aspires to revive and adopt the traditional African leadership tenets that are described as strongly communal, collaborative, consultative, with a character of integrity, responsibility and honour (Olajubu, 2002:54; Obiakor, 2004:405). Hence, in an ideal traditional African leadership context important decisions were made in consensus and consultation with others with the purpose that the implementation of the decision would honour and respect the protocol and human dignity of those affected by the decision.

In an Africa-centred leadership context, leadership is understood as a commitment to a service to the people either in the form of a clan, tribe or community (Masango, 2002:708). According to Khoza (2006:11), leadership is a collective endeavour to pursue group survival, human rights, and claims. Based on the above, I understand the leadership in Africa-centred context as a relational activity that influences one another to an action of service by mobilising individuals to achieve the common goal that benefits the community, and by applying available traditional African tenets, philosophies and concepts of development.

The nature of leadership in an Africa-centred context has the following characteristics. Leadership is spiritual because the leader is understood as appointed by, and representing the spiritual being belonging to the African spiritual realm (Rukuni, 2009:20). In the context of Christianity, a Christian leader is understood to represent the Triune God. Leadership in an Africa-centred context is human-centred, communal, and collegial (Rukuni, 2009:48, 64). This implies that traditional African leadership's primary goal is about human development towards its best potential through interaction with and cooperation of a team of leaders. It is a leadership influenced by a philosophy of *Ubuntu* that aspires to respect recognition, and development of the other in the context of a community. Leadership in an Africa-

centred context is relational, in that it involves establishing networks and relationships for the purpose of achieving a common goal and promoting quality human values (Bolden & Kirk, 2009:81). Lastly, leadership in an Africa-centred context is interpretive, as it is useful for engendering hope for the future. This interpretive aspect helps African leadership to be creative and innovative amid challenges because new challenges cannot always be solved with old and outdated approaches.

The leadership in an Africa-centred context has various roles and a few that can be mentioned are as follows: According to Mbigi (2005:1, 2), the main focus of African leadership is the transformation of the community and social institutions. Mbigi (2005:7-15) maintains that the transformation of community members involves helping them to appreciate beauty in themselves, develop self-understanding, and understand the history and context in which they exist. According to Mbigi (2005:1), leadership in Africa is responsible for enabling the development and progress of an individual, society, and institutions. In the context of Christianity, pastors as leaders in their congregations have a responsibility to empower their lay leaders in responsible involvement in their community and demonstrate it themselves by being involved as individuals.

3. Shifts in the definition of leadership.

Leadership is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. There are as many definitions of leadership as people who try to define leadership. To demonstrate the complexity of leadership, Bass and Bass (2008:15-22) classify the definitions of leadership into three categories. First, the leader-centric definition of leadership is a one-way influence effect attributable to the leader as a person (Yukl, 2002:12). The emphasis is on the leader's personality, attribution, or the leader as a symbol of the group process. Examples of definitions in this group include leadership as an ability to lead (Northouse, 2012:40). The other one is that leadership is a skill to induce compliance from the followers (Stogdill, 1974:9; Northouse, 2012:5). The last one is that leadership is a form of persuasion from a leader to the followers to attain specific goals (Stogdill, 1974:11; Northouse, 2012:5). The best biblical example of a leader in this first category is Saul (1 Sm

9:2; 10:23) because Saul's charisma, physique, and war skills made him an appropriate leader.

Second, Bass and Bass (2008:15-22) define leadership as an effect or a cause of some effect. Leadership, in this instance, uses authority to mobilise the followers to positive goals; therefore, leadership seems to initiate the process, but the followers respond naturally. The definitions of leadership in this category include leadership as an instrument of goal achievement (Stogdill, 1974:12). The definitions in this category emphasise the instrumental value of leadership in the functioning of a group or organisation. For example, leadership is a source, initiative, effect, or facilitation of group interaction (Stogdill, 1974:14). The emphasis is on the resultant interaction process because of the acknowledged presence of leadership. The best biblical example is Nehemiah (Neh 2), who had a passion for rebuilding the walls of the city of Jerusalem, and was mobilised by his inner will to serve God and change the situation of the citizens of Jerusalem. Nehemiah initiated the process of rebuilding the city walls and persuaded the people to co-operate with him. He guided them until the goal was achieved.

Third and lastly, leadership is the interaction between a leader and a follower. Leadership is assumed as a two-way process: Leadership is a quality relationship of influence (Northouse, 2012:5). Leadership is a reciprocal influence process between a leader and the follower (Yukl, 2002:15). The biblical example in this category is Paul and Timothy (1 Tm 1:2, 2 Tm 3:10). Paul's deep quality relationship as a father (1 Tm 1:2) and pacesetter (2 Tm 3:10-11) to Timothy influences his leadership to be mutual and transforming.

According to Wright (2009:2, 3), the above shift from the leader-centric definition of leadership to leadership as an interaction between a leader and follower has brought some positive leadership developments, particularly within congregations. The positive developments are; that the practice of leadership as an interaction locates leadership in the relations between a leader and a follower. Wright (2009:3) argues that the further benefit of leadership as an interaction between a leader and a follower is the broadening of leadership practice, as everyone can exercise leadership and influence people and situations in their own context. Lastly, Wright says that the other benefit is that the burden of leadership is removed from an

individual and shared by all involved in leadership practise; that is, both leaders and followers can share leadership responsibilities.

But, how does the above discussion relate to Africa? The African leadership principles of the precolonial African era reflect a communal, collaborative, consultative practice of leadership with a character of integrity, responsibility and honour (Obiakor, 2004:405). However, many of these African leadership values were compromised during colonial times; hence, postcolonial African leadership is struggling to restructure and develop its leadership (Kludze, 2000:27; Obiakor, 2004:408). There is a need to restore Africa to itself and shift from exclusive, self-serving and despotic leadership promoted by colonialism. Bolden and Kirk (2005:8) try to address this kind of need in their empirical study on leadership in Africa, where they share the findings that indicate a shift from leadership experience that is negative, exclusive and inhibiting towards leadership that is embracing a more affirmative, inclusive and "life giving" view. In the context of the above, African leadership in the precolonial era was never understood in the context of leader-centric terms but was relational, spiritual, human-centred, communal, and collegial (Rukuni, 2009:48, 64; Bolden & Kirk, 2009:81).

3.1 Ultimate and contemporary role of leadership

Plueddemann (2009:161) describes the ultimate purpose of leadership is to bring people into a whole relationship with their Creator. Furthermore, Plueddeman (2009:160) discusses the ultimate role of leadership as knowing God through intimate relations with Him. To glorify God with our everyday life actions and decisions that we make: to love God with our whole heart, soul, and mind. Plueddemann (2009:158) argues that the ultimate role of leadership is spiritual and tends to influence universal principles of leadership. The current role of leadership is influenced by culture, ultimate purpose, worldview, methods, and leadership practice. Plueddeman (2009:174, 178, 179) discusses the current role of leadership as taking the initiative, helping people to grow into their God-given potential, helping the body of Christ to be mature, and so on.

In addition to the current role of leadership, Branson (2011:55-57) classifies leadership roles into three. First, it is the relational goal of

leadership which focuses on all human connections and interactions. These connections could be to God, the inner self, the community, and nature. Secondly, the interpretive goal of leadership is about guiding believers to create meaning from both texts and contexts. By texts, is meant scripture, confessional documents, and literature. By contexts, it means the world at large, the African context, and the South African context. Third and lastly, the implemental goal is about guiding practices, initiating activities, and forming and reforming structures that will help to embody the gospel in leadership's interpretive and relational work. According to Branson (2011:56), the implemental work involves initiating activities such as worship service, governance, and training on mission or faith.

African leadership in the precolonial era was spiritual (Rukuni, 2009:20), because the leader was understood as appointed by, and representing the spiritual being belonging to the African spiritual realm. Through dreams or visions granted by the ancestral spirits, one could be appointed to leadership. Consequently, the leader functioned as intermediary during sacrifices to the ancestral spirits. Furthermore, in the precolonial era, African leadership's primary interest was about human development; hence, in its everyday responsibilities it serves human beings towards their best potential through interaction with, and co-operation of a team of leaders. In light of the above practicing leadership that integrates knowledge of ultimate purpose of leadership is not new to African leadership but was a norm in the African leadership during the precolonial Africa era.

3.2 Influence of leadership

The essence of leadership influences may yield either commitment by followers or indifferent compliance and resistance (Yukl, 2002:141). Biblical strategies used to facilitate influence include, firstly, coercion (Deut. 6:6-9), whereby threats and force are used to implement a decision. The second one is persuasion (2 Cor. 5:11), which implies winning over the follower to support the common goal. The third one is a set of examples (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; 1 Tim. 4:12) about offering a set of behaviours to be emulated by followers. The last one involved a mutual exchange (Jn 6:26), whereby one follows a leader because of the material benefits that they derive from them. However, persuasion through the Word of God and personal behaviour,

which reflects imitating the life of Christ, is regarded as the main instrument of influence in Christian leadership (Wright, 2009:4).

Considering the above, leadership in the precolonial Africa was profoundly influenced by *Ubuntu* philosophy and belief in the spiritual world, which influenced its communication and actions. In its communication it was striving to preserve relationship and cooperations by communicating indirectly, using intermediary and delay decision making if it will offend others (Plueddeman, 2009:79-82). In terms of its actions it was striving to demonstrate moral authority, guide communities spiritually, and safeguard cultural rituals.

3.3 Church and mission

The mission of the Triune God is a calling and the mandate of the congregation and involves witnessing the coming of the kingdom of God (Guder, 2000:66). Witnessing in mission entails spiritual and societal aspects derived from the mission of the Triune God, which is spiritual and involves societal engagement (Du Toit, 2005:263). The spiritual aspect involves preaching the gospel within and beyond the borders of the congregation. Societal engagement implies responsible involvement in transforming human and societal institutions globally. Witnessing God's coming kingdom can be achieved individually and on a corporate level of the congregation. Witnessing in mission is concerned with evangelising and transforming both an individual and the entire societal order to bring all into a deeper life with the Triune God (Strawbridge, 1991:63). Hence, one can also say that the mission is transformational to a personal situation and societal structures (Stetzer & Rainer, 2010:3). It involves concrete action against injustices suffered by humanity in society and witnessing against societal institutions that perpetuate those injustices (Kritzinger, 2013:2).

How church practises societal engagement: Swart (2006) adapted Korten's model of societal development to congregations to analyse how congregations engaged the societal challenges throughout history. Swart (2006:98) argues that the first strategic approach used by congregations was a welfare approach. In this approach, churches volunteer and act to provide immediate relief to an emergency in the form of a war or a natural

disaster. In contrast, the relief provided can be food, clothes, healthcare, and temporary shelter. The second strategic development approach used by congregations was small-scale community development (Swart, 2006:100). This strategy focuses on community self-help actions in various sectors of the economy, culture, or politics to provide some skills for the sustainability of life. The third strategic development approach is sustainable development (Swart, 2006:101, 102). In this development strategy, the focus is beyond the local community, and the church facilitates the change of dysfunctional policies and institutions to benefit those who are affected on a broader scale. The fourth and last strategic development is people-centred (Swart, 2006:104). This approach aims for human growth in the context of values such as peace, justice, and inclusiveness. This human growth involves striving towards self-reliance and sustainable development through the systemic, effective management of resources, complete system change, and a challenge of the causes of injustice, poverty, and underdevelopment.

4. Methodology

The empirical data discussed here is from individual interviews with the pastors from Mangaung townships. The researcher is one of the founding members of one of the ministers fraternal within the townships around Bloemfontein. Through this minister fraternal the researcher has conducted many workshops on the role of Christian leadership and congregations in the community. The researcher has an experience of more than five years of relationships and interactions with the pastors within the townships around Bloemfontein. Purposeful sampling was used to select the five participants in this study. The participants were known to the researcher as ministers with more than five years' ministerial experience of leadership in the township congregations, active in the township community and participated in the workshops that were organised and conducted by the researcher. Participants were all male, and one was from a mainline denomination (P1), the other from a charismatic background (P2), and three were from African Independent churches (P3, P4, P5). Confidentiality of the participants was maintained using a code: P1 to refer to Participant One, P2 to refer to Participant Two, and so on. Their age ranged from 35 years to 60 years

and according to race classification in South Africa, the pastors regarded themselves as black. Their qualifications in theological training ranged from higher certificate to Honours degree.

Data collection was performed through oral interviews of the participants. Observation of participants' body movements, language, facial expression was undertaken during the interviews. Data analysis was conducted through deductive and inductive coding of the collected data. Deductive coding used were definition of leadership, role of leadership, influence of leadership and so on. The inductive coding derived from the data was on shift in leadership definition, ultimate purpose of leadership and so on.

In this study, the hermeneutical phenomenological approach is used to analyse the context, data from the participants, observations and the literature. According to Guillen (2019:222), the hermeneutical phenomenological approach is about explaining and interpreting the various aspects of the lived experience for the purpose of understanding the meaning and the value of this experience. In application of this approach, I discussed from the literature the conceptual analyses of definitions of leadership, role and influence of leadership. The purpose is to acknowledge or discard preconceived ideas that may hinder the meaning of lived experience. Second, I discussed the empirical data collected from the lived experience of the pastors. Empirical data was collected through individual interviews of pastors and observation. Third, I will reflect on the data collected from lived experiences to give meaning, and lastly, I will give more in-depth interpretation on the reflection on the lived experienced of the pastor about leadership, its role and influence in the community.

This study is part of practical theology, focusing on ordained leadership and its role in the church and society. Ganzevoort (2009:3-7) says that practical theology is a hermeneutics of lived religion, and Ikenye (2010:38) understands practical theology as a theological discipline descriptive of African lived experience. In this chapter, I take practical theology as critical, hermeneutical, theological reflection on the lived religious experience of the believer in the praxis of the church and society.

5. Discussion of the empirical data

The following discussion will be about discussion of the empirical data and I will engage it as follows: participants understanding of the definition of leadership, the role of the leadership in congregations, the influence strategies of the congregational leadership, Congregational leadership role in the community, participants' view on the best leadership for the township congregations and then is the discussion on the participants' inspirational stories. The last one is an interpretation of the results and conclusions.

5.1 Leadership definition

Table 1: Participants' definition of leadership.

Q1	What is your understanding of leadership in your congregation ?
P1	"Leadership is about being a servant who is serving the people. It is part and parcel of how one acts." A leader as a shepherd must lead, be present, and offer spiritual protection.
P2	"Leadership in the congregation, according to my understanding, is that it is of the nature of serving the people of God … having a character of a servant and having a character of Christ to serve your people and to show them [congregation members] the way to Christ that's in my understanding."
P3	"Leadership in the congregation is about giving direction."
P4	"My understanding of leadership in the congregation is that I must lead by example as a leader, and then the congregation must, in other words, there must be changes."
P5	"As a leader, one needs to have the ability to address people properly and respectfully."

Most of the participants (P1, P2, P4) defined their leadership understanding by using leadership metaphors like servant, shepherd, and exemplary leadership. Other participants (P3 and P5) define leadership from a leader-centric perspective. In light of the above definitions of leadership, some participants (P1, P5) elaborated on their understanding of leadership by saying that leadership involves doing. That is how one acts, behaves or treats

others. Leadership must lead people in a right way and not impose on them (P3). According to P3, right-way refers to listening to and reading the word of God to obtain the guidance, listening to the Holy Spirit to give guidance and lead one. Leadership is not about the one being taken into the hierarchy (P2) but having the character of a servant and Christ. The character of servant and Christ involves meekness, humility, the attitude to serve, and love (P2).

What is important to note is P1, who reports that as a leader, he is part of a congregation and belongs to a ward as a member; therefore, before he is a leader or pastor, he considers himself a member of the church so that he has the feeling of a member before he becomes a leader. In short, the meaning of the above is that before one becomes a church leader, he belongs to and is a member of the church. Therefore one has to have the experience of being a church member before becoming a church leader. Furthermore, P5 remarked that leadership is a calling and sacrificial because he left his things and accepted the calling from God to serve in his church.

> "But because of having people [congregation members as followers], I leave my things. Then I help this guy [congregation member who is ill]. You start with the people first and you, me, I am the last one… my calling in this church is not easy like someone who came, and came here in church with us, no it is not like that. Because I was very very sick before, it is when I received this calling." P5.

5.2 Role of the pastors in the leadership of the congregation.

Leadership has various roles in the congregation and community and participants were asked the following question: Describe your role in the congregation that you have especially as part of your leadership? (Q2) In response to describing the role of their leadership in the congregation, P1 said that his role in the congregation is to facilitate the decision-making process through participation, allowing others to give their input and collaborative practice. The above-mentioned role of leadership brings about benefits such as achieving a collective decision, giving freedom and space to other leaders to express their views without looking at the pastor as the one with the first and the last word in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, it is to avoid a gap between a pastor and other leaders and ensure that no one is left behind in the process of decision making.

P2 indicated his role in the congregation as multi-dimensional and gave it as:

> "My role as a pastor in the congregation is that of giving inspiration, that of giving counselling to the people of God, giving guidance, showing them the direction and most importantly preaching the word of God, preaching the Bible and you know with the hope of as a Shepherd they would listen to me as I listen to Christ they would imitate me as I imitate Christ that is my understanding."

According to P3, his role is to guide to the right path and, more importantly, is to be an overseer and prefers to work with other leaders who form the church council to make a collective decision. His goal is that though he is not the Messiah and does not like to order people around or take decisions alone, he wants to leave a legacy of a well-lived life. P4 mentioned that his leadership role is to ensure that no one of his congregation members are left behind and assists others in performing their ministry. Lastly, P5 reported that his leadership role is to work according to the church's constitution and consult with leaders in the upper hierarchy of the church for further clarity on matters that are not clear to be performed in the church.

5.3 The influence and impact of pastors' leadership on the congregation's ministry.

In this section, participants were asked to discuss the influence and impact of their leadership in their congregation's ministry (Q3). From analyses of the data, the participants' leadership influenced their congregations by words, actions, and relationships. According to P1, his influence as a leader is based on conduct and behaviour. P1 believes that conduct and behaviour influence people in how they must view one as a leader and accept whatever one directs them and the directions one gives as a leader. The influence that people derive from him is taking cue from the way that he can conduct himself and his relationship with them as congregants.

Furthermore, P1 mentioned that the way that a leader conducts himself amongst and away from congregation members is crucial to influencing others. Hence, he advises that relationship with the congregation members must be of nature and that there is a boundary as a leader. Lastly, P1 raised other points of importance when he discussed the distinction between spiritual leadership and political leadership. He acknowledged that spiritual leadership emphasises elements of spirituality and high ethical standard; hence he believes that a spiritual leader must influence congregation members to be like their leader.

P2, in his discussion on the influence of his leadership, said that he influences his congregation through preaching and setting an example. "My preaching is not just only a simple talk, but it also leads by example" (P2). Concerning P3, one can derive from the data that he influences his congregation through his collective leadership style that allows input, participation, and sharing of responsibilities in the process of decision-making.

Concerning the impact of their leadership, the participants mentioned the following. P1 understands the impact of leadership as the outcome of what one relays to the congregation members and the product of what one derives from the leadership ministry itself. In his understanding, the impact of leadership is consonant with whether one's leadership is on the right path. He realises the impact of his leadership from the reflections made by the congregation members, whether positive or negative. According to P1, the more positive reflection from the congregation members is an indication that he is on the right path. As a result, P1 remarked that the impact he wants to see is that of people appreciating one's presence as a leader and the spiritual protection that one provides as a shepherd.

Other participants, like P2, indicated that his leadership impact is recognised in his leadership ministry, igniting the love of God to congregation members whom he leads through his example and preaching. P3 reported that his leadership impact could be recognised by introducing new ideas to the ministry like introducing a brass band, exemplary leadership and healing services have brought about the church's growth. Lastly, P5 mentioned that his leadership impact could be seen in the change

experienced in the leadership and congregation members within and beyond the congregation.

> "I see changes in myself as a leader and in the congregation. There is more life in my congregation since they started being under my leadership. For example, we have people who came here with mental illness. They became healed with our prayers and support. Due to our traditional church, we pray for and heal people according to their culture and tradition." (P5).

5.4 Role of congregational leadership in the community?

On the question (Q4), "what role does your congregational leadership play in the community?", participants indicated that their congregational leadership role in the community starts with observing and analysing what is happening and what can be performed in the community. The outreach in the community targets the members of the church first, then an immediate and distant community from the church (P1; P2). The participants in the outreach to the community are the pastors and the congregation members. The kind of help that is provided to community members is spiritual and material assistance. The following table is about the kind of assistance offered by the pastors through their congregations.

Table 2: Community projects of the participants.

P1	Food and clothes Raised funds for poverty alleviation projects Offered job opportunities to congregation members and those beyond Provided free pastoral care to bereaved families and those in need
P2	Provided food and clothes Offered employment opportunities and entrepreneurial skills
P3	Food and clothes Engaged drug abusers, gangsterism, gender-based violence, parents, and child relations projects Deployed ministers in police stations and schools to assist with counselling and prayers

P4	Food and clothes Evangelisation Visited prison inmates
P5	Healing ministry to members of the church and beyond Assisting with funeral services to members of the church and beyond

P1 sees himself as a spiritual leader and father of his congregation and community members around the church. As a result, people look to him with the expectation to assist them in their needs. Hence, after his in-depth observation and analyses of the possible needs of the people in and around his congregation ministry, he devised means of how he may provide relevant help to those in need. P2 says that his church has a slogan, "Transforming community through hope, love, restoration, and empowerment." They use that slogan to inspire their congregation members to engage in their context. P3 uses his networks like Mangaung Minister's Fraternal (MMF), Motheo Faith-Based Organisation Network (MFBON), partnership with the Department of Social Development, the South African Religious Forum (SARF) and Christian Network in the Free State (CNFS) to engage the community around his church and beyond. Hence, in general, his ministry impacts his congregation members, the community of Mangaung and beyond.

5.5 Towards best leaders for their congregation and their community?

This question was asked to find out from the participants, what kind of leadership would be most appropriate for the township ministry in Mangaung? (Q5). In response, P1 provided an elaborate discussion on how we may strive for the best leadership in the township congregation ministry:

- leaders must listen to those whom they lead without belittling them.
- Leaders must avoid an attitude of we know it all, making leaders lose the battle in leadership.
- The practice of collective leadership is essential compared to leadership that sees itself as Alpha and Omega.

- Leaders must use the skills of those whom they lead for empowerment and collaboration with each other.
- Members of the congregation do have confidence in their leaders; therefore, leaders must trust members of the congregation with what they have and allow them to share their skills for the sake of the congregation's growth.

The response of P2 to the question was:

> "I think Christ is the great model of what leadership should look like more especially in our days whereby pastoral care has been taken to be so much glamorous and so much sophisticated whereby it is not easy nowadays to approach a pastor is not easy now to see a Man of God and seek help. I guess Christ should be our best model of what leadership in the context of church should look like, and it should represent meekness, humanity, the attitude to serve the attitude to love our community. Secondly being able to instil the principle of what congregation should look like from the content of the New Testament model as a body unified, as a system that works together not against each other. I think if we can uphold those principles, we would have great leadership ever in our lifetime."

In summary, P2 stated that the best leadership for the township congregations is the leadership that models Christ as the leader. It is the leadership that is approachable, and reflect meekness, humility and attitude to serve and love. Lastly, it is a leadership that leads the congregation to live by the principles of the New Testament church, which are striving for unity of the body of Christ and working together.

P3 responded by saying that the best leadership for the township congregations must be hands-on, have servant character, humble and not obsessed with titles. Leadership in the township congregation must *"Be hands-on, just to be hands-on. They have to humble themselves you know, they have to be servants. Forget about being a leader, or being an archbishop, or bishop or reverent or pastor whatever forget about that (inaudible word)."* (P3). According to P4, one needs to follow up and look after or visit those who are no longer coming to church. Lastly, P5 reported that as a leader, one should look at one's needs and pay attention to the needs of one's congregation members and help them where one can. In conclusion, as a

leader, he said to give people free spiritual services and not be concerned with their money to pay for one's service.

5.6 Inspirational stories of leadership in the congregation.

Pastors in the township ministry experienced enormous and complex challenges that ultimately may demotivate them in ministry. As a result, we asked the participants the following: Are there any crucial or inspirational stories of leaders in the congregation that you can tell? The purpose was to find out what keeps them going or inspires them when it gets tough in the ministry. In response, P1 mentioned that he is inspired by what he learnt from his spiritual father: humility, to be grounded as a leader and that people must pick something out of one. As a result, this made him be a resilient leader and patient, and wait on God to direct him without pushing things. P2 reported that in his church building project, he learnt that performing a joint project with congregation members led to an outstanding level of enthusiastic sharing, a positive vibe, and incredible motivation to the congregation. Secondly, P2 mentioned that when *"the leaders in the church take ownership of things in our church we do not just only lead from the pastor, but we lead across whether a pastor is there or not the [worship] service [is] going through smoothly [and] the message of the gospel."* This means, for P2, what inspired him is his congregation members taking ownership of the ministry in the congregations when he is not around busy with other matters.

Other participants related that their inspiration is received from the humility of their parents (P3), seeing leaders whom he had trained being progressive in the ministry (P4), and seeing miracles and people being healed in his ministry (P5).

6. Interpretation of the results

The leadership definitions of some of the participants (P3 and P5) reflect more of a leader-centric understanding of leadership. Whilst an in-depth reading of the data, other participants (P1, P2), reflect a shift in the understanding and practice of leadership. This shift is from leader-centric understanding and practise of leadership to collaborative, collective, and participative leadership. This can be attested by the participants mentioning

how they relate to their congregational members and allow participation in decision-making process in order to reach a collective decision. African leadership is well known to be hierarchical and authoritative. However, all the participants are African and often emphasised that their leadership must be interactive, participatory, and collective in decision-making. The participants emphasised this despite some of them having a hierarchical leadership structure in their churches and expected to be authoritative according to their church structure and followers. The impact of this shift in leadership understanding and practise is seen in how participants emphasise the significance of sharing leadership responsibilities, consulting before making decisions, utilising the skills of others in the ministry, and avoiding dominance and lording it over others.

One can realise from the interviews of the participants that most of them (P1, P2, P4) believe that leadership does not rest with one person - the pastor - but in the team of leaders. One can learn from the data that the identity of leadership influences the actions of the leadership of the participants. For example, participants showed affinity with a servant, exemplary, shepherd and modelling Christ in their leadership practices. As a result, because of adherence to such leadership frameworks, their leadership practice demonstrated humility, servanthood, participation and modelling of the behaviour of a servant and Christ. The other point that can be derived from the participants' data is that leadership is not about titles or positions; actually, they warned that one should not be obsessed with titles but must be humble and serve the people of God. The last point we can deduct from the data concerning understanding of leadership is what one has observed very often amongst the pastors from many emerging churches, which tend to be controlling and owning people in their congregations as if they belong to them, forgetting that they belong to God. However, we learned from the participants that before pastors are appointed to congregational leadership, they belong to and are church members. Therefore, their relations with congregation members must be that of humility, not belittling or lording it over others.

The role of leadership can be classified as a current role and ultimate role of leadership. The majority of the participants focused on the current role of their leadership, like serving, facilitating change, guiding, counselling, and

leading humanity to the right path. It is important to note that the service of leadership is mainly directed to humanity or congregation members and those beyond the borders of the congregation, not necessarily leaders themselves. Humanity is viewed by the participants as people of God, thus meaning that they serve God when they serve people in their congregation and community. Leadership of the participants reflected interpretive, implemental, and relational roles of leadership. For example, interpretive role is applied during the counselling sessions and preaching of the gospel to give meaning to life, and the implemental role is demonstrated by the way that participants oversee and guide the decision-making process in their congregations. The implemental role of leadership is not the pastor's responsibility alone but the shared responsibility of every leader in the congregation of the participants. The relational role of leadership, which involves building networks and relationships with other human beings, government institutions, organisations and fraternal, was used by other participants to facilitate decision-making and taking participants' leadership roles to other levels. For example, P1 mentioned how important the relationship of trust and confidence can help facilitate the decision-making process in his congregation. P3 is a leader of different minister fraternals and non-governmental organisations. He used these organisations to enhance his ministry to impact various community levels in Mangaung, Province and National. Few participants mentioned the ultimate purpose of leadership: serving God with the whole of his heart (P2), worshipping and trusting in God (P3). Considering the above paragraph, future studies within the township congregations need to conduct further research on what kind of change is brought by the township congregational leadership to its members and those beyond the borders of the congregations. Participants (P2, P3, P4) mentioned change brought by their leadership practice within their congregations and beyond. The change brought by the participants' leadership on an individual level is igniting God's love and healing of congregational members. On a congregational level is congregational growth experienced and on a community level is mostly addressing immediate needs and providing some assistance on a small-scale level. Only one participant demonstrated the ability of his leadership to contribute beyond local context to provincial and national level of South Africa.

Despite the positive impact of the participants' leadership in the community, there is a need to find out more about what entails change in individuals and society and what its impact is on the township community. Lastly, the ultimate role of leadership is essential to be emphasised amongst leaders both in congregations and beyond; hence, in-depth research in the future is essential.

The participants' leadership used the following influence strategies: words of inspiration and preaching (persuasion), conduct (being exemplary in behaviour), quality relationships and collective leadership styles. Recent research indicates that pastors as leaders and congregations in Africa still enjoy the trust and the confidence of the communities in their vicinity (Ngaruiya, 2017:29). If both pastors and congregations could make use of such benefits in Africa, there is a possibility of profound change and the well-being of African communities can be facilitated. It is motivating to realise that the participants still insist on good leadership ethics, inspirational words and proclamation of the gospel to influence their congregation members and those beyond. It is essential to note the remark of P1 that as a leader, what one achieves amongst congregation members and away from them influences them to accept or reject one's leadership. In short, one can put it in other words, saying what one achieves in private has an impact on the integrity of one's public leadership. If used appropriately and with deliberate intention, the influence strategies mentioned above can potentially and enormously impact the followers of township congregational leadership.

Some essential criteria were highlighted by the participants in order for them to have relevant and responsible involvement in the community. First, one has to observe intently and analyse the context and community in the vicinity of the congregation. Second, a leader has to know that communities around the congregations have some expectations from one as the congregational leader. Third, outreach programmes have to benefit first members of the congregations, then those outside and beyond the congregation. Fourth and lastly, involvement in the community has to offer spiritual services like pastoral counselling and prayer and material assistance like food, clothes, and employment skills. Analyses of the data indicated that the leadership impact of the participants in their communities

starts on the level of addressing basic needs; then, to P1 and P2, leadership ministry functions on the second level of small-scale development where the skill of employment are provided for the sake of survival. For P3, leadership ministry, through its links with the minister fraternals or NGOs, has an influence on the local, regional and national levels, that is, Mangaung, Free State province and the whole country of South Africa. Observations from the workshops from the NGOs and fraternals led by P3, indicate that P3 leadership is making that multi-level impact. From SARF, he attended parliamentary meetings to represent religious leaders in church and state relations discussions. With other fraternals like MMF, CNFS, and NGOs, he managed to form a network and partnership with many community stakeholders like government departments, schools, universities, and other civic organisations. The above information indicates that for a congregational leader to make a visible impact on various levels of the community, there is a need to network with ecumenical and civic organisations. Hence, I can conclude that the P3 leadership functions on the four strategic levels mentioned above; that is, welfare, small-scale community development, policy engagement and people-centred movement

Leadership in the township congregations is overwhelmed by many societal challenges and the dominance of unethical leadership characterised by corruption, violence, and lack of service delivery. In their suggestions of what could be practical and best leadership for the township congregations, participants positively mentioned collective leadership that utilises the skill of others and values trust and confidence between a leader and a follower. Moreover, they mentioned that such leadership must model Christ as the best leader by being approachable, and demonstrate attitude of service and love. In contrast, participants mentioned that it is a leadership that does not see itself as Alpha and Omega, belittle others or lord it over others.

Lastly, since leadership involves suffering, sometimes leaders in the township congregations experience tough times like rejection and insults that lead to emotional and psychological pain. In such a tough time, what inspires the participants in their ministry? In response, participants mentioned their spiritual father, parents, participation in a joint project, and seeing progress in others who had been helped by a leader as aspects that keeps them going in the tough times.

7. Challenges and recommendations

An in-depth reading of the data and observations of the participants in their leadership ministry in township congregations made one realise that much is happening in the township congregations but is still under-researched. Most of the participants have many years of experience and practice of leadership in their congregations. However, they seem to have limited knowledge of functioning on the theological / theoretical reflective level of their leadership practice. This limitation can be attributable to a lack of formal training in their ministry, lack of communication skills in the English language, as many books are written in English, and lack of funds for further training as most of the formal training needs funds to enrol in them. Lastly, it can be an irrelevant curriculum taught at theological institutions that make pastors from township congregations, especially in emerging churches, become suspicious of these institutional relevance to their ministry.

The role of spiritual leadership is to engage both the ultimate and current role of leadership. However, often the current role is emphasised at the expense of the ultimate role of leadership. In contrast, sometimes, the ultimate role of leadership is mentioned without much commitment to its implication for the contemporary leadership role. More research is needed to explore the role of leadership in the township congregations to find out how it impacts an individual, society, and other creations of God-like plants, animals, and land.

Since, in Africa, the spiritual leadership of the pastors and integrity of churches are still valued, pastors in the township congregations need to be empowered to use influence strategies to make a relevant impact in the lives of their congregation members in society. Church and its involvement in the community have long historical challenges. For a long time, churches have been struggling to balance the proclamation of the gospel and responsible involvement in society. Often, churches, when they engage their community, this is on the level of addressing basic needs or developing skills for the small-scale development of an individual. The level of empowering community members about learning and challenging policies that affect their livelihood or functioning as activists in a people movement is not considered in many programmes of training that happen in congregations. More research and empowerment need to be conducted

on mobilising spiritual leaders and religious institutions towards higher levels of community involvement in their context.

In conclusion, more research that appreciates positive development and facilitation of practising effective and transforming leadership and publication of inspirational stories about the creative development of the township is needed for the well-being of those in the township and for transforming social institutions within the context of the township.

8. Conclusion

Leadership in the township congregations is experiencing a shift from leader-centric understanding and practice to leadership characterised by participation, collective decision-making, and collaboration.

In describing the role of leadership, more emphasis has to be placed on the ultimate purpose of leadership, which tends to contribute to the universal practice of leadership.

More research needs to be conducted to enhance and empower pastors to effectively use biblical leadership influence strategies, especially concerning deep change in an individual and community.

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Chapter 4

An empirical exploration of leadership approaches in African Independent Churches in Mangaung.

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1. Introduction – an interest in African Independent Church leadership

A statement by Oduro about leaders of African Independent Churches (AICs) that they don't have mission boards, send missionaries, hold missionary conferences, or have mission budgets (Oduro, in Knoetze, 2016:2) motivated this research. Yet, there are AICs all over the world and in every African state (Kealotswe, 2014:228). Oduro says that the AICs see performing mission as the mandate of God to the church (Oduro et al., 2008:159-161). Out of this interest the research was conducted to explore leadership approaches of AICs in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Thus, the main research question aimed to describe the personal leadership

approach and style of the leaders of AICs in this context: *What leadership approaches and styles do leaders of the AIC congregations in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality have?*

To define the group of churches that sort under the term AIC is a complicated matter because of the complexity and independent nature of these churches. The acronym AIC can be understood as African Indigenous / Independent / Initiated / Instituted Churches, and represents a wide variety of churches (Oduro et al., 2008:iv). This broad term represents about 60 million different churches in Africa that groups into more than 10,000 denominations or smaller movements. This grouping can be viewed as a group for Africans, by Africans, in Africa (Tennent, 2010:291).

2. Exploring relevant leadership approaches and styles as a theoretical framework

The term "leadership" remains an elusive one to define and has fascinated people for centuries (Nel, 2020:192). In this study, the researcher looked at leadership in a religious context. For Christians, the concept of religious leadership dates to the biblical era. When looking at leadership illustrated in the Bible, it shows us a variety of different kinds of leaders. (Jinkins, 2021:308-310). This helps one to see that Christian spiritual leadership is a complex matter with variety and nuances and is not one-dimensional. Likewise, African Christian leadership is also not one-dimensional (Bolden, 2009:3).

2.1 African Christian Leadership

African pastors are key leadership figures and influencers on the continent. In a study conducted with 8,000 African Christians on their perception of their African Christian leadership, the following areas of influence were identified as areas that they perceive are influenced by their leaders: the prevention of drug abuse, education of children and youth, sex and HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) education, entrepreneurship, music, church leadership and development (Ngaruiya, 2019:29 & 38-41).

Oduro et al. (2008:126-128) indicate four principles that guide the kinds of ministries that AIC leaders engage in, namely a sense of God's calling of an individual to ministry, specialised ministries that individuals choose to operate in, dependence on God via the Word of God and faith in God for the work that is being conducted, and a deep sense that the Holy Spirit provides support in conducting ministry. On a negative note, Amoafo describes African church leaders to generally be occupied with material wealth, focused on ancestral spirits, worldly wisdom and might. The values displayed are self-serving, intolerance and inefficiency, to name a few (Amoafo, 2013:154). Leadership is a complex matter in an African setting, and in the rest of world society.

2.2 Introducing the leadership approach of Avery

The work of Avery, *Understanding Leadership: Paradigms and Cases*, assists to clarify some of the complexity in leadership theory.[1] This work seeks to create a frame of reference for leadership that helps leaders as practitioners and researchers alike to have paradigms for leadership that is helpful to the understanding and learning about this fragmented topic (Avery, 2004:3-4).

Avery suggests the use of four approaches to tie together vast amounts of information and theory, and to create a common understanding of leadership (Avery, 2004:17). These approaches are also not mutually exclusive categories, and some aspects of leadership in a specific context might be present in more than one approach. The four approaches are classical leadership, transactional leadership, visionary leadership, and organic leadership. These approaches align chronologically with the eras in which the leadership literature reflected a particular way of thinking and writing about leadership (Avery, 2004:18).

1 The work of Avery is used as framework in understanding the shifts in leadership paradigms (Niemandt 2019:77–88). The relevance of this framework for AIC leadership is explored in this chapter.

Table 2.2.1: Four leadership approaches and characteristics of Avery

	Classical	Transactional	Visionary	Organic
Major era	Antiquity – 1970s	1970s- mid 1980s	Mid 1980s – 2000	Beyond 2000
Basis of leadership	Leader dominance through respect and/ or power to command and control.	Interpersonal influence over and consideration of followers. Creating appropriate management environments.	Emotion – leader inspires followers.	Mutual sense-making within the group. Leaders may emerge rather than be formally appointed.
Source of follower commitment	Fear or respect of leader. Obtaining rewards or avoiding punishment.	Negotiated rewards, agreements and expectations.	Sharing the vision; leader charisma may be involved; individualised consideration.	Buy-in to the group's shared values and processes; self-determination.
Vision	Leader's vision is unnecessary for follower compliance.	Vision is not necessary, and may not be articulated.	Vision is central. Followers may contribute to leader's vision.	Vision emerges from the group; vision is a strong cultural element.

Classical leadership is marked by a powerful leader, and followers with little power other than the power to disengage and withdraw support from the leader. A strong hierarchical structure is present, with a punishment and reward system. Leaders have all responsibility and followers are very passive (Avery, 2004:38). Some limitations of classical leadership are the trouble that comes with succession, complex problem-solving, when followers are required to provide additional commitment, or when followers start to change their thoughts on coercive leadership and refrain from following (Avery, 2004:21).

Transactional leadership has a basis where leaders and followers negotiate agreements as forms of transactions. The leaders have a strong base of power in a punishment-and-reward system but tend to have a negotiation-and-consensus-seeking aspect to making the transactions (Avery, 2004:22 & 38). It can play out with a leader meeting the needs of followers in return for their contributions (Osmer, 2008:176-177). This form of leadership relies on the skill of the leader, a strong sense of direction, and the cooperation of those following (Avery, 2004:22). Leaders need to take followers' points of view into account when negotiating.

Visionary leadership starts where a leader receives and conveys a vision to an organisation, and the leader motivates the followers emotionally to help to realise the specific vision. It expects more co-responsibility, initiative, and participation from followers, but ultimate responsibility and accountability still rest with the visionary leader (Avery, 2004:38). This form of leadership is better suited than classical and transactional leadership in times of change, and this form emerged amid big changes taking place globally at a much faster rate in relation to times past. The focus shifted more towards leadership than management in organisations (Avery, 2004:24). It is a leadership style much more adept to turbulent times in society.

Organic leadership is good for assisting leaders to operate in a state of chaos. In this paradigm or approach, no single person, not even the leader, is in full control of the situation, and responsibility is shared between leaders and followers. Followers are supposed to lead themselves and organise themselves, and thus good communication is imperative for functionality (Avery, 2004:38). This most recent leadership approach is strongly informed by networked organisations that do not have a single leader. (Avery, 2004:36-27).

2.3 Other relevant leadership styles in churches

Various other leadership styles may be found within different churches and congregations. Some of these include transactional, charismatic, servant and transformational leadership styles (Echols, 2009:91). Cooper highlights transformational, transactional, transactional-transformational leadership and servant leadership styles (Cooper, 2005:49). Pali mentions the following

leadership styles as appropriate to use in the Kingdom of God: pastoral leadership, transformational leadership, person-orientated, enabling, humble servant, shepherd, visionary, evangelical, public, missional, communal, and task-competence leadership, to name a few (Pali, 2016:148 & 193). Missional, relational, servant and transformational leadership are discussed briefly below as it is referred to in the analysis of the data.

Missional leadership seeks to implement the missional church theory and ecclesiology. A foundational concept to missional leadership is the focus of church life and congregational life to be directed outwardly; towards God and towards people around the congregation and not a focus directed inwardly to the congregation itself (Burger, 2017:25). It is about the leader being a disciple that follows Jesus in an authentic missional spirituality, with a focus on discerning the activities of God, and partnering with Him in his actions on earth (Niemandt, 2019:89).

Relational leadership focuses on the relations between the leaders and congregation members and implies a proximity in contrast to superfluous or non-existent relationships between leaders and congregation members in very large church congregations. Members are all in relation to one another in a loving community of relationships modelled by the relationship within the Trinity. Leaders are responsible to facilitate relational networks within relationships in the congregation and in relation to the local context (Niemandt, 2019:82).

Servant leadership is people-orientated with a focus on the betterment of the individual. It aims to serve the individual in the congregation before the follower is encouraged to serve others in similar fashion (Echols, 2009:93). It is a self-sacrificial and counter-intuitive leadership approach. Osmer calls Jesus the *embodiment of God's royal rule in the form of a servant* (2008:183). He proposes that this form of leadership should encourage the followers to embody the servanthood of Christ to other people (Osmer, 2008:192). It is a leadership that sees the leader serve the congregants in order that they can learn and form the modelling of the act of service, and in return serve others.

Transformational leadership is people-orientated like servant leadership, but with a focus on the betterment of a corporate group of people and not primarily individuals (Echols, 2009:93). As an inclusive leadership style,

transformational leadership seeks to help groups to improve the common good of a particular population (Echols, 2009:88). Transformational leadership often makes use of the four I's to help motivate followers to bring about transformation: *idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration* (Hoch et al., 2018:504). It sometimes takes a community through a process of deep change in terms of mission, identity, operating procedures and culture (Osmer, 2008:178). The focus remains on effecting change in a group at the hands of a change process.

2.4 Leadership – concluding remarks

These brief definitions highlight some of the dominant religious leadership styles that proved helpful in exploring the leadership approaches of leaders. To summarise this section, we have four approaches to leadership; namely, classical, transactional, visionary, and organic that will serve as a basis for interpreting the data in the next section. The additional leadership styles that are described serve to broaden the scope of evaluating the leadership styles and approaches of the leaders. With this theoretical background in mind, the research methodology of the study and its findings will be discussed.

3. Research methodology and findings regarding leadership approaches

A qualitative methodology was chosen to answer the research question. The qualitative approach provides an in-depth voice to the study in contrast to the statistically driven approach found in quantitative and mixed method approaches (Fouché et al., 2011: 142-143). A semi-structured interview was used for gathering data from the leaders of AICs in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Three participants were selected with purposive sampling (Strydom, 2011b:232). All three of these leaders identified and described themselves as leaders of local AIC congregations.[2] All three selected congregations form part of the AIC groups of churches that were birthed in South Africa. AIC congregations do not have a clear set of

2 See du Preez 2022 for a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology and procedures.

including and excluding criteria, but all three of the leaders indicated that they do belong to this broad category of congregations called AICs.

The following is a short description of each participant and their congregational context:

- **Participant 1** is a black male, 55 years of age. He is the pastor of the local congregation and the bishop of a network of churches that were branches of the main church which he pastors. The congregation of P1 had 60 attending members and was established in 1970 by the current leader's parents. This also served as the headquarters for various other branches that had been planted across the Free State province and across the provincial borders. The leader is the bishop of this group of churches and has several pastors leading the different branches.
- **Participant 2** is a black male, 48 years of age. He was the pastor of the local congregation and also the president within a network of churches that had a bishop leading the group of AICs. The congregation of P2 had 80 attending members and was established in 1942. It formed part of a wider network of branches of this specific group of churches. The current leader is the president of this local congregation, with reverends as part of his local leadership team. The president has a bishop above him in the network that he submits to.
- **Participant 3** is a black male, 49 years of age. He is the reverend of the local congregation within a network of churches that have bishops leading the group of AICs. The congregation of participant 3 had 220 attending members and formed part of a network of churches that was established in 1918. The current leader of this local congregation served as a reverend, and he reported to a bishop and an archbishop.

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recordings and translated to English where needed. The data was imported to the Atlas.ti software for analysis. Both a deductive as well as an inductive approach was used in analysing the data. It is possible to make use of this kind of hybrid approach to the coding of qualitative data. This approach incorporates the use of a deductive set of codes in a code book, as well as seeing what codes arise inductively during the coding process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:1&4).

3.1 Deductive coding

A codebook served to organise the text for interpretation. A template for a codebook could be used, or a set of codes gained from theory, or by a preliminary scanning of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:4). The four leadership approaches of Avery formed the base of the code book (see Table 3.1.1). This codebook was thus developed based on a theoretical framework that was found in the literature review process and the initial scanning of the research data (Gibbs, 2014:285).

Table 3.1.1: Deductive codebook with code groups and codes

Marker	Classical leadership code group	Transactional leadership code group	Visionary leadership code group	Organic leadership code group
Structure and/ or leadership position	~Strong hierarchy	~Position in leadership structure	~Dynamic leadership position	~Group shared leadership
Follower power	% Follower power zero	% Follower power low	% Follower power medium	% Follower power High
Motivation to follow	)) Fear and respect	)) Negotiations and rewards	)) Directional vision	)) Commitment by collaboration
Decision making	\\ Decides alone	\\ Decides by consultation	\\ Decides by collaboration	\\ Decisions mutual

What was found in the research data? The first four themes correlate with the four leadership approaches of Avery and the relevant code group with the same names, classical, transactional, visionary, and organic leadership. Next, the additional themes that arose from the inductive coding will be discussed, as well as the connection for each participant. The transformational leadership and servant leadership themes, along with the four leadership approaches of Avery, assist to answer the research question. After the inductive and deductive coding of the data, it was combined into two tables (see Tables 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) to provide an overview of the results of both deductive and inductive analysis.

Based on the theoretical framework, all four code groups could have been included as themes, but in the research data the organic leadership paradigm did not feature a single time (see Table 3.1.2). Not one of the four codes of organic leadership was connected to any participant. Thus, it could not be viewed as a theme represented in the data. The other groups from the code book are considered as themes in the research, as all of them have significant occurrences in the research data. These themes are classical leadership, transactional leadership, and visionary leadership.

Table 3.1.2: Deductive coding results summary

	Classical leadership code group	**Transactional leadership code group**	**Visionary leadership code group**	**Organic leadership code group**
Structure and/ or leadership position	~Strong hierarchy P1 P3	~Position in leadership structure P2	~Dynamic leadership position P1	~Group-shared leadership
Follower power	%Follower power zero P3	%Follower power low	%Follower power medium P1 P2	%Follower power high
Motivation to follow	)) Fear and respect P3	)) Negotiations and rewards P1 P2	)) Directional vision P1	)) Commitment by collaboration
Decision making	\\ Decides alone	\\ Decides by consultation	\\ Decides by collaboration P1	\\ Decisions mutual

After looking at the inductive coding of the data, five additional codes were created (see Table 3.1.3). The three codes pertaining to leadership styles; namely, missional leadership markers, transformational leadership markers, and servant leadership markers, are all prominent leadership

styles in spiritual leadership, and have also been included in the theoretical framework. These three codes were also considered as themes emerging from the data and will be referred to as transformational leadership, servant leadership and missional leadership. The remaining two codes; namely, helping others and respecting others were not considered as themes as they do not represent a distinct leadership style or approach, although they had many occurrences in the data set. The six themes have provided the following results in relation to each participant.

Table 3.1.3: Inductive coding results summary

Other leadership markers code group			Other codes group	
Transformational leadership marker	**Servant leadership marker**	**Missional leadership marker**	**Helping others**	**Respecting others**
P1		P1	P1	P1
P2	P2	P2	P2	P2
		P3	P3	P3

The deductive data and three themes arising from the results (classical, transactional and visionary leadership) serve as the main anchors for helping to determine the dominant leadership approach of each congregational leader. The three inductively sourced themes (transformational, servant leadership and missional leadership) fulfil the role of providing richer descriptions of the leadership styles.

4. A discussion of findings the AIC leaders' approaches

The discussion in this section aims to describe which leadership approaches align best with each research participant's deductive code groups, and how the inductive data gathered support or expand the findings of the deductive coding to create thicker descriptions of the participants' leadership approaches.

> "*In this sense, every qualitative study, irrespective of which specific method is used, interprets its data because the data never speaks for itself. It is always processed and interrogated in order to obtain answers to particular questions, to shed light on a particular dimension of human experience, and/or to clarify a particular aspect of an experience or a situation* (Willig, 2014:147)."

Participant 1: As seen in the findings, participant 1 had code occurrences in each of the four categories for visionary leadership, one code with a couple of occurrences in the transactional leadership code group, and one code with a number of occurrences in the classical leadership category.

- **Classical leadership:** Although participant 1 is in a strong hierarchical position, he operates as a leader practicing a visionary leadership approach. It would not be unprecedented for this leader to operate with tactics-associated classical and transactional leadership, especially given the hierarchical structure in which he is operating.
- **Transactional leadership:** This code is not a recurring one and is outweighed in quality and quantity of codes rather highlighting the visionary leadership code of)) Directional vision. As in the case of the overlap between leadership approaches, it is not uncommon for leadership to operate within different approaches at various times.
- **Visionary leadership (dominant approach to leadership):** With the overlaps discussed above in mind, and the rest of the codes that all sort under the visionary leadership code group, this leader primarily operates within the visionary leadership approach. To further illustrate the point, here is the first answer that the participant gave in the interview: "*I can say, uhm Leadership in the congregation is about giving direction. Uhm, if you say you are leading that you are at the forefront. Meaning you are taking the congregation somewhere. That is my understanding of leadership (P1:4)*."

- **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:**

  Transformational leadership: It is indicated that the transformational leadership marker was prominent for participant 1. In the case of participant 1, it supports the findings of the deductive coding, as the leader is an inspirational and visionary figure who mobilises other leaders in the community to bring about corporate change relating to issues of moral decay.

Participant 1 is a leader who has a strong association with visionary leadership while operating in a classical leadership structure, and from time to time he employs transactional leadership methods. In addition, he has a transformational leadership style that ties in well with his visionary leadership strength.

Participant 2: Because of the brevity of participant 2's interview it was slightly more difficult to interpret the data, but because of the way that the participant reiterated certain topics and codes, it provided more validity to the results. There were only three code types in the deductive code set that occurred for participant 2, with two belonging to the transactional leadership group, and the other to visionary leadership. Although classical leadership does not feature in this participant's interview data, a comment on this approach will also be made.

- **Visionary leadership:** It is not such a strong marker for illustrating power to followers that it would help in categorising the leader as a visionary leader, but it is evident of more than one approach informing his approach to leadership.
- **Transactional leadership (dominant approach to leadership):** Looking at his codes that illustrate his dominance in the transactional leadership approach, the)) Negotiations and rewards code features the strongest here. This code emphasises the nature of transactional leadership lying in the transactions and rewarding of followers; an example: "*Leaders can improve themselves, self if they understand the Word of God and the Word of God will to translate them, so that they can be right thing* (P2:34)."

- **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:**

  Transformational leadership: It is indicated that the transformational leadership marker was prominent for participant 2. The references for participant 2 are not strongly connected to the visionary component of transformational leader, as is the case for participant 1. The transformation that is sought by participant 2 is focused on a small circle of influence, including the local congregation and one or two entities outside the congregational borders. *"In our community like, uh, we organise some clothings. E, From different, people they used to give different kind of clothings and also the breads and the breadrolls. So, I am going, I am taking them there to the community surrounding us. Because there are a lot of people who are suffering in that area* (P2:19)*."* Participant 2 has quite a few transformational leadership markers and it does speak of his inclination to see change in his congregation and surrounding community. It adds another dimension to understanding his leadership inclination and transactional leadership approach.

  Servant leadership: The leader serves the follower, and the follower learns how to serve, and in turn serves others as it was modelled by the leader to the follower. Participant 2 had this servant leadership theme occurring, and it indicated that the leader is focusing on the leaders whom he is leading. He aims to assist them in order that they can conduct their ministries and serve others. This adds depth to the leadership perspective of participant 2.

Participant 2 has a strong focus on transactional leadership while he is operating within a classical leadership approach, and he seeks to act as a servant-leader who wants to equip his followers in order that they can serve others in return.

Participant 3: He had all his codes and occurrences in the deductive coding sorted under the classical leadership approach.

- The results capture the extent to which this leader is positioned in a strong hierarchical structure. For example: "*I am a Reverend in my church and there is a bishop for whom I am accountable. Above our bishop, we have an Archbishop whom both the bishop and I are accountable to and take orders from" (P3:11).* This leader has a prominent marker of his own compliance to his leaders through a reverence and respect for their positions, and the constitution of the church. He also has the marker of zero power to the followers because even he as a leader has no freedom to take initiative in his own congregation.

  There are no occurrences that connected him to another leadership approach during the deductive coding phase, and thus he has a very prominent connection to the classical leadership approach. Although he is not the top leader in the hierarchy, he is still operating within this leadership approach as both a leader and a follower.

- **Expansion on leadership approach via inductive coding:** The additional codes for transformational and servant leadership did not feature with participant 3.

Participant 3 had a very strong classical leadership approach to leadership and operates within a strong hierarchical structure with little room for initiative. He is not the top leader in the hierarchy, but a follower, and leads the structure with other leaders dictating most of his ministry activities.

Figure 1 illustrates the links between the participants, the deductive code groups, and the inductive codes.

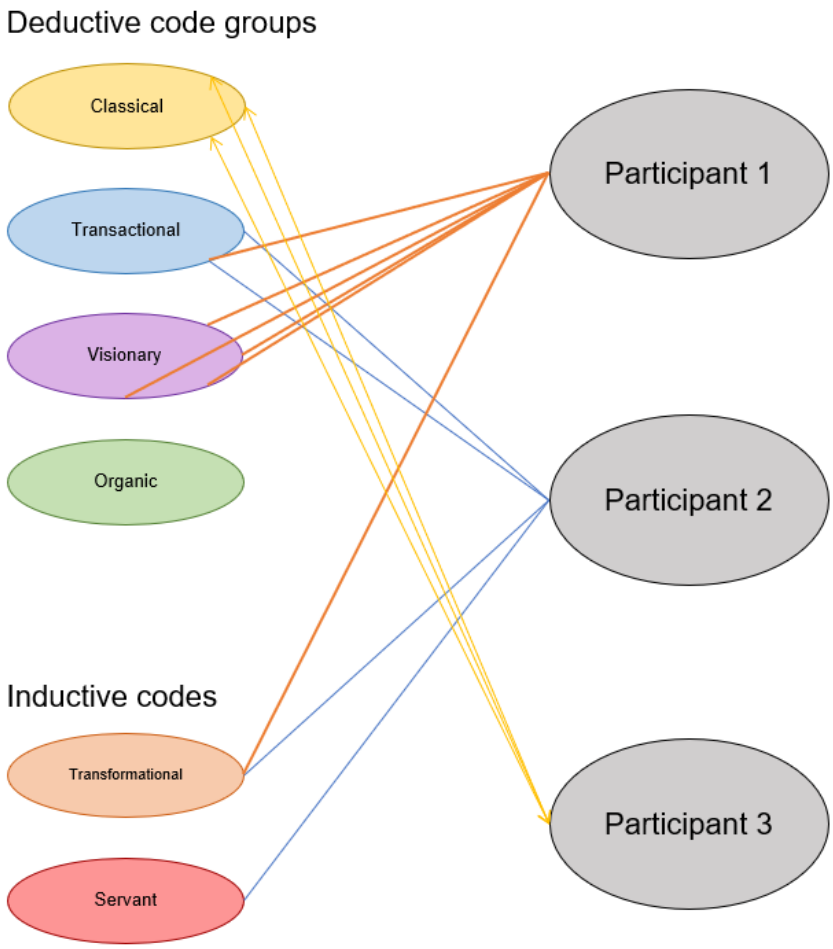

Figure 1: Map of links between participants and deductive groups and inductive codes.

In conclusion, it can be said that participant 1 has a visionary approach to leadership within a classical leadership structure, and transformational and missional leadership as a supporting style. Participant 2 has a transactional leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and servant leadership as a supporting style. Participant 3 has a classical leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and no other prominent additional leadership styles.

No research is without limitations and the following may be stated as limitations. There are always things that can be improved on, and that other researchers in the same field of study can learn from for future research. The sample size for this study was three participants. If this number could have been increased, it could have yielded results that would have provided more depth in the understanding of the leadership of the participants. The differences and similarities could have been more nuanced by a bigger sample size. The sample profile could have been selected from a more diverse group of leaders from different AICs. This study is a once-off study, and the validity of the data would be increased if the findings of the study could be discussed with the participants in a follow-up interview or even more than one follow-up interview. To provide more validity to the data, the use of multiple methods could have been helpful by making use of a Delphi study on the same topic with all the leaders taking part, or perhaps a focus on group interviews. Quantitative data gathering could have been helpful by making use of a questionnaire of differing leadership approaches and missional leadership theory. This could have assisted in increasing the validity of the findings of the qualitative data.

The relationship between the researcher and the interviewees should be noted. The researcher is a white male of the higher middle-class conducting interviews with black leaders from a low socio-economic context a power relationship was present. The researcher was cognisant of it and aimed to make use of power regulation to regulate the power dynamics during the interviews (Strydom, 2011a:123-124). An improvement could be to have research assistants who are from the same ethnical background as the participants. Language also plays a role in the relationship between researcher and interviewee. The interviews were conducted in English. It is not the mother tongue of either the participants or the researcher. If the interviews were in Sesotho, it could have provided better-articulated answers to the research questions.

5. Reflection and conclusion

A study on new understandings of leadership in the African context shows that an Anglo-centric essentialist approach to leadership development is often taken in order to understand the African leadership space (Bolden, 2009:16; Eyong, 2016:148).

Much more is being said and still needs to be said on the de-colonisation of Africa.

To answer the research question, it was found that participant 1 has a visionary approach to leadership within a classical leadership structure, and transformational leadership as a supporting style. Participant 2 has a transactional leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and servant leadership as a supporting style. Participant 3 has a classical leadership approach within a classical leadership structure, and no other prominent additional leadership style.

The leadership framework that was chosen was partly used to assist the study in dealing with an extremely complex topic such as leadership by trying to use broad guidelines that looks a bit more at a chronological summary of leadership, than a current perspective of leadership. New perspectives of African leadership approaches could have been more beneficial to the research in gaining endemic understanding of leadership on the African continent. If one would like to gain a more in depth understanding of leadership in African Independent Churches, further endemic research would need to be conducted. Perhaps African anthropological and social studies would assist in a multi-disciplinary approach to greater understanding into leadership within the African church setting.

The topic of leadership in African Independent Churches is one that has not been explored much in academic circles or amongst African Independent Churches themselves. There is much scope for future research in this area.

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Chapter 5

Post-colonial preaching in a township: Discovery and critical reflection on an African sermon

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1. Introduction

Two critical points are focal for researching preaching in the township context in South Africa. Firstly, research on preaching in the township context has received very little attention. In this case, the mere attention towards such a specific context opens potentially new avenues of perspectives, insights, and enhancements for Practical Theology. Thus, my emphasis is on *discovery*.

Secondly, the insights of post-colonial thinkers have brought forth the necessity of empirical research on lived experience, which has been expounded by such thought. By the choice in this chapter for post-colonial thought, I postulate that the *post-colonial* has become synonymous with a liberated South African context, already indicating methodological markers of interest for this context, notwithstanding other possibilities.

With these two focal points, I align myself to two of the reflective questions of this volume. What can one learn from conducting research in a township context? What is the role of congregational leadership in terms of the

relationship of preaching in a township context and the post-colonial theory? I will return to these questions in the conclusion.

That being said, using post-colonial as a theoretical framework is not an endeavour in homogenous thought, and a myriad of research possibilities can be proposed. One such possibility is a post-colonial research paradigm espoused by Linda Smith (2008). In my reading of her proposal, the limits of representation and the benefactors of research are fundamental to the shift between colonial and post-colonial research (Smith, 2008:2-3). I mention her insights because my attempt in this chapter of researching preaching in the township context is not without these limitations. However, I posit that this chapter is an incremental step towards future research that could more rigorously contend with the limits of representation and benefaction. To clarify, to solve the limits of representation, the particular preacher will have to be more central to the research on their own sermon, which is not true in this chapter. As an antidote to who benefits from the research, there should be more proof that research of this sort will actually benefit the community where the research has taken place. As much as I wish this research would benefit the community where the data has emerged, any such proof would be mere speculation.

However, despite these limitations, I opine that it is still vital to research a township sermon as a preliminary discovery. My focal question is whether post-colonial thought is indeed prevalent in a sermon in a context such as a township. Importantly, I argue that the township itself is a context on the margins of society and is thus most viable in finding the forms of knowledge that Walter Mignolo (2007:453) espouses as post-colonial. Secondly, I consider an individual sermon rather than a system of thought within a myriad of sermons, as others have proposed for empirical research on sermons in South Africa (Pieterse, 2020). Finally, as I am interested in post-colonial thought within the said sermon, the means of expositing thought from the data is theory-driven and, therefore, consists of theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006:88). These are methodological choices that I have made which will inevitably be wanting, but does indeed address the central question of this chapter.

To thematically analyse the sermon in question, I will first propose three focal images of post-colonial thought as theory. Secondly, I will look at the sermon itself and use direct quotations from the sermon within the framework of the post-colonial theory. Finally, I will reflect on the interaction between the world of the sermon and the post-colonial theory. Again, my reflection on the sermon will be weighted towards the theory of a post-colonial vision and not the intended meaning of the sermon. This research is not meant to be a final word on preaching in the township, post-colonial preaching, or the interaction between theory, preacher, and context. This research is instead a preliminary discovery into the lacuna of such research and necessitates further research and contemplation, including from other methodological and theoretical perspectives.

2. The post-colonial vision

I have elsewhere (Wessels, 2021:4) made the claim, notwithstanding the larger complexity of post-colonial thought, that three themes are important for an understanding of post-colonial thinking: epistemology, the positionality of the centre, and identity. I argue these themes as follows. Firstly, regarding epistemology, that post-colonial epistemology "is the deconstruction of any totalitarian ideology" (Wessels, 2021:6). The argument is hinged around three interlocutors, Walter Mignolo (2007), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993), and Frantz Fanon (2004). At first glance, it may seem that my interlocutors promote the deconstruction of the West in itself, as Douglas Murray (2022) acutely showcases in his book *The War on the West*. However, given the context in which post-colonial thought came to the fore under Western ideological imperialism, which undermined the epistemologies of alterity, I would posit that the correct interpretation of post-colonial deconstruction is not the unsophisticated and blind deconstruction of the West but rather a sophisticated deconstruction of any and all totalitarian ideology. This does not mean that an unsophisticated and even unethical war on the West in the name of post-colonial and decolonial endeavours is not taking place. It certainly is, and is especially visual in the student protests in South Africa, where only some identities, which are counter to whiteness, maleness, and Western, are allowed to shape the discourse, whilst other identities are to keep quiet (Urbaniak, 2019).

Nonetheless, I believe that my interpretation of the post-colonial is in alignment with important books on the post-colonial, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1993) *Moving the Centre* and Homi Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture*, where it is pretty clear that the replacing of one ideological centre or identity does not solve the problem of coloniality and may itself become totalitarian. Homiletically speaking, the post-colonial preacher will be acutely capable of locating, naming, and deconstructing any totalitarian ideology. However, the possibility exists that no totalitarian ideology is at play in the contextual situation. Thus, the post-colonial preacher should be as acutely aware of totalitarian absence as they are of its presence. This brings forth one more question: the legitimacy of a totalitarian ideology as espoused within the sermon. A viable argument for the legitimacy of totalitarian thought would be to look at the internal logic of the sermon itself and determine whether what is espoused as totalitarian is indeed totalitarian. The internal logic of the sermon will then have to convince that what is espoused as totalitarian is indeed so.

From this post-colonial deconstruction, the post-colonial preaching will have to reconstruct a new way of knowing, which comes to the fore through repositioning the centre of thought. This is the second theme. However, and this is quite an unexpected development, post-colonial positionality does not replace one centre with another centre, for that would bring forth merely a new totalitarian epistemology or form of epistemological colonisation. Using the insights of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, I have claimed (Wessels, 2021:7) that Europe can no longer be the positional centre of thought, but neither should any other geographic position replace Europe as the only legitimate centre of thought. This claim applies similarly to any individual epistemological centre. Rather, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993:26) proposes:

> But it did point out the possibility of moving the centre from its location in Europe towards a pluralism of centres; themselves being equally legitimate locations of the human imagination.

This moving of the centre towards plurality is an antidote to the problem of subjectivity, for the individual's own subjectivity is upheld as legitimate but not universalised. At the same time, this movement opens the possibility of dialogue and mutual learning from other centres of thought, each

from its own subjectivity, towards something akin to mutual influencing of each other. It must be mentioned that this line of thinking is partly descriptive of the best type of interaction between others in the historical reality of existence (Volf, 2002:9). Furthermore, this type of cooperation with the other is also the best possible endeavour when encountering the epistemological other, compared to separation or violence (Kapuściński, 2018:87-90). I conclude thus (Wessels, 2021:8):

> A person or community can, therefore, legitimately think and theorise from their specific centre of thought, with the caveat and responsibility to conceptualise how their centre relates and dialogues with other centres of thought.

Homiletically speaking, the post-colonial preacher will be well located within the contextual realities of their congregation, albeit from their own subjectivity. This implies further that the post-colonial preacher is both confident in their own subjectivity and aware that their epistemological centre is not absolute but in need of interlocution with others. Furthermore, post-colonial preaching will not incorrectly equate subjectivity with the biblical text but explicitly treat the biblical text as a centre of epistemological alterity. Post-colonial thought does not, however, engage with a hierarchy of meaning, which implies that the biblical text does not enjoy a position of authority, as Brueggemann (2007:36-40) has proposed. Therefore, the ethics of post-colonial thought rejects authoritative direction and proposes something akin to struggle for meaning. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:108) articulates such an ethics as follows:

> [This book] is a call for the rediscovery of the real language of humankind: the language of struggle. It is the universal language underlying all speech and words of our history. Struggle. Struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language, and our being.

Thus, the relationality between differing epistemological centres finds its greatest ordeal in the struggle for meaning as the epitome of the epistemological creative endeavour. However, the struggle for meaning as an epistemological concept does not thoroughly contend with the ethics of struggle, and much contemplation is still lacking on the relation between ethics and post-colonial thought.

Thirdly, using Homi Bhabha as his interlocutor, I contend that the post-colonial understanding of identity rejects identity markers, which are "sign(s) of differences - be it class, gender, or race" (Bhabha, 1994:313), opting rather for a conception of identity which corresponds to themes of fragmentation, decentring, and hybridity (Wessels, 2021:9). This implies, firstly, the rejection of group identity towards polarisation (Wessels, 2021:10). And secondly, the embrace of "becoming the other of themselves and living into the (post)colonial identity" (Wessels, 2021:11). I conclude as follows:

> But the point is even more precarious, for the myth that there exists such a thing as a fixed identity is unveiled. And herein, the (post) colonial identity showcases the human condition, that identity is constantly in flux and negotiated, decentred, and fragmented. (Wessels, 2021:11).

Homiletically speaking, the post-colonial preacher will be wary of any identity fixed in time and space concerning individual and group identities. This does not disregard the reality of identifying with groups, including religious communities, but such identification cannot be correlated to identity as written in stone. Furthermore, the representation of God's identity becomes similarly open to flux and negotiation. A greater awareness of the myriad representations of God's identity in the biblical text can mitigate the temptation of concluding that God's identity is fixed in any one gaze. Furthermore, the post-colonial preaching will be aware of her own fragmented and hybrid identity. In its essence, the awareness of a post-colonial identity is the awareness of identity fluidity within the lived experience of the individual and community as time and space, thought and interaction play out on the lives of people.

3. Post-Colonial Preaching? Reflections on a Township Sermon

As I have mentioned in my introduction, I have chosen a theoretical thematic analysis as the methodological grounding of engagement with the data. Braun and Clarke (2008:88) articulate theoretical thematic analysis as follows:

> [A] 'theoretical' thematic analysis would tend to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. [...] cod[ed] for a quite specific research question.

Thus, using the post-colonial vision that I have proposed in the preceding section, I will analyse a sermon preached in a township congregation. The sermon was delivered on the 26 September 2021. The congregation in which the sermon was delivered is of the Mainline Christian tradition. The township is in Bloemfontein. The sermon was delivered in English, and all quotations are verbatim. The preacher's identity is kept anonymous. Finally, once again, this sermon only represents itself and not all sermons in this congregation or the township. Thus, I am under no impression that what comes to the fore in this reflection is representative of all township preaching or should by any means be a theory of preaching within the township context. Furthermore, I make no claim that my choice of post-colonial theme, nor my theoretical framework within the post-colonial theme, is representative of the intentions of the preacher or the larger tradition of post-colonial and decolonial thought.

3.1 Epistemology: Deconstructing Division and Discrimination

Four times in the early part of the sermon, attitudes and actions that bring division are deconstructed as ideological visions that, according to the preacher, are alive and well in the community where the sermon takes place. Considering this deconstruction on closer scrutiny, it is clear that a parallel is drawn between the actions of the disciples in Mark 9:38-41 and the congregation:

> Indirectly, what [the disciples] were doing is what many of us are engaged in today. And that is dividing the body of Christ based on a certain set of things we think we know towards certain things we are privileged to and others are not privileged to. […] We are engaging in the very same behaviour which the disciples were engaging in. And that is to bring division and discrimination within the church of God.

> […] We live in a time where people and the church itself can take and act on certain decisions to bring division between itself within the church itself (Anonymous, 2021).

The particularity of the actions and attitudes - that is, the totalitarian ideology within the context of the congregation - which the preacher deconstructs revolves around the concepts of division and discrimination. To the largest extent, these divisions and discriminations are located within what the preacher calls "the church of God". The concept of the church of God is not readily apparent in its meaning, whether it is an institution, a community, or the congregants in their interaction with the greater community. However, the preacher is thoroughly intent on deconstructing any actions and attitudes which bring forth division and discrimination. Furthermore, the word "privileges" plays an important role, for it brings forth connotations of hierarchies of positions, which may deepen division and discrimination. In another part of the sermon, some light is shed upon the exact locationality where these attitudes and actions come to the fore within the context:

> Jesus Christ is not interested in what distinguishes these other people. Listen, he does not begin to ask them: "Are you sure these guys are from that other party? The one that was green and black and gold? Or the one that wears red and black? Or the one that wears blue?" He doesn't begin to ask those questions (Anonymous, 2021).

The references to colours in this quote are the colours of prominent local and national political parties in South Africa, with differences in their political visions. This concrete representation of contextual realities sheds light on what the preacher is essentially trying to deconstruct: the divisions and discriminations within the political sphere of human existence. Nowhere in the sermon is reference made to the actions or attitudes of role players within these political parties. One possibility is that the preacher implies that the political sphere is under the same scrutiny as the congregation. Still, it is also possible that this silence is a silence of scrutiny. Notwithstanding, it seems that the hearers are implored to let go of any natural divisions and discriminations which are part and parcel of the political game.

Finally, it must be mentioned that the preacher also showcases the prevalence of division and discrimination between differing Christian denominations (Anonymous, 2021). Thus, the preacher directly deconstructs two spaces where the hearers may find themselves: the political sphere and the church denomination, as particular iterations of the Christian tradition. The deconstruction of division and discrimination finds its climax in the words of Jesus, as proposed by the preacher:

> [Jesus] says: "What are they doing? They are using my name, let therefore, let them be" (Anonymous, 2021).

Thus, in deconstructing the attitudes and actions of division and discrimination in the spheres of the political and ecclesial, the preacher directly links the actions of these other role players as equal to the unknown group in Mark 9:38-41, insisting that their legitimacy is located in the name of Jesus. This does, however, leave much to the imagination of the hearers. For one, is the implication that scrutiny of political actors should be set aside to avoid division and discrimination? Does this mean that dialogue between religious communities must only occur on grounds of acceptance rather than rigorous debate?

A further important question is whether the preacher's proposed deconstruction could legitimately be called post-colonial preaching. On the one hand, it could indeed be deemed post-colonial in the sense that these attitudes and actions of division and discrimination bring forth the destruction of the well-being of the community. This is indeed what the sermon is implying. However, post-colonial thinkers are quite contrarian in their proposals and do not shy away from principles that could be divisionary. Consider, for instance, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986:6-7) contrarian stance towards the languages of Europe as a platform for unification:

> In some instances these European languages were seen as having a capacity to unite African peoples against divisive tendencies inherent in the multiplicity of African languages within the same geographic state[…] See the paradox: the possibility, of using mother-tongues provokes a tone of levity in phrases like 'a dreadful betrayal' and 'a guilty feeling'; but that of foreign languages produces a categorical, positive embrace.

Similarly, Walter Mignolo (2007:450) calls upon contrarian epistemologies to be brought to the foreground as the post-colonial endeavour, whether or not they are divisive: "other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics." Furthermore, Frantz Fanon (2004:141) proposes a contrarian understanding of development that does not favour political ends but the development of the consciousness of the people within the local community.

Granted, from the preacher's perspective, it may indeed be the case that the text from Mark 9:38-41 is interested in undermining division and discrimination. Indeed, as Robert Stein (2008:446) showcases in his commentary on the text, it is indeed "best to see [the exorcist in verse 39] as a follower of Jesus who carried out his ministry outside the circle of the Twelve." However, Stein (2008:446) makes the caveat: "Ministry, such as that of this exorcist, that brings glory to the name of Jesus should not/must not be hindered, even when it ignores 'we/us'". Stated differently, bringing glory to the name of Jesus is an important virtue of the legitimacy of this ministry, which certainly cannot equate all political and ecclesial actions being equal to such a high ideal of bringing glory to the name of Christ.

This brings me to the second point of discussion, the positionality of the centre.

3.2 Positionality: The Name of Jesus

The preacher themes his sermon as "The name of Jesus" (Anonymous, 2021). This central theme is also the positional centre around which the sermon revolves. Regarding the interaction between Mark 9:38-41 and the context, there is a clear decentring of the disciples, who essentially become the antagonists at odds with Jesus. This being said the preaching associates the disciples with the hearers and they, by implication, also become antagonists.

> Indirectly, what [the disciples] were doing is what many of us are engaged in today. […] [But, Jesus] says that [the exorcists] were doing these miracles in my name, therefore leave them alone. If they are calling in that name, they are for us, and therefore, they are not against us[…] He says: "What are they doing? They are using my name; therefore, let them be" (Anonymous, 2021).

It is important to note that the centrality of the disciples is moved because of the presence of the name of Jesus. This is a significant movement towards a post-colonial positionality, dislocating the universal positionality that the disciples presume. However, as per Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993:26), the post-colonial positionality is interested in a plurality of legitimate centres and not merely replacing one universal centre with another. And it is at this point that the preacher falters. "The name of Jesus," as the decentring concept for the disciples' position, becomes the sermon's universal centre. But it becomes even more conspicuous, for this central theme's exact meaning is elusive. Whether or not the elusiveness of the meaning of "the name of Jesus" is intentional leads the preacher into two important avenues regarding positionality.

Firstly, the centrality of the elusive "name of Jesus" brings forth a supernatural, almost magical, power. The power of this theme breaks down, almost automatically, the divisions and discrimination that the preacher has it against as totalitarian ideology and brings unity. Furthermore, the name of Jesus is envisioned as an antidote to seemingly every ailment and tragedy in human existence:

> What is in this name? We want to know. That this name can bring us together. […] He says, in that instance, you know what this name does: it heals the sick, it brings out demons, and it is effective, in other words. It is powerful. He says it sets free the captives (Anonymous, 2021).

Secondly, the elusive theme, quite ironically, locates the agency of this supernatural power squarely in the hands of the person who can somehow use this power through faith and awareness:

> But if we are not aware, we can be rendered asunder; we can be torn apart if we do not realise the centrality and importance of this name. […] This is the power of this name when appropriately appropriated by a person who knows what is in it and why they have the right to use it (Anonymous, 2021).

Three movements can be discerned concerning the preacher's positioning of the centre. Firstly, he moves the centre away from the hearers, decentring their own centrality in the Christian narrative. Secondly, the name of

Jesus as an elusive concept becomes central and represents an attempt by the preacher to unite and heal the greater community around the Divine. However, and this is the third move, the elusive nature of the centre of the Divine actually recentres human agency with the caveat that the human agency must be an ideal equal to someone who knows how to implement the elusive power of the Divine. Therefore, the sermon's positionality moves from the non-ideal human to the Divine and then to the ideal human. This movement, to my mind, does not reflect the post-colonial centre of plurality, but rather two tendencies in preaching which Johan Cilliers (1996, 2004) has pinpointed: the elimination of God from the pulpit and moralisation, which find their climax in the final movement where the centrality of the Divine name is replaces by an idealised human agency.

3.3 Identity: Transcendental Righteousness in the Name of Jesus

Closely related to the centre of the sermon is the identity of both the Divine and the hearers. It must be noted that the elusiveness of the name of Jesus still transpires regarding identity, but there is also a transcendental nature to it. Let me first consider the Divine identity as portrayed in the sermon:

> And this name is the same as his personhood. When you call in the name of Jesus Christ, it is the same as calling Jesus Christ himself (Anonymous, 2021).

The elusive nature of the name is thus transposed onto the personhood of Jesus Christ and, therefore, the person of the Divine. Once more, this elusiveness may point to a supernatural identity as it has pointed to supernatural power, but much is left to the imagination of the hearers. When it comes to the hearers, however, identity is formed to a much greater extent:

> So, what is it that sets us apart as a people? I said, it is this name. When we are baptised in the church here, we mark you with the sign of Christ. We make you into a people or a person of Jesus Christ. From that day onwards, you carry this name within you, the name of Jesus Christ (Anonymous, 2021).

The first critical understanding of identity is found in baptism, where a former, unnamed identity is transcended to an identity aligned with the

Divine name. However, this identity seems to be fixed almost automatically from the moment of baptism.

> And I dare say this morning, I venture to say, I think, this morning, that you are the righteous. You are the righteous, not because you did something good, but because of your faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ. That's what puts you right with God (Anonymous, 2021).

But baptism is not the only caveat for this transcendence, that is if an identity aligned with the Divine name has the same meaning as being righteous. The second caveat of this transcended identity is the importance of faith, which puts one right with the Divine. Faith itself is not defined, and it may be possible that the hearers automatically understand its meaning, making such a definition redundant. It may also be possible that the elusiveness of the name is transposed onto faith. It is unclear why the preacher does not clearly define many of the important thoughts in the sermon. He goes on:

> It is in the same way that God regards us when he sees us covered by the blood of Jesus. When he sees us, he sees that righteousness, that robe of righteousness, that Jesus Christ has clothed us in, that he has put on us. He sees us as righteous, pure, blameless, and deserving of his mercy and favour. […] When you have righteousness and know what God has done for you, you are as bold as lightning. Not your own righteousness, but the righteousness of God (Anonymous, 2021).

In these final thoughts on the identity of the hearers, the Divine transcends the identity of the hearers. The identity of God, which is equated with the elusive supernatural power of the Divine name, is transferred to the hearers. They are overwhelmed by that identity to such an extent that the Divine gaze can only see the Divine identity bestowed upon them, but not without the caveat that the hearers must know the secrets of what God has done. Thus, the divine identity becomes the identity of the hearers when they know it correctly.

One could argue that the sermon represents some post-colonial tendencies with identity, especially regarding the change of identity within the sermon. However, the nature of the Divine identity is problematic, for as much as it may represent supernatural power, it may also merely cloak incoherence

of thought in the sermon. Instead, I would argue that there is no identity change for the hearers. The preacher is merely pointing towards a baptismal identity where a fixed identity is given to the hearer, ending with the appeal that they should live into that identity through correct faith and correct knowledge.

4. Preliminary Discovery: Linear Progression

Considering the description of the sermon around the three post-colonial themes of epistemology, positionality, and identity, I posit that three discoveries can be made revolving around a linear progression of thought. Firstly, the preacher is deeply interested in conceptualising a way of existing in the world which conceptualises a vision of unity. Therefore, in epistemological terms, the congregation, as individuals and a group, is encouraged to move from division to unity in their consciousness and actions within the political and ecclesial realms. The progression of this epistemological vision is without complexity and does not contemplate the possibility of transgressive thought or action in the world.

Secondly, regarding positionality, the linear progression moves from the non-ideal human centre to the elusive Divine centre and finally to the ideal human centre. The elusive Divine centre of the name of the Divine merely functions as a temporary positionality within the sermon until the deeper intention of the preacher is revealed, a moral enticement to become the ideal human being. This is an especially unfortunate conclusion to which the preacher arrives, for the possibility of a plurality of positionalities, is waved aside for the ideal human being, who seems to be beyond and above the struggles of human existence.

Finally, the preacher's contemplation on identity is similar in its linear progression. At first, identity seems to revolve around baptism, and it certainly does. However, baptismal identity is not sufficient as it is the divine choice for human beings above their natural realities. Instead, the baptismal identity must progress beyond God's acceptance towards a more rigorous baptismal identity augmented by correct knowledge and correct faith. To a certain extent, one may argue that there is some hybridity in identity, for the baptismal identity changes the identity of the human being

from non-righteous to righteous, but this also seems to be only a temporary placeholder, for the final baptismal identity righteousness is to be found not in the complexity of identity vis-à-vis existence, but correct knowledge and right faith. The progression of identity is thus this: from non-being to baptised in Divine righteousness, to baptised in Divine righteousness on the condition of correct knowledge and correct faith.

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked two questions for the post-colonial paradigm of preaching: What can one learn from conducting research in a township context? And, what is the role of congregational leadership in terms of the relationship between preaching in a township context and the post-colonial theory? Although some post-colonial insights were discovered within the sermon, the linear progression of epistemology, positionality, and identity in the flow and content of the sermon has showcased shortcomings in overall post-colonial thought. Indeed, this discovery has limitations in its methodological framing and the fact that only one sermon was analysed. That being said, one would have hoped that the marginal geographic location of the township would have brought forth ideals of post-coloniality. The first thing one can learn from this finding is that spaces of marginalisation are by no means an automatic conduit of other ways of thinking, being, and exposition of Christian thought but that the prevalent forces of thinking in society are just as much present in these spaces as more central spaces. Stated differently, post-colonial theory is not as prevalent as either academia or the proponents of post-colonial thinking will have us believe.

The question regarding congregational leadership and their role in this context would revolve around at least two aspects of thought espoused on the pulpit. Firstly, congregational leaders must engage with the narratives on the pulpit, shaping and directing congregations in the township, especially asking whether such narratives are conduits of liberation and hope for a better future. Secondly, leaders will have to engage more deeply with the possibilities of other ways of thinking towards local particularities, which reflect better possibilities for communities to take responsibility for

their lives, well-being, identity formation, and the prevalence of abusive ideologies which may abound.

From a more critical perspective, if the sermon interpreted in this chapter is indicative of a larger culture of leadership within the township context, the foundational directives of leadership towards the community can be conceptualised as demanding obedience for unity, moral indignation against the community's actions, and a call to orthodoxy, all aspects of a strict colonial leadership.

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Chapter 6

Practice orientated research in service of the study of multi-cultural congregations

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1. Background introduction: The complexities of multicultural contexts

Within an increasingly interconnected world and global society, the idea of independent, coherent, homogeneous and stable cultures becomes increasingly irrelevant and difficult to sustain. The processes of globalisation and constant migration are increasingly drawing people from different cultural origins into close relationships (Hermans & Kempen, 2000).

At a local level, South African society cannot escape globalisation, and neither can culture, race, ethnicity, language and congregations escape globalisation. The "new" context does provide new realities and opportunities, but as Naidoo (2017) writes "Churches, instead of being places of acceptance and love, become an arena for subtle racial tension, sexism and homophobia". The notion of trying to maintain mono or homogeneous cultural spheres, is slowly being tested and shifted as broad stream societal shifts are taking place towards more inclusivity and a more multicultural meta society.

No group, cultural or church, can escape intergroup contact with others. The 1996 constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) with its intrinsic Bill of Rights and the demographic shifts that occur within all contexts, are introducing a new hybridity of group-forming and consequently pose a challenge to existing homogeneous groups. Jonker refers to this as the inevitability of intercultural exchange (Jonker, 2006:22).

Seekings (2008:12) found in his research that most South Africans continue to live in mono-racial neighbourhoods, but because of South Africa's changing demographics, the fast-growing trend of spatial integration in existing neighbourhoods as well as newly established, more integrated neighbourhoods, has resulted in more racial integration, thus setting the scene for more multicultural environments to form of which multicultural congregations are part of.

This chapter digs into the potential of utilising practice-oriented research as a methodology for investigating multicultural congregations. Beyond merely gathering empirical data to comprehend the dynamics within such congregations, this approach is seen as an intervention tool. It not only sheds light on the functioning of these congregations but also aids them in discerning their purpose in accordance with God's will and their role within the larger societal context.

2. Exploring research options for multicultural congregations

What would an appropriate congregational research approach be for multicultural congregations where research needs to deal with these complexities, imbedded rights, and deep-rooted attachments to culture, ethnicity and language? The South African context can be mentioned as an example of such a context. Baugh and Guion (2006:8) remind researchers in the field of culture that any research methodology needs to have a cultural sensitivity. They then state 3 "main foci" of such research and that is a) instead of using the individual as the unit of analysis, culture that drives human behaviour should be the main focus, b) the relationship between changes in behaviour and contact with culture should be addressed and c) researchers should note the difficulty in comparison data because behaviour is distinct for that culture under examination.

Moving forward with this in mind, one research approach would be a linear dichotomous approach where a division into two (or more) parts or classifications are done by simply distinguishing between for e.g., "African", "coloured", "Indian" and "Western or white" cultures that exist within a congregation. Existing research has shown that apartheid established a

mind-set of Western culture being superior to African culture and that this is strongly opposed by calls for decolonisation and Africanisation.[1]

Another route could be to move away from the dichotomies towards dialogue and interconnectedness and forms of hybridity that provides options to enhance inclusivity and not continue patterns inherent separation. In this line of thinking, both Carbaugh (2007) and Hermans and Kempen (2000) argue for a discursive or dialectical approach in dealing with culture in a globalised and diverse world. Carbaugh treats culture not as a set of abstract dimensions but as a system of discursive practices which invoke conversation about who we are (and should be), how we are (and should be) related, how we can (and should) act, how we feel about what is going on and how we dwell in our places (Carbaugh, 2007:5). Hermans and Kempen argue for a rediscovery of people through cultural dialogue attributable to the increasing cultural connections with the phenomenon of hybridisation. Hybridisation, in turn, is a consequence of the emergence of a world system that implies an interpenetration of the global and the local, and the enlarged cultural complexity because of large-scale distribution of cultural meanings and practices (Herman & Kempen, 2000:1119).

From this approach that is in line with relational thinking and a dialectical approach, the argument is made that practice-orientated research as a methodology for research within multicultural contexts do provide a research methodology which is in its essence a dialectical process between practice and theory. Given the past and present complexities of the South African context and the strong group sentiments towards culture and language, and the strong pull towards dichotomies, a research approach that is in essence dialectical could bring forth not only different research results but also different interventions. Within multicultural contexts an intervention would seek to bring cohesion and inclusivity. A more dialectical research approach would stimulate dialogue and interaction more so if it is combined with focus groups.

1 See Arowolo (2010) and Booysen et al. (2007) e.g. the educational model of Verwoerd, which stated equal but separate education, but which ended up in a Bantustan lower-grade education in Davenport's section on "Verwoerd's new vision 1959-1960" Davenport (1991, 352-356)

3. Practice-oriented research in multi-cultural contexts

Practice-oriented research stems from action research, which in turn is defined by Reason and Bradbury (2006) as a methodology that is working towards practical outcomes. They also argue that it is about creating new forms of understanding because action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless (Andriessen, 2014).

Theory-oriented research focuses on solving a theory-related problem encountered in the theory development in a particular scientific area and on theory developing and theory testing as problem-solving methods. Practice-oriented research aims at providing knowledge and information that can contribute to a successful intervention in practice to change an existing situation as is encountered in the congregation (or context) that is studied (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Leading scholars who moved from action research and developed practice-oriented research are Verschuren, Andriessen, Hermans and Schoeman (Verschuren, 2009b). Hermans, and then Schoeman joining him, unambiguously introduced practice-oriented research into practical theology and hence the argument to propose practice-orientated as a research methodology within multicultural congregational contexts (Hermans, 2014b; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

The remarks of Andriessen and Verschuren, respectively, need mentioning here as they depict and support reasons why a research project opts for practice-oriented research: *"Praktijkgericht onderzoek vereist competenties die te maken hebben met praktische relevantie én met methodische grondigheid."* [Practice-oriented research requires competencies related to practical relevance and methodological thoroughness] and "*Praktijkgericht onderzoek is onderzoek waarvan de vraagstelling wordt ingegeven door de beroepspraktijk en waarvan de opgedane kennis direct bij kan dragen aan die beroepspraktijk*" [Practice-oriented research is research whose research question is inspired by professional practice and whose acquired knowledge can contribute directly to that professional practice.] (Hermans, 2014a). In his farewell address in 2009 at Radboud University in Nijmegen, Verschuren outlined in detail the historical development and importance of practice-oriented research within the framework of research methodology. He states that a prerequisite for

practice-oriented research should be "*carried out by social scientists, should meet scientific-methodological criteria and procedures, and should take human practices as its object*" (Vershuren, 2009b).

Every scholar mentioned, emphasises the importance of making use of practice-oriented research that is practice-relevant and methodologically grounded in solid method. Hermans states, "*All practice-oriented research emerges from an ACTION problem or FIELD problem*". Therefore, having made a decision to start from a practice problem, a next question would be what happens to theory because theory could provide significant answers to the practice problem (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013).

As research focusing on the complexities found within multicultural congregations, it can be said that the problem does not stem from theory but from a practical congregational problem. Hence, the knowledge that is created will not only contribute to the improvement of the congregational practice, but it will also contribute to theory and could even introduce new theory or new knowledge on theory. The model of Andriessen, whereby the knowledge stream is combined with the practice stream, is viewed as a useful methodology for conducting this research. There is a coherent and deliberate combination of the knowledge stream and the practice stream in his proposed model for practice-oriented research (Andriessen, 2014; Andriessen & Butter, 2013).

Schematically this process appears as:

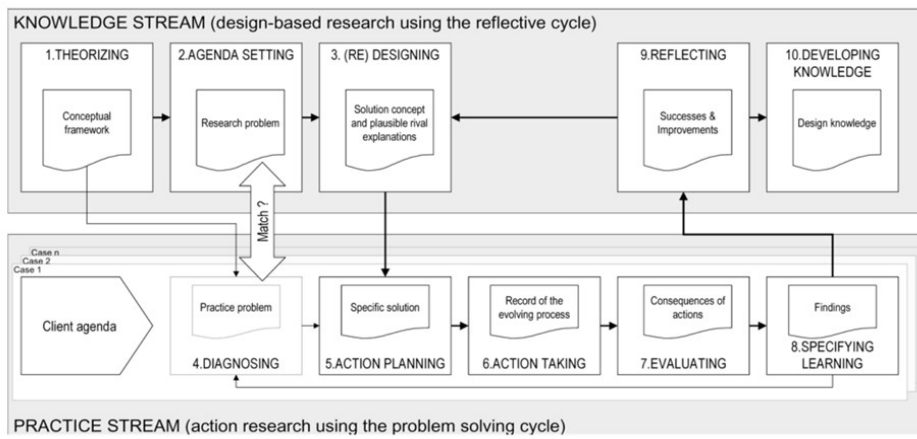

Figure 1: Model for practice-oriented research (Andriessen & Butter, 2013)

4. Practice orientated research in practice – a case study

Working within the framework of qualitative research, a research project was undertaken where a choice was made to use practice-oriented research as methodology within a multicultural congregation. As practice-orientated research derives from the practical life or *beroepspraktijk*, it was deemed an opportunity to make use of practice-orientated research to conduct the research project within an urban congregation that identified itself as a multicultural congregation.

The question that was framed for the research project was: *How can attentiveness to a spatial ecclesiology enhance inclusivity within a multicultural urban congregation?* The premise was that the knowledge gained from the research project will be applied to enhance the practical life of an urban faith community in a changing environment. It was also viewed that the research process itself would serve as an intervention that can be evaluated in terms of how this intervention(s) can improve the practices of members of the congregation.

4.1 Understand the concepts

4.1.1 The Actual (A) and the Desired (D)

Moving into the research identifying the action problem is crucial. Action problems express the discrepancy between the actual (A) and the desired (D) situation where we (based on the existing knowledge) have *no knowledge* how to solve this discrepancy.

The A-component may be identified by asking questions about the current position of the congregation, what are the challenges that the congregation is facing, how does the problem manifest itself and how is it experienced or communicated in the congregation? The answers to these questions would contribute towards the description and understanding of the action problem (Mostert & Schoeman, 2020).

The description does not create an action problem. There needs to be an awareness that 'it should not be like this'. If not, there is no action problem and people and organisations simply continue to do what they are doing.

The D-component is the prescriptive or normative dimension of the action problem. It does not refer to questions of true or not true, but of what is desirable in terms of what we should be able to do. The D-component is formulated in action terms of a dream for the future, what practices would shape the future of the congregations or what, from a missional perspective, would be the calling of the congregation? (Hermans & Schoeman 2015a:30). In this instance, the NG Hugenoot (the congregation selected for the research) congregation, and her leadership expressed a need to be more inclusive, thus framing the action problem.

4.1.2 The action problem

In the category of an action problem, a next question would be whether the intention is to contribute to an improvement of the problem or whether it is to design something new, leaving the researcher with a choice between making use of an intervention cycle or a design cycle. Because the object of research is a congregation already in existence and with established practices, the choice was made to use an intervention cycle that will fit into the methodology of practice-oriented research to move from a practice problem through research back to contributing to better practices within the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

4.1.3 An intervention cycle

Using the improvement of practices within an intervention cycle as a base for studying the congregation, it was anticipated that it will contribute to the observation and tracking of shifts made in practice in the congregation, as well as to facilitate an intervention to discover a desired outcome and suggestions for improving practices to be more inclusive. An intervention cycle, as proposed by various scholars, with the aim of diagnosing, intervention and improving practices within the practice stream, will be as follows:

1. Problem analysis
2. Diagnosis
3. Conditions for a solution

4. Intervention plan
5. Implementation
6. Evaluation

(Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a).

4.1.4 The research framework in schematics

Verschuren and Doorewaard describe a research framework as a schematic representation of the research objective that includes the appropriate steps that need to be taken to achieve it (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). A schematic outline of the research was drawn up plotting the process and methodology and then argued how and why certain steps should be taken and what kind of knowledge will be generated in doing so.

4.2 Designing the research praxis (From theory to praxis/ A practical application)

A next step would be to outline how practice-oriented research works and how it would be used within the process of a specific research project. The researcher in the project being used as a case study for this chapter, made a choice for a dialectic approach where the combination of knowledge and practice, based on sound practice-oriented research methodology, forms the foundation of the research framework. The decision therefore to utilise, with adaptations, the practice-oriented model of Andriessen (see Figure 1), is based on that it best suits the relational interface between theory and practice employed by this research.

Next, a schematic framework that depicts the methodological practice-oriented process for this research was drawn up to track the reasoning of a knowledge stream and practice stream as core and it incorporated the positioning of each step of the intervention cycle. The purpose of such a frame is described by Verschuren and Doorewaard as "a schematic representation of the most important research phases" (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). Schematically it can be presented as follows:

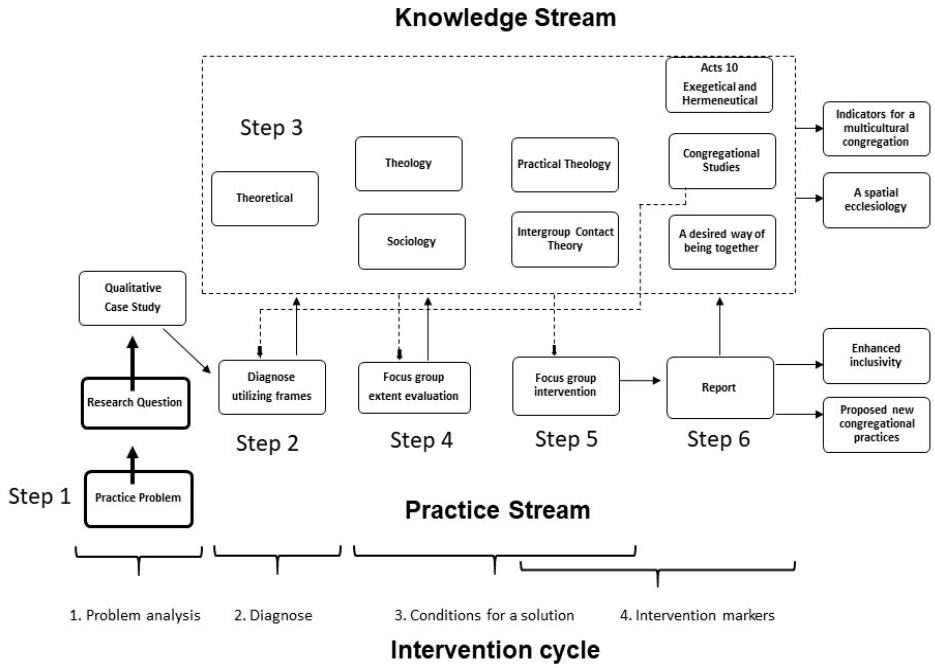

Figure 2: Schematic representation of the most important research phases ((Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013)

In this framework or flowchart, the methodology as well as the method that was followed, is outlined. It also indicates how the researcher understands the process as relationally working with and between the knowledge stream and the practice stream to conduct the research, not only to arrive at findings and reporting the results, but also to contribute by adding knowledge to the practice and knowledge stream. Following the lines that connect each section, the reader will be able to track flow and relation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Solid line arrows indicate a movement from the practice stream to the knowledge stream and dotted arrows indicate movement from the knowledge stream to the practice stream. The choice for an intervention cycle is incorporated into the framework, at the bottom, and will be discussed in detail in step 6 to explain why certain choices were made.

4.3 Plotting the steps within the process

With the schematic research process frame in place, clarification is needed to show how this frame will be used by the research process. The research then formulated a step-by-step process that consists of six steps. The researcher opted to follow the process as proposed by Verschuren & Doorewaard, and Schoeman & Hermans with adaptations relating to this research (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013).

Hermans and Schoeman propose in their article, *Practice-Oriented Research in Service of Designing Interventions,* an eight-step process for conducting practice-oriented research (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). The six-step process in the research differs slightly from the Hermans and Schoeman proposal in that some of the steps have been merged because of the method of approximation followed by the research. All actions are included, just in different steps. It was performed as follows:

Table 1: Six-step process

Hermans & Schoeman	This research
Introduction Step 7: Formulate research questions Step 8: Definition of concepts	Step 1: Problem analysis, problem owners and roles
Step 1: How are the roles of researcher, researched and problem owner distributed?	
Step 2: What is the action problem?	Step 2: Framing the practice problem, describing the actual or the A-component
Step 3: Is the action problem an improvement or design problem?	Step 3: Conditions for improvement: Finding appropriate knowledge to describe the normative or the D-component for an improvement
Step 4: What is the knowledge problem connected to the action problem?	

Hermans & Schoeman	This research
Step 5: What is the contribution of the research for practice (professionals and/or congregations)?	Step 4: Conditions for improvement: Extent evaluation to track shifts
	Step 5: Conditions for improvement: A first intervention
Step 6: Decide which stage(s) of the intervention or design cycle will be the focus of the research	Step 6: A step in a different direction

Step 1: The problem and the owners

The point of departure, Step 1, ensues from professional practice with a practice problem and in this case, from a multicultural congregation in urban Bloemfontein, in South Africa. Included in Step 1 were arguments presented regarding the purpose that logically led to the formulation of the research question, concepts mapping and hence the choice for practice-oriented research. To complete Step 1, clarity had to be obtained about the identity of the problem owners, and the role and interest of the researcher (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Vrystaat, 2013).

> *Defining the problem owners*
>
> *Hermans and Schoeman define a problem owner as "a person (for example, a minister), groups of persons (for example, a policy body within congregations), or an organisation as the 'stakeholder' of an action problem". It is not only a matter of owning the problem, but it is also a matter of taking responsibility for the action in question. Concerning the problem itself, they remark that it may not always be viewed as something negative; it can also be viewed as a positive challenge or as an area where there is need of growth for the person or the group* (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015b).

Deduced from the above-mentioned criteria, the problem owners in the research project were identified as the leadership of the NG Hugenoot congregation. In the Dutch Reformed Church - the denomination that they are part of - the leadership of the congregation is vested in a church council or *Kerkraad*. This council is elected from the members of the congregation

and usually consists of male and female members. According to the church order or *kerkorde*, the polity document regulating the order and defining the decision-making authority within congregations, the council forms the leadership and determines the policies of the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk Vrystaat, 2013: Artikel 15, 16, 17).

To solve the problem regarding the practices of the congregation, the leadership needs to be viewed as the owners of the problem as they not only determine the policies but also influence the entire congregation. In this case, it would be the *Kerkraad* of the Afrikaans group. This was part of the practice problem in the congregation, the absence of a joint legal decision entity where decision-making resides in all the groups present in the congregation and not merely in one group. The Afrikaans-speaking *Kerkraad* were then identified as a constituted legal entity and were therefore considered the problem owners.

Cognisance needs to be taken of the conditions set out by Hermans and Schoeman regarding the problem and the problem owners as they write, "*A description in itself does not create an action problem. There needs to be an awareness that 'it should not be like this'. If not, there is no action problem and people and organisations simply continue to do what they are doing*" (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). For this reason, the researcher opted to select the focus group of the Afrikaans-speaking group, from the leadership serving on the church council. This was the body that will receive the report and who can then implement the recommendations of the research that will hopefully lead to a practice or action change in the congregation. It is this leadership structure that should realise that the current action should not be like this.

The role of the researcher

Dreyer provides a detailed description and role clarification of the researcher and the researched in qualitative studies. In an article called "The Researcher: Engaged Participant or Detached Observer?", he explains the historical understanding of the subjectivity/objectivity issue that is vested in a detached researcher to give scientific validity to the research. In dealing with the criticism from social science scholars

> *a researcher as a detached observer is able to stand outside the research situation and is able to have control over subjectivities including his/her own, Dreyer refers to the work of Habermas who explained that only through entering into the lifeworld of the researched as an insider, could the researcher hope to gain understanding of meaning embodied in actions, institutions, products of labour, words, networks or cooperation, or documents. Pursuing the argument of Habermas, Dreyer proposes a hermeneutical dialectic between belonging and distantiation, which is at the heart of the methodological dialectic between the insider/engaged participant perspective and the outsider/detached observer perspective* (Dreyer, 1998).

Moving to the role of the researcher within the framework of practice-oriented research, Hermans (2014b) and Hermans and Schoeman (2015a) propose three options or models that can be followed:

- Expert model: The researcher has the role of an expert with much knowledge on the subject, related to the problem and problem solution. Roles of the researcher and the researched are separated or detached.
- Knowledge-generating model: The focus of the research is on the production of new knowledge and insight that can be applied to the solution of the problem as soon as it becomes available from the research; hence, the research is mainly data-driven and the roles of the researcher and researched are clearly distinguished and detached.
- Problem-solving model: The focus of the research is on an attempt to come to a partial or complete solution of the problem that occurred in a specific situation or place of practice. The roles of the researcher and the researched blur in the problem-solving model of practice-oriented research. There is participation between the researcher and researched which leads to a practice where the solutions to solve the problem are generated from within this relationship (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Hermans, 2014b).

In the Dutch Reformed Church (the denomination that the studied congregation is part of), the pastor forms part of the council according to the church order and the practices of the congregation. Therefore, consideration was given to the role of the researcher in this study, since he forms part of the leadership structure of the congregation. At the time when

research was undertaken, the researcher was not only the longest-serving pastor in the congregation, but he was also considered the senior pastor of the church. In the governance policy of the congregation, there is no reference to such a position - it is merely based on practice and not a formal position of authority; hence, it was difficult to separate the researcher from the research and therefore some clarification is required in this respect.

Because the researcher in this research finds himself immersed in the lifeworld of the researched, (the pastors of the congregation) it could imply that their voices (interpretations) might be muted by the researcher's interpretations. On the other hand, the researcher understands that from the outsider or detached observer perspective, the aim is to eliminate or to reduce the ideological interpretations of the researched and of the researcher themself and take a critical objective stance on the data that is gathered from the research.

Bearing this in mind, a choice was made to follow the problem-solving research model. Although the researcher is part the congregation and finds himself in the leadership structure of the congregation, his role is blurred. Yet, it nevertheless creates an opportunity for participation between the researcher and the researched to generate solutions that will help to solve problems in the congregation. He is co-owner of the research problem. To maintain research validity, the researcher was duly aware that he would have to follow Dreyer's dialectic hermeneutical methodology of belonging and distantiation with fitting rigour and personal integrity. This was a crucial presupposition of the project.

Step 2: Framing the practice the problem

Step 2 necessitates moving into the practice stream by determining the practice problem. The research question will be answered either via the practice stream through empirical work or via the theory stream by means of theoretical arguments or existing theory that sheds light on the research problem.

The changes brought about by the events of 1994 in South Africa, namely a new constitutional democracy and the dismantling of the apartheid laws, stimulated a new spatial composition of urban environments. Established white Afrikaans-speaking congregations of previously exclusive white

neighbourhoods found themselves more and more in a different spatial and demographic context.

As black, Indian and coloured people migrated[2] into the traditionally white neighbourhoods, traditional white congregations started to experience a decline in numbers and accompanying that, financial difficulties. It was further observed that many of these congregations still consisted of exclusively white Afrikaans-speaking members and little effort was being made to expand or include non-white people into these congregations. It was also observed that the rhetoric of conflict, fear and prejudice amongst the members of these congregations is very real in their conversations.

References to what can be considered expressions of fear and prejudice, and which are prevalent amongst white people, include phrases such as: "our neighbourhood is black now"; "you cannot put your children in that school anymore because it is now a black school"; "crime has increased because these black people live here now"; "we have to fight for our language because they (black people) have taken everything away from us and Afrikaans is all that we have left"; and "we have given them (black people) everything, we are not giving them our church" etc.

However, this is not a "white people only" phenomenon or problem. It is observed that within the current public discourse and especially from political platforms, similar rhetoric is expressed by black people that could be considered expressions of fear, anger and prejudice amongst black people; for example: "the white people stole our land, we need to take it back"; "racist attack by white teacher on a black child"; "a vote for the opposition is vote for white oppression"; "we will take land by force"; "white people are racist"; and "white monopoly capital" etc. Add to this the occasional media reports of race-related incidents in schools and rural farming communities, the sporadic outbursts of xenophobic attacks in townships on foreigners

2 By using the term "migrate" rather than "move", the researcher wants to emphasise that apartheid created vastly different worlds within the same country. White urban suburbia are vastly different from black, urban townships in South Africa. One of the derivative meanings of "migrate" is a spontaneous movement of people to new areas to find better working and living conditions. The growing movement from outlying townships to the white urban suburbs is a migration and not merely the moving of home or the changing of address.

and a visible rise in support for political parties and groupings that advocate populist anti-white sentiments, and one has a context that makes it difficult and problematic to form inclusive communities.

What then makes the NG Hugenoot congregation different from many other Dutch Reformed churches in the changing South African environment of traditionally white urban suburbia? It is observed that this congregation does not follow the traditional pattern of being white Afrikaans-speaking congregants only. Although this congregation is situated in a traditionally white urban neighbourhood, the people who form part of this congregation are white Afrikaans-speaking, black Sotho-speaking and Asian (Chinese) Mandarin-speaking.

Worship services are conducted in the same building at different time slots in different languages. Not all pastoral staff members are white and several events such as bazaars, certain worship services, meetings and communal meals reflect some sort of inclusivity, which makes Hugenoot different from other congregations of the same denomination within the same geographical area.[3] Why is this so and, is what is happening there, creating a more inclusive congregation amid a divided context? What can this congregation themselves do to be more inclusive?

Leading the research into determining what the actual problem (A-component) is, the following question was asked: Could an evaluation of the historical background contribute towards the understanding of segregated urban congregations?

3 This assumption is made using the statistics of the Presbytery where the NG Hugenoot is situated. The minutes of the 2016 Presbytery meeting were used, which include reported member statistics and types of worship services that are held by the respective member congregations. The Presbytery consists of five congregations situated in a traditionally white urban area of Bloemfontein. Three of them have a membership exceeding 1,000 members and two of them a membership of between 250 and 500 members. It is only the NG Hugenoot (membership exceeding 1,000) that reflects members of different ethnic groups with official services and congregational activities for the different ethnic groups. Two congregations report sporadic services for Sotho people, but no evidence could be found that these people are being considered formal members of the church or that the activities reflect something of inclusivity or togetherness.

This question was then answered by using four frames (taken from congregational studies) as empirical methodology to describe the facts surrounding the congregation. The empirical description was performed with the reminder of Hermans and Schoeman that action or practice problems need to be concrete, observable, enacted by human agents or communities in time and space (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Here, theory from the knowledge stream was needed to facilitate this empirical process. Within the field of congregational studies, the utility of frames is used as valid empirical methodology to describe what the historical actuality of the congregation entails.

In the discourse of Hermans and Schoeman, step 2 consists not only of determining the A-component, but also of asking the normative questions or the D-component (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). This research moved to separate the two components into two different steps. Step 3 was then introduced to incorporate the normative, as this step moves into the knowledge stream for gaining knowledge on how to solve the practice problem presented by step 2.

Step 3: Conditions for improvement: Finding appropriate knowledge

Moving towards determining the D-component or the desired framework, the research would need to ask questions that will determine what conditions would be appropriate for improvement of the practice problem. Within the framework of Osmer (2008), and as portrayed by other scholars in the field, this would be considered the normative task of the research (See also Hermans, 2015; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Vershuren, 2009b; Vershuren, 2009a; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). The normative in this research was linked to the question "What is the normative framework for an inclusive multicultural congregation?"

Step 3 takes the research into the knowledge stream. In this research project, it identifies and describes the two streams of theory that are applicable to provide knowledge for this research. In considering the practice problem arguments and evidence, it was evident that two disciplines will provide the underlying knowledge base for the research, namely theology and sociology.

Theology is the main field of study as this research was conducted in the faculty of theology and specifically in the field of practical theology.

Positioning the research within practical theology was a next theoretical step and the researcher chose to work with congregational studies as a sub-discipline with practical theology.

A second theoretical framework providing theory that illuminates the actual configuration and provides direction towards the desired configuration, is the field of Sociology and particularly Intergroup Contact Theory. Segregation is a practice that is deeply ingrained in South African society. The intention of the onslaught of apartheid was to limit the contact between the various ethnic groups and partition physical space in South Africa. To achieve this, spatial segregation played a major part in the strategy to limit the contact between ethnic groups. The effect of the spatial and social segregation is to be found in poor inter-group relations, prejudice amongst groups, fear of the other, and in some cases, outright conflict.

One of the most prominent, interactive approaches towards the reduction of prejudice is the contact hypothesis or contact theory that specifies conditions under which inter-group contact should take place for achieving improved and more inclusive relations. Here the theory from the knowledge stream can provide insight into the practice problem to bring about a change in practice.

Step 4: Conditions for improvement: Extent evaluation to track shifts

This research also worked with the question whether a shift towards inclusivity can be measured in multicultural congregations? Having opted for an intervention cycle, the practice stream determines that conditions for a solution should be outlined. In the case of this research, it entailed that measurement or tracking be performed to determine whether shifts in spatial sharing is possible and will the sharing of space within the congregation aid the congregation to become more inclusive?

Step 4 involved the use of a focus groups from the congregation. An appropriate selection process was followed in the selecting and the conducting of the focus groups. Working with a pre-set list of questions derived from the theoretical knowledge gained in Step 3, the focus groups provided data that helped to determine the participants' views on the theory. By using deductive coding and Atlas.ti (CAQDAS), codes were derived

from the theory and the researcher was able to plot the degree of movement of each indicator on an extent evaluation scale.

Step 5: Conditions for improvement: A first combined intervention

A prerequisite for desired future practices is described by Hermans and Schoeman as actions that need to be *"concrete, observable and enacted by human beings or communities in time and space*" (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). It is through concrete and observable actions or practices that this congregation must realise or portray itself as the body of Christ that is different from the status quo where it finds itself in time and space.

Having determined the actual (A-component) and the desired (D-component) situation, and understanding the discrepancy that exists, a condition of improvement would be a further intervention. An intervention would facilitate an awareness that the actual situation is not what it should be, thus emphasising the action problem (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2013). If a different understanding of spatial existence and a different embodiment of that existence is needed within a divided urban South African context, the question remains whether a shift towards inclusivity could be measured in a multicultural congregation. In answering this, a next question was asked, namely, how a strategy of attentiveness would enhance inclusivity in a congregation?

Step 5 in this research project remained in the practice stream and utilised a combined focus group (combining the same participants of the three individual groups into a combined group) to determine whether the group agrees with the findings of the individual groups, thus confirming or rejecting any shifts. The findings from the first group meetings were shared with the combined group to determine the accuracy and validity of the first meetings.

During this focus group meeting the group was asked probing questions towards formulating their own understanding of God's desire for the congregation. This was achieved with a reading of Acts 10:1-43 and two questions to guide the discussion, namely (1), "How did the meeting of Peter and Cornelius change their way of thinking of each other?"; and (2), "What practical suggestions do you have as leaders that will help Hugenoot to become more of what God's desire is for the congregation?"

Step 6: Explorative steps in a different direction

With reference to the theological orientation, Schoeman and Hermans, in their article, describe the core question for practical theology as a discipline as: "*How* [does it] *contribute to the future of the Christian religion in the historical, socio-cultural and societal conditions in which people live?"* (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). The aim of the research is to contribute towards a workable solution of the practice problem, thus improving socio-cultural and societal conditions within the congregation (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a). Regarding the NG Hugenoot congregation, the question would be how a strategy of attentiveness would enhance inclusivity in a congregation?

Part of the intervention was to investigate the practices in the congregation itself before markers for next or future interventions could be plotted. This entailed reviewing the actual practices, adopting better practices, and proposing strategies that would help the congregation to enhance inclusivity and work towards reaching the desired outcome of a more inclusive congregation.

Working with practice-oriented research, the contributions of the research need to be practice-driven and help to improve professional practice. Hermans and Schoeman (2015a) and Hermans (2015) offer a guideline in terms of products, processes, programmes and policies for improving the socio-cultural and societal conditions of congregations.

For the NG Hugenoot, it would entail the establishing of more communal space in the congregation (Yin, 2011). Aspects that could contribute to the expansion of communal space include the following: more joint worship services with shared liturgies, a weekly intercultural assembly in English in an open time slot, communal youth camps inclusive of all groups and conducted bilingually, joint activities such as poverty relief or outreach to poor communities, and a multicultural Bible study group conducted in English.

Regarding processes, it can include joint decision-making and alignment of preach topics to focus on the desired goals of what the congregation should be. Programmes that are envisaged could include amongst others, courses on cultural sensitivity, diversity and evaluating diversity training, conflict

resolution and religious tolerance, retreat programmes for discovering spiritual gifts and the sharing of gifts. Policies could include items such as a code of conduct or a credo, which all groups in the congregation could identify with; the manner of communication, e.g. multilingual; how the church office interacts with and supports the various groups, how the pastors facilitate the diversity within the congregation; and how the different ministry groups interact and work together.

The researcher cannot prescribe these programmes or policies by imposing them on the congregation, as this would jeopardise the validity of the research. Any processes, programmes and policies that might emerge from the findings of the research, were considered no more than suggestions to the congregation for follow-up and implementation by the congregation.

4.4 A critical reflection on the process

The question was whether this research should attempt to present the full complement of the intervention cycle or whether it should constitute only a specific part or parts thereof. As Schoeman and Nel, supported by Yin, rightly remarks, the answer depends on two aspects. What is the contribution to the action problem and what are the constraints in terms of time and resources? (Yin, 2003; Schoeman & Nel, 2015).

The answer to the first question was threefold, namely, to describe and analyse the conditions that gave rise to the problem faced by the congregation and then, with the available data, to detect what the actual situation or A-component is regarding the congregation. Second, following theological and social theory, to utilise descriptive frames by working with the congregation in focus groups to determine whether shifts are possible, and whether it will contribute towards a better understanding of the action problem. Thirdly, to contribute towards the conditions for solving the action problem and gain a fresh understanding of God's desire that will help to nudge the congregation towards the ideal or desired mode of togetherness (or the D-component). To achieve this, the reading of Acts 10 can contribute towards intervention markers that need to be devised by the congregation via the focus group and then be implemented by them as the leaders of the congregation.

This sufficed the intention of the research to be involved in the intervention cycle up to the intervention planning stage. Thus, the intervention cycle was determined to be as follows:

1. Problem analysis
2. Diagnosis
3. Conditions for a solution
4. Intervention plan

Reduced to the essentials, the reasons for not taking the study past the planning stages of the intervention cycle relate to scope, time and resource constraints. The compass of the study was just too wide to include the implementation and evaluation stages since the researcher was conducting the study as part of a PhD programme and where submission periods were predetermined and the researcher was compelled to adhere to those time frames. The researcher therefore opted to use the available time and resources to conduct a thorough study of the intervention planning stage of the intervention cycle research.

It would be advisable though that the implementing and evaluation stages should be performed within the scope of the research project. In this case, the researcher left the congregation soon after the results and an intervention plan were presented to the problem owners. In later follow-ups, it transpired that nothing was undertaken by the congregation after the research was conducted. The data provided possibilities for the congregation to achieve God's desire. During the data collection process in the focus groups, the participants acknowledged where they were and agreed that they should proceed towards God's desire. A guided implementation process as part of the research project with the researcher could have produced a different outcome for this congregation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the outlined research framework provides a structured approach to conducting practice-oriented research within a multicultural congregation context, aiming to address real-world problems and contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical improvements. The research

process, spanning six steps, involves identifying the problem, framing the practice problem, determining conditions for improvement, evaluating the extent of improvement, implementing interventions, and reflecting critically on the process.

The research methodology emphasises the integration of theory and practice, utilising theological and sociological frameworks to gain insights into creating a more inclusive congregation. By adopting a practice-oriented approach, researchers can engage with practitioners to address action problems within existing contexts and facilitate interventions aimed at improving practices.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the limitations of the intervention cycle, particularly in terms of time, scope, and resources. While the research may provide valuable insights and recommendations, the effectiveness of interventions may be limited without active involvement in the implementation and evaluation stages.

Future research projects should consider including all stages of the intervention cycle within their scope, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of intervention effectiveness and ongoing collaboration between researchers and practitioners. With guided implementation and ongoing support, congregations can be better equipped to enact meaningful changes and move towards achieving desired outcomes related to inclusivity and community building.

In multicultural congregations, the practices of the congregations, the cultural origins of the members and inter-group relations are crucial elements that determine how such a congregation will function. Practice-orientated research as a methodology to study multicultural congregations, does allow the researcher to produce critical empirical data to determine where such a congregation is (the A-component) and what the desired (D-component) is. It allows the research process to act as an intervention process.

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Chapter 7

Congregational research in a context of poverty: Methodological markers for conducting Practice Orientated Research

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1. Introduction

Do we conduct empirical research in a context of poverty, different than in an affluent context? Does the identity of a congregation in a context of poverty differ from congregations in other contexts? Does the nature of relationships between congregants and leadership in different congregations, variate? Accepting the answer to these questions as a positive "yes", we need to determine what is different, how it implicates relationships, and how should we go about conducting research in a context of poverty. Methodological markers are necessary to align the research outcomes to be relevant and useful to the professional practice in a congregation.

This chapter will utilise the results of a case study[1] on the involvement of congregational leaders in communities where a high incidence of poverty prevails, to determine essential methodological markers for research in a context of poverty. The discussion that follows will attend to four fields of interest:

1. The background and motivation for the empirical research
2. The research
3. How does the relationship between congregants and leaders implicate the research results?
4. The relevancy of methodological markers for research in a context of poverty.

2. The background and motivation for the empirical case study

Before attending to the methodological markers used in the empirical research, a background discussion about the case study enlightens the choice for methodology.

Reformed Initiative for Community Development (RICD), a registered non-governmental organisation institutionalised through congregational participation of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa (URCSA), experienced a problem in their professional practice. The RICD provides services and funding to enable congregational involvement and participation in development practices focused on the enhancement of the well-being of people - especially children. They (RICD) expressed the need for data about the possible reasons why congregations do not engage with them. One of their prime goals is to provide funding and expertise for early childhood development, and it seemed that no one was interested. Are there obstacles, and if so - what can they do to enhance the engagement with congregations in a context where high levels of poverty exist.

The RICD, as the problem owner,[2] looking for answers to the question on why congregations do not utilise their services. RICD needed data that will

1 The case study was part of a research study for a DTh submission.

2 The problem owner refers to the professional institution, who experiences a problem, challenges, or difficulties in their professional practice. For more details, see the discussion on Practice Orientated Research in 3.1

enable them to make positive shifts towards improving their professional practice in serving the congregations.

The RICD, as problem owner, operates in the Free State province of South Africa. The Free State is known for high levels of poverty - especially in rural areas. The Free State is mainly rural, with Bloemfontein the biggest city in the province. According to the Community Survey of 2016 (Stats SA, 2016), 41% of people older than 15 years in the Free State, do not take part in economic activities. Only 36.2% of people older than 15 years were employed. In 2016, 14% of people lived in informal dwellings in the Free State. At the time of the research study in 2020, Trading Economics[3] indicated that the living wage of a person in January 2020 in South Africa, was R6,570. At that time in Bloemfontein, the NGO (non-governmental organisation), Towers of Hope, served ± 290 (off-street and in shelters) of the 500 to 600 homeless people in the city centre every day. Because of the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, these numbers have recently risen significantly. Other main challenges amongst people living in a context of poverty are health, education, and access to public transport.

In the Free State, there are numerous registered non-profit organisations assisting people in need, whether it is about disability, mental health, childcare, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), food programmes, education, or old age. The RICD represents 381 congregations, of which the DRC is 154, the DRCA is 135, and URCSA, 92. The different denominations have their own diaconal services that attend to congregants with the same needs that the NGOs attend to. In these congregations are 240 ordained pastors. In the URCSA and DRCA, evangelists, elders and deacons are also responsible for the leadership and preaching in their congregations. The leadership are the main drivers and motivators in the work of the diaconal services in their congregations. Because the RICD is connected to the same values as the NGOs and the diaconal services of the congregations, it seemed appropriate to investigate the role of leadership in the problem they (the RICD) experienced. To assist the RICD in their professional practice, empirical research was needed. Empirical research

3 https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/living-wage-individual

provides new knowledge that can inform new practices. Because of the nature of the context of poverty, the empirical study needed to be amongst congregations in a context where a high incidence of poverty prevails. In that way, it was possible to determine if and how the relationships and consequent practices of both leaders and congregants influence the need for assistance from the RICD.

3. The research

The problem owner was seeking new knowledge towards understanding the lack of interest and involvement in the opportunities that they provide for assisting the development of congregants, especially children, in a professional practice in congregations. The professional practice of the RICD in conjunction with congregations, seems problematic. They wanted to know how they can enhance their professional practice to help their stakeholders. There was only one sure way to acquire the data: ask the stakeholders (the congregations). The leaders and congregants know best what they want and what they need. The voice of the possible beneficiaries needs to be heard. Without the voice of the people, no new knowledge can be generated to improve the professional practice of the RICD. If the data provides positive possibilities, it will contribute to the enhancement and relevancy of the professional practice of the RICD. The empirical research needs to focus on data that can provide positive new knowledge attaining through consultation and interviews with all people involved in the practice. Empirical research was needed. The problem and the quest for answers on what is happening in the practise, led to the choice for practice-orientated research (POR).

3.1 The methodology of practice-orientated research (POR)

There are many theories and biblical markers to evaluate the nature of a professional problem, but the researcher opted, above literature studies, for the use of practice-orientated research (POR) as a method of empirical research. Although statistics provide good demographical background, quantitative research (only) would not guide the researcher to provide relevant solutions to the problem of the RICD. Qualitative empirical research, informed by literature (existing knowledge), could provide new

knowledge to inform advice to the problem owner on possible solutions to their problem.

POR is used as a suitable empirical approach to gain new knowledge to understand the lack of engagement that a problem owner (the RICD) encounters in the professional practice. Key elements of POR involve the voice of the people involved in the practice; an evaluation on the performance of practises of the parties involved; and positive suggestions to enhance the professional practice. POR happens at ground level – there where theory and biblical guidance impacts the practise.

Theologians[4] developed a model of POR: "Research in which the research goal is coming from the professional practice and in which the knowledge created in the research contributes directly to this professional practice" (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a:26). In POR, the problem owner identifies a professional practice problem. This probes investigation for new knowledge that can enlighten (give reasons for and why) the problem in the practice. The new knowledge, when applied, may initiate change or intervention.

Miller-McLemore (2011) argues for the creation of a new *space* in which an ongoing circular process and action can function towards a *new understanding*. In POR, the focus lies in the fact that the new knowledge comes from a process and intervention in the professional practice. The process of gaining new knowledge happens in two streams: evaluating and interpreting existing knowledge, and research towards finding new knowledge. The explicit voices ground the positive results from the realities of the practises. The positive results that the POR provides need to be workable, practical, doable, beneficial, and relevant to both the questioned practice and the problem owner.

During the search for new knowledge, people start to evaluate the existing knowledge (for example, during an interview). When this happens, it acts as an intervention in the practice. The interviewee, in trying to answer the questions with their own experience and existing knowledge, starts to think. This is an intervention in the life of that person. By asking interview questions according to the four tasks of Osmer (2008), new understanding

4 Hermans and Schoeman (2015b) built on the work of Vershuren as in Verschuren, P. & Doorewaard, H. (1999) *Designing a research project*.

emerges. Therefore, the practice does not necessarily need separate interventions to create and implement new knowledge.

In the *Descriptive-Empirical Task,* as described by Osmer (2008:31-78), we determine *what* is going on. Through a process of priestly listening, individuals receive intensive attention, and in POR - their actions, to define what is really happening. Empirical descriptions are conceptualised from qualitative interviews during empirical research. Because practice-orientated research is concerned about attitudes, culture, emotions, history, and the so-called facts behind the obvious, a qualitative approach seems more appropriate to use in POR. This does not rule out the contribution of quantitative data. Both quantitative and qualitative data contribute to the description of what is happening - not only in the practice, but also in the context.

The *Interpretive Task* (see Osmer, 2008:79-128) is all about asking *Why are things happening*? In POR, the focus will be the reason why certain practices happen in certain ways. It can therefore be argued that in the case of practice-orientated research, the answers gained, while compiling the two tasks of description and interpretation are combined in one action of collecting existing knowledge. The latter emphasises the importance of combining a qualitative and quantitative approach when collecting data to enlighten the research problem.

The *Normative Task* (see Osmer, 2008:129-173) requires prophetic discernment to ask the "theological" question: *What should be going on*? Although POR is concerned about the practises or actions, it needs to look at "informing" knowledge that directs the actions in the practice. Collecting existing knowledge or knowledge about the expected practice is an integral part of POR. In this case, a biblical understanding of the ecclesiastic approach in congregations will enlighten answers towards the normative question about the professional practice.

The *Pragmatic Task* (see Osmer, 2008:175-218) asks the question of *how* things should be performed. In the case of POR, this part of the hermeneutical process will consist of elements of planning, suggestions for an intervention, actual interventions, or generating professional practice models – all based on the outcome of the totality of the research.

When these different tasks are used in POR, there are no definite borders between them. Interpretation happens all the time. Moreover, when the interviews are conducted with an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach,[5] the whole research process is an intervention. In an AI approach, questions are formulated to obtain answers with positive outcomes. In the research process, the new knowledge gained during interviews, both by researcher and researched, acts as interventions. The interviewed person is guided in new positive thinking (through an AI approach), and the researcher gains knowledge from the practice which can be used to compile new knowledge for the professional practice (which may be used in interventions).

To ensure that POR practices provide relevant and contextual contributions to the professional practice, it needs to answer the question of how? To ensure effective POR, Hermans and Schoeman (2015a:28-42)[6] suggest the following steps:

1. Identify the problem owner, the researcher, the researched, and the model.
2. Describe the action problem.
3. Establish the nature of the problem: action, knowledge, an improvement, or a design?
4. Determine the connection between the knowledge problem and the action problem.
5. Determine what the contribution to the practice would be.
6. Decide which stage(s) of the intervention or design cycle will be the focus of the research.
7. Formulate the research questions.
8. Define the concepts.
9. After all is done, utilise the new knowledge in the professional practice.

It is important to note that step 9 is only possible after all data collection was performed. The new data informs, through analysis, the new knowledge to inform an amendment, probe an intervention, or enlighten the problem in the professional practice.

5 Appreciative Inquiry approach: Refer to 3.4

6 The same argument is followed by Niemandt et al., 2018

3.2 Qualitative approach

Central to the above-mentioned steps is a qualitative approach. In qualitative research, theoretical issues drive the formulation of a research question, which in turn drives the collection and analysis of data. Findings then feed back into the relevant theory (Bryman, 2012:383).

Qualitative research increases the understanding of human behaviour. It contributes, through involving the feelings, attitudes, emotions, and behavioural practices, to the extraction of data from the lives of people in a specific situation.

Qualitative research involves people. When people become involved through participatory research, the researched forms part of the formation of new solutions and new knowledge.[7] Where participation (or as De Roest, 2020, calls it: collaboration) of the researched is included in the research, the intervention in the professional practice might succeed with less resistance to change. Change happens where the researcher and the problem owner collectively generate solutions and insights.

To utilise the new knowledge, improve the professional practice by using the scientific knowledge gained through empirical practice orientated research with a qualitative approach and the inclusion of the voices of all participants.

3.3 Participation

It is important for people to participate (collaborate) in the sustainability of their own well-being. If, in this case, the RICD wants to improve or assist in their (people living in a context of poverty) well-being, the people individually or corporately need to identify and agree to that. In this case study, three groups were involved: the RICD, congregational leaders, and the congregants. The RICD wanted information on the why, or why not, of the involvement of congregational leaders, as well as the lack of interest from congregation (members). The leadership plays an important role in the well-being of the congregants. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to involve both leaders and congregants: consult leaders on their involvement in the

7 De Roest (2020) uses "collaboration" in the same sense as "participation" and "involvement" are used in the descriptions in this article.

congregation, and congregants on their expectations from the leaders of the congregation concerning their well-being.

Congregational leadership needs to understand what is happening in the local community and congregation. Leaders who understand the "poverty" phenomenon and the challenges that poverty imposes on a congregation, will be able to minister more effectively in their congregations and context.

Because of the strive for a better life for their people, economic and social development agencies or projects in South Africa, as part of the United Nations, need to subscribe to the eight United Nations Millennium Goals[8] articulated in 2000 (UN, 2018). The goals imply high levels of development of communities and individuals. Poverty and development are interrelated, poverty being one of the main reasons for the stimulus to development, and development one of the main solutions to relieve and eradicate poverty. All too often, poor people experience little benefit from the development projects.

In the early 1990s, development practitioners started to realise that they needed the assistance of community members in their projects of development. If the development practitioners do not consult the intended beneficiaries, the development project may fail. Development agencies, stakeholders and facilitators started to realise that "*development is about people*" (Davids et al., 2009:106). When beneficiaries of the development project are involved and are active participants in the process of decision-making and implementation, they grow in capability to make their own decisions and thus be empowered and developed. Participation (collaboration) of the people, in any project or process of development, needs to be valued. Beukes (1992:3) agrees with Korten's formulation:

> Development is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to reproduce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.

People must be involved in their own aspirations to accomplish their own development goals.

8 http;//www.developmentgoals.org

When people participate in the enhancement of their own well-being (through development), they will attend to their own needs, dreams, and expectations. Martinussen (1997:298) argues:

> Basic needs include, first, the individual human being's and the families' need for food, shelter, clothes and other necessities of daily life; secondly, access to public services…thirdly, access to participate in, and exert influence on, decision making both in the local community and in national politics.

Where these needs, and their emotional and psychological needs, their need for belonging, etc., are not fulfilled, people experience a certain level of deprivation. The ten basic needs that Max-Neef (1991:20-40) listed,[9] act as a framework for congregational leaders to attend to people living in a context of poverty.

Where people participate in their own development, naming their needs, and experience that they can contribute to a positive outcome of enhanced circumstances in a context of poverty, a positive attitude and trustworthiness towards their leadership is evident.

Research results show that where a congregational leader attends to these needs and includes people through trustworthy relationships, their well-being improve. In following the suggestion that "(d)iverse professional interests, … are promoted by doing research in and with a community of practice that discusses and shares specific norms and values and that shares a common spirituality", De Roest argues that "collaboration with practitioners *always* enhances the utility of practical theology" (2020:180). When congregants living in a shared context of poverty are involved in their own development and growth; when they experience that they themselves contributed to the improvement of their lives, they experience that they

9 Max-Neef. List of basic needs (in no particular order): · Subsistence (means of supporting life / the bare necessities of life)81 · Protection (safeguard / prevent injury) · Affection (emotion / goodwill / love) · Understanding (having insight / power of abstract thought) · Participation (share in) · Idleness/ leisure · Creation (investing with title /a production of the human intelligence, especially the imagination) · Identity (individuality / personality /absolute sameness) · Freedom (personal liberty / independence / power of self-determination / exemption from) · Added later on: Transcendence (beyond the grasp of human experience, reason, description, belief, etc.)

have value; their self-image improves, and these experiences and realisations create and enhance feelings of well-being.

The discussion above illustrates the importance of the participation of people in their own development. The voice of the people reflects the real facts of the reality that informs the new knowledge. John Reader constituted in 2008: "Being practice-oriented, practical theology is committed to engaging with real problems, often from a grass-roots perspective." The voice of the researched, the congregants on grass-roots level, are an indispensable marker of "participation" (collaboration) in the qualitative search for new knowledge to inform a relevant professional practice.

3.4 Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Because of the search for positive contributions during interviews, an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was chosen to conduct interviews. To gather information that could enlighten the difficulties and uncertainties raised by the RICD, the researcher opted for an AI research approach. An AI approach to data collection enhances the outcome of positive inspirational data from participants in a context of poverty.

> AI engages members of an organisation in their own research - inquiry into the most life-giving forces in their organisation, the root causes of their success, and discovery of their positive core (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010:12).
>
> Asking positive outcome questions enables people to discover their strengths, assets, and best practices, making them realise that a life of well-being is possible.
>
> …by discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organszation, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future (Branson, 2004:23).

Asking questions and listening to answers with a positive intent creates images with a collective theme or topic that inspire people. These images are on different levels: biblical, social, individual, educational, and even medical. The different images work together to create hope. Although

reciprocal trust is vital in the AI approach, Branson (2004:24) lists a few principles that AI builds on:

- In every organisation, some things work well.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Asking questions influences the group.
- People have more confidence in the journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
- If we carry parts of the past into the future, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language that we use creates our reality.
- Organisations are heliotropic [lean towards the source of energy].
- Outcomes should be useful.
- All steps are collaborative.
- Where these building blocks, which include trust, exist in relationships in a congregation, people will have a sense of well-being. Respondents and leaders will talk about the interviews. They will share their positive experiences. A collective sense of well-being and faith strengthens, which is essential in their circumstances of a high incidence of poverty.

The methodology of AI "is re-shaping the way organisations all over the world are thinking about change" (Whitney et al., 2005:xi). AI is "built on theories that move a congregation away from deficit-based models toward the images and forces that are most life giving" (Branson, 2004:39). AI opens the knowledge and positive contribution of individuals in a congregation. The AI approach builds on the theories of new science, social construction, and the power of images. These images are rooted in "our own narratives, the biblical and traditional narratives, and the "what ifs" of our conversations" (Branson, 2004:40), giving us courage and direction in our sanctified imaginations.

The five steps that Branson (2004:28) suggests when conducting research interviews with an AI approach, adds to the construction of the interview questions. He suggests as follows:

1. Choose the positive as the focus of inquiry.
2. Inquire into stories of life-giving forces.
3. Locate themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry.
4. Create shared images for a preferred future.
5. Find innovative ways to create that future.

It can be argued that these steps all have a positive intent, and therefore add positive value in the research process with an AI approach. The contribution that Cooperrider et al. (2008:105-228) made to the AI approach, was the development of the 4-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry. It starts by choosing a topic that needs inquiry. Then a circular process starts: first with the leaders, then groups of people to individuals and eventually back again to the leaders. This engagement takes place in four phases of the 4-D Cycle: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny. During the discovery phase, people identify and appreciate the best of their current situation: the identification of the life-giving sources and the appreciation thereof. They perform this by sharing stories about exceptional accomplishments, look at positive possibilities, and the capital available to them. Thereafter, they start dreaming. The dream phase is all about 'what might be': envisioning and expanding people's views of what might be. By looking at change and history, a new dream emerges for the future. This brings them to the design phase: the phase where they identify what the ideal situation should be or look like. By enlightening themselves through consultation with other disciplines (futures studies for instance), they create a new design for the congregation to operate upon. The 'design team' suggests some provocative proposals to help to move the congregation to positive actions relevant to their new environment. The destiny phase does not mean that the process has ended.

> The Destiny phase delivers on the new images of the future and is sustained by nurturing a collective sense of purpose and movement. It

> is a time of continuous learning, adjustment and improvisation (like a jazz group) – all in the service of shared ideals (Cooperrider et al., 2008:46).

The 4-D Cycle of Cooperrider et al. (2008), in conjunction with the five focuses of Branson, directed the design of questions in the interviews in the case study. The AI approach, with special focus on the first three steps of Branson, contributed to positive knowledge about the professional practice. Because the focus of the case study was research towards a positive intervention to better the lives of people living in poverty, the approach of AI enhanced the design of the interviews and resulted in data with a positive voice.

3.5 The process

The process of research in the case study started off with a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted with the main purpose of refining the interview questions. After completion of the reformulation of the interview questions, sampling was conducted. Interviews were undertaken, transcribed, and analysed to produce new knowledge from the interpretation of the analysed data.

3.5.1 Sampling

To determine what is really happening, data (existing knowledge) was collected from three communities living in poverty in and around Bloemfontein, SA, where three different reformed congregations are operational. The diversity of white, coloured, and black people was included, because different racial groups' affiliation determines the mainstream of the three congregations. Inclusion in a homogenous group in the local congregation determined the choice of respondents from the poverty contexts in their community.

Because of the existing knowledge available to the RICD, the researcher requested the RICD to nominate the congregations suitable for the case study. The RICD identified three congregations where positive impacts are visible, one from each denomination in their partnership in the *Mangaung* Metropolitan Municipality.

To compare needs and practices, the researcher purposely chose to hear the voices from members and leadership. Interviews were conducted with the pastor, a deacon, an elder, and five members from each congregation. The members needed to be part of a congregational group or activity in the congregation. Because of the participation approach, it was necessary to hear the voices of people from the context of poverty. Therefore, the researcher requested the pastors to identify five congregants who come from a household with a collective maximum income of R7,000[10] per month. These congregational members were adult men and women of any age.

The main purpose of the sampling was to be able to hear the voices of congregational members and leaders from the context of poverty.

3.5.2 Interviews

The purposeful sampling made it possible to hear voices from the congregants (the participants in the research study) living in a context of poverty.

Five respondents (men and women) from each of the three congregations were interviewed. The other group of interviews was with three congregational leaders from the three different congregations. In each congregation, the pastor was one of the leadership respondents.

The conceptualisations of poverty, the ecclesiology of a congregation, and congregational leadership served as the building blocks to inform the scheduled questions for the structured interviews. The interview questions aimed to produce information about the experiences of congregational members, and the professional practices of (in particular) pastors in the congregations.

All questions were asked with the intention of a positive response.[11] The answers to the questions reflected the people's voice. Questions were open-ended. Respondents were encouraged to voice more than the questions required.

10 The monthly living wage in 2020 was R6,570. R7,000 monthly income for a household seemed a fair comparison regarding the poverty-line at that stage.

11 Refer to the discussion on the literature by Branson and others in 2.4

All participant voices were recorded, coded, and analysed to provide new knowledge about the relationships between congregants and leadership in congregations where a high incidence of poverty prevails.

All ethical procedures were met before any interviews were conducted.

3.5.3 Analysis

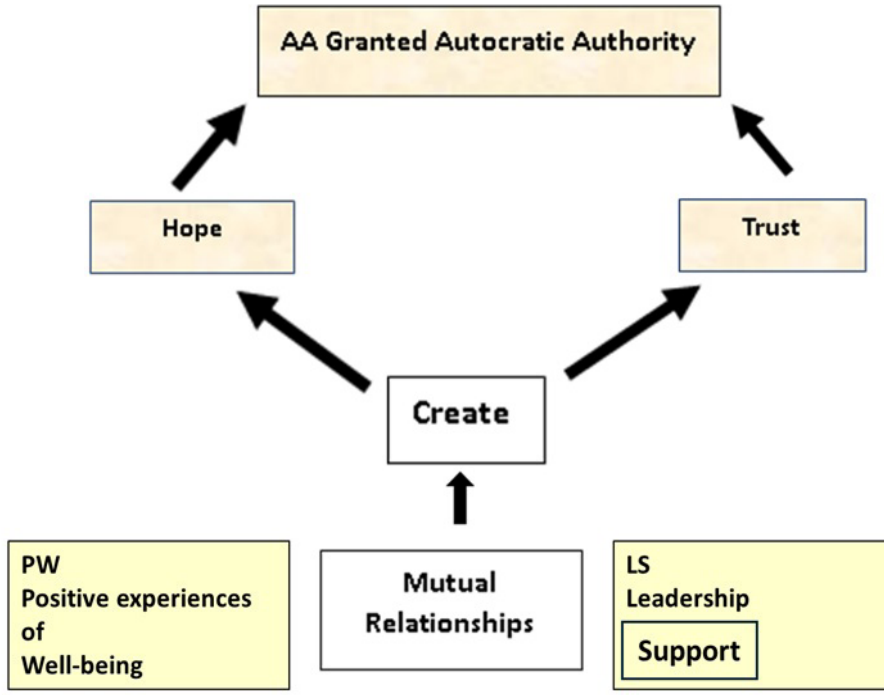
After concluding the interviews, the data was transcribed and imported into Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is a computerised analysis program that enables researchers to code, analyse and compile data scientifically.[12]

A process of inductive coding, guided by knowledge from the literature, followed. The literature served to inform the conceptualisations of the codes in the coding process. The codes were grouped together through a process of comparing, thinking, sorting, and organising. The code families (as different codes grouped together), reflect collective answers to the research questions, as well as specific themes emerging from the data. Throughout the analyses process, the AI approach was applied.

3.5.4 Results

The professional practice of the leadership in the congregations in a context of poverty, revealed leadership practices of autocratic authority. Pastors can ask almost anything from their congregants, and they would commit to it. Congregants in a context of poverty are so committed to their congregation and the leadership because they experience these relationships positively. These positive experiences of well-being create hope and trust towards the leadership in such a distinct matter, that the congregants who experience these feelings, grant their pastors autocratic authority in their lives.

12 For more information on Atlas.ti, refer to Friese in the Bibliography.



Mutual relationships between leaders and congregants, characterised by experiences of well-being, created through hope and trust, granted autocratic authority to leaders.

The contribution (collaboration) of the congregants provided evidence for these findings. In POR, the positive involvement and participation of the researched are of great value. The data from the researched case study showed the importance of the voices of the people living in a context of poverty - revealing their concerns and relationships with the congregation, and especially their pastors. Several voices were heard:

> "We need to have trust in the church and the congregation… The congregation show us where we must go. Church attendance will grow due to love in the family-house"; "They [pastors] must treat the people nicely"; "With respect and honesty"; The pastor "Create and enhance feelings of happiness among small children. Let the small ones feel better and happy".

Because the congregational members show their support for the congregation and trust the leadership, they expect the pastors to constantly evaluate the congregational practices and guide them accordingly. They grant the pastor the authority to guide them, and therefore *expect support* in their lives.

> "Then we look at the problems that really matter"; "To sometimes ask the people how they are doing"; "Check on the circumstances at specific households"; "They must support and help the people"; "Help them and talk to them"; "The congregation…they do a lot…for all children…keep them away from the wrong things".

The people voice their *witness about the support* they receive:

> "I chose this church, because it provides the best spiritual lives for our youth and children"; "They guide you on the right path"; "The fact that the pastor gave us some work to do…that makes me excited… now I know that I do not need to worry"; "They assist with food. They give you some work to do"; "The pastor gave all of us a little job. That excited me…then I know I do not need to worry".

The voices of the congregants are proof of the mutual relationship between pastor and congregation – *a relationship characterised by integrity, trust, and reliability*:

> "The pastor is a good person"; "the leadership will seek advice from the pastor"; "Pastor solves the problem"; "You can phone him any time at night. You can phone him early in the morning. He is always available"; "The pastor will not only promise a food parcel…he will keep his promise".

The participating voices are signs of experiences of (PW) well-being, characterised by trust and hope. Because these people have positive experiences in their relationship with the pastors, they grant their (LS) pastors (AA) autocratic authority in their lives.[13]

13 See graphic illustration above

3.5.4 The relationship between congregants and leaders

David Bosch published several works[14] on the focus and intention that a congregation [by means of their leaders] should attend to in the community where they reside. Ammerman (1997, 2005) and Ammerman et al. (1998) also made meaningful contributions to the role of leaders in congregations. Because of their position, faith leadership in a congregation is mainly responsible to lead, model, and practise a missional ecclesiology in a congregation. Therefore we expect that the focus and intention of these leaders are derived, firstly, from the authority gained from the congregants. Secondly, Scripture[15] substantiates the God-given authority for leaders to lead (Carroll, 2011; Stevens & Collins, 1993) in their congregations. Thirdly, congregational leaders in the communities where they reside, are generally authorised by the community to lead the people in the specific community where the congregation resides.

Rising poverty, rising unemployment, corruption, and a lack of proper services to the poor and helpless are the true challenges of society in the South African context. Poor people look towards their leaders, especially their faith leaders, to alleviate their situation. Congregational leaders need to pay attention to the needs and active relational participation of people (living in poverty) towards their own development and methods of poverty alleviation. It is much more than poverty alleviation - it is an ongoing improvement of the well-being of the people. Poor people have specific expectations of their congregational leaders. Research results show that the two most appreciated and needed qualities of congregational leaders are integrity and trustworthiness (Maritz, 2021:168-194). Where congregational leaders attend to the needs of people (even the needs that the people do not comprehensively realise) with integrity, people trust them to act with autocratic authority over their lives. Leaders need to take care on how they use their influence on people: they must act with integrity, and always include people through participation.

14 1980. Witness to the world. The Christian mission in theological perspective. 2011. Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. 20th Anniversary ed.

15 Scripture examples: Titus 2:1; 2 Tim 1:6-11; Ephesians 4: 11-16; Matt 28: 18-20

4. Methodological markers

Research in the field of Practical Theology needs to serve the professional practices of theologians, deepen the understanding of ecclesiastic work in congregations, evaluate programmes, develop a better understanding of the context, and enhance possible interdisciplinary influence, value, and cooperation. To achieve this type of contribution we need information from different fields of study. It seems inevitable to conduct ***empirical research,*** from a POR perspective, to inform us about the actual situation where theology is practised at grass roots level. we agree with Ward (2017:155) when he states:

> (e)mpirical research brings something unique and special to the theological table: it enables theologians to investigate present-day practice and experience. An empirical project might take different forms, including exploring the self, exploring the community, testing theological assertions, generating new theological perspectives, or correcting problems.

The empirical research leads to new knowledge that is utilised to advise the professional practices of theologians. Again, if you do not (as previously discussed) involve ***participation***,

> Good ministry is never merely a matter of solving problems; it is a mystery to be ventured and explored. But we can journey into this mystery with knowledge and skills that help us find our way as we move along (Osmer, 2008:3).

Unfortunately, the hermeneutical process does not always provide answers. Therefore, if we want to know what is really happening and why it is happening in the action or practise, we need to investigate the practises and actions on what is really happening. If these investigations do not lead to an improvement of the practise, the new knowledge is worthless. The research needs to involve the professional practise, hence, need to be ***practice-orientated***.

Use an approach of ***Appreciative Inquiry*** to enhance the contribution of new knowledge. Appreciative Inquiry enhances the knowledge and positive contribution of research participants.

> Appreciative Inquiry engages members of an organization in their own research – inquiry into the most life-giving forces in their organization,

> the root causes of their success, and discovery of their positive core. (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010:12).
>
> …by discovering the best and most valuable narratives and qualities of an organization, participants can construct a new way that has the most important links to the past and the most hopeful images of the future (Branson, 2004:23)

Conducting qualitative research in a context of poverty by implementing the methodology of practice-orientated research, and using the markers of Participation and Appreciative Inquiry, gives rise to new knowledge which opens the possibility to enhance the professional practice of congregational leaders in a context of poverty.

During this case study it became clear that the voice of the participants expressed their needs and mutual appreciation towards pastors who were creating well-being in their lives while living in a context of poverty. Where people participate in the development of creating positive outcomes, through contributions of positive voices and active participation, they experience that their voice adds knowledge that will enhance mutual circumstances. Practice-Orientated Research opens the opportunity for the researched (professional practice and people involved) to contribute and collaborate towards the creation of new knowledge to improve the professional practice of, in this study, the problem owner.

Because of participation of the researched, the empirical data that was gathered from the interviews, is reliable. In this case, the reliability through participation, adds value to the ethical practices in the research study.

5. Conclusion

Do the methodological markers for congregational research differ in contexts? POR contributes to the improvement of professional practices and opens the door for various approaches and research methods to be used in different congregations. It seems though, that the inclusion, the participation, and the active listening to the voices of the researched is essential. Add to that a search for positive contributions by using an appreciative inquiry approach, and it will result in positive contributions to practice-orientated and applicable new data in congregations.

When the methodological markers of Participation, Appreciative Inquiry, and the empirical research method of practice-orientated research are used, research outcomes will be relevant and useful to the professional practice in any congregation, whether in poverty-stricken communities or not, as well as in other instances where problem owners seek new data and advice.

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Chapter 8

Children's ministry in a township with reference to early childhood development

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1. Introduction

Some of Mangaung's local congregations are involved in early childhood development (ECD) programmes of one form or another. These congregations are part of other stakeholders and role players in this sector. These include the government through the Department of Social Development, the local Municipality, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and private individuals. The Department of Education (DOE) (2001) defines ECD as "the process by which children from birth to nine years of age grow and thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially." Atmore et al. (2012:122) regard ECD as a foundation for future learning and therefore believe that quality ECD programmes are critical in terms of preparing children for adulthood by providing them with opportunities that they need to succeed in all areas

of life. In the early childhood development space, local congregations may offer a unique service that distinguishes them from other role players and stakeholders in this sphere.

Unlike other organisations and social institutions, congregations have a unique mission calling to be the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13-14). Therefore, they should approach child care and ECD from a different perspective from other entities. In support of this view, Myers (1999:127) says that unlike other organisations, congregations can make several critical contributions to the transformational development agenda in society. In everything the church undertakes, its mission should always be to advance the kingdom of God and bring light and taste in darkness and insipidity and this would include the formation and development of children.

Concerning ECD, townships in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality are swamped by a myriad of socio-economic challenges that manifest themselves in the form of inadequate access to healthcare, education, social services and nutrition, amongst others (Atmore et al., 2012:122) and for obvious reasons, these challenges have a significant effect on the well-being and development of young children. Young children depend on either parents or guardians for almost everything. If those are destitute, unemployed, or abuse alcohol or substances, the children suffer as a result. The focus of ECD is to address these challenges from an early age. If this is not undertaken in the children's lives, it has the potential to stifle their development in almost all areas of their lives and development as adults.

A missional framework, as a theoretical framework, directs the calling and ministry of the church and congregations. Saayman (2010:5) states that the church should be missional in its approach to conducting its ministry. According to Bosch (1991:413), the mission of the church is two-pronged, one spiritual and the other social. Given this, the church should preach the gospel while becoming involved in practical ways to solve the community's social ills. In this regard, Pillay (2015:4) advises the church to first "understand the context, analyze the situation, gather facts, and do its research - sometimes teaming up with others in this endeavour." The church and congregations should adopt the same approach and framework in their involvement in ECD while maintaining its uniqueness. According to Hermans and Schoeman (2015:9), practical theology starts with

practical concerns and contributes to practice. This research is a result of a practical theological concern regarding the role that congregations may play through their children's ministry and ECD centres in a township context. The concern is whether these congregations were running them in terms of *Missio Dei,* thereby making a unique contribution that no other organisation was making? The research also reflected on the ECD practices undertaken by congregations in a township context and ways to identify best practices for them.

Various role players in ECD approach it from different perspectives. Dominant perspectives in this regard include the following: scientific-biological perspective, social-economic, human rights or political and community development perspectives, amongst others (Woodhead, 2006:4; Shonkoff & Richmond, 2009:1-3; Biersteker, 2012:52; Van der Westhuizen et al., 2019:2). Different ECD providers, whether aware or not, align themselves with one or more of the perspectives mentioned above.

This chapter focuses on the following question: What contribution can a congregation make in early childhood development? The research sought to establish the unique contribution that congregations are making in the community through early childhood development.

2. Research methodology

The research employed a qualitative research methodology; was inductive in its approach and data was collected from three congregations in Mangaung Township that were purposively selected (Babie & Mouton, 2001:309). The selected congregations are located in different geographical areas around Mangaung Township that had similar social and economic challenges. Two congregations ran formal and registered ECDs while the other one had an informal and unregistered ECD. The formal ECDs had proper infrastructure, and registered programmes, and most of their personnel had received ECD training. On the contrary, the informal ECD lacked proper infrastructure and trained personnel. The ECD was not registered with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with pastors of the three selected congregations. Data was collected using structured open-ended interview questions. The purpose of open-ended questions was to allow the pastors to provide elaborate answers. The pastors' responses were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. Themes were highlighted and inductively coded, and thereafter grouped (De Vos et al., 2011:308). The grouped codes were referred to as categories.

The categories were allocated names linking them to the main research question. The categories were named programmes or projects, role of congregation and unique contribution. Programmes or projects referred to the type of ECD. For example, pre-school, crèche and day-care centre. The role of a congregation implies the perceived mission of the congregations in the communities it is based in. Unique contribution referred to a specific act or actions that a congregation was performing in the community through the ECD centre that it believed set it apart as a Christian entity compared to other organisation(s) that render similar services. The coding and network categories were made using the Atlas.Ti software program.

3. Findings and reflections

This section focuses on findings from the analysis of the interviews with the three pastors[1] of the township congregations. Three themes were identified to reflect upon: the programmes or projects that the congregations have, the role that they play in the communities concerning ECD, and thirdly, the unique contribution that they are making in the communities through ECD.

3.1 Programmes and projects

The three congregations all ran crèches. Congregation 1 ran a programme called PEPE Network. According to pastor 1, "The idea of the PEPE network is to help churches reach out to the community through the children especially disadvantaged kids and we have this crèche it is not necessarily a normal crèche it is a centre whereby we get kids from

1 For confidentiality, the pastors were referred to as Pastors 1, 2 and 3 for the first, second and third congregation respectively.

communities and then we reach out to the parents through these kids." The pastor indicated that the crèche trains the children to be better people within the communities and provides them with two meals a day while charging them a minimal fee. He furthermore said the purpose of the crèche was two-pronged. It was to assist children from families who could not afford expensive fees to reach the community with the gospel, using children who attended the ECD centre.

According to Pastor 2, congregation 2 had two programmes, namely, Sunday school and a crèche. Sunday school targeted primary school children aged 6 to 13 years of age. Its purpose was to teach its members' children the congregation's dogma. On the other hand, the crèche targeted all the children aged 0 to 5 years of age from the community, not considering their social background and religious affiliation.

Pastor 3, on the other hand, indicated that they had a crèche which targeted children aged 2 to 5 years. According to the pastor, the purpose of the crèche was to educate the community's children in an attempt to contribute towards community development. It intended to help children from families of unemployed parents with a cheaper and safer environment. Figure 1 depicts the ECD programmes that the congregations had.

In conclusion, the programmes for the three congregations involved crèches and a Sunday school. These were used to (1) Train the children to be better people within the communities and alleviate hunger by feeding the children, (2) Provide all children from poor families access to cheaper early childhood education in a safer environment, and (3) Reach the communities with the gospel using children who attend their ECD centres. The Sunday school targeted primary school children of the congregation's members to teach them the congregation's doctrine.

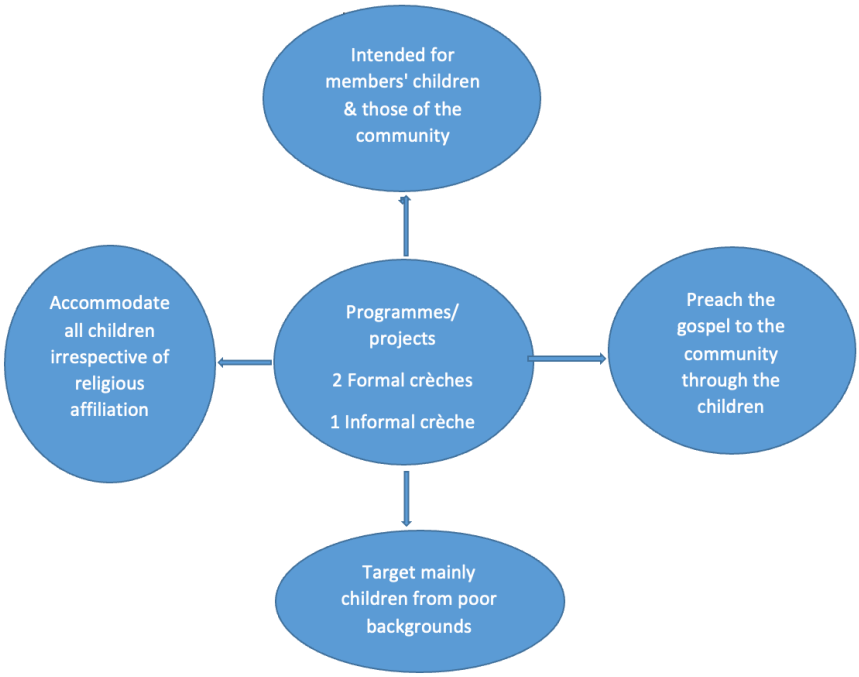

Figure 1: Programmes or projects of the congregations

3.2 The role of the congregation in the community

Pastor 1 regarded the role of his congregation's ECD in the community as offering children an education that encouraged better social and spiritual development. He said, "Our vision is to promote and prepare them (children) for primary schools and (that) they grow with those values of Christianity or the Bible as we are more Bible-based in training them as well, but we do integrate the normal training of reading, naming animals and all those things." According to Pastor 1, the congregation's role in the community through its ECD was to socially uplift its children by offering them education and grounding the children spiritually in Christian values.

According to Pastor 2, the church's role through ECD in the community was to build children morally, spiritually and otherwise. The pastor believed that their ECD should teach children morality. He said, "As the church, we take the church and their (children) families as the small church." The church expected that first, members would bring their children to the congregations' crèche for holistic development; that is, morally, spiritually and otherwise, and second, the children and their families would embody the church's teachings and thus become a "small church".

Regarding the role of the congregation through its ECD, pastor 3 believed that it was to ensure that children attending their ECD grew healthily and spiritually formed because if this is not performed early on in their lives, their morals would be negatively affected later on in their lives when they were grown up. Pastor 3: "We sort of try to consider the question of nutrition which is very important especially in our poverty-stricken areas so we would expect each member of the congregation and the community at large to send their kids to the crèche." The pastor is of the view that if children's faith is not built from an early stage, this tends to have a negative impact concerning their morals. They tend to have poor moral judgement later in life. The congregation, therefore, see its role as either forming the children's faith or influencing their religious beliefs early on in life.

Figure 2 explains, in summary, the role of congregations through ECD.

In conclusion, the three pastors regarded the role of their congregations through their respective ECDs as to: first, offer education that encourages better social and spiritual development and inculcate Christian values; second, contribute to poverty alleviation and help children experience better (quality) growth and form their faith; and third, build children holistically (morally, spiritually and otherwise).

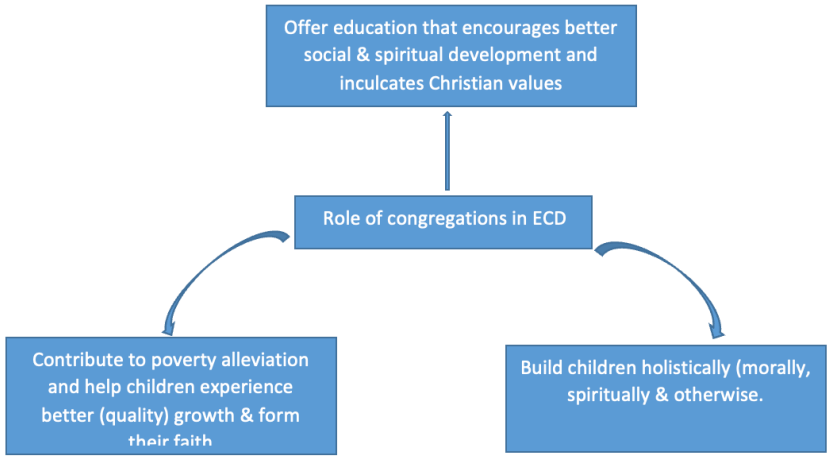

Figure 2: The role of congregations through ECD

3.3 Unique contribution made by the congregations

The first congregation believed that they were making a unique contribution to ECD in five ways; namely, charging minimal fees, alleviating poverty by providing children with meals, training the teacher and giving her a stipend, teaching children Christian values, and building relationships with the children's parents which enables them to preach the gospel to them.

Regarding charging minimal fees, Pastor 1 said, "Most of these kids honestly speaking cannot afford to go to our 'normal' pre-schools whereby we find a 'normal' pre-school charges R1,200.00 per child (per month), so in this one, they can pay as little as R100.00 and the church subsidises towards the well-being like the cleanliness of the yard to the cleanliness of the place where the kids are developed." Indeed, the ECD centre was engaging with the community to ensure that it educates children at its own cost. If it was for profit, it would not survive.

Concerning poverty alleviation, the pastor said that the ECD provided children with breakfast and lunch whenever they attended classes. Providing meals to children living in areas such as this plays a critical role in their lives and development. The ECD centre is situated in an area characterised by

many RDP houses and shacks, and a significant number of its residents are either grant recipients or are self-employed. The pastor emphasised the importance of providing children with two meals a day and said, "There is one thing that I can say, food is one of the things we try to provide, two meals for them, breakfast and lunch of which we know that the R100.00 which they pay is very little." Providing children two meals a day over and above the other benefits that they were receiving, while charging them R100.00 per month went a long way concerning poverty alleviation because the children only needed to eat one meal per day instead of three at home during the days that they attended the ECD. In areas where they live, not many families can provide their children with three meals a day.

The teacher who works at the ECD is said to be a volunteer; however, according to the pastor, the ECD undertook to train and pay her a stipend. The ECD did this, even though they were not making a profit from the fees that they were charging. Through these gestures, the ECD contributed to community development. Paying the teacher a stipend and training her has a multiplier effect in the sense that the teacher would become motivated to perform her job, and with the training she would have acquired it would enable her to provide quality education to the children and even make her employable.

Another unique contribution that the ECD was making related to teaching the children Christian values. Unlike other ECDs not aligned with congregations, the pastor claimed that they made sure that their ECD incorporated Christian values in their curriculum. The pastor said that the other part of the job of the teacher was to advance the kingdom of God. Regarding building relationships with parents, the teacher was required to identify one or two children whom the pastor would visit at their homes. When the pastor arrived at their home, he would ask their parents what difference they might have noticed in terms of the behaviour or conduct of their children since they started attending the ECD. The pastor said that most parents would say, "The child has learned to pray, learned to bother them (us) that before we eat or sleep we are supposed to pray even when we wake up we are supposed to pray." In a nutshell, the congregation used the ECD to reach out to the community with the gospel.

Pastor 2 claimed that their congregation's ECD was making a unique contribution in three areas; namely, charging lower fees, hiring people even from other congregations and teaching children morality through which they believed that they were contributing towards community development in reducing crime in the community.

Concerning charging lower fees the pastor indicated that in comparison to other ECDs in their area, they were charging lower fees. He attributed this to the fact that they were not servicing any mortgage on their buildings. They had therefore decided to pass on the advantage to the community through charging lower fees. When it came to employing teachers, they employed any qualified person irrespective of their denominational affiliation. Through this act, they were putting into practice the commandment of loving a neighbour as oneself. Concerning teaching children morality the pastor in his own words said, "This part of teaching morals we think we are sort of participating immensely to the community development by teaching morality." He further said, "If we fail to teach a person when he/she is at an early stage (of his/her life) it would be difficult for us to contribute to control crime around our area and in the world at large." The pastor believed that this was critically important as it helped to shape children's character and mould them into responsible community members.

The third congregation, through its pastor, claimed to be making a unique contribution in three ways. First, they accepted all children from the community irrespective of their religious affiliation; second, by developing the community through educating its children; and third, by teaching children morality.

Pastor 3 said that they intended to develop children's faith from an early age regardless of their religious background, as this contributes to community development. He further said that they believed that when they invested in education the community would have a better generation in the future. On the contrary, if children were neglected, this would contribute to problems such as high unemployment rate, poverty, drug and/or alcohol abuse, diseases and crime, amongst others, in the future. In his own words, he said, "If the children are not built from an early stage with their faith and so on, it tends to temper with their morals as they grow up." The congregation

took it upon themselves to be proactive by assisting in moulding the future generations by teaching them what is right and wrong now rather than waiting until the children are involved in criminal conduct only to come then and try to rehabilitate them.

Figure 3 depicts the contribution made by the congregations through their ECDs.

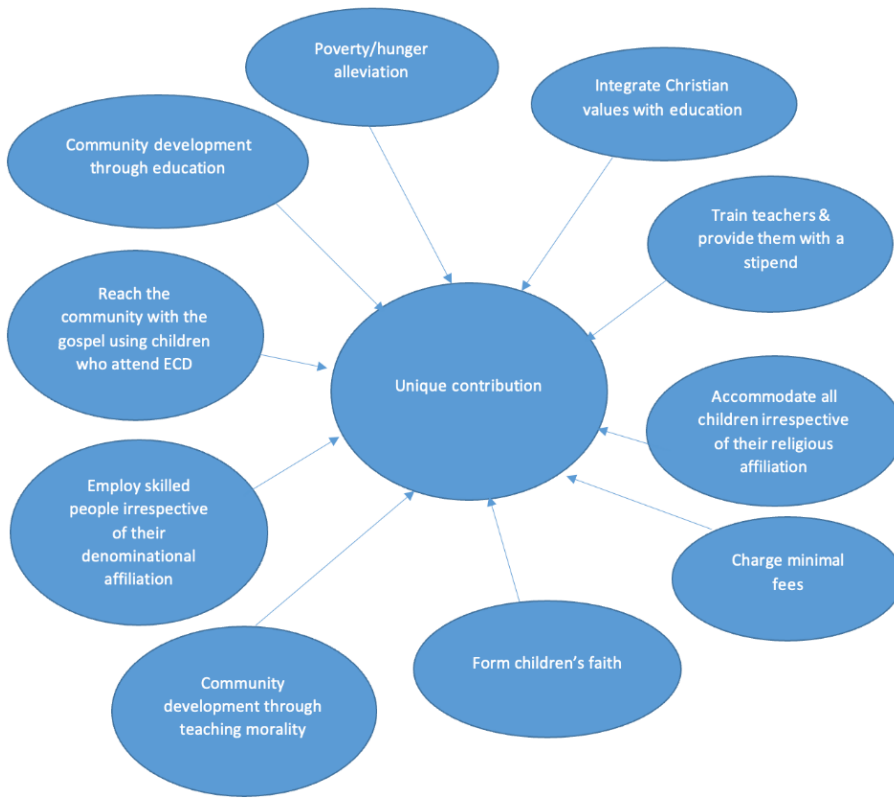

Figure 3: Unique contribution made by congregations through ECDs

In conclusion, the ECDs of the three congregations were making unique contributions in their communities, albeit in their own but complementary ways. Congregation 1 charged the children R100.00 per month, while the congregation subsidised other expenses such as paying the teacher a stipend and training her, and it also provided children with two meals per day. The

pastor further indicated that they evangelised the community using the children who attended their ECD centre. Congregation 2, on the other hand, charged lower fees, hired people even from other congregations and taught children morality through which they believed that they contributed to crime reduction in the community. Lastly, congregation 3 contributed uniquely by accepting all children from the community irrespective of their religious affiliation, developing the community through educating its children, and teaching children morality.

In a nutshell, the congregations made a unique contribution to the communities through their ECDs through poverty alleviation; that is, providing children with meals and charging lower fees compared to their counterparts, and contributing to community development through job creation, educating children and teaching them morality, thereby investing towards better future generations. Furthermore, they engaged with to the community through the gospel using children to reach their parents.

4. Recommendations

Notwithstanding the contribution that congregations are making, it should be noted that according to Anderson et al. (2003:32), the purpose of ECD is to "seek to prevent or minimize the physical, cognitive, and emotional limitations of children disadvantaged by

poverty." And that ECD programmes should be comprehensively designed so that they improve the cognitive and social-emotional functioning of pre-school children. This would in turn influence the children's readiness to learn in the school environment. It is in light of these that the recommendations would be made.

While congregations are performing a good job in terms of helping the children from poor households in terms of poverty alleviation, they however need to have a way of ensuring that the poorest of the poor benefit, since there are different levels of poverty in the communities. They could achieve this by obtaining a list of indigent families in their localities and also by profiling their members to determine the neediest amongst them so that they prioritise them for their services. Congregations should consider collaborating with other like-minded organisations in tackling the issue of

poverty while still maintaining their uniqueness. In this regard, Thesnaar (2014:5) advises the church to engage other stakeholders such as social, political and economic stakeholders with the clear purpose of addressing the plight of the poor.

In the case where congregations employ members of the community in their ECDs who are not members of their congregations, they should orientate them in terms of the culture and ethos of their organisations. Congregations should also have a mission and vision for their ECDs. These should be made known and adhered to by all their employees. Furthermore, they should have an assimilation programme for the new employees so that these employees could in turn be able to pass on the organisation's culture and values to the new employees as well.

Regarding the faith formation of the children and teaching them morality, it is recommended that the congregations should primarily focus on making disciples as their goal and as secondary goal teaching them morality. Roberto (2005:11) advises congregations to be guided by this goal in pursuing faith formation that "seeks to inform, form, transform, and transform individuals, families, and the entire community." Congregations should keep focusing on their mission.

5. Lessons learnt in conducting empirical research in the township

In conducting empirical research in an African context in Mangaung Township congregations, there were several lessons learnt. These included amongst others, the formal ECD framework as described by the Department of Education vis-à-vis how the congregations either understood or implemented ECD; the different types of ECDs and their programmes or lack thereof; the infrastructural and human capital challenges experienced by the ECDs and how these have a bearing on the functioning of ECDs; lastly, how the congregations understood and interpreted their mandate in the community or the world through ECD.

The formal ECD framework does not apply to all ECDs. The Department of Social Development only registers and has proper facilities which are run by qualified personnel in formal recognised centres. The challenge in a

township context is which ECDs may be regarded as the formal ones and which ones are not? Because of a host of challenges, ECD centres to a large extent do not seem to be capable of assisting children to grow and thrive as they should according to the formal ECD framework. Guidance should be given to all ECDs and the research highlighted this need for a broader framework of understanding, than the formal official definitions.

In the township, there are different types of ECDs called by different names. For example, crèche or day-care centres. The question is what distinguishes one from the other? These different types of ECDs are owned by different people or entities who subscribe to different schools of thought. For example, psychosocial theory or faith formation theory. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the challenge is how to strike a balance between the two or more different perspectives. Moreover, as mentioned before, these ECD centres are given different names such as crèche, Grade-R schooling, and/or day-care centre. Some of these ECDs have programmes that they use to teach children while others do not have them. Even some of those that have them are outdated. Congregations may provide an efficient entry point of influence to the different ECDs.

Infrastructure and personnel are the two main challenges in many ECD centres; hence. some of ECD centres were not registered with the Department of Social Development. Some of the ECDs in the township have an acute shortage of infrastructure such as proper and adequate classrooms and play toys and facilities. They also lacked books. Coupled with that was a lack of suitably qualified personnel. The research highlighted the needs of ECDs in a township context.

The above-mentioned challenges, to a large extent, could have an impact on the methodologies that may be used in performing empirical work in the township. Some methodologies are more suited or appropriate to certain settings than others and infrastructure becomes a critical factor in that regard. For example, the use of participatory action research or ethnography vis-à-vis interviews. The factors to consider, amongst others, in determining the appropriate methods and tools would be the availability of infrastructure and other resources. The researcher therefore ought to know the study area and select appropriate methods and tools to use.

The church should be clear about its mission in the communities it is based in and in the world. The church does not have a mission of its own. However, it is called to participate in the mission of God. This will make it play a more meaningful role in the community, which is not played by any other entity, even if they are offering similar services. The three pastors, through their congregations' ECDs claimed to be contributing to community development, poverty alleviation, and morality, amongst others, albeit one who indicated that they were also engaging with the community through the gospel and have a strategy of achieving that.

The church must be intentional in engaging with the communities with the gospel. It is its primary mandate and this should not happen by chance. In performing the empirical work in the township it would appear that some of the congregations' ECDs were not clear enough regarding how they were undertaking the church's mission. More emphasis was on morality and other issues. While these were good things to do, however, they are part of the mission and therefore could also be performed by other organisations, not the church.

6. Conclusion

The study set out to determine the contribution that the congregations in the township can make through early childhood development centres. The objectives of the study were: to determine the types of ECD centres and programmes that congregations had, to determine the mission of the congregations in the community regarding ECD programmes, and to determine the unique contribution that congregations can make in the community through early childhood development. The study found that in the main, the congregations had crèches as their ECD centres. Their mission varies from offering education that encourages better social and spiritual development, and inculcating Christian values, and contributing to poverty alleviation and helping children to experience better (quality) growth and form their faith. And lastly, to build children holistically (morally, spiritually and otherwise.

Congregations were also found to be making an important unique contribution in the following areas: poverty alleviation, integrating Christian values with education, training teachers and providing them

with a stipend, accommodating all children in their centres irrespective of their religious affiliation, employing skilled teachers irrespective of their denominational affiliation, charging minimal fees, forming children's faith, contributing to community development through teaching children education and morality, and reaching the community with the gospel using children who attend their ECD centres.

Lastly, there are important lessons to be learnt when performing empirical work in the township. These relate to the implication of the definition and framework of early childhood development, types of ECDs and programmes, infrastructure and personnel challenges and the mission of the church in the community and the world. All these have a bearing on the methodologies used when performing empirical research in the township.

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Chapter 9

Engaged congregational research serving communion driven transformation of church and society[1]

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1. Introduction

The research in this volume stands in a long tradition of "*reimagining community engagement within the context of a responsive, responsible, and transformative university*" (Hart et al., 2023:224). Practical theology (PT) has "the responsibility to embrace engaged scholarship and decolonisation process that provides African people with ideas, methods, habits of the mind to critically evaluate their societies, and reconstruct their culture and consciousness for the well-being of African community" (Pali, 2024: chapter 1 this volume).

Engaged scholarship aims at scholarly engagement activities with emphasis on activities that redress past inequalities that have historically evolved in societies (*idem*: 239). Reports of the South African Reconciliation Barometer show that social inequality is still dominant in South Africa.

1 The aim of this chapter is to reflect on previous chapters from an "engaged-outsider" perspective. This is explained in more detail in the introduction to this volume.

> The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) asks how often people go without basic necessities: food, water, medicine, fuel for cooking, cash income, electricity (excluding load-shedding) and, for the first time, internet access. Consistent with national poverty data, levels of deprivation are high: a quarter (25%) of South Africans answered that they or their family members have gone without enough food to eat in the past year (several times, many times or always). Forty-four per cent (44%) have gone without a cash income (several times, many times or always) during this period. Experiences of lived poverty continue to differ significantly between South Africans of different races. Analysis of LPI data from 2023 shows that average lived poverty scores are highest among black South Africans and lowest among white South Africans (Lefko-Everett, 2023:17-18).

Community partnerships should demonstrate the following seven key features:

i. "the linking of human needs with societal problems, issues, and concerns;
ii. the direct application of knowledge to human needs, societal problems, issues, and concerns;
iii. utilisation of professional and academic expertise;
iv. the ultimate purpose of public or common good;
v. the generation of new knowledge for the target groups in the community and the discipline;
vi. a clear relationship between programme activities and HEIs (higher education institutions) mission; and
vii. a commitment to long-term engagement" (Hart et al., 2023:236)

The Mangaung research aims at scholarly engagement with congregations in an African township in view of the transformative role of congregations for the well-being of the community and to redress inequalities that have historically evolved in society. In this contribution, I will formulate some characteristics of engaged congregational research aimed at transformation of church and society.

The limits of my contribution are that I am an engaged outsider coming from the Netherlands. I am an outsider who has been part of a scholarly debate on the engagement of research to societal problems in the past twenty years. I observed a debate on what engagement implies and to which problems? Is it the transfer of any kind of knowledge from scholarly research to society? Does it prioritise dominantly economic impact and/or engagement with specific issues of inequality, societal challenges like climate change, or specific deprived communities? (De Jong et al., 2016). I conducted much research on action problems of teachers and school leaders, school communities and congregations and learned with trial and error that the focus of the research was more on theory-building and not so much serving the action problems of the practitioners. All this changed me in my understanding of practical theology and scholarly engagement with action problems with and for practitioners, leaders, communities (see Hermans, 2023, 2014; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a, 2015b). From 2010 onwards, I visited South Africa and worked with many scholars and supervised researchers in the field of practical theology. I learned from their practical engagement with societal needs, inequality, human concerns and adversity. These are the limits of my contribution.

I start my reflection on engaged congregational research with the notion of communion of *Ubuntu*. Transformation has a normative orientation, and specific for the African context, is the orientation on communion or *Ubuntu*. Next, I will reflect on the position and power of the researcher in the construction of knowledge in line with the process of decolonisation. We will raise two questions: Whose actions are the (material) object of our research? and, what knowledge is the result of our research? The research strategy should be characterised by a decentring the theological scholar as all-knowing subject. Next, we focus on the formal object of practical theology and congregational studies, i.e. the kind of knowledge or theory that is the aim of the research. What are the kind of reasons, i.e. religiously, social, wellbeing, personal, communal, for acting in situations of heartbreaking adversity, such as endemic poverty, violence, etc.? The situation of endemic poverty which is dominant in the context of townships in the Mangaung area, leads to the next topic; that is, the influence of scarcity on transformation of persons and communities in

a situation of endemic poverty. Scarcity deeply affects the mindset and practices that keep people in the poverty trap. There is no "one size fits all" concept for transformation of persons and communities, no blueprint programmes. Transformation is local, contextual, co-constructed by the persons (stakeholders) in the poverty trap and grounded on the stories of resistance connected to Gods' promise of human fullness. An important research strategy for township research is practice-oriented research which has the potential to generate new knowledge for the community and the academic discipline; to use professional expertise of ministers, or groups within congregations and academic knowledge; to apply knowledge directly to human needs and societal problems, and to build long-term engagement. Finally, we reflect on leadership in connection to community development and empowerment of the community. We will reflect on the content of servant leadership in light of the Afro-communal ethic of *Ubuntu*; the research strategy chosen to study leadership in townships' congregations and the practice of discernment as a core aspect of servant leadership.

2. Communion as basic African value

Transformation has to do with overcoming challenges or problems. How to overcome them? And where is this transformation leading to? To answer these questions we need an ethical or prescriptive understanding of human life. Not anything goes. What is an ethically right way of transformation of society or human life? We need an ethical perspective to value the direction of the change or the lack of change of a situation. There is a widely accepted understanding that two maxims express the "indigenous sub-Saharan ethical thought, namely 'I am because we are' and 'A person is a person through other persons'" (Metz, 2020:41). Often the Nguni term of *Ubuntu* is used to refer to this African value. The philosopher Thaddeus Metz uses the concept "communion" or "communal relatedness which is pursued as an end and not merely as means to some other value" (Metz, 2020:42). We will focus on three questions. What is relational communion? How to live in communal relationship? and finally, how to deal with partiality towards those who are in a long-term communal relationship with us?

What is communion according to the two maxims mentioned above?

- The first part in the maxims refers to the fact that a person can become a better or more complete person, a basic aim in life is to develop "one's humanness, personhood or selfhood as much as one can" (Metz, 2020:42).
- The second part related to the first element is that we become a more complete person "through other persons". Ethicists working in the African tradition hold that "the only comprehensive respect in which one can exhibit human excellence is by relating to others communally or harmoniously" (Metz, 2020:43). This relational nature of human life is also expressed as "relationship[s) of interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, relationality, community friendliness, harmonious relationships and other-regarding actions" (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019:100).

Both elements are part of a relational good which is an aim in itself.

The next question is, what does it mean to live in communal relationship? What capacities (attitudes, motivations, competencies) are needed related to fellowship, reconciliation, belonging and harmonious relationships? On the one hand, one can think of capacities like positive attitudes of belonging or cohesion, empathy, motivated towards cooperative behaviour, taking pride in others and reconciliation (Metz, 2020:45). On the other hand, capacities related to achieving the good of all, serving the community and advancing the common good such as empathic awareness of the needs of others, being motivated that others are better off, commitment to long-term engagement with disadvantaged groups, capacity for the same and reduce discord.

The last question concerns the practice of prioritising in sub-Saharan ethics, notably to blood relatives. Here, Metz offers in interpretation of partiality in communal. He offers the following rule of thumb:

> All things being equal, the stronger and longer one's communal ties with others, the greater the obligation to help them, even if it comes at some cost to communal relationship elsewhere in the world (Metz, 2020: 45).

This rule denies the possibility to exclude needs of others who are potential sites of communion.[2]

3. Decentring of the researcher

Engaged scholarship is connected to the process of decolonisation in theological education and theological research.

> Decolonisation in the African continent is undoing the process of colonisation by liberating the African mind, spirituality and the body from the lingering forces of colonisation (Pali, 2024: chapter 1 this volume).

The anthropologist Linda Smith writes in the opening lines of her influential book *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us…. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas..." (Smith, 2004:1).

Who is the owner of the knowledge that is leading the research methodology? Does the researcher and the research community desire and claim ownership? Whose actions, cultural imagination, practices do we study in congregational research? Is the theological researcher of congregations the all-knowing subject? Who "owns" the practices, images, dreams and stories that are the "object" of our knowing? What room is there for not-knowing and resistance in the methodology which we use and the theory (knowledge) that we develop? The core issue here is "the old colonial adage that knowledge is power" (Smith, 2004:16).

To get our hands around this problem it might be useful to ask two questions: Whose actions are the (material) object of our research? and what knowledge is the result of our research? In the history of practical

2 The strength of this formulation is that it argues from the principle of relational communion in thinking about blood ties. If it is strong enough to deal with prejudice (us versus them) and to deal with otherness, is beyond the focus of this article.

theology in the Western world since the middle of the 20th century, we can see a change in the material object of practical theology. In the clerical paradigm of PT which was dominant until the middle of the 20th century, the practice of ordained ministers or priests was the object of research (Hermans, 2014:9-10). The object of research widened gradually to all believers in the (local) church, next to the church within society (the Kingdom of God), to other believers (interreligious dialogue) and to all people in search of the ultimate good in living with and for others, in just institutions and a sustainable world. This widening of the object of our research implied *eo ipso* a decentring of the theological researcher as a privileged holder of knowledge. Within the clerical paradigm, the theological researcher considered himself an "all-knowing-subject". By entering a new and unknown world of practices, images, beliefs as object of our practical theological research, a process of decentring emerged in which the researcher is no longer the privileged source of knowledge. Decentring of the researcher refers to the shift of the theological researcher from the centre to the margins of knowing and knowledge construction in empirical research.

If knowledge is power, decentring of the researcher in congregational research within the townships of Mangaung implies a shift of the researcher from the centre of knowing to the margin. How do poor people look to their leaders (ministers)? What do they expect from them, or from the community? What differences exist between families in short-term poverty and long-term (endemic) poverty? What role does African indigenous knowledge play in religious practices? Theological researchers are probably more inclined to accept that they do not know the answers to these questions. This may be different with research topics on leadership (ministry) or specific acts of ministers like preaching. However, the question is if this is true. We read in the research of Pali (chapter 3 in this volume) "we pray for and heal people according to their culture and tradition." What culture and traditions exist in the community in praying and healing? What role do indigenous traditions play? How does the leader deal with different traditions and expectations of the members of the congregation? Of course, a theological researcher can use their knowledge to analyse a sermon. Based on their knowledge, they can come to certain conclusions:

> The movement of the positionality of the sermon therefore moves from the non-ideal human to the Divine and then to the ideal human. This movement, to my mind, does not reflect the post-colonial centre of plurality (Wessels, 2024: chapter 5 this volume).

We now know what the theological researcher knows. But we do not know what the preacher uses as knowledge base for his ownership of the sermon. And we do not know the (plurality of the) reception of the sermon related to the ways of knowing, imagery, longings, stories of resistance of the members of the community. The focus of engaged scholarship in congregational studies is to get answers on the last questions related to ownership, empowerment and resistance of the community!

4. Practical reasons for acting and rules of action

The formal object of practical theology refers to the actions of people, more specifically the reasons for acting as well as the rules of action (Ricoeur, 1991:189). These practical reasons give meaning to actions within a community of people who share a certain background knowledge (language, values, etc.) In this section, I will first define what practical reasons are. Next, we will elaborate on tension between the rule-guided character of action and the freedom that an actor has in giving reasons for acting. This distinction is important because we should not restrict our congregational research to rules of action and neglect the reasons for acting of the agents which might be very different.

A person with a certain degree of experience is able to understand these reasons and can communicate about them with other people. People act on the basis of certain reasons that (1) have the character of a desire; (2) refer to a particular class of motives for action; and (3) constitute the goal or purpose of action. Desires are expressions of the will. Motives can have a different nature: cognitive, affective, social. Next to reasons for acting, actions are also rule-governed. The action itself expresses meaning which is the rule or *logos* of action (Ricoeur, 1991:197). For example the *orantes*- position of kneeling when saying a prayer, is meaningful not only for the actor themself but also in a public sense for others. This rule-guided character of action is epistemologically in tension with the freedom that an

actor has in giving reasons for acting. They cannot act according to these rules. An observer can establish the rule of action but cannot consider the freedom of the actor that is constitutive of practical reasoning from the actor perspective. Therefore, action cannot be reduced to an observer's perspective (Arendt, 1978).

Congregations are social systems characterised by institutionalisation. What do we mean by this? Parsons, in his structural-functionalist theory of organisations, states:

> "that institutions intimately are related to, and, in part at least, derived from ultimate value attitudes common to the members of a community";
>
> [and] "that the primary motive for obedience to an institutional norm lies in the moral authority it exercises over the individual" (Parsons, 1990:326).

From an institutional perspective there are limits to the permissiveness for action, and these limits inform the rule-governed character of actions. Disobedience of the institutional norms will tend to lead to disapproval and "sanctions" on those who violate them. All agents in the congregation act according to the status connected to the structural position within the social system, and the role of the agent in such a position (Ritzer, 2011:244). In congregations, what actors should do and are not allowed to do is derived from the ultimate values and beliefs grounded in their understanding of the gospel. All members in the congregation share this common ground.

How does this relate to our definition of practical reasons? We made a distinction between reasons for acting and rules for acting, which express the goal or purpose of actions. The rule-led character of religious practices such as the Lord's supper, baptism or healing are based on constitutive rules which grants the status function as "act of God" to this religious practice; by the authority of the sacred tradition as shared by the collective "we" of the community, and mediated by status-role of ministers in the social system who can perform these religious practices (Hermans 2020c:58-59). In the Mangaung metropole there are Christian churches that differ in religious practices because of the constitutive rules which define the meaning of a religious practice (see Schoeman, 2024: chapter 3 this volume). African

Independent / Initiated Congregations (AIC) are explicitly in conversation with African indigenous traditions. Their understanding of certain religious practices (like baptism) might be completely different from mainline Christian churches with strong historical roots in Western Christianity. And both types of Christian churches may differ deeply from Charismatic or Pentecostal Congregations which centre around the working of the Holy Spirit as powerful force amongst believers. The consequence of this for engaged scholarship in congregational research is, that we need to "respect" (i.e. recognise and understand) the differences between churches and within churches. Religious practices which have the same name like baptism, praying, outreach or mission have different constitutive rules, (possibly) different understanding of the gospel, different status-function of ministers, a different understanding of Gods' power within this practice. In line with this, I agree with the conclusion of Schoeman (2024: chapter 3 this volume) that "There is a need for the development of a relevant mixed methodology to understand congregations.". For two reasons. The first is that under the same label like baptism or healing, deep theological differences might exist! The second reason relates to the freedom of the agents who participate in religious practices. Agents can have personal longings connected to certain practices, because of certain experiences of heartbreaking adversity, extreme poverty, living conditions, health issues, etc. And they can have different kinds of motives for participating in religious practices apart from obedience to the values of the religious community. Agents can be driven by social motives related to intimate partner violence, or affective motives such as anxiety, shame or guilt about things that happened in one's life. Engaged scholarship is specifically focused to hear stories of resistance related to personal longings and motives of persons and not only to understand the rule-governed reasons of taking part in the religious practices as members of the community.

5. Scarcity: how it affects the life of people and congregations

Scarcity can be defined as "a subjective sense of having more needs than resources" (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013:4). Poverty is the key domain to which scarcity theory is applied. In South Africa, living in extreme poverty is still a reality for many black and coloured people, as indicated by the SA

Barometer report of 2023 (Lefko-Everett, 2023:17-18). But scarcity not only affects the life of individual persons and families, it also affects the way that congregations handle the problem of a shortage of financial resources. One-third of the AICs report that their financial situation is a serious threat to our ability to continue as a viable congregation (see Schoeman, 2024: chapter 3 this volume - Table 7.6). In this section, I will first introduce how scarcity changes people's mindset and the practical reasons that they use in handling their situation. Although the mechanisms of scarcity are the same, the way that persons and congregations find their way out of the scarcity trap differs. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution, which implies that engaged scholarship means a long-term engagement with people in finding a sustainable way to get out of the scarcity trap.

The theory of scarcity originated in 2013 when Mullainathan and Shafir published their influential book *Scarcity. Why having too little means so much* (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013).[3] Scarcity is not an objective indicator but a subjective feeling. "The key idea of scarcity theory is that scarcity itself induces a specific mindset by affecting how people think and decide, and subsequently affect human behaviours" (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022: 8). Scarcity affects the mind, and this change of mindset influences the way that people act given certain socio-economic conditions. The way that they act keeps them in the scarcity trap.

"Mindset" refers to the processes and mechanisms of the mind and how that shapes our choices and our behaviours. The scarcity mindset is characterised by both a positive and a negative process which changes the way that we react on a subjective feeling of having more needs than resources. The positive mechanism focusing on scarcity captures our attention and help to focus our energy on specific needs. Focusing is characterised by a sense of urgency, and heightened productivity. The negative process is one of neglect, caused by the mechanism of tunnelling. Scarcity leads people into a tunnel, causing them to neglect other (possibly more important) things that they value (*idem*:28). While our mind is drawn to scarcity, all other things are harder to reach. "We do not make trade-offs using a careful cost-

3 For an overview of 10 years of research based on the theory of scarcity, see De Bruijn, E.-J. & Antonides, G. 2022. Poverty and economic decision making: a review of scarcity theory. *Theory and Decision*, 92, 5–37.

benefit calculation. The tunnel magnifies the costs and minimises the (long-term) benefits" (Hermans, 2017:48). Secondly, according to Mullainathan and Shafir, scarcity reduces our 'bandwidth'. "Bandwidth measures our computational capacity, our ability to pay attention, to make good decisions, to stick with our plans and to resist temptation" (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013:41-42). The focus on scarcity is involuntary. It captures our attention and impedes our capacity to focus on anything else. People have fewer mental resources and are more impulsive. They tend to focus on immediate rewards, and their willpower is affected.

A second element (next to mindset) concerns patterns of practices and habits that keep people trapped in scarcity. Two features define the scarcity trap, namely tunnelling and one step behind. Scarcity draws the mind towards the behaviour (practice) that the person needs to avoid. If you have an endemic shortage of food or money, you magnify the behaviour that is causing the problem. Tunnelling is like juggling by focusing only on the ball that is ready to drop. At the same time, you do not see the next ball that is going to drop. This means that you are always "one step behind". When you see the next ball fall, you reinforce the behaviour which you should actually stop.

The third element are socio-economic determinants of poverty and household welfare in Soutth Africa. Research shows that

> levels of education of the household head, (…) , race of the household head, dependency ratio, gender of the household head, employment status of the household head and marital status of the household head are statistically significant determinants of household welfare (Biyase & Zwane, 2018:115).

Poverty and equality are related but different phenomena. "While poverty is characterised by a lack of basic needs, inequality is a relational phenomenon, at the centre of which is power"(Francis & Webster, 2020:733). Deep poverty and inequality persist in South Africa and are amongst the country's most significant obstacles to reconciliation.

How can the theory of scarcity help us to understand the transformation of persons in extreme poverty, or congregations who think that the lack of finance brings severe problems to the viability of the community? First,

the case of persons and families in extreme poverty. Scarcity influences the mindset of people, which makes them act in ways that keep them in the scarcity trap. Although the mechanisms (tunnelling, bandwidth, one step behind) are the same, the impact of what they do is different for different persons. What works to transform their situation is different for people. There is no "one size fits all". What is more: persons in extreme poverty have the knowledge and drive to escape the scarcity trap. Engaged scholarship means a long-term engagement with people in finding a sustainable way to escape the scarcity trap, where persons and communities are considered as a source of resistance and the solution of transforming their situation of extreme poverty. .

The same applies to congregations that experience a serious shortage of finances. Engaged scholarship demands that the research acts on the basis of ownership and empowerment of the community that experiences a serious shortage of finance. On the one hand, their mindset and practices keep them in this situation. But on the other hand, they also have this longing: ideas and knowledge to change their situation, they have images of the future of the community as given by God to all who believe in the triune God , and to the mission of the community in the context where they live. They share stories of resistance overcoming challenges based on shared communal values. In other words, instead of investing all their energy on short-term goals and focus all their practices on money-raising, they should invest in building long-term goals and on the power within the community to look for new possibilities of Gods' future which is emerging in their community.

6. Practice-oriented research and community partnership

The focus of engaged scholarship is to build community partnership. There are different types of research strategies which serve different goals.

> A research strategy incorporates all the decisions of the research design. It includes the method of research, in the sense of data collection and data analysis, but also decisions, whether it is theory oriented or practice oriented, about the depth or width of the research, the number of research units, and so on" (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015b).

Practice-oriented research has the potential to meet key features of community partnership. It has the potential to generate new knowledge for the community and the academic discipline; to use professional expertise of ministers, or groups within congregations and academic knowledge; to apply knowledge directly to human needs and societal problems, and to build long-term engagement (Hart et al., 2023:236).

There are two examples of practice-oriented research reported in this volume. Dr Nico Mostert used this research strategy for the development of workable steps dealing with the problem of segregation in a multi-cultural congregation (chapter 6 in this volume). And Dr Marelize Maritz used this research strategy in her research on supporting members in the congregation living in extreme poverty, specifically the role of leadership (ministers) (chapter 7 in this volume). We will use their projects as examples of what practice-oriented research has to contribute to engaged scholarship. At the same time, we will refer to ways to strengthen the development of practice-oriented research in congregation research in line with the key features of community engagement. I will first discuss the role of the problem owner, researcher and researched in terms of ownership and empowerment of the community. Next, I will elaborate five qualities of the utility of practice-oriented research. What criteria can we use to judge the utility of practice-oriented research? And finally, I will elaborate the quality of transformation in congregation studies. In many social sciences, transformation is connected with adaptation. In congregation studies (theology) it relates to the possibilisation of a new and better life based on Gods' promise.

The action problem for Mostert is the division of different cultural groups within one congregation. The different cultural groups in the congregation are "living apart together" under one (church) roof. For example, "different worship services are conducted in the same church building at different timeslots in different languages" (Mostert, 2024 - chapter 6 in this volume). The problem at the start of the project is not knowing how to move from this situation of exclusivity to a desired situation of (more) inclusivity. The way forward to enhance inclusivity was a strategy of attentiveness. At the end of the chapter, the researcher formulates a "disclaimer" regarding the effectiveness of interventions in the implementation. I share this disclaimer, but this might be the consequence of the way that the different roles of the

researcher, the researched and the problem owner are operational in this research. According to the researcher, he worked according to participatory research in which "solutions and knowledge are the result of a co-construction between the researcher, the researched and the problem owner" (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015b:3). A participatory research strategy has the strongest guarantee for ownership of the community. But is this also what happened? The problem owner is the *kerkraad*. The researcher is aware of the fact that this is an "all white" *kerkraad*, which implies that the other cultural groups are excluded from ownership of the problem. Next, we do not observe any contextual information of the different cultural groups on the understanding of the action problem. In a participatory model, one expects a co-construction of the action problem by (different) groups involved in the research.

The problem owner in the project of Maritz is the Reformed Initiative for Community Development (RICD). The action problem of the RICD is that they do not know how to change the practice of professionals in serving congregations. In the current situation there is a "lack of interest and involvement in the opportunities that they provide for assisting the development of congregants, especially children" (Maritz, 2024; chapter 7 this volume). In this project there is a clear distinction between problem owner (the RCID), researcher and the researched (people in endemic poverty) (expert model). The participants were all persons taking part in a congregational activity. They voice a positive relationship with the pastor and have high expectations of the help he gives them in their situation of poverty. Although the project uses a different model, I have the same questions regarding a deep contextual understanding of the persons living in endemic poverty, and their needs to escape the poverty trap. We know from scarcity theory (see above), that the problem of not being able to escape the poverty trap is connected to their mindset and practices which keep them in poverty next to the socio-economic conditions in which they live as community. The intention of the engaged researcher is to help people to escape the poverty trap, but her research strategy is not delivering her to that point. In situations of endemic poverty, we learn from the scarcity theory that all the steps in the regulative circle (action circle) need to be taken in co-construction by the community using their values and wisdom

to find sustainable ways to escape the poverty trap. There is no evidence that the minister has co-constructed this knowledge with the poor. And if the minister doesn't have that knowledge, the professional workers of the RCID cannot serve congregations, especially with the development of children. Community development demands the generation of new knowledge for the target groups in the community (e.g. in the practice stream of the research) and the discipline (e.g. the knowledge stream). There is no blue print of how to perform practice-oriented research in this situation. What we do know is that participation should lead to ownership and empowerment and that we need good practices of how to do this.

The type of knowledge produced in practice-oriented research is geared towards the action problem. The criteria for the quality of practice-oriented research is the utility of knowledge about the intervention to improve the socio-economic and religious well-being of people in a specific contextual situation. The criteria for quality of the utility of research are different from internal scientific criteria (Verschuren, 2009:21-22; Hermans & Schoeman, 2015a:21). Verschuren mentions five criteria: holism, interdisciplinarity, context restraint, profoundness, and transformation. Holism refers to the fact that one researches the entire phenomenon, in all aspects (social, economic, practical, cultural, emotional) in the conditions of time and place as it manifests. Interdisciplinarity refers to the fact that many real-life problems cut across different disciplines because they touch multiple aspects in real life. A good example of this is work on participatory development by Davids et al. (2009). Thirdly, the knowledge about the intervention is bound to the context in which it is gathered. Yes, there are mechanisms working in the scarcity trap which can be found in different setting of poverty, like tunnelling or bandwidth (De Bruijn & Antonides, 2022). How they work in an intervention for persons in a specific context is context-bound. Fourthly, profoundness refers to the fact that behind problems, a myriad of causes can influence this problem. The aim is to support a community to escape their situation of endemic poverty. In both researches of Mostert and Maritz presented in this book, I think this myriad of causes did not become clear. Finally, transformation refers to the fact that it does not suffice to understand phenomena. The important issue is whether the problem can be transformed and whether the stakeholder(!) can do it.

The next issue concerns the specific character of the intervention in practice-oriented research in congregation studies. The type of intervention is what we call a regulative (normative) cycle, and the kind of resilience in religious transformation is not based on adaptation but on the emergence of new beginnings based on Gods' promise of the ultimate good. Interventions of practitioners are characterised by the so-called regulative cycle in which different steps (phases) are identified to solve a practical problem (Van Strien, 1997).

> Whereas the methodology of scientific hypotheses testing is geared toward the 'disinterested' *prediction* of future behaviour, the methodology of practice is geared towards the 'interested' *regulation* of the behaviour of individuals, groups or organization in the desired direction (the normative component of practice) (Van Strien, 1997:689).

The goal is not to test theoretical predictions for a certain type of practice (as in social sciences or natural sciences) but to engage as scholar in an individual case to find a solution for the stakeholders involved in this situation. Ownership and empowerment of the stakeholders is the aim of intervention. Yes, we can use insights from psychological theory in helping stakeholders to ask the right questions to diagnose their contextual problem and reflecting on conditions to escape the poverty trap. But we are not testing predictions but solving an action problem of stakeholders in this specific case. Engaged scholarship implies that the scholar has an interest in changing the behaviour of individuals of groups in a desired direction. This positive involvement of the scholar implies the anticipation of a desired future (Van Strien, 1997:688). This is something completely different to the objectivity and distance demanded in theory testing research. This attitude can be seen in the way that Mostert and Maritz conducted their research. To strengthen this in future practice-oriented research in congregation studies, one would like to see a methodological reflection by scholars on this "interested" engagement within the intervention. What decisions were made based on this interested position? On what grounds? Another point concerns the fact that in the regulative cycle, the different phases are less distinct and well defined than in hypothesis testing research. For example, it can be necessary in the stage of formulation of a plan of action to go back

to the diagnosis, because some aspects of the action problem are unclear. The regulative cycle is less rigid than the methodology of falsification of theoretical predictions. It is a holistic process in which researchers should describe carefully in their research report, but the good news is that researchers use this freedom in view of the "interest" in transforming the action problem.

This brings us to the issue: What is the "interest" of the stakeholders and researcher in congregational research? Resilience as preventing or processing adversity can be seen as a common interest of engaged scholarship. Resilience is something different in social sciences than in theology and congregation studies. In social sciences, resilience refers to "processes of adaptation to deal with adversity, and a resilient system is better adapted to deal with adversities. Adaptation presupposes an existing order, and the best condition to deal with changes in this order" (Hermans, 2020a:4). The point of reference of resilience is the stability and continuity of the existing order, and resilience is considered a bouncing back to a new situation of stability in the existing order of living with and for others. Theology and congregation studies have a completely different understanding of resilience. Resilience in religion is not about adaptation to the existing order, but about new beginnings based on Gods' promise. New beginnings of what is considered to be ultimate good in life with and for other, transformation to a better, more fulfilling life grounded on Gods' promise in Jesus Christ (Hermans, 2020a:5). Mostert gives strong attention to this desired situation as normative component in practice-oriented research. He uses a reading of Acts 10:1-43 in his intervention to find their understanding of God's desire for the congregation in terms of inclusivity. I think we need to build deeper knowledge on the role and impact of religious stories in imagining the desired situation which individuals and communities long for (well-being, justice, a good life with and for others). This experience of new beginnings is contingent: not necessary, but possible. How can stakeholders experience a passion of the heart where God's promise of the good life if experienced as actual, e.g. emerging in their life? (Hermans, 2020c:62). What is the role of liturgy? Healing? Or contextual Bible-reading fostering resistance and resilience?

7. Leadership and discernment

Leadership is an important topic in congregation studies related to community development and the type of leadership that we need to empower communities towards development. In this section, I will first focus on the Afro-communal ethic ground of leadership as expressed in the ideal of servant leadership (see also Pali and Du Preez in this volume). Next, I will raise some questions regarding the research strategy chosen to study leadership in township congregations by Pali and du Preez. And finally, I will elaborate the practice of discernment as a core aspect of servant leadership.

In the chapters of Pali and Du Preez, we observe a focus on servant leadership based on an African understanding of communion. This specific Afro-communal value of communion specifies what should be involved of serving other:

> a good leader is one who helps to meet others' needs, and above all their need to realize their social nature by prizing communal relationship (Metz, 2020:47).

According to Metz, the difference with other conceptions of leadership is the idea that communion is an end and not a means to something else. In servant leadership this leads to a consensual way of making decisions; based on a "we-consciousness" and taking pride in collective accomplishments; prizing people by virtue of their capacity to relate communally, and celebrating this capacity in ritual, prayer and song (Metz, 2020:8-12). Communalism is also important in what is called the African development challenge. Development is at the end "not about leadership thinking what development is and pursuing programs that they consider to be advancing development" (Gumede, 2017:88) but must involve the people themselves. This involvement in development "is a liberatory human aspiration to attain freedom from political, economic, ideological, epistemological and social domination that was installed by colonialism and coloniality" (Gumede, 2017:88).

The research strategy selected by both Pali (chapter 3 in this volume) and du Preez (chapter 4 in this volume) is descriptive research using a qualitative interview. Du Preez uses a deductive coding system, where Pali works inductively. Descriptive research produces accurate descriptions of the leadership which are observed in the interviews of the ministers. Based on these observations, the researchers formulate hypotheses about the type of leadership of the minsters by asking questions about the observations (Why is this leader acting this way?) and formulating explanations about possible reasons of the way that they act, for example towards members of the community. The explanations are not observed in reality but are created by the researcher. In this way, we learn what the researchers think based on their models of leadership, but not how the leaders reflect on their ideas. If they had presented their statements to the respondents, the researchers would have gained more insight into the ministers' underlying views. If they had interviewed the ministers in a focus group, they would also have gained insight into the differences and contrasts in the views of the ministers. It would have generated new knowledge for the target group (community of ministers in townships) and tested knowledge for the discipline. Another possibility of course would be practice-oriented research. I know researchers do not always have time available to do this, but one can always cut a research project in parts connected with a long-term engagement with a community and involvement of other researchers in the project.

The last issue that I want to raise is the role of decision-making in leadership and the process of discernment connected to it. It is one thing to claim servant leadership and give reasons for it, but it is another thing how this is realised within the community. How are intentions brought into practice? What are the reactions of the members of the congregation, and how is the minister responding to it? In the history of Christian spirituality, there are different models of discernment given differences in context and culture (Hermans, 2021). The differences between models of discernment can be mapped along five dimensions. Each dimension can be described as a continuum of adjacent elements, the extremes of which are distinct but not completely disjunct. We think that the different dimensions offer a scheme to understand the specific kind of discernment in congregations as influenced by African ethic, values and wisdom.

- The first dimension refers to the difference of a (more) individual versus (more) communal discernment.
- The second dimension refers to the focus on the origin of the good (coming from God) versus the future of the coming of the good (the Kingdom come).
- The third dimension is the focus of discernment on exceptional situations, versus decision-making in general. "A situation is exceptional when the capacity of human beings to decide has disappeared, such that we need an extraordinary source for deciding the good" (Hermans, 2021:395)
- The fourth dimension is the focus on the penultimate versus the ultimate goal(s) of Discernment. "The penultimate goal is the purity of the heart (volitional). The ultimate goal is the contemplative state of the beatific vision of God" (Hermans, 2021:396).
- The fifth dimension in which concepts of discernment can differ concerns the source of reliance or authority for growing on the path of discernment, which may be ethics, ancient wisdom, (theological) dogma, or a spiritual teacher or minister.

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The empirical research that is the focus of this volume aims to critically reflect on the role of congregations and their leadership in the community through a discussion that offers new perspectives, with specific reference to the South African context, to enhance the field of congregational studies. The aim is to be significant, transformational, and relevant to the context and its challenges in developing contextual ecclesiologies within congregational studies. The contributions to this volume have a specific empirical and methodological aim: to map markers for conducting empirical research within the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. The research question in this volume is: In conducting practical theology and empirical research within an African context, what methodological markers can be identified for this context?

The research is grounded in the field of "Congregational studies and leadership". The academic endeavours of practical theology and the department over the last decade have developed towards a more hermeneutical discipline, emphasising context and working inductively. A hermeneutical approach profoundly impacts the understanding and practice of engaged scholarship. The research is strongly inclined towards a hermeneutical and inductive approach and takes the local context seriously.

This research project aims to critically describe and evaluate, from a contextual and practical theological perspective, the role of township congregations as faith communities within their communities and broader society. The focus is also on practice-orientated research as a framework for empirical research; in this instance, a multi-cultural congregation and congregation within a context of poverty are also analysed from an empirical perspective. The empirical research is conducted using quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

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