I declare that *Caring with Women Married to Dutch Reformed Clergymen: Narratives of Pain, Survival and Hope* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

(Signed)

(C Swart)
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research journey was twofold: (1) to investigate the ways in which the lives of women married to clergymen have been influenced by their position in the Dutch Reformed Church and (2) to collaboratively present ways of caring and supporting these women living within this reality. Discourse analysis explored the taken-for-granted truths and power relationships that inform these women's daily lives. Fifteen women embarked on this feminist narrative participatory action research journey, not only to tell their stories but also to negotiate for change in current practices as well as their own contexts. This research journey challenges the institutional structure of the Church through narratives of hope, survival and pain, as storied in a book (*Lamentations and Butterflies*, 2003), that were collaboratively constructed by the women living these realities. This book and research journey offers a deeper understanding of the experience of being a clergyman's wife in the Dutch Reformed Church.

**Key terms:** clergymen's wives; *Mevrou Dominee*; clergy marriage relationships; spiritual abuse; Dutch Reformed Church; ethnographic writing; ethicising research; participatory practical theology; contextual practical theology; feminist theology; postmodern theology; power/knowledge; social construction discourse; feminist poststructuralist paradigm; deconstructing cultural discourses; patriarchy; femininity; collective responsibility; participatory narrative pastoral approach.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PRINCESSES AND THE MAGIC WAND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I introduce the reader to the different voices that speak throughout the research text. There are the voice of the story of the magic wand, my own story and voice, the voices of other women married to clergymen, the voice of the context, the voice of the Church¹ and the voices of other research projects. Through these different voices the need for this study is conveyed and therefore this research journey can be seen as a ‘multivocal narrative’ (Fox 1996:350). At the end of the chapter, a map for the journey ahead is also given.

1.2 A STORY

Once upon a time, there were some princesses whose lives came to be influenced by an extraordinary event. This wonderful event occurred in their husbands' lives, but it swept over the princesses' lives like a magic wand to change it forever.

The magic wand's supernatural power spoke of many things: culture, oral tradition, legendary women that lived before them, gender, calling, subservience, spirituality and much more. The power of the magic wand is an illusion, like all magic, but for the rulers and inhabitants of the kingdom, a reality. This illusion mysteriously crowned the princesses as the Superwomen of the faith communities they lived in. As a result, these princesses never became tired, felt despair or had any negative feelings. The magic wand bestowed spiritual gifts, boundless energy, as well as organisational and leadership skills on these women. Each of these princesses then became an example of the perfect wife, the perfect mother and the perfect spiritual woman. Therefore they were supposedly instantaneously able to lead women’s prayer and Bible-study groups, organise bazaars, be secretaries and do pastoral counselling. However, these things did not seem real to the princesses, who always wondered when somebody would catch them out and expose them as being less than Superwomen. The spell of the magic wand empowered some of these women and brought them gifts of opportunities, challenges and growth. For others, it brought tears, unspoken and unknown expectations, oppression, isolation and messages of not being good enough!

The magic wand made some of these women feel quite alone. After all, Superwomen obviously do not need any care from others! Women of the communities they lived in started to treat these princesses differently from other women and did not invite them to join in as friends anymore.

¹ In this study, when the Church is capitalised, the term refers to the Dutch Reformed Church.
Through the years many men and women have proposed that these princesses must be trained for their position so that they can live up to the expectations that other men and women have of their new life under the spell of the magic wand.

There were also magic words that were supposed to guide the princesses' conduct, with regard to how and what they should/could say/do, where and when. Unfortunately, nobody ever explained what these magic words were all about and many princesses found out when it was too late. Quite apart from all the expectations people had of them, there was one aspect of the spell woven by the power of the magic wand that weighed heavier than all the other things: silence….. Most of these women grew up in a community where the following Afrikaans saying is still applied, especially to women: ‘Stil is soet en stil is goed’ (Uys 2002) [to be quiet is well behaved and to be quiet is good].

This research journey tells the story of these lonely and silent princesses, their relationship with the spell cast by the magic wand and the influence it has on their lives. As a result, they have decided to break the spell of silence…

My own voice will now speak as I share parts of my own story with regard to the magic wand that ‘contains recollections and selective memories that I have fashioned through my own reflective imagination. It is fiction with no truth status. It is a tale in progress, one of coming to understand who I am and what my story can become’ (Myburg, Alice & Kotzé 2002:62):

1.3 CHANGING THE WHOLE WOMAN INTO A HALF

From the age of thirteen I saw myself as being called by God and therefore I went into the classroom and playground for Christ. I used every opportunity that I had to share the gospel of Christ with whoever listened. ‘My life's theme of total ministry was pursued with the dedication of ordination’ (Cohen 1986:102). When I had to decide on a career, both my parents and music teacher felt that it would be sensible for me, being a girl, to pursue the more ‘feminine career’ of a music teacher rather than that of a clergywoman. From my whole struggle around my choice of career, I realised that ‘sexual differentiation' had a definite ‘bearing on my usefulness to Christ’ (Cohen 1986:102) and to the Dutch Reformed Church. I slowly felt how all the energy of my enthusiastic dreams was being drained out of me.

Thirteen years ago, when I married my husband, I learned that I was not just a wife. I was a clergyman's wife. Therefore, from the time my husband was ordained onwards, it was assumed that I would make no

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2 In this study, the term clergyman/clergywoman refers to people who have been ordained as ministers of the Christian Church.
contribution to the ministry outside the role expectations that the congregation had about me. As a result, it has been very interesting through the years to experience the assumptions that have been made by my husband’s employers and congregations about the things I would do and enjoy or should do and enjoy. In the beginning of our marriage I was so caught up in my husband's work and identified so strongly with it that in effect I had a joint career with him. It was not, however, a career of equals, for my role in the eyes of the congregation was secondary and subordinate. This experience resonates with that of Cohen (1986:103): ‘As it turned out there has never been recognition of that partnership in the sense in which we envisaged it.’

I tried to meet the customary expectations of a clergyman’s wife during the first few years of my marriage, but I gradually became disenchanted with playing a traditional role. Although for a long time I pursued my husband’s calling with him, a day came when I could no longer play the role of the other half anymore. In this regard my experience is similar to that of Cohen (1986:108), who says: ‘I had no real place, no personal location. My being had somehow been subsumed in my husband’s: I had become a mere embellishment to his person and ministry.’ So, in order, to escape many of the demands that I was subjected to, I fell pregnant.

When we moved to a new community, my second baby was only a few months old and my oldest son 2 years of age. My life consisted of being a housewife and breastfeeding mother, mostly a single mother, as my husband was seldom at home during the peak times like feeding and bathing the children. During this time, one of the men involved in the ministry asked my husband when I would be getting out of my starting blocks in terms of my involvement in the congregation. Again I tried to live up to the expectations of what others perceived my involvement should be. Once more I experienced a sense that for some reason God did not want to use me in any way other than through my husband’s calling or through motherhood. As I see it now, God had nothing to do with the ‘restrictions placed on me’ (Cohen 1986:105). During that time there was a ‘real sense in which I ceased to exist’ (Cohen 1986:107).

The different and sometimes conflicting ideas from my own background, the Church system, my love for my husband, my expectations for our future, and demands from the religious society, were competing in my head for pre-eminence. I could not figure out why it was so difficult for me to accept my prescribed position and role in the Church. This only contributed to my feelings of frustration and rebelliousness. I felt more and more like a misfit as the wife of a clergyman within the Dutch Reformed tradition. I did not speak any more; I
was tired of being judged as an incompetent and non-compliant Mevrou Dominee\(^3\).

At times I became so sensitive to the idea of being different and rebellious that even the lifting of an eyebrow with regard to something I had said in one of my more talkative moments was enough to silence my voice again.

A few years ago I snapped and found myself on my bed in a foetal position. It was the first time in my life that I had felt so hopeless. I was tired of trying to be the perfect Christian woman; tired of not living my preferred identity and calling; tired of being misunderstood and measured by some invisible standard. I could no longer face the faces I was expected to face. I was tired of the loneliness and the power that set me apart from other believers. Tired of the anxious eyes that look upon my person as something sacred, that should speak to them in the words: 'Thus sayeth the Lord!' I was tired of the self-surveillance of my life, trying to live up to some unspoken code of behaviour that I am measured by, subjugating my self to the image of the perfect clergyman's wife. The prize of being a clergyman's wife came at a price. In an attempt to make some meaning of my situation, I travelled a long and difficult road. I tried to talk to many people about the struggles and joys of this world, but somehow I always ended up feeling guilty about talking about something that should be such an honour and a calling for me. The advice, accusations and comments from other clergymen and their wives, family and friends did not help either; they only added to my feeling of being trapped. I read books, attended courses on doing church, spoke to friends and cried a lot.

There came a time when I ventured on a journey to re-discover and re-claim my place and my calling in the Church. Not the one that was designated by my role as clergyman's wife, but a journey that led me back to my high school days. I came across the Network Course (Bugbee, Cousins & Hybels 1994) that helps people to discover and re-discover their spiritual gifts and callings. As I went through the material, I felt how life began to creep back into my bones and I started remembering again how, and of what, God and I had dreamt together. I became excited once more about the community of believers and the role I should be playing in this community. I also came under the strong impression that this course might help our congregation to change to a more egalitarian way of being church where everybody is equally gifted and called. My position as a clergyman's wife gave me the opportunity to be able to teach this course and I can already see how some of the adult participants are being fulfilled and excited in their ministries in our church.

\(^3\) This is the name that congregations often use when they refer to clergymen's wives within the Dutch Reformed Church. These words literally mean the wife (Mevrou) of the clergyman (Dominee). The term is retained throughout the study because of the broader emotive connotations of the term, which is, in many ways, untranslatable. The term encapsulates a patriarchal tradition and attaches an indelible label to the wearer.
This course and the studies I am currently involved in have been my survival kit, my alternative story, and my hope.

1.4 INCLUDING OTHER PRINCESSES IN THE JOURNEY

I have been engaged in my own struggle as a clergymen’s wife for a long time, but I invited other wives to join me in this research journey, to participate and tell their stories of the meanings they attached to their experience. I embarked on a journey of discovery with other women living in this reality to be with them in the struggles and joys of their different contexts, and within their different identities and spiritualities. In the research I extended a hand of care, community and hope to these princesses touched by the magic wand.

I would therefore now like to introduce you to the third voice that will speak in the research text. Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) is a book that consists of excerpts from the translated transcripts of the conversations in which 15 clergymen’s wives talked about their realities. This ‘body of writing’ (Davies 2000) represents our collaborative work, and contains the stories of the experiences of the influence of the magic wand on the princesses’ lives. Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) is included in this research text in Addendum 2, and the reader is advised to read these narratives first before continuing with the research text. It would be a good thing if the reader can try to put him/herself in the ‘place of the Other’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:22), to feel what it feels like to engage in the daily realities of the princesses of the magic wand. It is our hope that the reader will not sit back as a spectator because we want the reader to ‘feel care and desire’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:24). We hope that ‘it may affect your life; may even dredge up feelings you’re not prepared to deal with now – well, maybe that’s a sign it’s making a difference’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:24).

I have given the participants the chance to speak for themselves by giving them the opportunity to let their previously muted and even silenced voices speak in their own words, with the authority of their experience. I have included their voices in the research text by quoting the participants as the source in Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) without othering them. Therefore I see the writing up of these narratives as a form of ethnographic writing, as described by Ellis and Bochner (1996:27-28):

[The] knowledge we’re seeking in ethnography [is] the kind that helps readers use other people’s sorrows and triumphs as a way to reflect on or recontextualize their own, enhancing their capacity to cope with life’s contingencies. Composing Ethnography is a modest attempt to do this. What we’re trying to do is to enlarge the space to practice ethnographic writing as a form of creative nonfiction, to take certain
expressive liberties associated with the arts, but to feel the ethical pull of converting data into experiences readers can use.

This form of ethnography appealed to me because I did not want to stay stuck at the level of data. I wanted to be a ‘storyteller, someone who used narrative strategies to transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think’ (Ellis & Bochner 1996:18).

So often it happens that in the writing up of a research journey the participants become mere subjects of research. They do not participate. My choice to be a storyteller is therefore a political one in the sense that I wanted to give a voice to these participants within the written academic discourse. I agree with Foucault (1980:81) when he talks about ‘a return of knowledge’ wherein it is not ‘theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality’. Du Preez (2000) has already ventured on such a journey in his dissertation and therefore my supervisor, Dr JP Roux, and I had a conversation in which we decided that I would include the participant's voices as written up in the book, *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003).

I would now like to introduce these princesses to you. Note that most of the participants chose pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The participants who shared in the research project and whose voices are recorded in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) are Rosy, Emma, Saartjie, Louise, Miekie, Disillusioned, AnnaMart, Magrietjie, Ironé, One Of Them, Rita, Elsa, Cynthia, Ria and Cleo.

I divided the content of our conversations into themes. I also used these themes in the text of this book to help readers to understand our joys and sorrows. The book is divided into different chapters that represent the different kind of conversations that took place:

Chapter One contains narratives gleaned during a weekend of conversations with three clergymen's wives, Saartjie, Emma and Rosy.

Chapter Two consists of the narratives of a group of women married to clergymen living in the same area. They are Ironé, Miekie, Magrietjie, AnnaMart, Louise and Disillusioned. Dr Johann Roux, my supervisor, also joined part of the conversation and his contributions to the conversation are also included. These narratives were told on a Wednesday morning in the home of one of the participants.

Chapter Three consists of various conversations I had with clergymen's wives living in very different circumstances: One Of Them stands at the end of her road as clergymen's wife and reflects on her journey. Cleo is an artist who is divorced from her clergymen husband. Rita is a young woman who grew up in a
parsonage⁴ and is now also married to a clergyman. Elsa is a professional who conversed via e-mail about her experiences of Mevrou Dominee trying to enter the workplace. Cynthia and Ria are both trained clergywomen in their own right and they are also married to clergymen. Both of them are employed as ‘tentmakers’ within the Dutch Reformed Church, which means that they are not serving as full-time ministers of the Church.

As discussed more fully in 2.8.7, the participants are quoted directly in the research text, from Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003), using roman numbering so as not to confuse the reader with the numbering of this research text, for example: (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXX).

The title of this book, Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003), originated from the conversations one morning, as storied in Chapter Two of this book. As I was searching for a word or phrase that could describe the stories of pain and survival that I was a witness to, I happened to listen to a programme, Wat sê die Bybel?, on the Radio Sonder Grense radio station. On Sunday 27 April 2003, Russell Botman spoke about the idea of lamentations in Luke 18:1-8. Botman (2003) said that the persistent plea for justice of the widow in this biblical text could also be viewed as lamentations aimed at God and designed to bring justice to her in her situation.

During one of the conversations presented in Chapter Two, I shared the above idea with the group. I explained that I preferred to regard the so-called moaning and groaning embodied in this book as a reflection of the lamentations of women crying to God to bring justice to their situation. At one stage during the same conversation, Magrietjie (Swart 2003:XXX) shared the narrative of a clergyman catching butterflies with the group. As a result, butterflies became our metaphor for hope. When I shared my ideas on lamentations, one of the ‘co-researchers’⁵ (Kotzé 2002:25) proposed that this be part of the title of our book.

‘Stories can serve as vehicles to carry people’s dilemmas and ethical choices, including the effects of those dilemmas and choices on other people. The more of these stories we have, the richer the possibilities that could guide people’s struggles to find ways in which to live at the margins of clarity about what is good and/or evil’ (Kotzé 2002:20-21). The stories that are recorded in this book are therefore a way of sharing the richer possibilities that could guide women married to clergymen in their struggles. Reading these narratives will

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⁴ The term parsonage is used here to refer to the church-owned and sometimes furnished residence in which the clergy and their families live. In Afrikaans it is called a ‘pastorie’.

⁵ ‘Co-research refers to a participatory search in which the “researcher” and the “subjects” of research become participants in co-searching for new knowledges about which all participants have a say’ (Kotzé 2002:25). Therefore I will sometimes refer to the participants as co-researchers and the research as co-search.
extend our knowledge of the lives of white Afrikaans women married to clergymen in the Dutch Reformed Church in the 21st century.

As background to this study, I drew upon my own experience as the wife of a clergyman in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. I want to emphasise that I am writing this dissertation in my second language and that my research journey was culture specific to Afrikaans clergymen’s wives. Writing in my second language has left me at a loss sometimes. At other times, the words just came.... Finding words to explain one’s culture in another language can be a very difficult venture and sometimes I found that words can get in the way.

In the white, Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Churches, the clergy are often called Dominee(s). In this research journey I use the word clergy or clergyman alternatively. My preference in this regard is discussed further in Chapter Four.

But what is the context that has brought the magic wand into existence?

1.5 THE CONTEXT OF THE MAGIC WAND

The next voice that will have an opportunity to speak on this matter is that of the history and context that forms the backdrop for this story.

In Stellenbosch, on 22 December 1805, the Church Board of the congregation decided that the female members of the parish must sit in order of importance:


(Van der Merwe 2003:7)

[1. Clergyman’s wife. 2. Magistrate’s wife. 3. Wives of all previous magistrates. 4. The spouses of ruling heemraadslede and the secretary’s (sekretaris) wife. 5. Spouses of previous heemraadslede. 6. The wives of the war council (krygraadsvroue) according to their husband’s positions. 7. Spouses of church board members. 8. The wife of the sieketrooster, and then follow all other women strictly according to ranking (rangorde).] (my translation)
In the early twentieth century she was called the ‘queen of the parish’, the ‘uncrowned queen’ and the ‘mistress of the manse’ (Brunette-Hill 1999:79) and sometimes even the parish autopilot.

Little research has been directed at a group of women who have played an enormously important role in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church. This denomination is the largest mainline protestant Afrikaans church in South Africa. According to statistics presented in 2002 at the meeting of the General Synod (Scherrer & Alheit 2002:105), there are 1 284 Dutch Reformed congregations in South Africa, serving 1 210 487 members with 1 902 clergy.

Historically, clergymen’s wives have been the leaders of female members of the Church. At some stage, they also occupied one of the most desired roles available for women in Afrikaans culture. As the above ranking of the Stellenbosch church clearly shows, this position carried with it a certain social prestige and power most other women would never be able achieve. ‘There is no doubt that there have been great joys and many opportunities that the role of “minister’s wife” has afforded women, especially in times when most other avenues of achievement were blocked’ (Brunette-Hill 1999:78). Therefore high ‘societal expectations have encouraged clergy wives to perform as model spouses, mothers, church and community leaders, and exemplars of the faith’ (Baker & Scott 1992:34). ‘In this regard, the church was ahead of the rest of society, offering women opportunities in church and community leadership unheard of elsewhere’ (Brunette-Hill 1999:79).

Nearly twenty years ago, the following list of tasks were presented in a report by Cloete (quoted by Stroebel 1993:5) to the Free State Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church with regard to the ten duties required from a clergymen’s wife:

1. She is to be the chairwoman of the Vrouediens\(^6\) (women’s auxiliary) in meetings and also in the work they do.

2. She must lead the women’s prayer groups and Bible study groups.

3. She is responsible for the Junior Youth group. She must organize leaders, programmes etc.

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\(^6\) The term Vrouediens, directly translated, means ‘women’s service’. This form of ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church consists of women that serve in various areas of Church life. If you are a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and you are a woman, you are automatically part of this ministry, which usually organises bazaars and teas for funerals, does mercy work and fund-raising and also provides spiritual care for the women of the Church. Traditionally, the clergymen’s wife is responsible for leading this ministry in the Church. Some congregations no longer have a Vrouediens, but instead have ministry teams consisting of men and women performing these services for the congregation.
4. She must take the lead in the organising, planning and execution of congregational functions like
fairs, bazaars etc.

5. She is seen as the driving force behind the actions of the sisters of the congregation. Even the
leaders that she gets to help her want the clergyman's wife to tell them how the work must be
done.

6. The parsonage, her house, must be open to the congregation.

7. Her tasks especially evolve around the sisters of the congregation. It is expected of her to comfort
and to help because she is the clergyman's wife. She also has an important role to play in crisis
counselling of the congregation, especially to the women of the Church.

8. She is a wife and a mother. In practice her responsibilities have not decreased. The congregation
expects her to participate in the ministry even if she has small children or babies to care for.

9. The role and place of the clergyman's wife has no parallel. It has never been expected of any other
kind of professional's wife to participate in her husband's professional life as it is expected of
clergymen's wives.

10. She is the secretary of the clergyman.

(my translation)

One Of Them (Swart 2003:XXXIV) confirms the existence of these expectations when she says: ‘I had an
appointment in our first congregation even before my husband was called to minister there.’ When she
wanted to give the Vrouediens over to some of the parish women, it took her 13 hours of negotiating to find
women that were prepared to take over her job. ‘For 26 years, up to that point, it was only a job that was
done by the clergyman's wife’ (Swart & One Of Them 2003:XXXIII).

The history of the place of women in the Dutch Reformed Church has been greatly challenged by the
emergent human rights culture in the new South Africa (Büchner et al 2002:401). In this denomination
women could only hold the office of deacons from 1982 en elders and clergy from 1990. Because of some
growth with regard to exegetic insights, there is now increasing wariness with regard to traditional
stereotyping when it comes to the nature of women, and I wonder what effect this might have on the wives
married to clergymen.
1.6 THE CHURCH TALKING ABOUT THE PRINCESSES

What does the voice of the Church say about the princesses of the magic wand?

In 1986 the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church commissioned a study to look into the role expectations and responsibilities of clergymen’s wives in this denomination (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1986b:697). Twelve years later, in the Agenda (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1998a) of the General Synod, Müller, Van Tonder and Oosthuizen (1998), three clergymen, reported back to the Synod on this matter. As this is the report on these princesses' realities and the most extensive of its kind at the General Synod level, it gives us a peep into how the Church thinks about these women and how the Church proposes to care for them.

Compared to the list of tasks that were presented in the report to the Free State Synod as mentioned in 1.5, this report (1998) sounds positively progressive on various levels.

The report (Müller et al 1998:239) claims that the work done by clergymen’s wives in congregations should be nothing more than the work of the office of the believer. In the Dutch Reformed Church there are only three specific offices namely: minister of the Word, deacon and elder. The ministry of the office of believer consists of spontaneous participation in the activities of the congregation according to the clergyman wife's calling, gifts and circumstances [Afr. spesifiek betrokke volgens eie roeping, gawes en omstandighede], as it is true for any other believer. The report therefore sets these women free from the leadership expectations mentioned in earlier reports (see 1.5). When I first read this report as part of my background reading for this dissertation, it brought me great relief and empowered me to voice my vision of how I see my participation in the congregation with greater boldness. Most of the participants, however, were not even aware of the report or the potential good news it brought for their contexts. The Church should therefore take a serious look at their communication channels and how they could maximize it so that appropriate information can reach the people that would benefit from it, in this case, clergymen's wives.

In the Bible, there are no models for clergymen’s wives, only indications that leaders of a church, if they have a family, should have a healthy, quality family life (Müller et al 1998:238). Müller et al (1998:238) prioritise ensuring that the marriage of a clergy couple is a healthy one, placing any other roles second and seeing them as supplementary! If it means that the wife is not involved in the congregation to ensure a healthy marriage, than let it be so. These men (Müller et al 1998:238) even propose that the Church Board has a responsibility to ensure that nothing impairs or constricts making healthy quality family life possible. They also propose that couples must have the space to grow and marriage problems and stress factors must be
eliminated and dealt with. Again, these tidings of good news that can bring hope into clergy couples' marriages were not sufficiently communicated, as 3.2 has clearly shown.

Müller et al (1998:236) further claim that this report focuses especially on the effects that traditional role expectations have on clergymen's wives. The report (Müller et al 1998:237) adds that the role expectations for clergymen's wives are usually vague because these expectations are communicated orally through congregational history. Therefore these expectations are scarcely negotiated with the clergyman's wife. One of the co-researchers called this vague situation 'World Trade Centre Stuff' (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXIX).

Müller et al (1998:237) also argue that the three conflicting roles of mother, wife and career woman are a breeding-ground for stress and burnout amongst clergymen's wives. The claims history of clergy families with medical funds confirm this contention as it shows that 70% of all claims of these families go to stress-related medication, mostly for the clergyman's wife (Müller et al 1998:237). Some of the co-researchers who joined in this research journey have confirmed that they have experienced these extensive and unrealistic role expectations (see 3.2).

According to Müller et al (1998:239) an additional task that these wives have, together with the rest of the congregation, is to support her husband as specific officeholder of the Church, in accordance with Romans 16:1-2 (Thompson Chain Reference Bible 1983):

I commend to you our sister Phoebe [deaconess], a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

The kind of support that Paul is asking the community of believers to give to the office bearers of the church is something my husband has not always experienced from a congregation as a whole. Could this task of support as mentioned in the above Scripture passage also cause stress, because a clergyman's wife is often left alone with this responsibility of supporting her husband without any outside help, not even from the denominational structures of the Church?

The following proposals with regard to clergy wives/husbands were made and accepted during this gathering of the General Synod in 1998 (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1998b:441):

4.2 The General Synod confirms the viewpoint that wives (husbands) of the clergy do not hold an official position in the Church and congregations cannot expect them to fulfil any official role.
4.3 The General Synod decides that it is a reasonable expectation that the spouses of clergy take part in congregational activities with commitment.

4.4 The General Synod requests Church Boards to sensitively monitor the unique and changing marriage-, family-, and career circumstances of clergy.

4.6 The General Synod requests synods to make arrangements whereby pastoral care could be facilitated for clergy and their families.

(my translation)

While these proposals sound very helpful in principle, none of the above proposals that speak of sensitive monitoring and the facilitation of pastoral care have been implemented in a way that has reached me in any clear form in the five years since the proposals have been approved. Sadly, although the General Synod decided during the same meeting (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 1998b:524) and again during the eleventh gathering (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2002b:634) that when issues are discussed that concern women in the Church, a woman or women would be included in the delegations or commissions. As the matters concerning clergymen’s wives are settled, these women have consequently missed the opportunity to speak for themselves or even to be included in the research that was conducted concerning them.

Nowhere in the research text (Müller et al 1998) do I hear the voices of these women that are spoken about with so much certainty and expertise. The effects of the role expectations on clergymen’s wives were not addressed in these women’s own voices. I still wonder to this day how different the outcomes of this report would have been if it had a woman’s face or women’s narratives woven through the text.

To address this lack of voice, in addition to frequently quoting the co-researchers as they spoke, I attempted in Chapters Three and Five to give women a strong voice in this research text. The fact that I, as the researcher, am myself a woman obviously adds another woman’s voice to the chorus of lamentation and hope.

1.7 OTHER VOICES ON THE MAGIC WAND

We will now hear what the voices of relevant literature have to say about the nature of the magic wand.

Most of the research that has been done on the subject of clergymen’s wives has been quantitative (Brunette-Hill 1999; Blanton & Morris 1999; Stroebel 1993; Baker & Scott 1992; Rogers 1991; Rayburn 1991;
Nothnagel 1990), where these princesses were asked to fill in some or other assessment instruments in which their answers were then interpreted and from which conclusions were drawn. Although these women were involved to some degree, an expert or experts always told them how they should interpret and live within their unique context. In this sense, the clergymen's wives either became the problem or were spoken about as an object with no insight into or expertise in their own situations. The broader social context of the hierarchy of the institutional church, and the discourses of patriarchy and femininity in and outside the church were seldom addressed to their full extent in any of the research projects that were available to me. In this dissertation a discourse will refer to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events' (Burr 1995:48).

Dempsey (1986), Van Biljon (1997), Frame and Shehan (1994) and Morey (1991) did some qualitative research work which I found very helpful, but because of the scope of this dissertation I am unable to discuss this research material in detail.

I have read through pages and pages of ideas concerning the lives of clergymen's wives across continents, western cultures, generations, paradigms and time lines and found it amazing that these women have so many things in common. What has given this so-called universal quality to the princesses' experiences? What bodies of knowledges are informing women married to clergymen?

I was fascinated by the alternative ways of being clergymen's wives, from women who are living in different cities from their husbands to husbands who are moving to a new town with their wives (Deming 1991), because the wives have received a very good job opportunity. The voices of literature helped me to feel less alienated and rebellious. One set of empirical data after another (Brunette-Hill 1999; Blanton & Morris 1999; Stroebel 1993; Baker & Scott 1992; Rogers 1991; Rayburn 1991; Nothnagel 1990) spoke about the loneliness of these women, that same loneliness which had previously left me with feelings of so much guilt. There were also some familiar voices that spoke in a certain tone of voice. There was a voice of advice (Wessels & Lotter 1999; Dobson 1995; Jenkins 1992) that told me that if I would only do this or that then I would have a better life. These voices of certainty wanted me to believe that there is a right way and a wrong way to be a clergyman's wife. There were also the voices of some women married to clergymen that told me that my situation will never change, that it is a given and that I have to accept it. These voices left me in despair and with a sense of being trapped.

One of the differences, however, between the situation of women married to clergymen in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and that of women married to clergymen in the American context, as
described in many of my sources, is the availability of care. I came across the following websites that all offer support and care and an opportunity for women living inside this reality to be heard:

http://members.tripod.com/kerryskorner/pastorswife.html; http://www.pastorswives.org/;

I was also fascinated with one article that explored the well-being of spouses of members of the clergy who worked full-time (Baker & Scott 1992). The advice for these women was either to work or to study again. This resonates with my own experience of being able to testify to my renewed sense of identity, personal agency and direction since I started studying and seeing people in therapy. I feel revived, refreshed and hopeful.

In the last couple of months I have heard of clergymen's wives who are thinking of ending their lives or who have done so, who feel depressed, and of some who are leaving their husbands because of the ministry. I have had quite a few conversations with other clergymen's wives and have encountered in most of these conversations moments filled with tears, bewilderment and a brave smile at the end, because "we are doing this for the Lord"! In my own bewilderment I have often asked myself if this is something the Lord wants us to do for him?

1.8 THE NEEDS OF THE PRINCESSES

It is against the background set out above that I see a need for a study of this kind in which we as clergymen's wives can speak for ourselves and inform others by means of this record of our research journey. To borrow some of the wording of the topic of a conference held with regard to women in office in the Dutch Reformed Church, I would like 'Mother Church's daughters to tell their own stories of their experiences of the practice of their daily lives' (Büchner 2002:399).

Laubscher (2002:82) writes the following about her needs: 'Nobody notices me, Lord, they only see the minister's wife. Nobody asks about me. To whom do I pour out my sorrow and despair, my pain? Of the intense solitude that I am experiencing?' These questions are also echoed in most of the co-researchers' stories (Swart & Associates 2003).

Houts (quoted by Blanton & Morris 1999:345) says the following in this regard: 'More than any other surprise to me has been the growing awareness that most clergy couples have very limited stabilizing friendships. They have an immediate acceptance into the church community and yet are often treated as misfits, wallflowers, or china dolls in the social fabric of the community.'
Müller and Howell (2003) used their assigned *Pastor Pastorum* visits to invite members of the clergy to be their co-researchers and they concluded that there is great need for a system of care for the caregivers (clergymen) in the Dutch Reformed Church. In some of these stories, Müller and Howell (2003) have ‘detected feelings of concern for the future’. Quite a high percentage of the pastors in their group were thinking of alternative careers. The reasons are threefold:

- Frustrations because of a difficult work situations and little career satisfaction.
- Financial problems of the specific congregation.
- Tension between pastor colleagues because of incompatible personalities and/or poor developed management structures.

(Müller & Howell 2003)

Apart from the factors that are mentioned above ‘[s]ociological research has shown that churches and pastors occupy an increasingly peripheral position in society and have less and less significance for modern adults’ (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:131). The very controversial book *Op soek na God …buite die Kerk?* [Seeking God outside the Church], written by Annes Nel (2003), also talks about people’s hurt and disillusionment with the institutional church and its leaders. This book reflects the situation which increases the alienation that clergy families experience inside and outside the church. Henshall (1991:17) confirms this dilemma when she says that during the ‘twentieth century people’s attitudes towards the clergy have changed dramatically’. Therefore many clergymen and clergywomen ‘find themselves in a state of uncertainty where once they were very positive and were acknowledged leaders in their communities. They find it hard to explain what they do, in layman’s terms, specially to non-believers. In some parts of the country the multi-faith society challenges them face to face’ (Henshall 1991:102).

I believe that it is time for the church to care for those who do the caring for and with others. Human beings cannot be isolated from the systems in which they exist and live and the context of which they form a part. Often clergy couples are excluded from the Christian community in which they serve and are marginalised as super Christians who hear directly from God and do not need the fellowship of believers and the mutual care of the laity. De Jongh van Arkel (2000:14) defines mutual care as ‘the personal, loving, dialogic concern of

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7 According to Bisschoff (2002:4), *Pastor Pastorum* is the Latin terminology for the clergy of the clergy.

8 The laity, according to the *Oxford School dictionary* are persons that do not have specialized knowledge, or ‘training’, or persons who are not ‘ordained as members of the clergy’.
one person for another’. It is of this care and love that the clergymen and their wives are so often excluded and starved. They long for the Christian hospitality that literally means the ‘love of aliens’ (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:15). Whereas congregation members can leave their church and join a new one if they find that the amount of support and care they receive is insufficient during times of crisis, for clergy couples this option is not available, because leaving the Church or even one particular congregation could mean losing a job. Bearing one another’s burdens and enduring one another’s failings are so often just the luxury of the laity, as professional Christians are not allowed to have failings or burdens. It is within this unique context of a community of interdependence that I find my heart longing for the mutual care of a community of believers.

Houts (cited by Morris & Blanton 1995:31) notes that ‘many clergy perceive their denominational support systems as a mistrusted and complicated bureaucracy held captive by administrative structures and limitations. Issues of truth and confidentiality may influence the extent to which clergy families utilize denominationally provided services’.

It has been pointed out that the ‘spouse is the one person in the parish who has no priest/pastor’ (Gregory 1989:66). Trapped between the increasing marginalisation of the clergy in our society, a lack of a sense of community in the congregations they serve, their loneliness in carrying out the behest of Romans 16:1-2, a distrust of denominational systems and their fear of talking to anyone and possibly in the end letting their husbands lose their jobs, these princesses can only ask: Where do we go for care and support?

1.9 CARING FOR THE OTHER WHOLE

The availability of support services has thus far been very limited, and the Dutch Reformed Church’s ministry to the clergy and their families has been inadequate, to say the least. During the General Synod gathering in 2002, caring for clergy families was proposed (Bisschoff & Van Tonder 2002:264-268), and it was supposed to take place at two levels: the Church Board level and the District Synod Level.

Firstly, at Church Board level it was proposed that caring/nurturing commissions be established inside congregations that would be friends of the pastorate and would fulfil a parental role towards the clergy family. One of the aims of this caring/nurturing commission must be to listen to any frustrations or grievances the clergy or his family might have with regard to the ministry and to address these issues to the satisfaction of all parties. The General Synod replied to this proposal (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika 2002b:627) by encouraging Church Boards to guide and care for the clergy through a commission with persons who are commissioned to do this work.
Secondly, at District Synod Level, a resolution was passed, according to the *Handelinge van die Algemene Sinode* (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika 2002b:627), that these synods are urged to introduce the *Pastor Pastorum* practice, which entails a team of clergy that are trained to listen and care for other clergy and will send the message that the Church cares for the clergy. This practice is mostly extended to the clergy and only where this is possible, to the rest of the family, according to the *Agenda van die Algemene Sinode* (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika 2002a:271).

My husband has received one visit this year from his *Pastor Pastorum* and I was not included in the conversation. In my conversations with clergymen’s wives, they reported their experience of this practice as follows: they were not invited to the conversation; they did not experience a sense of freedom to speak about their real needs; they did not trust the men that acted as *Pastor Pastorum* and their husbands answered on their behalf. Therefore I wonder whether clergymen’s wives specific needs can be met within this supposed caring practice, as it is often clergymen who visit the clergy couples. Who will represent the care of God in the clergyman’s wife’s life?

Currently there are attempts by the Dutch Reformed Church to develop and extend support services to their clergy and their families. Most of the proposed caring practices, according to the *Handelinge van die Algemene Sinode* (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika 2002b:627-631), except the *Pastor Pastorum*, must still be developed, and proposals have to be presented at the next General Synod meeting in 2004. In the end, I believe that improving ‘clergy family well-being impacts not only their families, but also the many families that turn to them for help and support’ (Blanton & Morris 1999:345).

The intended audience of this research would therefore be therapists working with these women; clergy; spiritual leaders who are married; the synod structures of the institutional church, teachers at seminaries and church boards.

### 1.10 Outline of Chapters

The following is an overview of the chapters of this research journey, which illuminates the lives of the princesses of the magic wand from different sides.

In Chapter Two, ‘Turning the gaze of the magic wand on itself’, I describe my research journey and the approach I followed and how the gaze of the magic wand turned on itself.
Chapter Three re-tells the themes of the conversations and the voices of the different co-researchers are heard in terms of their ‘Narratives of pain, survival and hope’. These narratives tell of how the princesses’ lives have been influenced by the power of the magic wand.

In Chapter Four, ‘Hypnotising the Princesses’, I reflect on the different cultural and religious discourses that constitute the lives of the princesses of the magic wand; I discuss the social construction of Mevrou Dominee and also discuss power/knowledge themes that came up in the telling of the women’s stories.

In Chapter Five, ‘Caring with the Princesses’, I reflect on what I have learned during this research journey. I also discuss the participants’ experiences on this research journey and the recommendations made by the participants as my co-researchers.
CHAPTER TWO: TURNING THE GAZE OF THE MAGIC WAND ON ITSELF

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the reader with the ‘lenses’ (Hoffman 1990) through which this whole research journey is viewed. The first part of this chapter introduces the reader to the five phases of the qualitative research process: the way the researcher is viewed in the journey; the paradigms that informed this journey; the strategies of inquiry; the research methods that were employed; as well as the way this journey was interpreted.

The second part of this chapter describes how the research journey was conducted and how these methods, paradigms and biases were applied.

2.2 MY RESEARCH APPROACH

I would argue that my ‘re-search curiosity‘ (Andersen 1997:125) and the re-search journey were part of my quest to ‘return the gaze of the magic wand on itself’ (White 1995:122) by ‘challenging...relations of power’ through this research journey. Therefore I situate my research journey within a qualitative approach (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:5-6) by means of which I attempted to capture the individuals' points of view, to examine the constraints of everyday life and to secure rich descriptions of these accounts. This capturing, examining and securing were done using feminist, narrative and participatory action research approaches, which I discuss by weaving accounts of these approaches through the phases outlined below.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994b:11) structure the process of inquiry in qualitative research into five ‘headings’ or ‘phases’, namely: the researcher and the researched, major paradigms and interpretive perspectives, research strategies, methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials, and the art of interpretation. I applied these five phases in my research design to explain how and why I chose qualitative research as my research approach.

2.3 THE RESEARCHER

The first phase requires the researcher to be identified. Within qualitative research, ‘research is an interactive
process shaped by [my] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and those of the [participants] in the setting’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:3).

Therefore I am a carrier of a ‘complex and contradictory history’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:12) as a white, middle-class Afrikaans-speaking woman in a predominantly patriarchal religious society. The reader must remain aware that, in terms of its background, this study is constructed by and filtered through my research experience as the wife of a clergyman in the Afrikaans, protestant Dutch Reformed Church. My situation is similar to that described below:

In acknowledging my involvement with my subject matter, I am not only recognizing the personal sources of my preoccupations, my interest and my writing but I am also recognising the ways in which I am a social/cultural being, a being which seeks to make life matter, to make meaning from experience. I, the researcher, am a socially constructed person, a product of my culture. I speak through my experience of gender, sexuality, race, class.

(Hosking 2001:162)

Therefore I agree with Reinharz (1992:260), who writes about the ‘epistemology of insiderness’ within the feminist research approach, suggesting that there is a link between the personal experience of the researcher and the research journey. My research curiosity and journey is close to my heart and I experience the merging of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ (Reinharz 1992:259). As I ‘self-disclose’, I am ‘reformulating [my] role in a way that maximize[s] engagement of the self but also increases [my] vulnerability to criticism’ (Reinharz 1992:34). Consequently, I am a researcher who is a ‘fully engaged participant’ (Dreyer 1998:5). My ‘narrative’ is ‘lived, told, and retold in this narrative research process. Thus the two narratives of [the] participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through inquiry’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265).

I know that my journey into ‘the personal worlds of others’ has become ‘a journey into [myself]’ (Sears 1992:147) too. For me, the journey has already begun; but it is only now that I experience my voice and the voices of the co-researchers being expressed in this dissertation. In this regard, I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (1994:423), who say: ‘For many, especially for women…voice is an acknowledgement that they have something to say….We think of this as the development of voice after silence.’

Because this story takes place in the context of my own larger life story, as a researcher I am observing myself in ‘participation with participants’. It is even possible that I am a participant and that the ‘study in question is an autobiographical one’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:414). However, within the postmodern
paradigm, Gergen (1991:164) would propose this study to be a 'sociobiography', because together we as clergymen's wives narratively construct the truth of our worlds as we experience them.

The first phase is followed by the second, which involves explaining the different paradigms through which this research is viewed.

### 2.4 INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS

In the second phase 'the beliefs [that] shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:13) are discussed. According to Guba (quoted by Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:13), these beliefs 'may be termed a paradigm'. In qualitative research, the researcher works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms that forms a ‘bias’ that ‘is essential to the conduct of research’ (Wolcott 1992:54) in this approach.

My research is conducted within a postmodern discourse, with social construction discourse (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997) as well as critical and feminist poststructural paradigms as the conceptual foundation. These paradigms 'work within relativist ontologies (multiple constructed realities), interpretive epistemologies (the knower and the known interact and shape one another), and interpretive, naturalistic methods' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:13).

As a result 'each interpretive paradigm [made] particular demands on me, including the questions that [were] asked and the interpretations that [were] brought to them' (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:13). These demands are explained in the third phase of the inquiry.

The interpretive paradigms that formed part of my bias as researcher are discussed below.

#### 2.4.1 Social construction discourse

Social construction discourse is situated within postmodern discourse, which holds ‘the idea that objective knowledge is impossible’; therefore ‘multiple realities are preferred’ (Kotzé 1994:21). The postmodern view of knowledge is that ‘values infuse all knowing’ and therefore ‘postmodernism typically values diversity, plurality, and choice’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:569). Social construction discourse not only gave me a lens or epistemology to view the reality of my context and this research journey, but also empowered me to constitute realities in relationships and language. In this regard, Gergen (quoted by Hoffman 1990:3) says that ‘the move is from an experiential to a social epistemology’.
This paradigm takes a ‘critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge’ and operates on the assumption that the ‘ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific’ (Burr 1995:3). The specific cultural context of the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church and the taken-for-granted ideas that inform this reality would therefore be discussed in this construction, especially in Chapter Four. ‘Viewed from a social constructionist perspective, culture is a social construction and anything said about culture is a social construction about a social construction’ (Kotzé 1994:110).

The aim of social construction discourse is to expand and enrich the vocabulary of understanding, which implies that I am responsible for my description of this research journey, because it is my construction. For this reason I should go about my research in ethical ways by doing participatory research with other women in my position, using socially reflexive procedures and being transparent about my assumptions.

I trust that the social construction of my journey and experience during this research project will enhance the reader’s vocabulary and understanding of clergymen’s wives’ contexts and realities.

2.4.2 A feminist poststructuralist paradigm

The concepts and ideas of Foucault, a poststructuralist, are among the ‘lenses’ (Hoffman 1990) of social construction discourse through which this research journey is viewed.

In my work as a researcher I drew upon what Foucault (1980:82-83) calls ‘subjugated knowledges …knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientficity.…[I]t is through the re-appearance of this knowledge…[that] criticism performs its work.’

The subjugated knowledges of the co-researchers therefore ‘re-appeared’ in the writing up of the lived stories of the participating clergymen’s wives in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003). I strove for the ‘reactivation of local knowledges’ so that ‘subjugated knowledges’ would ‘be released’ (Foucault 1980:85). In turning real lives into writing, I tried to guard against a procedure of objectification and subjection by deconstructing my power and letting the co-researchers have the last say on how their stories are represented in the research text.

Because ‘resistance does not exist outside of the system of power relations’ (Fillingham 1993:145) it was important that my research involved participants, who like me, stand inside the same system of power relations. Foucault (quoted by Fillingham 1993:151) insisted that political resistance was not just possible, but
a necessary part of the equation, and that ‘one must put “in play,” show up, transform, and reverse the systems which quietly order us about.’ That is what I tried to do in this research journey.

Postmodern and poststructuralist feminism ‘view the world as endless stories or texts, many of which sustain the integration of power and oppression’ (Olesen 1994:164). It is to these stories and texts that tell of clergymen’s wives’ subjugation within the determinant order of the Dutch Reformed Church that I directed my research. I see my research as feminist because it highlights a specific women’s issue and focuses on potentially problematic institutions and structures that influence the situation of these women.

2.4.3 An emancipatory paradigm

Another interpretive paradigm which I used to look at my research was the critical or emancipatory paradigm, which can be understood in the context of the ‘empowerment of individuals’ and an exposure of the ‘contradictions of worlds of appearances’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:140). I see this research journey as emancipatory because I tried to use this research journey to empower clergymen’s wives by exposing the taken-for-granted ideas that have become part of our lives (see Chapter Four). In addition this research became ‘a vehicle for resistance, a means of social transformation through collective participation. In line with…critical research…researchers attempt not simply to describe [their] reality…but to change it’ (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:147). In participatory action research, a group of co-researchers collaboratively combine in inquiry, learning and action. Together we as clergymen’s wives negotiated and conversed about how we might be able to change our realities. Our conversations about the kind of pastoral care that we would find helpful in achieving change and our recommendations for further change are discussed in Section 5.3.

2.4.4 Practical theology as interpretive paradigm

I agree with Roux, Myburg and Kotzé’s (2001:59) comment that ‘an understanding of practical theology is inextricably linked to one’s epistemology – the guide to one’s understanding…Practical theology is not something out there that we discover, but something we construct within our local religious or spiritual community.’ In my research journey I therefore used practical theology as a paradigm, particularly the contextual and participatory approaches to practical theology. Under each of these approaches I discuss the theology that best describes my values and ethics and that formed part of my bias as a researcher.
2.4.4.1 Contextual approach to practical theology

This research project is part of a contextual approach to practical theology consistent with the features of that approach set out by Bosch (1991:424):

I refused to endorse the world of clergymen’s wives as ‘static, as something that ‘only has to be explained, but [saw it] rather as something that has to be changed’ (Bosch 1991:424). Therefore my ‘commitment’ to these women ‘as the first act of theology’ (Bosch 1991:424) was especially important, as both the institutional Church and the Christian community have marginalised clergymen’s wives. I also agree with the notion that theology or spirituality can only be ‘done with those who suffer’ (Bosch 1991:424) and therefore I would describe our research relationship as a form of doing theology together as suffering individuals. Within the contextual approach to practical theology, the emphasis is on ‘doing theology….since doing is more important than knowing or speaking’ (Bosch 1991:424-425) and that moved me to practise care beyond the research relationship through letters, phone calls, sms-messages and conversations.

a) Feminist theology

According to Bosch (1991:421) Feminist theology is seen as the ‘revolutionary’ side of the contextual approach to practical theology. ‘Feminist theology of praxis is an exercise in accountability to a specific way of doing theology which stems from a passion for change’ (Ackermann 1996:45). In my practice as a researcher, this passion for change works toward ‘justice in women’s lives’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:77). This shows that ‘the feminist maxim of, “the personal is the political”, is nowhere more true than when applied to Christian pastoral care’ (Graham 1996:173). Because the co-researchers spoke out and told their stories in the book, Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003), the personal became the political for the princesses of the magic wand.

My passion for change is best described in the words of Welch (1990:165), who says: ‘When we begin from a self created by love for nature and for other people, choosing not to resist injustice would be the ultimate loss of self.’ This dissertation is the result of my first step in resistance and questioning the injustice, pain and oppression (see Section 3.2) that some of the participants are experiencing.

Feminist theology exposes the harmful effects of a hierarchical model in religions, while promoting an egalitarian model. I therefore applied the following strategies suggested by Isherwood and McEwan (1993:87) in my research journey: ‘questioning assumptions on the role of women held by societies and churches; dismantling the sexist command structures of the churches; placing reflection on theology in the context of women’s lives; giving voice to voiceless; supporting the oppressed and introducing new values.’
As is indicated in the participants’ reflections in Section 5.4, the co-researchers felt that they were being taken seriously and that this research journey has become what Isherwood and McEwan (1993:82) call a ‘liberating action, a commitment to praxis’.

In this research journey, ‘women’s experience’ is claimed ‘as the basis of theological reflection’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:80) that can be owned and expressed ‘without feeling alienated’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:10) in a patriarchal religious world. Therefore ‘muted persons in the community of faith’ have been given an opportunity to ‘contribute to the dialogue of faith’ (Bons-Storm 1998b:23) by sharing their stories of faith and doubt in this research. This was done by including a summary of the participants’ narratives in the book, *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) as discussed in Sections 1.4 and 2.8.7. I saw myself as a ‘midwife’ who removed ‘the obstacles which prevent faithful people from expressing their faith’ in a ‘two-way traffic’ (Bons-Storm 1998b:23-24) as one of the aims in my research. I therefore took a position that will accord women a voice.

The ‘friendship’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:102) quality of equality is something I dared to employ in my research journey. In employing this friendship quality, I hoped that my research would be experienced as a ‘trusting and caring holding space’ (Weingarten 2002:35) where the inclusion of God in the conversation leads to beauty ‘collaborat[ing] with pain, creating hope’ (Weingarten 2002:36). I deconstructed my power as a researcher to create a safe space of equals and friends where we could speak the unspeakable and hope the unthinkable!

### 2.4.4.2 A participatory approach to practical theology

A participatory approach to practical theology is practised against the backdrop of a postmodern paradigm that sees ‘theology as a commitment to participation’ (Herholdt 1998:224), a commitment which goes beyond the doing of theology. Within this approach I see ‘practical theology [as] practised/done by all people grappling with an understanding of the presence of the spiritual, holy, “Other”, or God in our human circumstances’ (Roux et al 2001:64).

Therefore the previously marginalised voices of clergymen’s wives can now be heard in this record of their stories in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003). In line with a description of practical theology by Poling (1991:186), Roux et al (2001:65) developed a number of guidelines for participatory practical theology which I applied in my research.

I accepted the ‘presence of difference and otherness in experience’ (Roux et al 2001:65) as a given with the clergymen’s wives I journeyed with. I also listened to their ‘unheard voices and interpreted these voices as
critically and constructively as the familiar voice of tradition’ (Roux et al 2001:65). Therefore I know that within this practical theological approach the co-researchers and my own ‘unheard voices’ as the voices of so-called ‘non-theologians’ (Roux et al 2001:65) have made a contribution.

a) Postmodern theology

Within this participatory approach to practical theology I can relate to postmodern theology, where every ‘person imagines God personally and differently, although this does not exclude the religious feeling that my God is also your God’ (Herholdt 1998:225). God is therefore seen as *Divinity-in-Diversity*: female/male, Black/White, and so forth’ (Bons-Storm 1996:130). In my research journey I was open to new ideas and views on God because I believe that each person’s relationship with God is unique. Postmodern theology helped me to open the ‘certainties’ of my theologies ‘to the refreshing breezes of curiosity and wonder, in which multiple realities can coexist and relationships can evolve’ (Griffith 1995:127). Griffith (1995:137) sums this all up when she says:

> It is in this context…that a person continues to co-create an evolving story with God that is uniquely his or her own, not dominated by my story, nor a psychological story, nor even the story of his or her particular religious doctrines…. [P]rimacy must be given to that person’s story as the person describes his or her experiences…and the possibilities and surprises that are encountered.

In postmodern theology there is a ‘return to a contemporary literary role of the Bible, motivated by the conviction that the Bible as literature discloses God. This results in an epistemology that takes knowledge as a way of knowing that includes personal experience’ (Herholdt 1998:223). Clergymen’s wives’ personal knowledge and experience were therefore included in the understanding of God as he/she discloses himself/herself to these women.

### 2.4.5 A narrative approach

‘Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centres people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives’ (Morgan 2000:2).

This viewing of ‘problems as separate’ from people is called ‘externalisation’ (17-31). ‘Externalizing is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, personify the problems that they experience as oppressive’ (White & Epston 1990:38). Recently Elsa, one of the participants, recognised that the attendees of her workshops knew that she was married to a clergyman and this became a problem for
her as she felt that in her experience the label or identity of *Mevrou Dominee* impeded her work in various ways. She could not identify with the woman, *Mevrou Dominee*, that the group had in mind and knew that she was not the problem. Elsa is familiar with the narrative approach to therapy and when she told me her story she spoke about the problem, *Mevrou Dominee*, as being separate from her identity. Elsa (Swart 2003:XXXIX) reflected on our conversation in the following way:

I also thought about the externalising conversation we had and realised (this helped me the most) that my response came automatically, which confirms the fact that I would not tolerate her (*Mevrou Dominee*) in my life. I was surprised though about the intense response she aroused in me when she tried to make a way into my life, work and group. This shows me the extreme POWER she has.

Therefore Elsa used ‘externalised language’ (Morgan 2000:17-31) in the letters she wrote to me because she saw the problem (*Mevrou Dominee*) as ‘separate’ from herself. This is also why the words *Mevrou Dominee* are used in capital letters in this research text and in Elsa’s story to assist us in externalising this issue further, as suggested by Morgan (2000:18).

‘Externalising conversations establish a context where a person experiences themselves as separate from the problem’ and ‘the problem no longer speaks to them of their identity or the “truth” about who they are’ (Morgan 2000:24). Therefore Elsa felt that externalising conversations opened up space for her to ‘take action against the problem’ and reduced the ‘guilt and blame’ (Morgan 2000:24) that she experienced.

The narrative approach and principles were used in the conversations we had as clergymen’s wives. I deconstructed my power as therapist and researcher in my work by transgressing the ‘oft-made work/life boundary distinction’ (White 1997:132) in being with these princesses of the magic wand who had accepted my coming into their lives. This research journey and being with these clergymen’s wives have encouraged a re-authoring of their lives and agency of self (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:10), as will be seen in the reflections of the participants in Section 5.4.

During the conversations I used the following therapeutic practices to deconstruct my power within the process: accountability, a not-knowing position, feedback, therapeutic letters, practices that are formed by a principle of transparency, practices that are shaped by a commitment to the deconstruction of the modes of life and thought that are more richly described and ‘taking-it-back practices’ (White 1997:132) work.

The narrative approach is therefore guided by the notion that we are in this together, which is something that I tried to convey in this research journey.
2.4.6 A participatory approach to pastoral care as paradigm

I situate myself within the participatory approach to pastoral care. This means that I am committed to a ‘participatory ethical care’ that does not ‘care for but care with people who are in need of care’ (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). Therefore the co-researchers and researcher who are at the receiving end of the care collaboratively constructed the recommendations for care (see Section 5.3) in this research journey.

As a pastoral caregiver I de-centred myself, but not in the sense that I became neutral and non-directive. As a participant, I ‘collaboratively’ negotiated ‘alternative ways of being and doing’ (Roux et al 2001:46). Therefore this approach goes beyond ‘hermeneutics towards co-construction’ (Roux et al 2001:46).

Within this approach I see pastoral care as a ‘participatory process in which therapists collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and negotiating ways of living in an ethical and ecological accountable way’ (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). Especially the first weekend of conversations allowed for this ‘participatory process’ to take place; and the first chapter of Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) is therefore a co-construction of our collaborative journey.

The interpretation of both the literature and recollections that are discussed in more detail in Phase 5 took place from within, or against the backdrop of these different interpretive paradigms. Now that the paradigm and the research history have been revealed, we can move to the next phase, namely, working with a specific strategy of inquiry.

2.5 STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY AND INTERPRETIVE PARADIGMS

‘A strategy of inquiry comprises of a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world. Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:14). As a result I chose the following approaches to research and thereby put the paradigms (see Section 2.4 above) in motion: feminist action research, narrative research and participatory action research.

According to Reinharz (1992:175), ‘the purpose of feminist research must be to create new relationships, better laws, and improved institutions’. By writing down these women’s stories in Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) and including these women through participation, this research journey can be said to be ‘oriented to social and individual change because feminism represents a repudiation of the status quo’ (Reinharz 1992:175). Therefore as I was working on this research project, ‘a new story, a story of inquiry’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:418) began. This inquiry may consequently be seen as ‘interactions of
experiences of participants in a field’ and my ‘experiences’ as I came ‘to that field’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:418).

2.5.1 Re-search curiosity

As I was inspired to find a voice to story my own experiences, I also became curious about how other women under the spell of the magic wand would choose to story their experiences of being the wives of clergymen, to deconstruct dominant discourses constituting Mevrou Dominee and to story their ‘not-yet-said’ (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:381) clergyman’s wife practices. These areas of curiosity were formulated before I conversed with the princesses of the magic wand and were therefore initiated through my own curiosity. They then became my guide in formulating the preliminary research aims set out below.

2.5.2 Purpose of the study

My purpose with this study was to gather a group of wives of clergymen within the Dutch Reformed Church who were inspired by a desire to talk about their experiences and practices. Initially my additional aim was to converse with these women about the different areas of our re-search curiosity, upon the basis of which we could then negotiate the aims we would want to set for our journey together as proposed within the participatory action research approach (McTaggart 1997b). Although I envisaged a participatory action research journey, I was only able to see these women for one weekend. This meant that we had to diverge from some of the principles of this approach because a participatory action research journey is a ‘group activity’ (McTaggart 1997a:28). In this regard it was not possible to negotiate the aims and areas of curiosity as I had envisaged. With these negotiations I had wanted to ensure ‘authentic participation’ which ‘means sharing in the way research is conceptualized, practised and brought to bear on the life-world’ (McTaggart 1997a:28). In this ‘sharing’ of the research I wanted the research journey to be more than just a ‘mere involvement’ or ‘co-opting’ (McTaggart 1997a:28) of participants, which could eventually change my initial curiosity, which inspired this study.

I had to inform the participants who could join me for the research journey about the things that I was curious about and about the aims of the research journey via an information sheet. Because of the large amount of space that the book *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) takes up, the scope of the report became very long, and hence, the correspondence, consent forms and information sheets used in the research journey have been put together and are available to whoever would like to look at them. You can contact me at the following e-mail address if you would like to see this information: seepunt@hotmail.com.
Instead of the proposed three weekends of conversations with the same group, I had one weekend of conversations with a group, a morning conversation with another group, and five individual conversations. In both the group conversations I gave the co-researchers an opportunity to add, to question or discuss any of the aims or areas of curiosity, but the need to tell their stories, a sense of "let's get on with it", resulted in a change from my initial areas of curiosity to a very strong emphasis on storying the experience of clergymen's wives. While the storying of their experience was a first for most of the participants, others were tired of talking and wanted things to be done. Therefore plans for action and recommendations were collaboratively negotiated in our conversations as presented in Section 5.3. Hence, the outcomes of the study were different from the ones I had anticipated, but the re-negotiated focus was very much in line with the research approaches I had adopted.

At the outset I had wanted to explore the influence of socially constructed discourses regarding the ideal of the Christian Woman, focusing on Mevrou Dominee, and how these discourses have affected/informed clergymen's wives. Furthermore, I also wanted to explore how the label Mevrou Dominee influences our relationships with God, fellow Christians, our partners, friends, our children and our families. These explorations of the influence of the magic wand were possible during the weekend of conversations. With the other group conversation and individual conversations I took the transcripts and sorted the material according to the themes that had emerged in the weekend of conversations.

In addition I tried to investigate how the unequal distribution of power in gender plays a role in our lives. Therefore I wanted to ‘deconstruct power structures within the system through which [we] are marginalized [b]ecoming aware of power issues and the effects of the use and abuse of power on [us] and [our] relationships’ (Kotzé 1994:114). I also tried to expose the extent to which the culture of the professional Christian in the roles of the clergymen and their wives and the expert knowledge discourses marginalise and disqualify the local culture of the laity, and introduce a professional religious monoculture. Because of time limitations, it was not possible for us to fully explore these influences and therefore I diverged from my initial aim and opted for discourse analysis, as presented in Chapter Four.

I wanted to examine the multiple meanings that clergymen's wives attach to their experience and to consider their own interpretations, specific memories, significant moments, markers and milestones. These multiple meanings are reflected in Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003). The co-researchers’ voices, interpretations and significant moments are therefore further reflected on and emphasised, as they are presented and quoted as authors in this research text. Initially I envisaged that this exploration would lead to a co-construction of alternative stories, deconstructing the dominant discourses, as well as the re-telling of preferred stories. Again the once-off opportunity I had with most of the participants made the re-telling of
preferred stories very difficult. I therefore opted for writing therapeutic letters in which I asked questions that
explored the alternative stories of the participants further.

I also wanted to constitute a community of care and concern in which clergymen’s wives could experience
care and hope in a non-patronising way when they tell their stories. The participants’ reflections as presented
in Section 5.4 reveal to what extent this aim were accomplished.

The emphasis of this research journey was not my own observations and interpretations, but the
collaborative meanings generated by the women who shared their experiences in the stories they told. In this
regard, Sears (1992:155) writes that at ‘best qualitative inquiry enables us to come to know and honor the
meanings constructed by others’.

Apart from my commitment to benefiting clergymen’s wives, I considered more questions while formulating
this commitment: How will pastoral therapists benefit from collecting narratives co-constructed by the wives
of clergy? How will the community, faith community or society benefit from this research? How will the
children, husbands and congregations eventually benefit? What contribution will this research make to the
field of practical theology?

I also saw the aim of this research as a service to the faith tradition of which I am part. As a result I agree with
Clandinin and Connelly (1994:425), who say: ‘Just as serving the self serves the community, so too serving
the community in research texts also serves the self.’ My first commitment in the service to my faith
community lies in giving a voice to the princesses of the magic wand; giving a face to the “generalised other”
(Kotzé 2002:16); providing insights into what practices in the Dutch Reformed Church clergymen’s wives find
hurtful and even oppressive; what practices within this denomination are helping these women; and in what
ways pastoral care can be employed to support the princesses of the magic wand.

I was therefore not only intimately involved in the research journey, but this journey has infused my being. It
has created in me a thirst to discover, to clarify, and to understand crucial dimensions of knowing and
experience.

During the next phase, the methods used in discovering, clarifying and understanding are discussed.

2.6 METHODS OF COLLECTING AND ANALYSING RECOLLECTIONS

Denzin and Lincoln (1994b:2) define qualitative research as ‘multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive,
naturalistic approach to its subject matter’.
Routine and problematic moments and meanings in the lives of clergymen’s wives were described by the collection and study of a variety of ‘recollections’ (Faure Louw 2001). I prefer the term, recollections, to data or empirical materials. These recollections include personal experience, oral history, conversations, transcripts, journals and letters as different kinds of field text. This use of ‘multiple methods or triangulation’ provides an ‘alternative to validation’, as it attempts to ‘secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b:2).

2.7 THE ART OF INTERPRETATION

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994b:15) ‘qualitative interpretations are constructed’ and they are both ‘artful and political’. It is this artful and political act of making sense within the interpretive practice that Clandinin and Connelly (1994:423-424) describe when they talk about the research voice:

This struggle for research voice is captured by the analogy of living on a knife edge as one struggles to express one’s own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants’ experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience’s voices.

I measured the ‘trustworthiness’ of my interpretations relative to the following criteria suggested by Kincheloe and McLaren (1994:151-152): critical researchers ‘award credibility only when the constructions are plausible to those who constructed them’ which would be the participants. Therefore the research product should benefit the participants directly. Critical researchers also advocate ‘catalytic validity’, which direct the degree ‘research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it.’ The research should display the reality-altering impact of the inquiry process, so that those being studied will gain ‘self-understanding’ and ‘self-direction’.

2.7.1 Reporting the journey

When I look back on my interpretations, I know that I wanted these women to be empowered, ‘and this [is] expressed in the politics of the revised text’ (Jones 1990:20). As a result, the end product is ‘a mutually constructed narrative that offered a way of giving an account of our work together’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:269). Because the participants do not all live in the same geographical region, I sent the draft of the dissertation to all 15 participants via electronic mail and asked them to indicate their responses in the research text in a different colour so that I can incorporate their comment in the research text in commentary boxes. I asked them to comment on the texts’ validity by making further suggestions and asking questions. All the participants found the research text to be adequate and satisfactory and did not feel the need to add,
make suggestions or ask any questions. Therefore the ‘narrative inquiry process itself is a narrative one of
storying, restorying, and restorying again’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:272). Together the ‘researcher’s
relationship to the inquiry and to the participants shaped the research text’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:423).

2.7.2 Ethicising research

I agree with Kotzé (2002:18), who describes the demands of participatory ethics as follows:

*Participation of all is a primary commitment if in any way we aspire to being ethical.... Those who have a
voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge/power to ensure
participation with the marginalised and silenced, to listen to them, but not to decide for them, and to
eengage in participatory solidarity with them. The question, “who benefits”, becomes a central and guiding
challenge.*

Therefore I was continuously guided by the question: Who benefits?

Kotzé (2002:21) adds: ‘Research is therefore not a neutral or innocent act, but an ethical-political process
that cannot be anything but an ethicising process, act or art. The search for new knowledge is primarily an
ethicising act.’ The voices of the participants continuously resounded in my ears in the sentences I chose to
write and in the way I wrote them. Because I cannot presume to know what they know, think and feel, I
submitted the draft of this research text to the co-researchers so that they could weigh the search for knew
knowledge and comment on the way they experience that search. The princesses therefore also became
‘co-owners of the research and [could not] be left out at any stage’ (Kotzé 2002:28).

Because I was aware of my ability to re-shape the stories that are told in my presence, I kept the following
ethical considerations in mind, as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1994:422):

*When we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us,
there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as well as our own..... As personal
experience researchers, we owe our care, our responsibility, to the research participants and how our
research texts shape their lives. We all can find ourselves in the eventually constructed research
texts.... For researchers these issues of responsibility are always foregrounded as we construct research
texts.*

After the second group conversation and hearing of the distrust of these women towards institutions, I was
wary of doing anything that would betray these women’s trust. It became my aim to give back to them what
they had given me through their stories and openness.
I believe that researchers should also draw ‘upon others to oversee the protective system’ (Stake 1994:244). In my case, the person who oversaw this ‘protective system’ was my supervisor, who is, in his turn, accountable to the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) and the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The research journey itself is described in the rest of this chapter.

**2.8 THE RESEARCH JOURNEY**

**2.8.1 Finding participants**

I had no criteria when I first ventured out to find participants for the journey. My only thought was to get participants for this journey who were willing to talk about their experiences. I first shared my intentions to undertake this research project with a group of about 20 clergymen’s wives of the Dutch Reformed Church within the Eastern Transvaal Synod. This opportunity arose during a conference for the clergy held in September 2002 in the Kruger National Park. Some of the women were very enthusiastic about the project and a few indicated that, even though they would not be able to take part in the project, they would want to read the final research product.

After I had done a presentation about the research project at a morning tea for clergymen’s wives, the women asked me to do the same presentation for the members of the clergy who were attending talks at a different venue, particularly as not all the clergymen’s spouses attended the conference with their husbands. I was given three minutes at the venue where the clergymen and clergywomen were present to share what the research project was about. I also shared the story of the magic wand, at the request of the clergymen’s wives, which I used in the introduction of this dissertation (see Section 1.2). To both the women and men who were present in the meetings I handed out letters of information and invitation with regard to the research project.

I also gave a letter to the Commission for the Ministry to Clergy in which I asked the Eastern Transvaal Synod to assist me financially with this research project so that the participants could come together for three weekends in 2003. I also applied for financial support from the General Commission for the Ministry to Women in the Dutch Reformed Church. Both replied that they do not support research projects that they have not commissioned. Therefore the co-researchers had to cover their own expenses and for their willingness to do this, I am very grateful.

The Eastern Transvaal Synod’s office then sent a letter, which I provided for them, via electronic mail to all the clergymen’s wives in this Synod to invite them to participate in this journey.
The women were asked to answer before the end of October 2002.

From the outset I knew that it would be difficult to get participants for the journey because the voices of these women had been silenced for so long. Consequently it came as no surprise to me when out of a potential group of 199 women, only seven women responded. It was interesting to note that each of these seven women assumed that many more women would indicate that they would like to participate in this research project. One clergyman’s wife even asked me if there was still room for her to participate.

I then sent the information sheet and consent form via electronic mail to these seven women. The information sheet also proposed possible dates for weekends that we could come together for our conversations. These women were also asked to indicate which dates would suit them best. The letter had to be answered before 27 November 2002. These women were also required to fax the signed consent form to me as soon as possible, including the dates of the weekends that they would be available for conversations.

Of these seven women, only three were able to come together for conversations on one weekend within the first term of the year.

After the conversations on this weekend, I was left with another question that made me curious. I wondered how younger women; even women who had recently entered the ministry with their husbands would story and make meaning of their experiences. In April 2003, my supervisor arranged another opportunity of conversations and for a whole morning six other women told their stories as well. I am thankful for the opportunity I had with this group, as they represented a much younger group of women whose voices I was curious to hear.

In searching for diversity I also had conversations with a woman who had recently divorced her clergyman husband (Cleo), a clergyman’s wife who stands at the end of her journey within this position (One Of Them), two clergywomen married to clergymen (Cynthia & Ria), a women resisting the stereotypes of the label of Mevrou Dominee in her working place (Elsa) and a young clergyman’s wife who also grew up in a clergy family (Rita).

**2.8.2 Negotiating the journey**

2.8.2.1 The weekend group

When we came together for our weekend, I discussed the details of the research journey with the participants. I acquainted the group with my story and also informed them of my preliminary aims, of the purpose of the journey as well as of my ideas about how I saw our journey together. During the weekend I
gave ample opportunity for the co-researchers to ask questions and give their insights. At the beginning of each session I always asked if there was something they would like to add or questions they would like to ask, but thereafter they were quite willing to go in whichever direction the questions led us. They repeatedly said that I must lead the way, and sometimes I wonder how I could have deconstructed my power-position as researcher even more.

Underlying this way of working is ‘the feminist ethic of commitment and egalitarianism’ (Reinharz 1992:27) that expects the researcher to abandon ‘control and adopt an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risk’ (Reinharz 1992:181). This openness did imply that the end product of our journey looked different from the initial aims, in the sense that the women were very enthusiastic in commenting on the current caring practices for clergymen’s wives and they proposed and recommended a few actions that would lead to the telling of their stories through a conversational document (see Section 2.8.7). In a sense I became their scribe and their voice.

With regard to the research text, ‘authentic participation’ (McTaggart 1997b:28) was very important to me and I asked all the participants to choose their own pseudonyms, decide on how they as groups would like to be presented in the text and what they would like the chapters in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) to be called.

### 2.8.3 Introducing the co-researchers

#### 2.8.3.1 Weekend conversation

Saartjie, Rosy and Emma come from different geographical regions but from the same district, namely the Eastern Transvaal Synod. My expectations of the weekend of conversations operated at two levels. First, I wanted the participants to feel special and appreciated for all the times they gave of themselves for their families and their congregations. Therefore I wanted the weekend to be a memorable treat for these women, who so often stand on the giving side in the congregations they serve. I tried to make them feel welcome with cards, gifts, some interesting reading material and a journal in which they could write down their ideas as the weekend progressed. One of the participants did make use of the journal and came back with meaningful questions and comments during the start of quite a few of the sessions. The guesthouse where we stayed was not quite what I had had in mind, but because of the lack of financial support, it was the best option available to us.

Second, at another level, I wanted the participants to experience our conversations as happening within a safe space where they could say the unspeakable.
I hoped that these conversations would bring healing within a non-patronizing and non-judgemental caring holding space.

Chapter One of *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) consists of a summary of the transcripts of our conversations during this weekend.

2.8.3.2 Morning conversation

Chapter Two consists of some of the narratives of a group of women married to clergymen living in the same geographical region. They are Ironé, Miekie, Magrietjie, AnnaMart, Louise and Disillusioned. Dr Johann Roux, my supervisor, also joined in for part of the conversation and his contribution to the conversation is also included in Chapter Five (see 5.3.10). I negotiated beforehand with the group to ascertain whether his presence would impede the conversation in any way. Michael, the husband of one of the participants, is currently busy with his doctorate in narrative therapy and asked the groups' permission to be present in the conversation. I was concerned that the presence of a man they know quite well and who knows most of their husbands would impede the participants' openness and freedom to speak. I therefore requested Michael to leave the room and asked the women what they thought about Michael's presence in the group that morning. They thought it a good idea that a man would be present and hear what is really going on in their hearts. Michael's reflection on the morning's conversations is therefore also included in the research text and is presented in Section 5.4.

A few days before my conversation with this group I also had a conversation with my supervisor regarding the kinds of question I could ask, given that our time was so limited. He proposed that I ask the participants how they would prefer our conversations to go with regard to the following two questions that I sent them via the e-mail beforehand: *What are your needs as women married to clergymen and how does this influence you? What are the things you are doing to stand up against the difficult issues?*

I invited the participants to negotiate which of the two questions they would like to talk about, but spontaneously they started to tell their stories. This meant that they actually answered the first question. It was like a dam wall that broke and I struggled, in the end, to steal enough time to hear the stories of their butterfly practices (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXX) as the participants came to speak of their preferred alternative stories.

2.8.3.2 Individual conversations

I will now introduce the participants of the individual conversations:
One Of Them wanted to participate in the initial project, but she could not because the dates chosen for the weekend did not suit her. She then told me that at the end of the ministry she has a need to tell her story and reflect on how it influenced her life. I therefore visited One Of Them and I audiotaped our conversation. I then sent her the transcript and translation of our conversation through the post and she subsequently made corrections and sent it back to me.

Elsa is a very good friend of mine who journeyed with me through an extremely difficult time at which I struggled tremendously with the label of *Mevrou Dominee* in my life. We externalised the label and had quite a few conversations regarding this label's influence on my life and relationships. Though Elsa grew up in a clergy family, she never experienced the label of clergyman's wife as constraining or confining to her mother in any way. Now a clergyman's wife herself, Elsa has never seen herself as *Mevrou Dominee* in the congregation where her husband is currently serving. She is a social worker with her own practice outside the confines of their congregation and she does both individual work and training for companies. A few months ago, *Mevrou Dominee*, to call her by her externalising label, came to visit her in her workplace for the first time that she was aware of. We had a conversation about the label, *Mevrou Dominee*, and externalised it as the problem, therefore not making Elsa (Swart 2003:XXXVIII-XLI) the problem. Following on from our conversations, Elsa sent me a number of letters reflecting on the different strategies *Mevrou Dominee* used to enter Elsa's workplace.

I sent out a letter via electronic mail with questions regarding the different influences of being the wife of a clergyman had on the relationships in which these women stand. Rita, who is the daughter of one of the co-researchers, responded and her letter and answers via electronic mail have also been included.

Cleo has recently divorced her clergyman husband. She agreed to participate in this research journey. Our conversation was conducted over the telephone while I kept notes. I later managed to meet Cleo face to face and we then had an opportunity to go through my summary of the conversation together and we made the changes she proposed.

The conversation with Ria and Cynthia was conducted together and the excerpts from the transcript of this conversation therefore portray our collaborative work together.

‘Because the written word has power in our culture’ (Roux & Steyn 2002:169), I chose to empower these women's voices not only in the research text, but also in a record containing transcripts from our conversations, in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003).


2.8.4 Hearing the stories through oral history and conversations

2.8.4.1 Oral history

The conversations centred on the stories of clergymen's wives and their experiences of their different contexts. In listening to other clergymen's wives' stories, I felt that I was with them on their journeys through the history of their 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault 1980:83) and wondered alongside them about what the 'unique outcome' (White & Epston 1990:55) of their stories would be. As a result, I used 'oral history' as a 'method of getting in touch with another's experience' (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:419), by asking participants to tell their own stories in their own way. Conversations were used as a method to hear the stories of clergymen's wives (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422):

[C]onversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow group participants to establish the form and topics important to their inquiry. Conversations entail listening. The listener's response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. Once again, we see the centrality of relationship among researchers and participants.

The methods used to accumulate and record the stories were continually negotiated with the participants.

During the conversations, each participant had an opportunity to recount her story. The conversations were recorded on audiotape and by means of notes to enable us to reflect on the clergymen's wives' stories, as agreed upon in terms of the consent form.

2.8.4.2 Practices applied during the conversations

a) The client is the expert

'The not-knowing position entails a general attitude or stance in which the therapist's [researcher's] actions communicate an abundant, genuine curiosity....The therapist, therefore, positions himself or herself in such a way as always to be in the state of "being informed" by the client' (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29). Although I also have my own story as the wife of a clergyman and shared this story, I regarded each woman's story as unique. Every clergyman's wife was treated as the expert of her own story and I did not presume that I knew what her story was all about. As the researcher I took a not-knowing position and was guided by my curiosity to learn from the participants. I agree with Anderson and Goolishian (1992:38), who say: 'It is this curiosity
and not-knowing that opens conversational space and thus increases the potential for the narrative development of new agency and personal freedom.

The telling of these women’s stories in the conversations and in *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) was therefore a re-presentation of experience; it was constructing history in the present. These re-presentations reflect these women’s re-description and re-explanation of their experiences in response to what is ‘not-known’ by the researcher. As a result, I explored ‘the resources of the “not-yet-said”’ (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:37).

b) A participatory mode of consciousness

The type of relationship that I as researcher wanted to have with the participants during our conversations is best described by Heshusius (1994:17), who says that a ‘participatory mode of consciousness, then, results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention’. Through this participatory quality of attention I wanted my research to be a form of care to the princesses of the magic wand. I knew that each woman’s experience is unique. I reminded myself that through participatory consciousness ‘one forgets [one]self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status. It renders the act of knowing an ethical act’ (Heshusius 1994:19). Avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with the princesses was a priority in my being with them.

2.8.5 Transcribing the conversations

Due to the nature of this research, a large quantity of information was constructed during the research process. My determination to let the voices of the participants be heard kept me motivated throughout the journey. Armed with hours of conversations in Afrikaans on audiotape I started to translate. I did this word for word in most cases and then sent it to the participants for their comments and alterations where they saw fit. Then the process of dividing the conversational transcripts into ‘patterns’ and ‘themes’ (Tyndale 1990:25) that re-occurred began. These themes were guided by the influences and effects that living in this reality have on the different relationships in which these women stand. Therefore I cannot but see this journey as a co-production between the participants and myself.

I sent the transcripts of our conversations via electronic mail to all the participants to review and edit according to the meaning they made of the conversation. I know that these ‘field texts are [only] constructed representations of [our] experience’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:422) together, and I hoped that, if the ‘text
was collaboratively constructed with the researchers, then it would be representative of the research’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:419).

2.8.6 Writing letters

Apart from the transcripts, every participant received a letter concerning specific issues or unique outcomes that emerged during the telling of their stories.

The use of letters is closely related to the practices of narrative therapy. Epston (1994:31) describes the use of letters as follows: ‘Conversation is, by its very nature, ephemeral….But the words in a letter don’t fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalizing it.’

I used letters to ‘extend the conversation’ (Epston 1994) beyond our meetings. I stayed as true to the words of the participants as possible, because I had the verbatim accounts available in the audiotape recordings. The letters gave me an opportunity to be transparent with the participants as to how I experienced our time together and therefore I was able to share my confusions, joys, excitement, reflections and questions through this medium. These letters were structured ‘to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with the [research], it documents history, current developments, and future prospects’ (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:112).

I also used the letters to convey to the co-researchers how my life was touched by their stories and what I had learnt from them. This practice is called ‘taking it back’ (White 1997:132).

2.8.7 The chrysalis of Lamentations and Butterflies

‘The method of narrative analysis’ involves the ‘recording, coding and analysis of the conversations’ (Tyndale 1990:25) between the participants and the researcher. Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) contains about a third of the actual transcripts that I translated. As described by Burr (1995:168) I had to re-read the text several times to search for

recurrent themes, for coherent sets of statements or phrases which appear to talk about or represent events in similar ways, for metaphors that bring with them particular images of events described, for words which seem loaded with meaning. This involved underlining words and phrases that seemed to paint a particular picture, and listing them on a sheet of paper so I can scan them more easily for any sense of coherence. I looked for similarities and contrasts between them.
This ‘coding’ helped me to ‘reduce the transcript into manageable chunks’ (Tyndale 1990:25). This same process was also followed with the literature I could get hold of on this topic. The coding categories were informed by the areas of research curiosity, the research aims and the literature and transcript themes that are represented in Chapter Three of this journey.

I had to decide to let the book *Lamentations and Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) be no longer than 40 pages, as this dissertation would get too lengthy if the book was longer. To allow more space for the participants to tell their stories, I omitted several of the questions I asked. I also decided to omit my own voice from the first chapter of the book, because my voice is heard throughout the rest of this dissertation.

I therefore took colour pencils and marked the different themes and quotes that I wanted to use from the draft of the book in the dissertation text. I then edited the draft of book so that it would still make sense if one just reads it on its own. In this regard Tyndale (1990:25) writes: ‘Words or expressions that are emphasized or frequently used would be coded; so would inconsistencies, unusual or unique aspects, and even pregnant silences.’

This editing was a very painful process, as I would have liked to include nearly all 150 pages of the transcripts. When I had to face the decisions about including some sentences rather than others, I could still see the participants’ expressions, hear their voices and even see the room where we were talking. The ‘death of the author’ (Burr 1995:171) explained in discourse analysis became a reality. This process reminds me of the verse in John 12 where Jesus spoke about the wheat that has to die so that it could bring forth new life.

My aim in this research journey was to collect knowledges from the narratives of the princesses and therefore it was not my role to stand in judgement regarding these narratives. I wanted to make sure that I did not privilege one participant’s voice over another and this thought guided me through this selection process. It is important to bear in mind that no judgements were made as to the validity or so-called truth status of the narratives or comments. These are personal re-collections and accounts of our time together in conversations.

As explained earlier (see Section 1.4) this kind of ethnographic (Ellis & Bochner 1996) writing to some extent breaches the ‘received genre of realist writing that construes the author as a neutral, authoritative, and scientific voice’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:19).
Chapter 2

Turning the gaze of the Magic Wand on itself

The goal of this research journey is seen as a ‘search not for truth but for any usefulness that the researcher’s “reading” of a phenomenon might have in bringing about changes for those who need it. Research thus become “action research” and a political activity’ (Burr 1995:162).

2.8.8 Sharing the journey with others

I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (1994:418), who say of this collaborative journey: ‘It is clear, however, that when we come together in research projects, all of us begin to live and tell a new story of our collaborative work together....These new collaborative stories being lived and told as we work together in a research study also influence our other stories.’

Although my preliminary aim for this research was primarily to hear the stories of these women and give them a voice, in our collaborative work the co-researchers indicated that they wanted action to be taken. The term ‘action research’ is used to describe almost every research effort and method that attempts to inform action in some way (McTaggart 1997b). ‘Put simply, action research is the way in which groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others’ (McTaggart 1997a:27). Action research is therefore best understood as action and research, the coming together of two purposes in a single project or process. Essentially participatory action research is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together a current action which they experience as problematic in order to change and improve it. Lather (quoted by Reinharz 1992:175) suggests that our ‘intent more consciously be to use our research to help participants understand and change their situations’. This need for the participants to bring change in their situations has, however, come as a pleasantly surprising outcome from the research. The co-researcher’s urging toward action challenged me to move beyond my own aims for this research. In this sense I certainly see this research journey as participatory. Some feminists advocate that we should ‘stop doing research and start doing something about the problem’ (Reinharz 1992:178). In this regard, change-oriented research is the ideal marriage between doing research and tackling the problem.

A number of suggestions for action were made to bring about change or communicate this project more widely than the research journey could bring us.
2.8.8.1 A letter to the Kerkbode

Because some of the participants indicated that it would be difficult to get an article placed in this Dutch Reformed magazine we decided to rather write a letter. The letter was placed in the issue of 23 May 2003 (Swart 2003). After I had written the letter (Addendum 1), I sent it to Emma, Rosy and Saartjie for their input as they had initially proposed that this action be taken. Therefore the letter that was placed accorded their approval and incorporated their suggestions. In this letter other women married to clergymen were invited to share in the journey and I made my cell phone number, postal and electronic-mail address available for anyone who needed to talk. We hoped that this letter would help to involve a wider audience and make more people conscious of the situation.

2.8.8.2 Clergymen’s wives in the Eastern Transvaal Synod

We (Chené, Emma, Rosy and Saartjie) also decided to send out a letter via the Eastern Transvaal Synod’s office to share our ideas and invite other women and men to become involved in this research project. A second letter included Chapter One of Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003), as well as an information sheet. This information sheet informed women married to clergymen about what the General Synod decided in 1998 (see Section 1.6) and also gave a short report on the Kerkspieël Oorsig 2000 (see Section 5.2.2) information.

Therefore I saw myself as a facilitator who supplied the information necessary to those who have to make decisions so that they can make informed decisions with regard to alternative actions.

2.8.9 Deconstructing cultural discourses

My initial aim with this research journey was to collaboratively deconstruct social, cultural and religious discourses with the participants, but because I could not meet with the participants on more than one occasion, I diverged from my initial aim, shifting to discourse analysis.

In my experience, this was a very time-consuming road to take, but for this round I had no choice. Tyndale (1990:25) sees the ‘crux’ of discourse analysis as ‘a) the search for patterns in the data, and b) the concern with the function of discourse and its consequences, and the ensuing hypothesis about it which provides explanations for the patterns’.

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10 Die Kerkbode is the official paper/magazine of the Dutch Reformed Church in which articles are placed concerning events taking place at the congregational and synod level in this denomination. Advertisements are also placed in this magazine when posts are vacant in congregations.
Discourse analysis as an approach to research was applied in Chapter Four to three areas:

Firstly the deconstruction of the language(s) (see Section 4.2) of the magic wand, ‘revealing how they contain “hidden” internal contradictions, and making the absent or repressed meanings present for the reader, showing how we are led by the text into accepting the assumptions it contains’ (Burr 1995:165).

Secondly, Foucault’s ‘archaeology of knowledge’ (see Section 4.3.4) was used as a form of deconstruction. ‘This concerns itself with tracing the development of present ways of understanding, of current discourse and representations of people and society, to show how current “truths” have come to be constituted, how they are maintained and what power relations are carried by them’ (Burr 1995:166).

Thirdly, an analysis of discourses (see Section 4.4) was done whereby prevailing discourses are ‘examined and their identity and power implications brought to the fore’ (Burr 1995:166).

‘The ultimate aim of the approach described above is to take a critical, progressive and political stance to the truth claims made by discourses which help maintain oppressive power relations, and to increase the “voice” of marginalised discourses’ (Burr 1995:172). The process of deconstructing these discourses can empower the wives of clergymen to confront these discourses, enabling them to decide whether they are going to accept, change or discard the discourses by making informed decisions. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

### 2.8.10 Accountability and transparency practices

I received consent forms from all 15 co-researchers to use their stories. I created space and opportunities within the conversations to ask questions and make comments.

With regard to the weekend I spent with one group, I negotiated the weekend’s programme, the time for the group sessions, the process and confidentiality for the shared stories and lived experiences (Reinharz 1992:258) in the group.

In all the conversations, I asked the consent of the participants to audiotape the conversations and I have tried to transcribe and translate the participants’ words as accurately and ethically as possible. I also verified my transcriptions and sent each participant a copy which she could change and add to. I asked for consent to give the texts to my supervisor and to share the comments with him. The participants commented, changed and added things, so that the end product of this research had their approval. We agreed that they would use pseudonyms and that the names of their congregations would not be mentioned.
In addition I am also accountable to others that form the interactional context: the Dutch Reformed Church, the women whose stories we have not heard and the so-called laywomen of the church.

### 2.8.11 Reflections on my research journey

In this research journey, I have experienced how I have been changed, how my life is sustained and my vision and decisions have improved. This is a common phenomenon experienced by feminist researchers (Reinharz 1992:194-195). I have given an account of my experience by using snippets from the journal (see Section 5.5.1) that I kept during this research journey so that it can be included in the final research product as a document of how my life has been changed. In Chapter Five I have woven together my accounts of the private and the professional sphere, capturing fragments of experience in an attempt to sort things out. In ‘personal experience methods we must acknowledge the centrality of the researchers’ own experience: their own tellings, livings, relivings, and retellings. Therefore, one of the starting points is the researchers’ own narratives of experience. We try to gain experience of our experience through constructing narratives of that experience’ (Clandinin & Connelly 1994:418).

I was constantly guided by the following questions which were posed by David Epston (2002) during a workshop for ITD students and which influenced my research journey to a large degree:

If we would interview your research, what would research say? What would research teach you? What’s the nature of your research? What is my social responsibility in this research? How are you bringing your matter of concern in your research? How did you turn what you suspect into questions that can be answered? When did you suffer alone/together? Did your research go forward in leaps and bounds? When you started, to what extent could you have predicted how it will go? Why have you survived? How did you keep the writing alive? Was there a time when you had to force it open? What is your greatest thrill? How did you decide to tip the scale of significance?

### 2.9 CLOSING REMARKS

The nature of my research has been to give women without a voice a platform through writing, and it is therefore pastoral in the sense that it wanted to care for these women in a non-patronizing way. For me it is impossible to separate care from research.

The research started out as a journey of discovery of the stories of women in a specific context, but it has moved off the toll-road to an alternative route, joining a political movement to empower women abused by an institutional religious system. Therefore this journey also wanted to change these women's circumstances in
the sense that they become aware of their rights, of the discourses that inform them daily and of ways to turn the gaze of the magic wand on itself.

I want to borrow David Epston’s (2002) term ‘hope research’, because this research journey was not only about telling our stories and giving voices to those who had none, but also about doing hope (Weingarten 2000:402) together and making a difference. This ‘turning of real lives into writing’ (Foucault 1977:192) is turning the gaze of the magic wand back on itself.
CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES OF PAIN, SURVIVAL AND HOPE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I am alone in the parsonage this holiday to finish my dissertation. I have been informed that 26 trees in our backyard will be taken out because of termites. I was never asked what time would suit me best or how I felt about the 26 trees that have become part of my safe space for the eight years since I have been living here. Now I either have to find myself another place to work, or I must endure the noise of the chainsaws. For four mornings in a row during the past week I have been woken up by men’s voices in my backyard, when I was looking forward to sleeping in after a long night's work. I pulled on my ‘mask’, which was hanging dangerously askew this morning, to face the overseer of this project.

While I was trying to finish this dissertation and at sometimes thinking that I am better off than some of the other co-researchers, these last two weeks came as a stark reminder that I am somehow at the mercy of the people who pay my husband’s salary. Now, after the ordeal with the trees, I am left with more questions than answers: Why didn’t I stand up against the injustice being done to us? Why was I so silent? What discourses were overpowering me, subduing me to silence? Is the current silence of the loeries and the sunbirds in my backyard also speaking of my own silence?

This chapter records the researcher and the co-researchers’ attempt to focus on some of the joys and sorrows entailed in being a ‘clergy spouse’. The question that this chapter would like to answer is this: how do people live and cope with these circumstances? The personal narratives represented in this chapter are those of women ‘who have suffered in silence for too long’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:24). To highlight their voices, their words are italicised.

Again I would like to remind the reader that in this study the ‘conceptualization of reality’ is seen ‘as a multiverse of meanings…that includes a diversity of conflicting versions of the world’ (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:378). Therefore this chapter can only hope to story the conflicting versions of the world of the magic wand, and not to explain these versions. This chapter focuses on the influence of the magic wand on the different relationships in which these women stand by exploring different themes that recurred in the various conversations. These ‘social realities may not be “essentially true,” but that doesn't stop them from having real effects’ (Freedman & Combs 1996:36).

In creating a community of concern we were able to tell our stories of pain, hope and survival. I use the storying of this journey to outline our need as clergymen’s wives to be cared for and have our voices heard.
Woven together in this chapter, the reader hears the voices of literature, the voices of the participants and the researcher's voice:

First, we listen to the narratives of pain. This includes a discussion on the topic of spiritual abuse and the part it plays in these women's stories of pain. This section focuses on the painful influence of the magic wand on the different relationships and areas of these women's lives.

The next section highlights the stories of survival. Here the reader is introduced to different ways in which clergymen's wives have managed to survive a sometimes abusive system.

The last group of narratives focus on stories of hope and how these stories are influencing women's lives.

This chapter attempts to take away the face of the 'generalised other' (Kotzé 2002:16) and replace it with 15 faces and voices of women speaking of the influence and effects of the magic wand on their day-to-day lives. This narrative literature, ‘at once sociobiographical and fictional, is a form of homiletic writing’ (Morey 1991:338) that highlights the intensity of women's involvement with religion. Therefore the writing and speaking of this chapter have become part of our healing and doing ‘hope research’ (Epston 2002) together.

As has been explained in Section 2.8.5, the transcripts of the conversations were divided into themes and then divided further into the sections of this chapter, namely: pain, survival and hope.

3.2 NARRATIVES OF PAIN

'The women who are married to ministers are usually among the walking wounded' (Bouma 1980:63). Therefore the telling of these 'walking-wounded' narratives came to pass within the following contexts (Welch 1990:173):

The power of compassion is divine: the compassion expressed in simple acts of acknowledging each other's fear and pain... without diminishment, the pain others feel; the power of saying "Your pain is real, your cries are heard, your anger is just, and along with you are many others who mourn and rage." This power of compassion and anger is holy. Resilient connections with other people and the earth bring joy, pain, and wisdom. These resilient connections are the presence of grace.

It is within resilient connections through the presence of grace that these narratives were told and I would like to ask you as the reader to let the power of compassion guide you through this chapter. You are entering holy ground.... Do not judge, diminish or disregard but, listen....
The telling of these pain narratives has not been easy, as suffering in silence is part of Afrikaans culture, especially for women. We are grateful to Daleen Uys (2002) for letting us use her poem, *Die stil gil*. The ‘stil is goed en stil is soet’ [to be quiet is good and to be quiet is to be well behaved]-phenomenon, as some of these women have come to call their silence, has become a household term amongst us as clergymen’s wives, and we thank Daleen for the opportunity to be able to use it.

**Die stil gil**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al die mooi gediggies is nou klaar.</td>
<td>All pretty rhymes have gone away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hulle het weggegaan en opgeraak;</td>
<td>They've shattered; broke up; gone astray…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omgedraai en opgekraak…</td>
<td>The only ones left are spitting gall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodat al wat oorbly lelik en verwronge is</td>
<td>And holding cracked mirrors in front of all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En gruwelwoorde uit wil sisss.</td>
<td>That we hold so dear and want so to love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shh… Kom ons bly maar lieuer stil.</td>
<td>Because it was thrown on us from “Above”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stil is goed en stil is soet…</td>
<td>Sssshhh… Be quiet…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vloek en skree en gal uitbraak</td>
<td>It’s safer to be withdrawn and still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sal alles mooi wil lelik maak</td>
<td>If not, the evil inside will spill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En spieëls hou voor goed (wat ons glo)</td>
<td>And deform all that we once believed was good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>op ons geval het van Daarbo.</td>
<td>By silence we kill ourselves slowly inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So…Stil-stil gaan ons binne dood</td>
<td>And feeding on silence, the dragons abide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En voer ons vir die drake brood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We now invite you to join us in breaking the silence that used to ‘blanket’ (Ackermann 1996:48) our lives as clergymen’s wives.

### 3.2.1 Losing self

Most of the co-researchers experience a deep sense of loss of their identities, of self. They describe this loss in the following words:

‘I thought that I knew myself and that I was sorted out. But ten years later I am confused. It is terrible when you feel that you have lost yourself’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXII).
‘I feel that I have lost myself. I do not even know which kind of clothes I like or feel comfortable in anymore’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXV).

‘I began asking myself – who is AnnaMart if she is not the clergyman’s wife’ (Swart & AnnaMart 2003:XXII)?

‘Then suddenly you realise that you have lost yourself along the way. You have become a puppet on a string’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXII).

‘In secret, inside the walls of this house, I could be myself, but on the outside there were eyes that looked upon me with many expectations and for that reason there were two different persons: one inside and one outside the prison walls,’ says Cleo (Swart 2003:XXXV) of the parsonage.

‘I am sick and tired of the members of the congregation referring to me as the new unknown 12-year-old girl sitting in the church on Sundays. It annoys me that people label me because of my age. I do not know where to start creating my own life. I am experiencing an identity crisis’ (Swart & Miekie 2003:XXIII).

Sielie Laubscher has been a clergyman’s wife for 34 years and wrote about her experiences of depression in her book Dark forest of the soul (2002). She sacrificed herself in many ways for the church and the community, but at one stage in her life, everything became too much for her. Of this dark time in Sielie’s (Laubscher 2002:83) life she writes: ‘I don’t want to be the minister’s wife any longer, and after all these years I cannot be myself either.’

Have the way congregations’ voices of their expectations and disapproval of some clergymen’s wives been contributing to this loss of self?

3.2.2 Seen through congregational eyes

Niswander (quoted by Stroebel 1993:1), herself a minister’s wife, has long been convinced that ‘many of the conventional stereotypes and images of ministers’ wives are not only useless but even destructive’. Some of the destructive effects of this label that the co-researchers reported are manifest in their experiences of feeling that they are not good enough:

‘Sometimes I feel that I am not good enough, not even for God. Not to mention that I am not good enough in the congregation’s eyes’ (Swart & Saartjie 2003:XV).

‘I threw my youth and innocence away for this congregation – everything, but it was not good enough. I sometimes feel like a snail without a shell’ (Cleo 2003:XXXV).
'Feeling and acting as though they are constantly being watched and evaluated by the community culminates in feelings of loss of control over their living space, time management, and personal identities' (Baker & Scott 1992:34).

The co-researchers experience this ‘watching’ and ‘evaluating’ in the following ways:

*It ‘does influence me when even my private and financial matters are open to see and discuss’* (Swart & Rosy 2003:Xl).

Saartjie (Swart 2003:XI) says: ‘The other day one of the Church Board members said that “one just has to get to know Saartjie, she is not as grumpy as she looks”….I do not have a friendly outgoing personality, and one struggles with that in a congregation.’

‘It has become an issue for me to go and buy food, because members of the congregation watch what I buy. Things that should be mundane are becoming more and more of an issue’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXV).

Where do all these expectations leave women married to a clergyman when it comes to their marriage relationship?

### 3.2.3 The marriage relationship

What does for better or for worse mean for the wife of a clergyman?

Both Rosy and Louise feel that they have to ‘share’ their husbands with the congregation in different ways. Rosy (Swart 2003:Xl-XII) comments that some of the congregational women behave *in a flattering way towards the Dominee. This claiming of the clergyman becomes something very personal for me. It is as if it invades my personal space.*'

Louise (Swart 2003:XXVI) feels ‘guilty’ if she also demands some of her husband’s time because she believes that ‘the church has the right to his time’. This sharing of her husband with the church therefore culminates in her sometimes having to make an appointment with her husband to also lay claim to his time.

Rogers, Rayburn and Richmond (1988:47-48) write that if the partner of a clergyman is also ‘active as a professional partner to her husband, she is subject to the stresses of that role as her work and the couple bears that stress within their marital relationship’.

Rosy (Swart 2003:XlI) experience this stress in the following way: ‘Being the only minister and his family in the congregation places much more responsibility, pressure, stress and tiredness on you and your marriage.
Some days you feel as if the job is too much. The occupation of being a clergyman places him under a lot of stress that can lead to his becoming a man that you do not like anymore.

Sometimes the husband’s expectations of his wife can also bring conflict into the marriage relationship and cause added pain.

In this regard One Of Them (2003:XXXII) says: ‘In the beginning my husband did put pressure on me….We thought that this is just the way things should be.’

After 27 years Saartjie (Swart 2003:VIII) heard her husband saying for the first time that she had not supported him in his ministry.

Occasionally these women feel that their husband’s occupation is first on his list of priorities, which could have serious consequences for the lives of their wives: ‘Spiritualized adultery seems to lead the list in clergy marriage complaints. This is the pastor loving his work more than the domestic life’ (Ducklow 1995:31).

Cleo (Swart 2003:XXXIV) experienced this ‘adultery’ in the following way: ‘Slowly but surely it happened that my husband was increasingly absent and I felt he was married to the congregation. This reminded me of a talk by a seminary professor that I attended in 1989 in which he addressed clergymen’s wives. He told us that we must remember that in the first place our husbands are married to the congregation. I now look back on that statement and wonder what kind of adultery this man or the Church is proposing.’

In this regard Bouma (1980:67) writes: ‘A frequent complaint of many of the wives…was the feeling that they always came second. They felt that the church came first with their husbands. This leads to feelings of loneliness even if their husbands are physically present.’

Although this is also how One Of Them (2003:XXXII) used to feel, she eventually accepted the fact that she came second, she explains: ‘[I]n times of crises my husband was never available….After quite a few years in the ministry I knew that the children and I come second on my husband’s list of priorities….It was as if I experienced a sense of liberation when I realised this fact….If you want to keep him happy then you have to live with the fact that you come second.’

This experience of coming second is also linked to the wife’s supportive role that expects her to make him look good in every circumstance. In 1976 Eloff (quoted by Nothnagel 1990:127) said the following about the clergyman’s wife: ‘Die vrou is die ster wat die blik van die man, ook van die predikant altyd boontoe trek, of sy is die moeras, al is dit met lelies begroei, wat hom in die modder laat verdwyn’ [The wife is the star that pulls
the gaze of the man, also the clergyman, even higher up, or she is the swamp, even if it is grown with lilies, which makes him disappear in the mud]. (my translation)

Saartjie (Swart 2003:IX) found that these kinds of expectation come from two sides. Firstly, in the marriage relationship, she experienced that she had to put up a front even though it did not always go that well. Secondly, with regard to her involvement in the congregation she knew that she would impede her husband’s opportunity to work in another congregation if she was not prepared to lead the Vrouediens (Swart & Saartjie 2003:XVII).

Therefore clergymen’s wives ‘get caught up in the structural demands of the two-person career, which is defined as a situation in which only the husband is employed by the institution, but both spouses are expected to respond to its formal and informal demands….Her performance of critical roles not only frees him from the distractions of daily home life, it also provides important services for the church at no added expense’ (Frame & Shehan 1994:197).

In this regard One Of Them (Swart 2003:XXXIII) says: ‘My husband thought of the congregation as an employer, and if an employer expects certain duties from the wife of the employee, then she must do what is expected. He cannot make a success if she does not do her part. We are a team.’

Within this ‘team’ (Landgraf 1982:60) relationship, ‘ministers tend to lean on their wives for moral support to a degree uncharacteristic of other professional men’. For some of the co-researchers this leaning means protecting and standing with their husbands:

‘I then decided to leave and resign from everything, because my priority is to protect my husband. I could no longer go along with people who stab my husband in the back. If I am part of that church then I feel that I am also standing with them against my husband’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXIII)

‘As husband and wife you are one, and it is awful when they mess around with your husband like they do. You want to protect him from these people that have this awful attitude towards him’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXVI).

Ross (quoted by Stroebel 1993:45) confirms that the situation revealed by the above statements is not unusual:

The overriding expectation of the clergy for their wives is that she be supportive….The wife is to assume major responsibility for a cheerful, comfortable, clean house and happy, well-adjusted children….Closely
related is the second support which is emotional. It is to their wives that ministers turn for a catharsis of resentment, disappointment, and hurt, making their wives combination confessors and wailing walls.

Therefore 'out of concern for potentially discrediting their spouse's public image by disclosing personal information...many ministers' wives avoid discussing their concerns with other ministers, judicatory officials, or even ministers' wives of the same denomination lest their self-disclosure jeopardize their husband's career potential' (Baker 1989:17). This was also part of the experience of some of the co-researchers.

Saartjie (Swart 2003:VIII) says: 'I had nobody to talk to about my personal and family life because, if I did open my mouth, my husband's reputation could be damaged....If you should bare your soul to a congregational member, they might not feel at liberty to come to your husband again if they had problems.'

3.2.4 Dreams

How does being the wife of a clergyman influence your dreams?

'I am an artist and have often tried to do something in this line, but it does not seem to match up with my role in the Church. People often commented that it was nice to have art as a "hobby", but for me, art was breathing,' says Cleo (Swart 2003:XXXV).

'I wanted to be a lecturer at a university. If you are married to a clergyman and you get a calling to a rural area there is no other option than to be a teacher at a school. In terms of your career it does impede you in a sense. The five years I lectured at the technicon have given me back my dream' (Swart & Saartjie 2003:XIII).

These two participants' stories clearly tell us of the dilemma of the effect of the role of the context on these women's relationships with their dreams. Would a call to the ministry together with their husbands therefore mean that some of these women have to let go of these dreams?

3.2.5 Friends

The co-researchers talked about the influence of their being married to clergymen on their friendships in the following way:

'In all circumstances I refrain from telling people that my husband is a clergyman, because I know that often people react differently to you if they know that you are' (Swart & Rita 2003:XXXVII).

'It is not that you do not trust the people....Because your husband is the clergyman, your story remains a juicy bit of gossip to convey to others....This isolates you in terms of friendships....You feel lonely, sad and
isolated. At a given moment you might not necessarily want to talk to your husband’ (Swart & Rosy 2003:XIV).

‘Friendships usually last for about a year, and then you start building new friendships again. It sometimes feels as though people only want you to be their friend while there is something you can do for them and then that friendship is gone again’ (Swart & One Of Them 2003:XXXIII).

Sielie Laubscher (2002:83) feels similar to One Of Them, and she writes: ‘I have a deep longing to be accepted unconditionally and loved for the person I am, not for what I can do or give.’

3.2.6 Colleagues’ wives

Some of the co-researchers experienced the relationships with their husband’s colleagues’ wives as the most hurtful:

‘The most hurtful critics are the colleagues in the ministry that tell you that you are not good enough’ (Swart & AnnaMart 2003:XXVII).

‘In our fist congregation I was treated as if I was inadequate and incapable and my husband had to pay the price for my shortcomings’ (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXVII).

3.2.7 Your relationship with God

Sielie Laubscher (2002:82-83) writes the following with regard to the influence of Mevrou Dominee on her relationship with God: ‘I wanted to give You everything, sacrifice everything for You. I was burning for You and Your work. And now my enthusiasm lies in ashes….I am a shell, an empty jar, an orange sucked dry, a shadow of that young woman who wanted to do everything for You.’

Sometimes the lack of congruence between clergymen’s wives own spiritual beliefs and the socio-cultural expectations of her bring about tension:

‘At the end of the day my faith and my relationship with the Lord have suffered as a result of the situation. I get angry with the Lord because he allows this to happen. Not only that, but I do not want to read the Bible anymore. I cannot believe that the Lord allows you to walk into the ministry this naïve. Your intentions are to spread and proclaim his word and to extend his Kingdom, and then people kill you in the process’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXVI).
3.2.8 Losing faith in the Church

When Morey (1991:334) refers to the clergymen’s wives that are writing between 1850-1870, she says: ‘None loses faith in Christianity, but all deliberately separate Christian spirit from institutional practice.’ The co-researchers described their experiences as follows:

‘I organised fund-raising cycle tours for missionary work and now I hate the Church’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXIV).

‘I feel guilty because I am negative towards the Church’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXVII).

‘I am very negative towards the congregation and very negative towards the Church. I said to myself this morning that I hate the structure of the Church.’ (Swart & AnnaMart 2003:XXVII).

‘The big picture of the ministry is quite tragic. It is saddening that so many people (not only clergy, but also members of the congregation) experience such a lack of brotherly love within the Dutch Reformed Church, a place that should be the community of the saints’ (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXVII).

‘Although God is a true reality to me and I experience his care in a different way from before, I do not want to be associated with the church in general and Christians for that matter’ (Swart & Cleo 2003:XXXVI).

‘After our first year in the congregation I could not explain my feelings towards the congregation other than as hatred. I wanted to paste pictures of the members of the congregation against the wall and throw rotten tomatoes at these pictures’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXVII).

Do these women lack a feeling of safety within the Church as a result of abusive practices by people in powerful positions?

3.2.9 Trusting congregational members again?

Some of the women find it difficult to forget the people and sometimes the incidents that have hurt them in different ways:

‘There are lots of people in the congregation against whom you hold a grudge and this is never dealt with or worked through. This is my whole issue; it might be an incident that happened a year ago but you cannot forget’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXIX).

Louise (Swart 2003:XXIX) says that she finds it difficult when she has to go to communion and Magrietjie (Swart 2003:XXX) says: ‘I can forgive, but I am not going to expose myself again.’
3.2.10 Spiritual abuse

According to Johnson and VanVonderen (1991:20), spiritual ‘abuse is the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining or decreasing that person's spiritual empowerment.’

White (1995:93) argues that because most people have been abused within ‘institutions of our culture that are formally designated as a loving and caring context…. [this] is both mystifying and confusing.’

Could it be that some of these co-researchers are survivors of a religious abusive system that offer them no support and no rights and one that leaves them out in the cold? Has a religious system that should have been a loving and caring context turned out to be confusing and abusive? In this regard, Finkelhor (quoted by Jenkins 1990:37) says that ‘abuse of any kind is characterized by a more powerful person taking advantage of a less powerful person’.

Let us hear from some of these women how they experienced various traumatic situations where such ‘powerful’ persons have played their part:

‘When you have had an unpleasant experience in the ministry and years later something similar happens, these experiences are linked in your mind and become much bigger. In your subconscious you have not forgotten, you might have forgiven, but the memories remain’ (Swart & One Of Them 2003:XXXIV).

‘I wrote a letter to the Church Board in which I told them precisely what I think of them because I was really angry. After they received the letter, the leading elder came to visit me and he tore the letter up in front of me and told me that they are going to ignore the fact that they had received this letter. Even your statement is ignored’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXIII).

‘But when I open the church door and breathe in the air, the smell of the building makes me sick to my stomach…. The rug was pulled from under me when the chairlady of the Vrouediens and a very good friend of mine came to tell me that I was not good enough, that what I did was not good enough and that my relationship with the Lord was very bad’ (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXIII).

‘Since the elder told me that I am an embarrassment to my husband because I do not want to be the chairwoman for the Vrouediens, life has been very difficult for me. I struggle to forgive this man, I plead with God just to be able to go to communion again,’ says Louise (Swart 2003:XXIV). She adds: ‘If somebody tells you that you are an embarrassment to your husband, start to blame yourself and you begin to wonder whether this comment is not perhaps true…. I am killing myself with self-blame….’ I feel that to be a
clergyman’s wife is not my place and I do not fit in.....Expecting criticism every day, to be constantly experiencing it and handling it is not the life I want. One gets so negative that nothing seems good anymore’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXV).

‘I feel that we are so young, and the congregation actually exploits this. Sometimes I feel that they strongly abuse [Afr. verkrag] the fact that we are young’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXVIII)?

‘I am depressed and I am currently on anti-depressants. I have to pay that account. I have to carry the shame of asking the doctor and psychologist to help me. It is unacceptable that in the end I have to go for therapy. In addition the persons who do this to you do not even know about it’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXV)?

In his research, Dempsey (1986:82) has found that women were usually unsuccessful in their resistance in meeting certain expectations, much the same as Louise’s experience mentioned above: ‘The failure of their “rebellion” demonstrates whether morally committed or not ministers’ wives are caught up to a marked degree in their husbands’ work.’

Morey (1991:327) writes that ‘it is usually her physical health – and in the most dramatic instances, her life – that is sacrificed upon the altar of institutional cruelty’. Is the institutional cruelty inflicted, intentionally or not, by Church Boards and members of congregations on clergymen’s wives costing them their health and even their lives? Are the experiences mentioned above part of the way women are ‘spiritually abused in patriarchal churches’ (Hunt quoted by Isherwood & McEwan 1993:131)?

The telling of the stories of these women had different effects on the co-researchers. For some it brought healing, others felt relief, but for one participant it was ‘retraumatising’ (White 1995:86). Does the experience of retraumatisation speak of abusive practices that these women have had to endure? Can this research help these women to reclaim the ‘territories of their lives, in the refashioning of their lives, in having the “last say” about who they are’ (White 1995:86)?

According to Poling (1991:14-15), a hermeneutic principle that I also applied in this research journey was that ‘those with the least power can reveal the most about the nature of the good and unmask the abuse of power. Those who are in positions of power need to hear the voices of those who suffer from abuse or deprivation just as surely as those who suffer cry out to be heard’. Therefore an ‘abuse of power not only destroys individuals, it also destroys the web of relationships on which all life depends’ (Poling 1991:31).

White (1995:90) uses an analogy with torture when he converses with survivors of abuse. He explains that the purposes of torture relate ‘to breaking down identity, to breaking down a sense of community and to isolating people from each other, to destroying self-respect and to demoralising, to depersonalising the world
in people’s experience of it’. Do the constant questioning of self and the self-blame speak of a breaking down of identity? Are the accusations hurled at these women destroying their self-respect and demoralising them? Are these practices that are maintained by men and women breaking down the sense of community of the Christian church?

Many of the co-searchers experienced what is generally referred to as anger, and for women this right has often been disqualified. But White (1995:91) argues that anger, in the context of survivors of abuse, is ‘no longer something to work through, or some state of being, but something to be honoured’.

Disillusioned and Louise spoke about their anger in the following way:

‘But sometimes I do hear about things (they are doing to my husband) and then I can feel these issues rising to the surface again. I get angry all over again’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXVIII).

‘I never realised how angry I was with the whole structure [of the Church] and the frustration that goes along with that’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXVII).

I agree with Landman (1999:78), who writes that in the past, and even to this day, ‘anger was said to be not only unfeminine but also harmful to the soul. However, today a woman should acknowledge anger against an oppressor as lawful and a legitimate part of her ethical decision making. Anger, then, should empower her to act against the perpetrator’.

In the light of this potentially abusive religious context, could the stories in the next section be seen as courageous acts of resistance? White (1995:85) argues that in ‘response to such impossible and agonising circumstances; many [survivors have] developed rather fantastic mechanisms that enabled them to escape the abusive context – not materially, but to spirit themselves away in mind.’ Can these stories be seen as the acts of survivors choosing life by employing realistic or fantastic coping mechanisms to spirit themselves away in mind and sometimes in body?

‘When survivors reject society’s ignorance and seek healing, they are resisting the abuse of power that is intended to destroy them’ (Poling 1991:32). We will now listen to these accounts:

**3.3 NARRATIVES OF SURVIVAL**

In their report to the General Synod, Müller et al (1998:237) comment that the pendulum is swinging away from clergymen’s wives that were once over-involved to women that have become increasingly uninvolved.
Could the withdrawal of their involvement perhaps speak of surviving an abusive system? What coping skills are women employing in this struggle for survival?

### 3.3.1 Divorce

Zoba (1997:25) quotes Mattingly, who says that ‘the divorce rate for U.S. pastors rose 65% in the past 25 years. Eighty percent said that their ministry has a “negative impact” on their home life, while one-third said the pastorate has been a “hazard” to their families.’ Because there is not a sufficient database on divorce rates among its clergy, the Dutch Reformed Church did not give me any information on the divorce rate of this denomination's clergy.

According to Landgraf (1982:62), ‘ministerial divorce’ occurs ‘most often at the wife’s instigation – not because she wants a different mate, but because she wants a less painful life'.

Perhaps this longing for a less painful life has made divorce an option for Louise (Swart 2003:XXIV), but for Cleo the choice for divorce was a choice for survival and life for both her children and herself: ‘I felt that the children were losing it and I had to find a place where I could be human again. I did not care any longer about how I did it or what people would call the experience; I just knew that I had to get out….I decided to jump off, even if I broke my neck. I could no longer pretend….If I look back now, I knew that I would have committed suicide or something equally terrible if I had stayed there’ (Swart & Cleo 2003:XXXV).

### 3.3.2 Devotions and relationship with God

In a study done by Hsieh and Rugg (quoted by Frame & Shehan 1994:198), the researchers found that the primary coping methods used by clergymen's wives were talking with friends in the same situation and relying on devotional activities. Quite a few of the co-researchers spoke of these devotional activities as helping them to cope:

‘I decided by the grace of God to venture on the reconstruction and development process of my faith journey. As a result I make an effort to pay attention to my special time with the Lord, which I neglected terribly in the time when I was active in the congregation' (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXXI).

‘The religious aspect of it all and prayer. Also the fact that I am sure that I am a child of God. This is my anchor’ (Swart & One Of Them 2003:XXXIV).
3.3.3 Leaving the ministry as option

A qualitative research project done by Van Biljon (1997:1060) highlights the vague job descriptions regarding clergymen and their wives which leave plenty of room for frustrations, misunderstandings, and exploitation. This vagueness was cited as one of the reasons why clergymen eventually leave the ministry in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Church.

The frustrations and exploitations Louise has experienced have forced her to consider the option of leaving the ministry:

‘There is no hope for me in the ministry, no financial future,’ Louise (Swart & 2003:XXIV) says. ‘I want something to be done now, and if it is not, I am sorry, but I am finished with this! I am not threatening; it is a genuine fight for my survival. I want to leave the ministry and I want my husband to leave as well because I do not see any future within the ministry’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXVII).

3.3.4 Working as a means of survival

So-called secular jobs are currently part of some of the clergymen’s wives’ survival and coping strategies:

‘I fled the ministry by starting to teach again and gradually dropped everything that I was busy with in the congregation’ (Swart & AnnaMart 2003:XXII).

‘I have started working from home and it has become my excuse, because I can say that I am busy, and this protects me against the negativity that sometimes surrounds the ministry’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXIII).

‘I flee away from the congregation to my work. At work I can get out and be myself! At my place of work I am not seen as a clergyman's wife, I am Louise in the professional position that I hold there. My work is something I enjoy tremendously’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXIV).

‘I use my job as my excuse, because it brings the bacon home’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXVIII).

3.3.5 Resigning or withdrawing

For some of these women, the pain of the situation in their congregations has become unbearable and resigning from their positions or withdrawing from the congregations seems to be the only way to survive:

‘I then decided to leave and resign from everything, because my priority is to protect my husband’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXIII). She adds: ‘There have been quite a few times when I have typed and printed his
letter of resignation to the Church Board. That is how far I have gone. He just had to sign on the dotted line' (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXVII).

‘I avoid people; I do not answer the telephone anymore. I have withdrawn from the congregation’ (Swart & Louise 2003:XXV).

‘I am cut off from people. I isolate myself. I am alone. I have withdrawn’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXV).

3.3.6 Family first

Some of the participants have chosen their families as a priority and see this as a way to survive:

‘I realised that my first priority lies with my husband and my children. Only after this priority has been attended to can the congregation claim its place’ (Swart & Ironé 2003:XXIV).

‘I withdrew and switched all my attention to my family. I do not feel guilty about this and I am enjoying it tremendously’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXXI).

In a sense this section can also be seen as part of the stories of hope, because they speak of self-care, not self-rejection, of making plans and taking action and taking bold steps of protest against the expectations of others.

3.4 NARRATIVES OF HOPE

These stories of hope tell of ‘those personal actions that cannot be read as self-rejection, but as self-care. These unique outcomes provide a point of entry to the counterplots of women’s lives, those accounts that have to do with survival, resilience, protest, resistance, and so on’ (White 1995:94). ‘A unique outcome may be a plan, action, feeling, statement, quality, desire, dream, thought, belief, ability or commitment’ (Morgan 2000:52).

Alternative stories that come about as a result of these unique outcomes therefore reflect ‘both the richness of their lives and their preferred ways of being known’ (Freeman et al 1997:50). In what ways have these women written new scripts? What new adaptations are open to the princesses of the magic wand?

3.4.1 Outside employment or education

According to data collected for Kerkspieël VI (Bisschoff 2003), 63,8% of women married to clergymen are currently engaged in full-time employment, an increase of 12,2% from the previous data collected in 1996.
Brunette-Hill (1999:86) argues that outside employment can affect many aspects of these women's lives. A second income can raise the standard of living of the clergy family, as it does for Rosy (Swart 2003). It can diminish loneliness, as a job promotes the development of personal identity, as reported by Cynthia (Swart 2003) and Elsa (Swart 2003). It could establish friendship support networks not available at the Church, as mentioned by Rita (Swart 2003), One Of Them (Swart 2003), Saartjie (Swart 2003) and Louise (Swart 2003).

This life outside the congregation has given women opportunities to make friends that know and respect them outside the ‘thin description[s]’ (Morgan 2000:12) of what people see a Mevrou Dominee as or what they claim she has to be.

Baker and Scott (1992) found, in their comparison of clergymen's wives and non-clergy wives that the life satisfaction of clergymen's wives was most affected by the demands of their husband's ministry and the level of congregational support wives received for developing their own identities. Emma (Swart 2003:IX) spoke about her experience of this support in developing her own identity within the congregation.

Baker and Scott (1992:42) also say that since ‘many of the clergy wives had high levels of formal education, academic accomplishment may be a strategy used by other clergy wives to develop or maintain their personal identity and autonomy’. In this regard, I agree with these writers, as I have found the academic venture of this research journey to be part of my story of hope which has helped me to maintain and develop my personal identity.

Cynthia (Swart 2003:XLIII) spoke about her venture in finding a ministry and employment outside the Church in the following way: ‘I am much happier where I am currently ministering….It is a world that inspirers and motivates me. Currently I am treated as a person in my own right…..Since I have “left” the Church I have felt empowered for the first time in the ministry I am currently leading….I feel as if there are things behind me like legislation….I am in the first place a human being, not a woman. In the Church I did not receive respect. I was just my husband's wife.’

### 3.4.2 Called

One clergyman’s wife wrote (Baker & Scott 1992:42): ‘I really like what I am doing….We’ve moved a lot, but each has been an adventure – some better than others….I am a gifted individual that needs someone to trust that and let me go….I feel that my call….is just as much of a calling as my husband’s call as a pastor.’ I agree with this clergyman’s wife because I see the quest of this research journey as living my calling and therefore I do not believe in a hierarchy of calling that should classify my husband’s calling as somehow more important, holy or elevated than mine.
Some of the co-researchers also see themselves as jointly called with their husband to serve in the ministry:

‘We were there because the Lord had called us’ (Swart & Rosy 2003:X).

‘Because we experience the calling of the Lord to be in this congregation, I do not have a problem with being married to a clergyman’ (Swart & Emma 2003:XII).

### 3.4.3 When the label helps

‘But I still believe it is a privilege to hold the position that we hold. God definitely has a place for us in the congregation’ (Swart & One Of Them 2003:XXXIV). For some of the co-researchers, the label of being clergymen’s wives is part of their story of hope and they find it empowering in several ways.

In terms of empowerment Denton and Douglas (quoted by Brunette-Hill 1999:78) have identified the following rewards and opportunities for clergymen’s wives: ‘to learn more about the Christian faith, to help other people to find a better way of life, to be of service to others, to gain self-fulfilment, to meet a wide range of people, and to gain a place of respect.’ The co-researchers spoke about these opportunities:

‘My whole perception of who I am changed and I discovered new passions. The status of being a clergyman’s wife gave me the opportunity to go on stage and talk about 250 children that go hungry and have to choose which meal they want in a day….These are the kinds of positive thing that I find overwhelmingly empowering’ (Swart & Emma 2003:IX).

‘The positive thing about being a clergyman’s wife is that you can pray boldly for someone that is sick…..I realized that in a sense I have the right to do it [because] it is expected of me’ (Swart & Saartjie 2003:XIX).

‘I see my role as clergyman’s wife to support my husband in his work, being an ear and a sounding board to him, using my talents in a place that I enjoy and where I am needed in the congregation’ (Swart & Rita 2003:XXXVII).

Brunette-Hill (1999:84) found in her study that ‘60% of the clergy wives find their greatest joys and opportunities in nonchurch centered rewards, such as meeting a wide range of people, finding self-fulfilment, and gaining a place of respect in the community and church. Most of these latter awards appear to have very little to do with ministry; they are simply perks associated with marriage to any person of prestige in the community.’
Rita’s (Swart 2003:XXXVII) comment appears to support the above statement. She says that it ‘makes life easier for you because you are immediately part of a system and drawn in because it is expected that you will participate and be there’.

In this regard Rosy (Swart 2003:XII) says that ‘the members of the congregation have affirmed me. They have given me the room to do certain things, which gave me opportunities that I would not have otherwise had, and skills I would not have developed – opportunities to meet people that I would otherwise not have met.’

### 3.4.4 Resistance

Some of the co-researchers have come to resist the stereotyped expectations of a clergyman’s wife in the following ways:

‘When people do have appointments with my husband, it is not my responsibility to bring the tea; he goes into the kitchen and makes the tea for his guests’ (Swart & Cynthia 2003:XLIV).

‘One evening my husband wanted to invite over all the people in our townhouse complex that are also in the congregation….I asked him to do it one evening when I am not there. I do not want to be Mevrou Dominee that brings the tea’ (Swart & Ria 2003:XLIV).

‘I do not live up to these expectations and therefore I do not attend weddings, funerals and all the social functions of the congregation. I make life fun for myself…This helps me to survive’ (Swart & Rosy 2003:XIX).

‘My husband and I have made a conscious decision not to do our shopping in this area. We need time to walk in town like two normal people. We have also decided that when the tension between the two of us mounts up, we will climb into the car and go some place together….My husband’s cousin….does not live too far away; therefore I can drive to her place and curl up on her couch and cry. She does not answer me with Bible verses and soft talk’ (Swart & Miekie 2003:XXXI).

### 3.4.5 Husband

Some of the women married to clergymen have had the fortunate experience of husbands who support their attempts to have their own lives; these women say the following:

‘My husband has always pushed me in the sense of saying “be more, be what you really are”. He motivates me and supports me….I did not even know that I could do some things’ (Cynthia XLIV).
Emma (Swart 2003:XII) experienced her husband’s sorting out his priorities as helping her to handle the role and the demands of the congregation. ‘I eventually felt secure in our relationship and I am not angry with the congregation for taking him away from me. This has helped me to have a positive attitude towards my husband’s work.’

3.4.6 The congregation as a loving community

Some of the co-researchers experience their congregations as caring communities in which they feel safe and loved:

In Emma’s (Swart 2003:XIV) story it is clear that she can associate with the God of her congregation. She is excited by their vision, direction, model of church life and spirituality. ‘In the last couple of years I have come to recognise the church’s focus on the needs of the world. Currently this forms the heart of my Christian experience.’ She also believes that their way of being church in the world is helping congregational members ‘not [to] depend on the clergy anymore, and consequently not on the wives either [because]…they are all working as equals in the kingdom of God’ (Swart & Emma 2003:XVI).

‘The congregation are favourably disposed towards us and we experience the congregational life as positive. It is an adaptable system in which we feel we are given a lot of space by the congregation, both by the congregation to the clergymen and their families as well as amongst one another’ (Swart & Rita 2003:XXXVI).

3.5 CLOSING REMARKS

Again I want to remind the reader that this chapter was not about wrong and right ways to be clergymen’s wives, or about looking at the co-researchers’ words to find what lies beneath. This chapter consisted of snippets from narratives that were taken from our conversations to help the reader understand better how being a princess in the reality of the world of the magic wand influences our lives and what meanings we make of that influence. One of the reasons why women experience these contexts so differently is to be found in the discourses that prevail in society in general, and in specific communities and congregations in particular, and the power hierarchies that influence these women’s lives. The effects of the ‘taken for granted’ (Morgan 2000:45) truths of society and the power and knowledges that inform these discourses are explored in more detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: HYPNOTISING THE PRINCESSES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The ‘calamity is that it is as if one gets hypnotised in some mysterious way and then suddenly you wake up and realise what they are doing to you. You go into the ministry and you do everything because you think this is how it should be,’ said Disillusioned (Swart 2003:XXII). What does this hypnosis consist of? How is it possible that women do not realise what is happening to them?

In the previous chapter we read about the effects and influences of the magic wand on the lives of the princesses. Woven through these stories and murmuring under the surface of these narratives, there is a mostly hidden sea of discourses, power and knowledge that work together to have the ‘hypnotising’ effect that Disillusioned spoke about. In this regard Foucault (quoted by Burr 1995:71) warns: ‘Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.’ Hare-Mustin (1997:555) cautions that because ‘dominant discourses are so familiar, they are taken for granted and even recede from view’ and it is therefore hard to question them. As mentioned earlier, a discourse will refer ‘to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events’ (Burr 1995:48) in this chapter.

Because of the hiddenness of dominant discourses, some of the women who participated in this journey, like others subjugated by a dominant discourse, ‘believe their problems are personal, of their own making, a result of their inadequacy, ineptitude, unworthiness, badness, stupidity, impatience, or ignorance, and they feel great guilt and shame’ (Avis 1991:193). This chapter is therefore aimed at discovering and disassembling these beliefs, ideas, power and knowledge in a gentle way and to explore the foundations that keep these influences and effects in place.

The discovering and disassembling of the hypnotising effect of discourses is attempted at the following levels in this chapter:

First, deconstruction of the language of the magic wand is discussed in Section 4.2.

Second, Foucault's ideas on power/knowledge are discussed and these notions are applied to the lives of the princesses of the magic wand in Section 4.3

Third, an analysis of gender discourses as presented in Section 4.4 was done in order to examine prevailing discourses so that ‘their identity and power implications [can be] brought to the fore’ (Burr 1995:166).
In this chapter the reader will also find a critique on some of the resources available to clergymen’s wives in the Dutch Reformed Church.

4.2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION CALLED MEVROU DOMINEE

‘Our congregation believes in Mevrou Dominee and therefore even though I am only 21, I am addressed by this label. This has been a tremendous adjustment for me’ (Swart & Miekie 2003:XXX).

‘Even in my work as teacher I was seen as Mevrou Dominee. I was not allowed to get angry, raise my voice or take a strong stand – if I did, I was labelled aggressive’ (Swart & AnnaMart 2003:XXX).

‘I really struggled a lot with this Mevrou Dominee thing’ (Swart & Saartjie 2003:VIII).

‘Central to the social constructionist position is the view that “facts” are dependent upon the language of communities that have created and sustained them. Social constructionists argue that all forms of naming are socially constructed, including seemingly basic biological categories’ (Davies & Gergen 1997:5).

*Mevrou Dominee* can therefore be seen as a ‘socially bestowed identity’ (Burr 1995:30) rather than as the essence of the person who just happens to have chosen to marry a clergyman. This socially bestowed identity sometimes creates strange expectations about women. Therefore Dobson (1995:16) asks the following questions: ‘Would a client expect the attorney’s wife to be in the courtroom, thereby eliminating doubt that the lawyer could be trusted to defend him/her satisfactorily because he is trusted by his spouse? Would the obstetrician’s wife be expected to attend every delivery, or the surgeon’s wife scrub so that she could be near her husband while he was under the pressure of performing surgery? Would the plumber’s wife attend every pipe fitting?’

In the next section we are going to explore the meanings attached to the socially bestowed identity or the label of *Mevrou Dominee*.

4.2.1 Deconstruction

‘What’s in a word? Answer – a world!’ (White 1991:40). The language and meaning of the words used by the magic wand constitute our reality as clergymen’s wives. Words are filled with assumptions and meanings and in this section we are going to explore some of the possible meanings of the words that surround us in our reality. For some women, *Mevrou Dominee* speaks about prestige, honour and possibilities, while hurt; frustration and loneliness are part of the experience of other women.

Deconstructing the meaning of the words of the magic wand would mean undoing, not destroying.
White (1991:27) argues that 'deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called “truths” that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of person's lives.' Therefore deconstruction ‘focuses attention on hidden meanings in cultural[ly] embedded metaphors’ (Hare-Mustin & Maracek 1988:462).

‘Poststructuralism points out that the meaning of signifiers (such as words) is constantly changing, is context-dependent and not fixed. Words mean different things in different circumstances, depending upon who is using them, when, on what occasion, and upon the context of the rest of their talk’ (Burr 1995:105). As a result, what the words *Mevrou Dominee* meant in 1805 (see Section 1.5) is quite different to the meaning of these words in 2003 (see Chapter 3) because the circumstances and contexts are very different. Elsa (Swart 2003:XXXVIII-XLII) took the words *Mevrou Dominee* and asked attendees of workshops she facilitated to discuss the different meanings these words have for them. The different meanings that the different groups brought to the discussion showed how the meaning of words can change, that they are context-dependent and how they were collaboratively constructed in the groups she facilitated.

In white Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Churches most clergymen/clergywomen are called: *Dominee(s)*. In the *Oxford School Dictionary*, the word minister is defined as somebody who attends to people's needs or a servant. In my understanding the word servant would describe the work of a *Dominee*. In this research journey, however, I used the word *Dominee* or alternatively used the word clergy/clergyman. My preference for the word clergy/clergyman relates to the institutionalised classism within the Dutch Reformed Church, of which the clergy are part, and which has an influence on the position of their wives. This classism implies that there are levels of knowledge and power within a denomination and therefore these different people are called by names such as moderator, actuary, clergy, *Dominee*, elder, deacon and laity. ‘As a result, certain dignitaries are made responsible for activities that are an inseparable part of the Christian life’ (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:2). Not only do these duties become the work of the clergyman, but certain duties are sometimes also expected of his wife.

Being the wife of a clergyman puts me into this hierarchical structure. Therefore I have experienced first-hand how this classism has caused what Campbell (1985:47) calls ‘a kind of captivity’ with ‘various features such as: lack of mutuality, maldistribution of influence and power, intellectualism, neglect of communal dimension, and resistance to radical change’. Is this what the job of the paid clergy has brought to the *ekklesia*?11

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11 According to Greider, Johnson and Leslie (1999:26), the ‘ekklesia’ is the ‘biblically promised human community in God, infused with justice-love’. 
The ways in which a clergyman's position in the hierarchical structure affects his wife would vary, depending on the relationship she has with her husband, the context in which she finds herself, the expectations of the congregation and the history of the oral tradition of the congregation. In some congregations and contexts, she will be addressed as *Mevrou Dominee* (Swart & Associates 2003), which, if directly translated, would mean 'mistress clergy'. Some women are defined by the job or calling of their husbands, which is evidence of the strong patriarchal discourses (see Section 4.4.1.2) that are part of these women's lives. Therefore the 'language of dualism is a language laden with value judgements and as such bolsters hierarchy and the divisions between people that such a system implies' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:106).

According to Derrida (quoted by Burr 1995:106), 'the identity of something is given by what it is not'. So if we again take the words *Mevrou Dominee* as an example, and we think about what the words say she is not, we recognise that the term indicates that she is not the *Dominee*, or laity. Although most clergymen's wives would not have a problem with the reality that they are not the *Dominee*, the fact that these women are not part of the rest of the congregation or laity could single them out. This might give the impression that a clergyman's wife is some distinct and sacred person, an idea that she would not necessarily feel comfortable with. This dilemma reminds me of Stark's (1997:52) description of marginalisation:

> People are marginalized when the membership in two groups poses a contradiction or cross pressure such that their status in each group is lowered by their membership in the other. The concept takes on power as it is embedded in a proposition: *People will attempt to escape or resolve a marginal position*.

Clergymen's wives' marginalisation lies in the experience that they fit neither into the clergy nor the laity as a group because of the contradictions these memberships propose. In the General Synod report (Müller et al. 1998), the Synod denied clergymen's wives the hierarchical position of *Mevrou Dominee* in her so-called fourth office position and demoted her to a layperson in the Church. However, she does not always feel part of this laity either, which explains her sense of marginalisation. Therefore, when considering *Mevrou Dominee*, in order to understand her properly, we should take as our 'unit of study both what it is taken to be and what it appears to exclude' (Burr 1995:107).

As we have seen, words ‘are not neutral but value laden signs and they produce power-relationships’ (Van Wyk 1999:8). Because words produce power relationships, both power and privilege are bestowed upon the wives of clergymen (see Section 4.3.3) and they are sometimes promoted to leaders, public speakers, organisers and pastoral counsellors. Is it a prize at a price? Do these women necessarily want this power and position? Are the ways that congregations and church boards are representing the world having an oppressive or constraining effect on clergymen's wives?
4.2.2 The self

In Section 3.2.1 quite a few of the co-researchers indicated that they experienced a ‘diminished sense of personal identity’ (Brunette-Hill 1999:80).

What happens when women feel that they have ‘lost themselves’ and they do not ‘know who they are any more’ (Swart & Associates 2003)? When Magrietjie (Swart 2003:XXV) says that somebody must analyse her and tell her what her personality is like, how do we make meaning of this effect of the magic wand?

Within social construction discourse, the ‘very idea that we exist as separate, discrete individuals, that our emotions are personal, spontaneous expressions of an inner self we can call our “personality”, is fundamentally questioned’ (Burr 1995:17). Because realities are socially constructed through language and discourse, a social construction view of personality regards it as ‘existing not within people but between them’ (Burr 1995:27). The socially bestowed identity of Mevrou Dominee is therefore not a spontaneous expression of an inner self but rather an identity that exists as a construction between the clergyman’s wife and, for example, the congregation.

Because of the different ways we interact with different persons we would then tend to ask ‘which of these is the real you?’ They all are, ‘but each version of “you” is a product of your relationships with others’. Therefore ‘each “you” is constructed socially, out of the social encounters that make up your relationships’ (Burr 1995:27). In this regard, Emma (Swart 2003:Xl) says: ‘I am not merely Mevrou Dominee in our congregation. I experience myself as multi-faceted. I am one person but with different facets such as being a mother, a musician, a teacher, a clergyman’s wife.’

Instead, then, of people having single, unified and fixed selves, perhaps we are fragmented, having a multiplicity of potential selves which are not necessarily consistent with each other. The self which is constantly on the move, changing from situation to situation, is contrasted with the traditional view of the stable, unchanging personality...we have no “true” self but... a number of selves which are equally real.

(Burr 1995:29)

This is a mouthful, but what I understand from Burr’s comment is that Mevrou Dominee is a self which is constituted in certain relationships with people and which is then only one of a multitude of selves. So often I have felt trapped within the labels of my context. How could I ever escape the self congregations have decided I should be? The idea of multiple selves frees me to be all that I am; maybe a ‘richer description’ (White 1997:132) of who I am that constitutes many possible selves (Kotzé 1994:49) within different
conversations. In this regard, Kotzé (1994:48) says that we ‘construct who we are within the domain of social construction and conversation’.

Within ‘this framework, my choice does not have to reveal who I am. Instead, it can show what I decide to do in this situation, which I then describe in particular ways – either to myself, to others, or both. With this view of the self, the self is no longer an entity but an account, a narrative, or a story’ (Weingarten 1994:74).

‘The person is the mediated product of society and also, in acting, reproduces or potentially transforms society. People can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed’ (Sampson 1989:6). This view of the self has given me hope, because therein I can transform myself by addressing the structures that are keeping this Mevrou-Dominee-self in place.

4.2.3 Constructing new realities

Within the social construction discourse, ‘knowledge is therefore seen not as something that a person has, but as something that people do together’ (Burr 1995:8). If the knowledge of what clergymen’s wives should be and do is a result of a social process and not an objective description of external realities, the opportunity remains for these women, and consequently also their husbands, to socially construct new realities by negotiating meaning through language. There is no ultimate, universal, external image that clergymen’s wives must live up to. What a liberating thought! Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378) confirm this by saying: ‘Our view is that communication and discourse define social organization and that reality is a product of changing dialogue.’

4.3 POWER/KNOWLEDGE

Discourses are ‘embedded in power relations, and therefore have political effects. If our identities are not fixed and pre-given, but formed through the representations available to us in discourse, then why is it that some identities “stick” to us and other are hard to “bring off”?’ (Burr 1995:62).

The magic wand waved and its spell came with an identity and power that somehow stuck to me and I am curious as to what power relations and discourses are keeping it in place. I will now explore the nature of the magic wand and its ‘hypnotic’ (Swart & Disillusioned 2003:XXII) effect in the light of French philosopher Foucault’s concepts and ideas.
4.3.1 Discourse of truth

‘Foucault thinks of discourse in terms of bodies of knowledge or well-bounded areas of social knowledge’ (McHoul & Grace 1993:26). The magic wand came into being within a ‘discourse of truth’ (Foucault 1980:93).

Therefore the bodies of knowledge regarding *Mevrou Dominee* within the Dutch Reformed Church are associated with and inform the practices of power that I experience as the effects of the magic wand in my life. Since I am caught up in an inseparable ‘net or web of power/knowledge it is not possible to act apart from this domain’ (White & Epston 1990:22). Within the Church, a religious society exists with ‘manifold relations of power’ (Foucault 1980:93) of which the clergymen and their wives are part. What religious discourse is keeping these power relations in place and can this discourse be challenged? Whom does the religious discourse affecting clergymen and their wives serve? Who benefits if these discourses stay in place?

4.3.2 Normalizing truths

These religious discourses of ‘truths’ are ‘normalizing’ in the ‘sense that they construct norms around which a [people] are incited to shape or constitute their lives’ (White & Epston 1990:19-20). Not only are these ‘truths’ normalizing to the extent that they are shaping and constituting of my life, but there is a danger that I could be proclaiming these same normalizing truths through my being with members of the congregation. What are the ‘norms’ that are currently constituting and shaping my life? How am I incited to live by these norms?

Foucault speaks of a ‘society of normalisation’, and I cannot but wonder what has come to be normal for the wives of clergymen over the last 350 years of the Dutch Reformed Church in our country? Has the classism and hierarchy in our religious society become ‘normal’? Is the distance between Christians as equals and friends normal?

A member of the congregation once asked me to tell her if the Bible says that smoking is wrong, as her husband smokes and she wished he would quit. What should I say? She puts me into a power position merely by the way she is asking and approaching me to speak as an expert, not in my own right, but because of my position as the clergyman’s wife. How should I decentre my power when a member of the congregation has come to me as the expert? How could I tap into this woman’s skills and her ‘local knowledge’ (Foucault 1980:82)?

Foucault (1980:98) sees individuals as ‘vehicles of power’ that are always in the ‘position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.’ Therefore power lives in the relationships that I am part of. Although I
stand in a power relation to the laity, I am subject to power exercised by the same group, which pays my husband and provides the food on our table and the roof over my head.

### 4.3.3 Disciplinary power

Foucault believes there is a shift away from ‘sovereign power’ to ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault 1980:105), in which people are disciplined and controlled by freely subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of others, especially experts and to their own self-scrutiny. ‘Such disciplinary power, he believes, is a much more effective and efficient form of control’ (Burr 1995:68). Could this be the ‘hypnosis’ Disillusioned (Swart 2003:XXII) spoke about? I have experienced this disciplinary power in my own life when I have been disciplined and controlled by both myself and others when they told me that I am not being a good enough clergyman’s wife. The hypnosis therefore takes place when you think that this is just how life is and you do not realise that these disciplinary powers are at work and how they work.

‘For Foucault, knowledge is a power over others, the power to define others’ (Burr 1995:64). Who had the power to define *Mevrou Dominee*? Why would defining *Mevrou Dominee* be so important? Within a classist and hierarchal institution, it is always important to know where every person fits into the structure. Because the denominational structures of the Church have chosen to call their workers *Dominees* their wives had to be called something as well. Defining who *Mevrou Dominee* is is therefore also very important, because otherwise the title would have no meaning. These are questions that I discuss in more detail in Section 4.3.5.

These knowledges are very powerful, in that they manage to control women “efficiently and without force, through this “disciplinary power”” (Burr 1995:65). It makes one wonder why the social control of clergymen’s wives would be so important. I believe that this disciplinary power is helping to uphold patriarchy, the nuclear family, men and women’s roles in society, and a genderised view of femininity. What kinds of expert have been informing clergymen’s wives about their lives, subjugating them to this disciplinary power? Have they used/misused the Bible to give a stamp of the sacred to give such knowledge authority? But where do all these ideas come from?

### 4.3.4 An archaeology of knowledge

The archaeology of knowledge ‘concerns itself with tracing the development of present ways of understanding, of current discourse and representations of people and society, to show how current “truths” have come to be constituted, how they are maintained and what power relations are carried by them’ (Burr 1995:166). In this section of the chapter we are going to historically ‘trace back the emergence of a discourse into a culture and try to uncover the social, physical and economic changes that provided the breeding
ground for it' (Burr 1995:69). This tracing back is what Foucault calls the archaeology of knowledge. It is only when we as clergymen’s wives can understand ‘the origins of our current ways of understanding ourselves, [that] we can begin to question their legitimacy and resist them’ (Burr 1995:69).

Together we will explore the artificial and dehumanising barriers that hold clergymen’s wives confined and propose a few ways of resisting.

### 4.3.4.1 Speaking on behalf of the Deity

In pre-modern times '[r]eligious leaders were acknowledged to be entitled to the ability (or the power) to speak on behalf of the deity, or interpret the Word of God. They were regarded as able and were empowered to tell people the “right way”, what to do and what not to do....In no uncertain terms they proclaimed (and still proclaim), God's will on issues....Decisions were (and are) based on doctrinal or dogmatic truths. Those people directly affected by these decisions were (and are) never or seldom invited to participate and they were not privileged to take part in arguing right and wrong – their voices were silenced’ (Kotzé 2002:12).

To a large extent our current religious traditions are still informed by this way of thinking. Clergymen are mostly regarded as speaking on behalf of the Deity and therefore one of the implications for their wives could be that this sacredness rubs off on the wives. I have often heard congregational members ask: ‘And Mevrou Dominee, what do you say about this?’ In this regard somebody once spoke to me with the following words: ‘You should have known the day that you married a clergyman that you would not be counted as a human being anymore. Your life would never be the same!’ What makes it possible to be a young woman one day, and the very next day she is not accounted a human being, but a super-human being? Have the clergy become the “expert[s]” on God and on what He wanted for/from us’ (Kotzé 2002:8)? Emma (Swart 2003:XVI) says that ‘it sometimes seems as if people expect you to know what is written in you husband’s sermons and books, as if it mysteriously rubbed off on you.’

If the clergy spoke on behalf of the Deity, what implications could this have for the whole idea of a calling? If God calls this man in his service, does it then empower him to know what God wants for his life, congregation, family and marriage relationship? In this regard Louise (Swart 2003:XXIV) says: ‘All that helps me to hold on is when my husband tells me that he knows that it was the Lord's will that we got married.’

Therefore if this man of God is speaking on behalf of the Deity and his wife should not agree, she could be regarded as speaking and questioning God himself. Lynne Hybels (quoted by Rice 1991:73) says: ‘I knew my minister husband was uniquely gifted to reach the spiritually needy people of our community, and I
wanted him to do that. I also wanted a healthy marriage. Unfortunately the two goals seemed mutually exclusive...There I stood – one timid woman against the ministry, the church, the myriad of needy people, perhaps even against God himself.' Ross (quoted by Stroebel 1993:6) also confirms this dilemma when she writes that the ‘minister engages in “holy” work, [and] if the wife asks for different priorities, she is, in essence, questioning God.' Saartjie (Swart 2003:XVIII) explains this dilemma in the following way: 'I sometimes feel that a clergyman’s job is more holy than other jobs, as if it should have a higher priority than other things. At times this has made me very negative."

Could this be the reason that women would rather keep quiet than speak out? Will God then punish these rebellious women, as he did with Miriam because she questioned Moses, the man of God? Is this what Louise (Swart 2003:XXIV) was talking about when she said: 'I got a fright the other day when I told somebody at work that the ministry is a dead end for me. That night I went to the Lord and said to him that I was sorry because I know that what I had said cannot go by unpunished."

For the families of clergywomen and clergymen it can therefore ‘become particularly hard because the clergyperson usually sees the job demands as coming from other than earthly and mortal bosses’ (Rayburn 1991:131). The only way some of these women, and sometimes their clergymen husbands also propose this route, can make sense of their lives is to see their role as that of suffering for Christ (Bouma 1980:70) by denying themselves. In this regard, Zoba (1997:26), herself a minister’s wife, writes that there ‘is a degree of suffering attached to this role, and no small measure of sacrifice....The hard points and the sacred moments, in tandem, are the brick and mortar of kingdom-building."

Foucault (1999:143) says: ‘All those Christian techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have an aim: to get individuals to work at their own “mortification” in this world. Mortification...is a renunciation of this world and oneself: a kind of everyday death. A death which is supposed to provide life in another world....Christian mortification is a kind of relation from oneself to oneself. It is...a constitutive part of the Christian self-identity’ (Foucault 1999:143). Could it be that the life in another world and death to the self are part of some of these women’s survival mechanisms?

The implications for congregational life in this pre-modernist paradigm are that the offices of the church, namely clergy, moderator etc. are seen as offices that involve authoritarian leadership, and the spiritual gifts of the laity are seldom utilised. Therefore ‘people with a pre-modernist orientation toward religion regard religious leaders and clergy as leaders with access to “truth”, voicing God, Allah, or the Deity’s will’ (Kotzé 2002:14).
4.3.4.2 The Shepherd

According to Bons-Storm (1998a:8), practical theology is a ‘subject of Modernity’ that took ‘shape as the discipline who had to provide the tools for the clergy to lead, educate and counsel the community towards the goal of the congregation’. Within this expectation and clerical paradigm the ‘leading imagery is that of the shepherd leading his flock of sheep towards the stable. Primarily, a pastor embodies Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The pastor’s close association with Jesus brings him in the realm of the sacred, close to God. He embodies God’s chosen substitute or advocate on earth’ (Bons-Storm 1998a:9). Within this clerical paradigm, clergymen’s wives would usually be seen as the shepherdess of the flock and was often called that.

We will now explore some of Foucault’s ideas on pastoral power and the role of the shepherd in this power. Foucault (1999:137-138) takes the following themes as typical of pastoral power: first, ‘the shepherd wields power over a flock’; second, ‘the shepherd gathers together, guides and leads his flock’; third, ‘the shepherd’s role is to ensure the salvation of his flock’, and fourth, the flock has to wield its ‘power as a “duty”’ to the shepherd.

Foucault’s explanation of pastoral power has helped me to see where the ideas regarding ‘spiritualised adultery’ (see Section 3.2.3) originated. It takes quite a shepherd to be able to know his sheep on the intimate level that is proposed in the above paragraph. Could this explain why Cleo (Swart 2003:XXXIV) experienced her husband as being ‘married to the congregation’?

Foucault (1999:138) then goes on to describe the shepherd’s ‘devotedness’: ‘He acts, he works, he puts himself out, for those he nourishes….He pays attention to them all and scans each of them. He’s got to know his flock as a whole, and in detail….[H]e must also know each one’s particular needs.’ If this were the kind of ‘devotedness’ that is needed, it would take a special kind of shepherdess to give attention to the mundane matters of life so that her husband could ‘scan, nourish and know’ his flock (the congregation) at this level. It therefore comes as no surprise that a seminary professor would tell clergymen’s wives that they must remember that in the first place their husbands are married to the congregation (Swart & Cleo 2003:XXXIV). This kind of intimate knowing of the parish members would take a commitment similar to a marriage commitment. I also wonder if the shepherds within this paradigm would expect their wives to also wield their power as a duty to the shepherd, even if he was her husband.

Foucault (1999:136) calls ‘pastorship the individualising power’ and brings to light aspects he regards as important for the evolution of pastorship, namely the technology of power (Foucault 1999:141-144): first, in the Christian conception, ‘the shepherd must render an account – not only of each sheep, but also of all of
their actions, all the good or evil are liable to do, all that happens to them.’ Second, according to Foucault (1999:142), Christianity conceived the ‘shepherd-sheep relationship as one of individual and complete dependence….It is personal submission to him….Obedience is a virtue…the sheep must permanently submit to their pastors’. Third, Foucault (1999:142-143) says: ‘Christian pastorship implies a peculiar type of knowledge between the pastor and each of his sheep’ in the following ways: The shepherd must know the state of each sheep in the flock; ‘the shepherd must be informed as to the material needs of each member of the flock and provide for them when necessary; [h]e must know what is going on, what each of them does – his public sins; [h]e must know what goes on in the soul of each one: that is, his secret sins, his progress on the road to sainthood.’

Christian pastorship closely associated and appropriated two essential instruments to ensure this individual knowledge: ‘self-examination’ and ‘conscience guiding’ (Foucault 1999:143). ‘On the one hand, the guidance of conscience constituted a constant bind: the sheep let itself be led…every second.’ On the other hand, self-examination aimed at opening up ‘entirely to its director – to unveil to him the depths of his soul’. This led to the emergence of a very strange phenomenon: ‘the organisation of a link between total obedience, knowledge of oneself and confession to someone else.’

Did this discourse have anything to do with people’s longing for the sacred, for having a man or women of God in their midst? Could it be that our religious society demands power from us in its need and longing for the presence of the ‘sacred’ (Carroll 1991:182-187) amongst them in a secular society? Do people want to be guided and examined by a shepherd? Are the clergy keeping their power intact by playing the role of the shepherd and keeping the laity in the role of flock, while they claim spiritual gifts, to be called by God, and are kings, priests and prophets in Christ? According to Foucault (1999:144), ‘the pastorate is a complicated technique, which demands a certain level of culture, not only on the part of the pastor but also among his flock’.

Apart from the obedience that a clergyman can expect from his wife in this Shepherd paradigm, he could also be the one that examines and guides his wife in becoming a good shepherdess that knows the flock as intimately as he knows them. If complete obedience is expected, how dare she differ from him?

Another silencing effect on clergymen’s wives could be the training of clergy at universities. The power and authority over clergymen’s wives now not only came from God himself, the shepherd to whom she must be obedient, but also from the knowledge and power of the academic discourse. For a long time in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the clergy’s office has been the one around which everything evolved in the congregation. The clergy became the experts with their superior knowledge of the Bible because of what
they learned at seminaries. According to Hendriks (quoted by Stroebel 1993:2-4), the ministry evolved into a clergyman's church or *Domineeskerk* and the clergyman's wife became *Mevrou Dominee*. This places the clergyman's wife in double jeopardy if she should question her husband in any way. Not only can the clergyman hear from God himself on certain matters, but also, because of his theological training at both a university and seminary, he has knowledge of the Bible and the doctrinal truth of his tradition to back up what he is saying in any argument. In the light of this powerful situation, it would therefore come as no surprise that silence has ruled over the princesses for such a long time in this denomination.

### 4.3.4.3 State religion

Together with the academic discourses mentioned in the previous section, a political dimension has also played its role. When the church became ‘enmeshed in a political system, and more so, when it became a state religion following the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, it absorbed into its structure political concepts which ran counter to Christian ideals. In time, the religion of love and forgiveness sanctioned institutionalised racism, classism and sexism’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:14).

‘Sexism [is] seen in the exclusion of women in the decision-making processes in the church from the second century; classism was perpetuated by the Church with its notions of nobility, clergy and laity (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:15). Sexism results in the ‘undervaluing of one half of humanity, by defining the other half as superior; it wants and makes women the prisoners of biology....Religions have reinforced this attitude by ascribing to us the narrowly prescribed roles of wife and mother which we abandon at our peril’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:18). Even though the Dutch Reformed Church has renounced its sexist truths, the 'effects of these “truths” include oppression, suffering, exploitation and marginalisation of those people positioned at the unfortunate side of these “truths”' (Kotzé 2002:13).

The silence of clergymen's wives has now taken on a third dimension through the sexism of their denomination, the existence of which was only acknowledged in 2002 (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk 2002b:633-634) during the General Synod meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church. God stories, the academics and the Church's sexist notions have therefore reinforced the princesses of the magic wand's silence over many generations.

### 4.3.5 Marked as individual

In the previous section we spoke about how ‘representations of people and society’ (Burr 1995:166) come into existence. According to Foucault (1977:192), the ‘more one possesses power or privilege, the more one is marked as an individual’. My marking as an individual lies uneasily in the label that marks my position as a
privileged believer and my awkward ‘isolation’ from the rest of the faith community through privilege and power. This privilege and power results in the clergy’s telling us about the laity, but ‘we never expect to hear the latter talk about the former – what they have to say is already ruled irrelevant, because by definition they have no knowledge’ (Fillingham 1993:18). They are not marked as individuals that possess power and privilege.

Are the clergymen and their wives vehicles used to gain ‘access to the bodies of individuals’ (Foucault 1980:125), to their acts, attitudes and modes of everyday behaviour? Are clergymen and their wives nothing other than the moral police of society (Foucault 1999:150)? Does being an intellectual amongst the laity mean ‘something like being the consciousness/conscience of us all’ (Foucault 1980:126)? I have often experienced how a conversation changes when people hear that you are the clergy couple of the town. Suddenly excuses are being made for foul language or jokes and the tone of the conversation changes into something more serious. This marking as individual leaves me as a princess of the magic wand also playing this role of moral police in my religious society.

4.3.6 Technologies of power

The magic wand has elevated me above the rest of the congregation to the status of a professional Christian, a woman defined by her husband’s pay cheque. In my power position as a professional Christian, the ‘technologies of power’ include ‘practices of the observation, measurement, and evaluation of “behaviour”’ (White 1997:121) of the laity. But by the same measure the above practices are also applied to me and supported by the bodies of knowledge and tradition of this position. I am expected to use techniques for the categorising and classification of person’s lives and to intervene and to correct whatever it is that is assumed to be amiss. ‘These technologies are all informed by the modern preoccupation with the self-government of the self’ (White 1997:121). I am subjugated to these technologies of power in the sense that I am urged to engage in self-surveillance by trying to be the perfect Mevrou Dominee. Ironé (Swart 2003:XXV) describes this experience as follows: ‘A young girl’s puberty is one big question mark: Who am I? What am I going to do? And the questions continue. However, once you enter the ministry, there is a huge question mark all over your whole life again: Am I a Christian? Am I a good enough Christian? Do I really have a relationship with the Lord? May I practice my occupation? Which occupation may I practice? May I wear this dress to church? Are my children dressed properly enough? You start to question everything all over again. It’s like going through puberty again!’

I can abuse my power position by subjugating others into self-surveillance through the above-mentioned technologies of power. I can effectively recruit them into ‘policing’ (Foucault 1999:148) their own lives in the
reproduction of the truths of a Christian human nature according to the norms of living that are championed by these truths. At the same time, the Church Board members, members of the congregation, other clergymen and their wives are also policing my life.

### 4.3.7 The gaze

Another aspect of the magic wand that I would like to address is the ever-present ‘gaze’ (Foucault 1977). The narrative accounts in Chapter Three have inspired me to address this aspect because this gaze is part of our daily lives. I believe that Foucault could help us at least to understand what these gazes are about, which could further help us to resist them.

My experiences of the fixing gaze of a congregational member with regard to the way I dress, act and talk constituted my thoughts. The gaze not only affects what you wear, but how and what you say, where you go and do not go, etc. ‘It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish’ (Foucault 1977:184). With this gaze I feel that I am under constant surveillance that measures and weighs my actions to qualify as the Christian woman. Somehow my passing or not passing this ‘normalizing judgement’ (Foucault 1977:184) also implicates my husband. The punishment for not measuring up to comes subtly, when members of the congregation whisper an “I wonder…” in your husband’s ear. Self-surveillance then kicks in to determine by some unspoken code that I am somehow measured by subjugating me to the image of the perfect Mevrou Dominee.

Mevrou Dominee is not only the subject of the gaze, but is also expected to be the giver of the gaze. Although Foucault, according to Shumway (1992:47), focuses ‘on the narrow field of medical seeing and saying’ with regard to the ‘gaze’, I believe that the Christian seeing and saying attributed to clergymen and their wives has its own unique version of the ‘gaze’.

‘Thus the gaze suggests that knowledge forms at the intersection of seeing and speaking’ (Shumway 1992:52). That is often what I feel members of the congregation expect of me when they come for my so-called expert help and knowledge in difficult times. Mevrou Dominee’s perception as the Christian woman is the key, to see all, while listening, to being a perfect Mevrou Dominee. My ‘speaking eye’ must ‘scan’ the entire field of the soul, ‘taking in and gathering together each of the singular events that occurred within it: and as it saw, as it saw ever more and more clearly, it would be turned into speech that states and teaches’ (Foucault quoted by Fillingham 1993:67). Mevrou Dominee could look at a person’s outside and see the inside...
How can I return or turn ‘the “gaze” back on itself’ (White 1995:122)? I believe this research journey to be part of my quest to return the gaze on itself.

### 4.3.8 Political activity of resistance

If we accept Foucault’s proposal that these techniques of power that incite persons to constitute their lives through “truth”...and are then taken up at the broader levels, then, in joining with persons to challenge these practices, we also accept that we are inevitably engaged in a political activity....that challenges the techniques that subjugate persons to a dominant ideology’ (White & Epston 1990:29).

This research journey could therefore be seen as a political activity.

How could I resist the forces of the magic wand? It is the mundane or everyday acts of resistance that potentially produce profound effects. For Foucault, ‘resistance is more effective when it is directed at a “technique” of power rather than at “power” in general. It is techniques that allow for the exercise of power and the production of knowledge; resistance consists of “refusing” these techniques’ (McHoul & Grace 1993:86). It is in this sense that power forms a ‘productive network’ (Foucault 1980:119), which leads to ‘activism in individuals rather than apathy’ (McLean 1997:113).

Foucault insisted that political resistance was not just possible, but a necessary part of the equation’ (quoted by Fillingham 1993:151). Therefore Foucault says that ‘if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations, because it would simply be a matter of obedience. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance’ (quoted by Fillingham 1993:151).

Through my research journey I wanted to develop a critique of the extent to which the culture of the professional Christian in the roles of the clergymen and their wives and expert knowledge discourses have marginalised and disqualified local culture, and have introduced a professional religious monoculture. My context within the Dutch Reformed Church is filled with expectations of expert knowledges that disqualify local culture and knowledges. What are the assumptions and images behind these discourses? What are the effects that these discourses and narratives so prevalent in society are bringing about?

### 4.4 THE HIDDEN SEA OF DISCOURSES

Discourses “show up” in the things that people say’ (Burr 1995:50). In this section I will try to question some of the discourses that “showed up” in the speaking and writing up of this journey. The social construction discourse (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997) takes a ‘critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge’ and works from
the vantage point that the ‘ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific’ (Burr 1995:3) and are ‘dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time’ (Burr 1995:4). So, what we commonly know as Mevrou Dominee is specific to Afrikaans culture and depends on the social and economic arrangements of that culture to be kept in place. Therefore we will question, challenge and deconstruct the role of some ‘discourses that ha[ve] trained persons towards certain dominant ideas and away from others’ (Madigan 1998b:89). I remind the reader that it is impossible to address all these discourses within the scope of this dissertation.

‘The discourses that form our identity have implications for what we can do and what we should do’ (Burr 1995:54). We will also explore some of the discourses that are informing what the wives of clergymen can and should do. We will now take a look at the kind of knowledges and taken-for-granted ideas that are keeping this socially bestowed identity in place.

### 4.4.1 Discourses concerning gender

Hollway (quoted by Hare-Mustin 1997:559) says that many ‘discourses intersect and interact to create the cultural narratives we are familiar with. At any point in time, there co-exist several different discourses that define what is expected of men and women in relation to each other, and that produce feminine and masculine identities’. Therefore from a ‘postmodern perspective, there is no one “right” view of gender, but various views that present certain paradoxes’ (Hare-Mustin & Maracek 1988:462).

‘The dominant discourse of masculine and feminine differences views women as essentially caring, close to nature, and oriented to meet the needs of others, whereas men are essentially independent and achieving’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:557). According to the dominant discourse, ‘men and women are “naturally” so different, have such different talents and interests, different traits and ways of being and knowing, that they cannot be compared’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:567). These dominant discourses influence how men and women think and behave and as a result ‘disguise inequality’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:568).

‘Beliefs that come to be regarded as natural do so only because they reflect the most powerful interest groups in society’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:570). Therefore we will now venture on discovering some of these gender discourses that play such an important role in keeping the socially bestowed identity of Mevrou Dominee in place.
4.4.1.1 The discourse of equality

The ‘marriage-between-equals discourse’ allows ‘marriage to conceal the extent of male dominan[ce] and female subordination’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:566). According to Hare-Mustin (1997:567), the ‘discourse of marital equality is violated when one partner pursues his or her interests with such clarity and focus that the label “selfish” is readily applicable’.

The traditional discourse of marriage expects women to be fully involved in the marriage relationship and the little day-to-day tasks that support it, and not herself. Therefore women lead lives interrupted by the needs of others. In this discourse ‘love equals taking care of’ others and therefore, for a woman, ‘love equals selflessness. The discourse of equality makes a woman uneasy if she focuses on herself, her interests, her needs’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:568).

We will now explore the discourse(s) of male dominance through patriarchy and female subordination through the discourse(s) of femininity.

4.4.1.2 Patriarchy

‘Patriarchal societies are those in which the rule of the father is the basic principle of social organization of the family and society as a whole’ (Radford Ruether 1996:173). Is patriarchy still the prevailing discourse in Afrikaans society and culture? Whose interest is this discourse serving? Does patriarchal discourse have a silencing effect? Below, I discuss my ideas on these questions.

The world of clergymen's wives is still predominantly male. ‘God images are typically considered to be male. Our clergy are still primarily men. Our church administrators are men. Our congregations are politically controlled by men. Even the liturgical language of the church bears the stamp of God Image maleness’ (Schmucker 1979:98). Nevertheless, Mouton (2002:2) says that in spite of the fact that women have nearly no say in official Church policy within the Dutch Reformed Church, Afrikaans Christian women comprise more than 50% of the Church’s members. She adds that women are often criticised because they do not let themselves be heard, but their silence is evidence of the success of the dominant patriarchal ethos within the Church during the past couple of centuries.

Landman (1999:54) describes the ‘functionality of women and the way in which it had always been religiously justified’ as an important root in our piety. Therefore she describes how ‘white Dutch Reformed theological students were encouraged to marry (white) women who would function well in [the] parish….Christian women’s functions and their skills had in the past been used to the benefit of somebody else, a man, a cause, a church, or children. They were not allowed to be functional on their own behalf and for their own
benefit’. Might the source of what is often experienced as oppression be the ‘genderised structures of society which justified patriarchal religiosity as divinely inspired’ (Landman 1999:67)?

We are sometimes introduced as our clergyman’s wife. This has put me in very uncomfortable positions. No one knows quite what to say after that kind of introduction, so there is an awkward silence. Would this then imply that we are the congregation’s possession? Are we only a possession because the Dominee is also their possession? Wessels (1998:4) argues that this label and way of speaking makes us into the property of the community. She adds that the hidden message of a reference such as ‘ons predikantsvrou’ [our clergyman's wife] is that the man is still seen as the norm and therefore the wife is described in relation to him.

‘I come from an era in which men still believed that the “man is the head of the home” and therefore women had to go along with that. I married this man because I loved him, without really knowing what lay ahead of me,’ Saartjie (Swart 2003:VII) said. In white Afrikaans culture, the notions of the man as head of the home (1 Corinthians 11:3) and the wife as his helper (Genesis 2:18) are still very strong paradigms (Wessels 1998:46). However, during the last decade the position of women in society in general has changed considerably and recent biblical exegesis points out that the traditional patriarchal system has not interpreted the Bible in a valid manner and that this paradigm is actually not biblical. The Dutch Reformed Church has been part of a long tradition wherein the Bible has been misused to justify the subservient (sometimes a synonym for inferior) role of women (Büchner et al 2002:403). This has caused conflict, because it is the result of a dishonest way of dealing with the Bible. How much of the abuse that clergymen's wives experience is still a remnant, an echo of the Church's sanctioning of this second-hand role of women? Is the clergyman's wife still part of this injustice?

What has been believed about women through the ages is, according to Burger (quoted by Wessels 1998:63), based on superstition, not faith. Just as we are still struggling to get rid of the effects and covert continuation of the gross misconduct justified as apartheid in South Africa, so the Church is struggling with the position of women in the Church. Our interpretation of the privileged position of the man in the Church has a social and cultural basis and not a biblical one. Burger adds that the word feminism has been made the equivalent of a phenomenon that is unfeminine, disobedient to Scripture, and unacceptable in traditional Christian settings.

In this teaching of subservience, ‘God’s voice was used to speak against them, ... God’s voice was reconstructed from the Bible to restrict women to subhuman conditions’ (Landman 1999:3).
According to Brueggemann (1993:8-9) we are in a ‘new interpretive situation’ and therefore the ‘practice of Christian interpretation…is contextual, local and pluralistic’. I believe that this new practice of Christian interpretation can bring hope for women because it speaks to their contextual, local and pluralistic experiences.

4.4.1.3 Discourse(s) of femininity

‘If we accept that men, relative to women, are still in a more powerful position in society, then we can say that prevailing discourses of femininity serve to uphold this power inequality’ (Burr 1995:55). As a result our ‘society particularly encourages marriage, family and male leadership roles in the family, the workplace, and political and cultural arenas of society. Our social order provides relatively easy access and acceptance to roles fulfilling the criteria of male leadership and female support roles in the family, workplace and society’ (Rogers 1991:107).

In the South African Afrikaans cultural context we have the saying that behind every successful husband there is the inspiration of a faithful wife. So, to measure up to the standard of his job, he has to have the backing of his wife, which would be true to a greater degree when it concerns the clergyman's wife. Therefore, as recently as 13 years ago, Nothnagel (1990:2) says that there is no occupation in which the wrong wife can be so disastrous to a man's occupation as that of a clergyman. This whole transaction is only possible because of the marriage commitment of these couples and a particular discourse of femininity. Nothnagel (1990:14) adds that if a woman marries a man, she also marries his occupation. She is therefore required to arrange her life around the context of her husband's career. The ideal wife is a woman who gives her husband the support to use his professional opportunities, to help him to achieve his occupational goals as well as the opportunity to be able to work with calmness and self-assurance within the demands of his occupation. In this regard she claims that a woman's disposition towards her husband's occupation, her attitude and reactions to his career are of the utmost importance. When she considers her husband's emotions first, her own needs often take second position, which leads her not to bother her husband with household affairs. The question that remains to be asked is this: What advantages are there for the wife if she has invested so much of her time and energy into the husband's career?

Weingarten (1994:65) confirms the prevalence of ideas such as those propounded by Nothnagel (1990) when she says that women and especially mothers have been ‘brought up believing that the ideal of feminine goodness was selfless care for others….She was not brought up nurturing her own self’. I believe that, being a clergyman's wife, one is expected to be the epitome of this selfless feminine goodness, not even needing to nurture oneself. When I think about the princesses of the magic wand I often recognise that they are called
upon to make a choice between being a good clergyman's wife and a bad individualist or the other way around.

Saartjie (Swart 2003:VIII) experienced how this discourse of femininity has sworn her to silence: 'I had remained silent. I had never said what I thought or felt. I had accepted my lot and had just done what I thought I had to.' Within this discourse of femininity, 'silence' is therefore 'seen as goodness; speech as selfish' (Weingarten 2000:392). Is the silence on this matter keeping women in their allotted space of home and family, and emotions? I believe that the silence of women speaks of the power relations discussed in Section 4.3. Even worse, the discourse(s) of patriarchy and femininity are taking hands with an archaeology of knowledge to swear these women to silence so that religious communities can continue to benefit from clergymen's wives' services without any responsibility to care for her.

Therefore the discourses of motherhood, femininity, family life and so on actively encourage women to engage in practices which are not necessarily in their 'own psychological, social and economic best interests. Thinking of oneself as oppressed rather than depressed fosters a different view of oneself and how to attack one's problems. It may not solve [her] problems...but she may not feel so conflict-ridden and guilty' (Burr 1995:151). These ideas have helped and changed me throughout this research journey. Thinking of myself as oppressed rather than depressed has empowered me to question the discourses that have been mentioned above and have given me a choice either to accept them into my life or to resist them.

When a clergyman's wife then chooses to care for herself by pursuing a career, continue her studies, take some time off to read, sleep, exercise etc., she can come into conflict with the congregation or her husband if the above discourse of femininity is prevalent in her community or family. In this sense clergy couples can struggle with the realities of changing gender roles in their lives, as do other contemporary couples, in terms of family and work roles and demands. However, often these struggles are made more challenging by the belief of some parishioners that the clergy and their spouses should be the keepers of the flame for traditional roles for men and women. Within these traditional roles the wife is often seen as an 'ego extension of the church that assumes that “when we got Harry we got her as well”' (Ducklow 1995:34). As a result, there may be 'various levels of ambiguity and conflict today regarding the expectation for clergy wives to continue playing the kind of traditional supportive role that for so long was taken for granted' (Blanton & Morris 1999:333).

In the light of all that has been said, it is 'not by chance or as a result of some personal inadequacy that many women find self-doubt an unwanted part of their lives, but, within this framework, this is understood to be a
direct consequence of the ways in which patriarchy operates in women's lives to undermine our sense of self and thus, through self surveillance, to maintain particular relations of power' (Swan 1998:67).

The purpose of this section was, in the first place, to expose these hidden discourses so that clergymen's wives can make an informed decision either to embrace or to resist them. This section was also an attempt to help the princesses of the magic wand to wake up from their hypnosis and make conscious decisions as to what helps them in these discourses and what does not. As has been mentioned earlier, it is only when we can understand 'the origins of our current ways of understanding ourselves, [that] we can begin to question their legitimacy and resist them' (Swan 1998:69).

4.5 LITERATURE CREATING MORE OF THE SAME

In Sarah Jane Wessels's (1998) dissertation, *Die pastorale versorging van die predikantsvrou*, she suggests a pastoral care conversation that can lead clergymen's wives to maturity and she proposes a *Pastor Pastorum* care system, training and equipping clergymen's wives and congregations.

Wessels (1998) proposes a victory model to help clergymen's wives to be pro-active. Somehow, to me, this feels like mere patching up. The wife as a survivor of a sometimes unbiblical abusive system must now undergo all sorts of training to cope. 'This thinking invites us to believe that, if only the victim had more skills and was taught how to handle the [abusive context], there would not be a problem' (Morgan 1999:211). This sounds like children who are victimized by bullies that have to undergo assertiveness training to cope better with a situation that screams of injustice. Is this the answer to women who want to take their lives back and leave their husbands? Is this not creating more of the same?

Wessels (1998:92) proposes that clergymen's wives experience identity crises because they have not discovered their identity in Christ. If they could make this discovery they would no longer be victims of depression and related psychological problems. This kind of advice did not help me at all. I knew my position in Christ, but that did not take away the reality of my situation and the questions in my heart as to my position in the *ekklesia*. The participants all have close relationships with God but that did not stop them from losing themselves. Wessels (1998:129) also proposes that clergymen's wives attend courses in self-esteem building.

Wessels (1998:92) claims that 98% of women experience guilt in some or other way. I believe that the discourses (see Section 4.4) prevalent in religious communities are feeding these experiences of guilt. Again she suggests that clergymen's wives must be trained and equipped in guilt pastorate to be able to cope better.
At the end of her dissertation Wessels (1998:130) has added an information sheet for clergymen's wives in which she proposes that the wives of clergymen should accept the stressors indicated in her research as a fact that cannot be escaped. This information sheet has since evolved into the booklet: “Mevrou Dominee” Jy mag maar jy wees (Wessels & Lotter 1999). The writers encourage clergymen's wives to develop the ability to say “yes” to their pain (Wessels & Lotter 1999:34-35). The authors add that as long as these women continue to see the pain, as something that attacks them from outside, they will never experience peace. They claim that this pain is part of our lives, our stress, our situation and part of us. If we say “yes” to our pain, we can make it our own and we can go to God with our whole history of who we are.

I cannot go along with these proposals. I practise a narrative approach (Freedman & Combs 1996; White & Epston 1990; Morgan 2000) in which we see people and their problems as separate from one another. We also believe that societal discourses train us to react and to be in certain ways. When we recognise these societal discourses we can resist and show up against those that want to order us about.

Wessels and Lotter (1999) urge clergymen's wives to open their memories to remember everything and I see that as re-traumatising.

In this booklet, Wessels and Lotter (1999:44) reinforce the stereotypes of women and men by emphasizing that men have qualities such as power and braveness and portraying women as soft and motherly with caring qualities as gifts from God. Jenkins (1992:4), herself a clergyman's wife, wrote a self-help book which claims to be a manual that gives women a 'solid foundation' to make a 'success of their calling'. This manual also re-enforces all the stereotypes of traditional roles within the discourses of femininity.

Because clergymen's wives are included in the 'package deal', Stroebel (1993:116-117) has also made suggestions with regard to training for clergymen's wives in order to lessen the depression and stress these women experience. However, Stroebel (1993) acknowledges the fact that these programmes would be of no use if congregations were not also trained in living their biblical office as believers.

Does the proposed training victimise us even more? Could it make us feel that we are not good enough or that we do not measure up and therefore we need training? Could this training marginalise us even further by claiming that this depressed and stressed life is part of our suffering for Christ and we should be trained to get better at taking it?

Lorna Dobson (1995:20) proposes that women accept their lot and she gives the following advice:

So whether we feel that we have chosen our lot in life or not, whether we want to call it a “role,” or whether we will forever be frustrated by not being able to change the stereotypes people have held about
us, our love for our husband and commitment to help him fulfil his own dreams is cause enough to spur us to seek a heart of contentment and peace within our circumstances.

It is statements like these that make me feel trapped.

Is this literature making clergymen’s wives the problem, while the problem is one of ‘discourse, power and culture’ (Madigan 1998a:29)?

4.6 CLOSING REMARKS

All the participants in this journey are ‘in the process of claiming and resisting the identities on offer within various prevailing discourses’ (Burr 1995:76). As can be seen in Chapter Three, we are resisting the thin descriptions of our identities. By ‘challenging and resisting the representations of ourselves on offer in prevailing discourses, we have the chance to construct or claim alternative identities for ourselves’ (Burr 1995:92-93).

The gradual emergence of alternative discourses of femininity has brought much conflict within the traditional discourses in the church. Discourses which are ‘threatening to the status quo’ and ‘which explicitly challenge existing social institutions, will be strongly resisted and marginalised. The process of constructing and negotiating our own identities will therefore often be conflict ridden, as we struggle to claim or resist the images available to us through discourse’ (Burr 1995:76). Will this resistance of clergymen’s wives cause clergymen to lose their jobs or leave the ministry, as in the case of some of the participants in Dempsey’s (1986) research?

The question faced by the ‘truths’ of Western Christianity is this: ‘Where do we find a just and ethical society to live in?’ (Kotzé 2002:13). If we listen to the women’s stories in Chapter Three and to some of the discourses, power and knowledge that inform them, is there any suggestion that they experience the religious communities in which their husbands serve as just and ethical? How much oppression has been experienced by women who have tried to resist the thin descriptions of clergymen’s wives? For many of the women who participated in this journey, the Dutch Reformed Church has been unable to deliver a just and ethical religious society in the communities they served. How can women negotiate for change?

‘A postmodern orientation reminds us that all realities are constructions, and some are more influential than others. By opening up the possibilities of alternatives, a postmodern view moves beyond existing practices to their transformation’ (Hare-Mustin 1997:571). In the final chapter of this dissertation, clergymen’s wives propose transformation at various levels.
CHAPTER FIVE: CARING WITH THE PRINCESSES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the different voices speak their final words with regard to this research journey. Together my own voice, literature's voice and the participants' voices form a choir of voices pleading for resistance and justice in this chapter.

First, I comment on different aspects, such as the silence of women's voices, the daily realities of clergymen's wives despite important reports, the collective responsibility of the Church and the practical theological and pastoral implications of this journey. This is all done through the lenses mentioned in Chapter Two and the princesses' needs as mentioned in Chapters One and Three. The co-researchers then make their own recommendations and also comment on their own contexts. I will end this chapter with the co-researchers' and my own reflections on the research journey.

5.2 CRITIQUE

5.2.1 Women's voice(s)

We as women married to clergymen have spoken about our realities, needs, hopes, pain and survival within a social construction discourse paradigm that aimed to expand and enrich our and our readers' vocabulary of understanding. I therefore believe that the readers' vocabulary and understanding of clergymen's wives' contexts and realities have been expanded.

'A lot of people have expressed gratitude for being exposed to stories that historically have been shrouded in secrecy. They think of these stories as gifts. They are gifts, at least to the extent they make it possible to converse about previously silenced and unspeakable topics and prepare us to appreciate and deal more humanely with the diversity of human experience' (Bochner & Ellis 1996:25). Will this research journey be appreciated as a gift enabling us, the Church and congregations to deal more humanely with the diversity of the princesses' experiences of the magic wand? Or will this journey be devalued in an androcentric religious community because we as women are speaking and writing for ourselves? Will this research journey be labelled as too shrill, strident, sentimental, and mundane, especially when this shrillness is critical of sacred, patriarchal institutions? Will the Dutch Reformed Church dismiss several of these women's accounts of their 'suffering and confinement within a male-dominated religious society' as 'self-serving rhetorical excess' (Morey 1991:336)?
The writing up of these women’s narratives has given them a voice, an opportunity to seize the research journey and their book *Lamentations & Butterflies* (Swart & Associates 2003) as their ‘pulpit’ (Morey 1991:338). In contrast to the silence of these women’s voices in previous research journeys, this journey has given ‘speech to the speechless’, has empowered the powerless and has let ‘outsiders participate’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:91).

What has been done in this research journey in terms of ethnographic writing (see Section 1.4) is therefore not only seen as ‘representation but as communication’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:19). It has been communication aimed at the Church, therapists, religious communities and spiritual leaders.

### 5.2.2 Realities despite decisions made in 1998

While the 1998 (Müller et al) General Synod report explicitly stated that no such ‘quasi-ecclesiastical office known as “minister’s wife”’ (Smith 1983:92) exists in the Dutch Reformed Church, congregations still continue their sometimes abusive practices and expectations of these women (Chapter Three & *Lamentations and Butterflies*). Despite the clarity of the proposals (see Section 1.6) which were accepted by the General Synod in 1998, the practices that have been exposed in this dissertation still continue, as is visible in advertisements such as the following that are still being placed in the *Kerkbode* by congregations across South Africa (my emphases):

The church board would like to hear from *devoted clergy couples that feel called* to serve in this congregation (*Die Kerkbode* 2002a).

The applicant and spouse must be available for a personal interview (*Die Kerkbode* 2002b).

Teamwork in the congregation by the clergy couple (*Die Kerkbode* 2002c).

If applicable, involvement from the clergy’s spouse will be expected in terms of congregational development’ (*Die Kerkbode* 2002d).

A clergy couple that would be involved in: pure scripture proclamation, an open heart for the needs of people, a love for young people and good human relationships (*Die Kerkbode* 2003a).

Applicant preferably married (*Die Kerkbode* 2003b).

Interests in the elderly, young people, missions and Vrouediens is a requirement. Clergy couples that are interested must live in the parsonage (*Die Kerkbode* 2003c).

(my translation)
In this regard Emma says that this type of advertisement in *Die Kerkbode* as mentioned above, lists the job description of the clergyman’s wife next to that of the minister with the implication that he is being paid for her job as well. Therefore many congregations continue to ‘view the couple as a “package deal,” expecting service from the wife as well as from the hired clergy’ (Rogers et al 1988:48), making the wife ‘a tag-along package-deal who comes and leaves with him’ (Rayburn, Richmond & Rogers 1988:55). This idea is explored in more detail in Section 5.2.4.

Even if it is not mentioned so explicitly in the advertisements, women are mostly required to accompany their husbands to interviews and are almost always asked the following questions: ‘How are you going to support your husband? How do you see your involvement in the congregation? Are you going to lead the Vrouediens?’ In many cases women know that if they give the wrong answers in the interview they could impede their ‘husband’s chances of getting the opportunity to work in that congregation’ (Swart & Saartjie 2003:XVII).

In addition to the above information, *Kerkspieël Oorsig 2000* shows that the report of the 1998 (Müller et al) General Synod has not been adequately communicated to all congregations. The following information regarding clergymen’s wives, as reported by clergymen and Church Boards in the Dutch Reformed Church (indicated in percentages), confirms the above scenario.

Clergymen who participated in this assessment had to consider the following statement: ‘The claims of the congregation on my wife’s services are too demanding’ (*Kerkspieël Oorsig 2000* 2002:20). They then had to indicate whether they ‘definitely agree’, ‘agree’, were ‘unsure’, ‘do not agree’ or ‘definitely do not agree’. The results of the survey are set out in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Results of survey on clergymen’s views of demands on their wives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Do not agree</th>
<th>Definitely do not agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The conclusion reached was that the group of clergymen that experience claims to their spouses' services as excessive is shrinking, but it remains disturbing that 27% of the participating clergymen agree or strongly agree that claims to their spouse's services are too demanding.

The following statement had to be evaluated by Church Boards: ‘The position of the clergy’s spouse is described by the following response indicated in percentages’ (Kerkspieël Oorsig 2000 2002:28). Again they had to rate their response as agreement, being unsure or disagreement. The results are set out in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Results of survey on Church Board’s views of the position of the clergy’s spouse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The clergy’s spouse:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>may exercise a fulltime occupation</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should lead the Vrouediens</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should lead the children’s ministry (JKJA/Kinderkrans)</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is a normal/ordinary member of the congregation who serves according to her gifting</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should be compensated if she fulfils a leading position in the Church</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has a leading role in the congregation</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The response clearly shows that Church Board members have definite role expectations of the clergy spouses with regard to their leadership that cannot be ignored. The management of this situation is very important because it can easily lead to conflict and tension for all the parties involved.

The next table (5.3), provided by Bischoff (2003), shows how the different geographical areas responded to the above question on the expectation of clergy spouses with regards to taking up a leadership role in the congregation:
Table 5.3: Results of survey on Church Board’s views of the position of clergy spouses in terms of fulfilling a leadership role according to the different geographical areas

| Relationship between Region and Statement 53  (As a percentage) |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Region          | A   | B   | C   | D   | E   |
| Yes            | 2000| 83.6| 77.6| 75.9| 65.7| 69.5|
|                | 1996| 86.1| 81.8| 82.6| 81.6| 74.9|

Key: A = Small rural; B = Rural; C = Large town; D = Extraordinary; E = Suburban

Source: Translated from notes provided by Bischoff (2003).

From the above information Bisschoff (2003) concludes that the Church Boards in the small rural areas have the highest expectations in terms of the leadership roles they expect clergymen’s wives to take, which supports the view that communication since the 1998 report (Müller et al) has not been very successful. When I read through this empirical data I wondered how important such data is in altering the Church’s direction and determining changes. As this data and conclusions (Table 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3) will be published and made available before the next General Synod meeting in 2004 I believe that such data has the possibility to alter the Church’s direction and determine changes for both clergymen and their spouses. The above information and the women’s narratives in Lamentations and Butterflies (Swart & Associates 2003) undoubtedly voice the continuation of the injustice done to women married to clergymen in the Dutch Reformed Church.

5.2.3 The Church taking responsibility

During the last meeting of the General Synod (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika 2002b:633) the following decisions were minuted:

1. The General Synod states categorically that discrimination against women is and was sin and confessed its share, intentionally and unintentionally, in acts that have been inequitable and hurtful to women in the Church. The General Synod also encourages clergy, Church Boards and members to be sensitive to attitudes of condescension and prejudice against women.
2. The General Synod states that the privileging of one gender above the other is against the will of God. The General Synod speaks out against all forms of structural injustice, discrimination, power abuse and violence. The General Synod speaks out against all forms of violence.

3. An ad hoc commission is appointed to give attention to the role of women in the Church, their contributions and experiences with the emphasis on women’s perspectives.

(my translation)

The General Synod also undertook to employ mechanisms to give attention to this matter until their next meeting in 2004.

Could the 12-year period of silence between the Synod’s proposals for doing research on the clergymen’s wives in 1986 (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika 1986b:697) be seen as discrimination? Could the fact that not one woman’s voice or story was included in the report of 1998 (Müller et al) be seen as discrimination? What should the fact that there has not been much action in response to the proposals be called? What about women’s experiences that suggest that there has been no significant communication to help us understand what the Church expects us to do (Swart & Associates 2003)? What about women's experiences of being left out in the cold, paying fees for therapists and stress medication because of the spiritual abuse (see Section 3.2.10) happening in congregations? Would spiritual abuse be part of the violence that the General Synod is talking about? Are the traditional role expectations of clergymen’s wives prejudiced against women in terms of what and how they should serve in congregations? What about the power abuse by Church Boards in congregations? What kind of restoration and reconciliation would the Church be prepared to implement? The Pastor Pastorum practice has been widely employed throughout congregations, but what about the promised care for women? Any women in the congregation can claim care but what about the women that have to live up to Romans 16:1 & 2, 24/7? Why is it that Cynthia (Swart 2003:XLIII) experiences the Church as a place where she is both invisible and also exposed, and feels that she has no legislation behind her that will protect her?

‘Liberation theology understands itself as a dialogue between scripture and tradition on the one side and the concrete daily life experiences of the people of God on the other…[it] injustice is not simply an act of fate; it is caused by people's actions and therefore requires people's action to redress the balance’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:76-77). How will congregations and the Church address the structure’s injustice to so many women?

Could Hannah Arendt’s (1987) work on collective responsibility give an answer to the Church regarding this matter? She says that ‘collective and vicarious responsibility’ has to take place when ‘the member[s] of a
community is held responsible for things he [they] did not participate in but which were done in his [their] name’ (Arendt 1987:48). Patriarchy has been part of the Dutch Reformed Church history from the start, and men, just because they have been part of and have benefited from patriarchy are collectively responsible.

Arendt (1987:43) says that guilt, ‘unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal. It refers to an act, not to intentions or potentialities’. What about the acts that the Church knew about and partook in and benefited from? Is it then guilty in that sense and should it ask forgiveness? Will the Church be prepared to confess its sins in the acts of discrimination against clergymen’s wives of which the Church is guilty? Is the Church guilty of the act of not caring for these women? Is it guilty of not employing a clergyman’s wife who could at all times be an advocate for these women and could speak on their behalf? Of the act of not taking women’s stories seriously enough to include them in a report that concerns them?

Arendt (1987:45) says that ‘this kind of responsibility…is always political…when a whole community takes it upon itself to be responsible for whatever one of its members has done, or whether a community is held responsible for what has been done in its name’. Will the Church rise up to the challenge of taking responsibility for what is still being done in its name? Will the Church go further than its apology of discrimination and move forward in love? Because when love ‘is connected with our becoming or our concern for the becoming of others it is manifest as a commitment to justice in the world. By the same token sin is no longer breaking rules laid down by an abstract Being but is a violation of love….So evil…[is] a refusal to move forward in love’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:70).

Will the Dutch Reformed Church move forward in love by creating the kind of change, support and care for clergy’s spouses that the spouses themselves recommend? The Church could take responsibility by informing congregations through preaching against discrimination against women and provide the kind of change, support and care from which the clergy’s spouses can benefit.

‘Once we recount our stories in community, and analyze and reflect together on their meaning, they acquire the power to move us forward’ (Ackermann 1996:48). Our hope is not only that we would be able to move forward, but also that the Church would take the lead in the ‘praxis of justice, liberation and healing’ (Ackermann 1996:49) for the princesses of the magic wand.

### 5.2.4 Church Boards as employers

Since Church Boards have become the employers of the clergy in 1998, they have received the power to tell clergymen and their wives that they must remember that they pay the clergyman’s salary.
The Basic Conditions of Employment Amendment Act 2002 (Business Blue-Book of South Africa 2003) requires that employers who have staff that work for them for 24 hours or more per month need to have a contractual agreement with them, have to pay them and have to comply with the conditions of this Act. According to this Act (Business Blue-Book of South Africa 2003:116), a ‘person who works for, or renders services to, any other person is presumed, until the contrary is proved, to be an employee, regardless of the form of the contract…[if](a) the manner in which the person works are subject to control or direction of another person’.

The purpose of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act is ‘to advance economic development and social justice’ (Business Blue-Book of South Africa 2003:105). This law, however is not applicable to ‘unpaid volunteers working for an organization serving a charitable purpose’ (105). Do clergymen’s wives have the freedom to decide if they want to volunteer their services to the charitable causes of the congregations in which their husbands serve? Are they expected to fulfil specific duties that would take up more than 24 hours per month without any financial compensation? Has the handing over of power to Church Boards as employers further complicated the situation for the clergy couple?

On the one hand, this new law safeguards women married to clergymen, but on the other hand Church Boards can now decide how much they pay clergymen, as the Synod’s recommendations with regard to salaries remains only a guideline. Is it possible that Church Boards can now decide to pay clergymen smaller wages because their wives are not involved in congregational life?

Some of the co-researchers argue that a contractual agreement and payment from the congregation will make them the possession/property of the congregation. Others feel that with a contractual agreement they are at least able to negotiate what they are prepared to do when they receive payment for their services.

5.2.5 Practical theological implications

I believe that this collaborative work with the co-researchers has made a contribution to the field of practical theology at various levels:

This work has storied the effects that the different practical theological approaches have on clergymen’s wives within the Dutch Reformed Church and asks for more liberating practices.

In one of the conversations I had with a clergyman’s wife, she told me that the God that the congregational members in the community serve and the God she serves are two different Gods. This leads to a stream of questions that I would like to explore further in my continuous being with the wives married to clergymen: What happens when clergymen’s wives find themselves in a different theological paradigm from the pastor,
the Church Board or the congregation? Is this where the different Gods come into the picture? In which of these paradigms are the clergy trained? Where are the congregations in terms of these paradigms? What effects will this conflict of paradigms have on marriage relationships; relationships with congregations, and expectations of what and how the clergy couples should do and be? If congregations move to a more participatory or contextual approach to practical theology, would it be more bearable for women married to clergymen? Are Church structures going to be willing to journey with congregations to make it more bearable for both the clergyman and his wife, especially if they are serving different Gods?

Another contribution this research journey wants to make is to expose the hidden assumptions addressed in Chapter Four and therefore I agree with De Jongh van Arkel (2000:16), who questions our ‘ecclesiology.’ The policies and ecclesiology that keep these princesses and so-called laity captive have already been addressed and discussed in Section 4.3.4.

Through this journey these women have had an opportunity to see their own experiences as normative, have learned to value their feelings as good and healthy and not to compare them to a ‘consciousness measured against a “norm” which does not accept their experience’ (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:81). It is my hope that the acceptance of their experience will lead to a richer and even more challenging spirituality from which they, the community, the faith community and society will benefit.

Women are beginning to start to trust their own counsel and the ladder of the old hierarchy is shaking. Will the Church make room for these women to speak for themselves? Will the Church honour these women’s recommendations mentioned in Section 5.3?

Is women’s participation in this research journey starting to question the legitimacy of the old ways of understanding and resist? Are the image of the ‘people of the Divine on their way through the desert towards the Kingdom of the Divine [gaining] influence’ (Bons-Storm 1998a:11)?

I believe that ‘practical theology from a feminist perspective pushes past the clerical, the pastoral and the ecclesial paradigm to the question: How – under which conditions and in what manner – can people in their various situations and their different positions on the field of power and authority, and in their particular contexts, live their life as faithful and liberated people, in a critical relationship to tradition, shaping liberated and liberating communities of faith in this world?’ (Bons-Storm 1998a:17). We will now look at the ways the faithful and liberated participants live in this critical relationship with tradition and how they propose that these liberating communities of faith must come to life and bear fruit by inviting their voices to change the Church’s old ways.
5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CARE AND A BETTER LIFE

It is within ‘liberating communities of faith’ that we ‘ethicise’ by doing ‘everything in participation with others, or rather, with everyone participating’ (Kotzé 2002:21). Therefore within a participatory approach to practical theology (see Section 2.4.4.2) and pastoral care, it would only be appropriate to let clergymen’s wives make their own recommendations in terms of the pastoral care that they need. Apart from the care that is needed, some of the co-researchers feel that the context also needs to change. As I mentioned earlier, this need for change is in line with the feminist theology of praxis that is committed to a ‘specific way of doing theology which stems from a passion for change’ (Ackermann 1996:45).

In a conversation with my supervisor, he suggested that I ask the participants what they would recommend the ideal situation for the clergymen’s wives to be. In the therapeutic letters I wrote to these women I asked them to reflect on the following question: What would be the ideal situation for clergymen’s wives? How must it be to make it better?

The suggestions and recommendations made in this section are therefore a combination of addressing both the pastoral needs and the daily context of these women. For some of the participants, preparation, help lines and mentor programmes are only patching-up measures. If the contexts of these women’s lives would also change, they would experience it as care.

5.3.1 Preparation

The seminaries of the Dutch Reformed Church usually have support groups for clergymen’s wives or potential wives while their husbands are still studying. The participants and I do not know how active these groups still are. The co-researchers felt that the women that guide such groups must be involved in the day-to-day reality of the situation in congregations.

There are mixed feelings about the current courses presented at universities for clergymen’s wives. Some found them helpful and for others they were not helpful or relevant at all.

Several of the co-researchers suggested that I lay the proposals and findings of our research journey before the seminaries of the Dutch Reformed Church, which I will definitely try to do. This I would do in the light of the continuation of this research journey.

The co-researchers also proposed that this preparation for the spouses of clergy while their husbands are still studying addresses the following topics: Who you are; what you can do; the marriage relationship in the
parsonage; looking at the ministry through the wives’ eyes and speaking about the different seasons of one’s life.

Saartjie and Rosy proposed that a clergy couple must attend preparing-for-the-ministry-classes before they enter congregational life. Issues such as who is going to handle the finances or cook the meals when both are tired from work must be addressed. The role that the wife wants to play must also be negotiated before entering the ministry.

### 5.3.2 Guardians or tutors/Mentor programmes / Pastor Pastorum

The co-researchers indicated that it would be helpful if a group of women volunteered to be available for clergymen’s wives to talk to. As a result or outcome of this research journey, there have been three women who have volunteered to be of service in this regard. The co-researchers believe it would be helpful if women married to clergymen knew that there is somebody they can phone or visit that will keep the contents of the conversation confidential and will not judge them for the things they are experiencing.

The General Synod has approved proposed mentor programmes for the first three years of clergymen’s/clergywomen’s ministry in their first congregation (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika 2002b:627). Rosy believes that mentors must be trained to assist women for the first five years of ministry in their first congregation. It is our hope that the women married to clergymen will also be included in this mentoring programme.

In this regard the co-researchers also proposed that a Pastor Pastorum, who is also a clergyman’s wife, must be employed by the denominational structures.

### 5.3.3 Nurturing commission

The co-researchers are divided on the issue of a nurturing caring commission from within the congregation as discussed in Section 1.9.

Some of the participants thought it a wonderful idea to have a support group from within the congregation that you can trust completely so that you do not have to go to your husband with all your issues. Other participants, however, doubted if they could really trust members of the congregation with such personal matters.
5.3.4 Help line

In one of the conversations Disillusioned (Swart 2003:XXVIII) spoke about a time when she went through a crisis and she stared at the telephone because there was no one she could phone to talk to.

In the literature I found an example of a Listening Line that Linda Riley (Rice 1991:72) started with trained minister’s wives with at least ten years experience. These women volunteer to listen to other wives living in this reality. Most of the participants felt that a help line would be a very good thing and therefore I offered to give my cell phone number as a preliminary help line for women that need somebody to talk as my bit of ‘doing theology’ (Bosch 1991:424).

5.3.5 Camps/retreats

In the second group conversation, the participants spoke about an annual camp for clergymen and their families in their district. During this weekend a psychologist would be invited to facilitate their conversations and times together. These camps have become a place where these women can feel safe to tell their stories of hurt within the Church and help one another. It has been helpful to them to meet women who have been in the ministry for a while longer and liberating to know older women who have the courage to say that you do not have to be ‘OK’ all the time. Although the camps are held annually, the psychologist is always available when they need somebody to talk to. In addition there are also a couple of women in the district that know something of their hurt. The solidarity that the clergymen’s wives feel means a great deal because there are people that actually understand how they feel. Michael also regards the above-mentioned retreat as a form of resistance to the isolation forced upon clergy couples by congregations.

During the last meeting of the General Synod the gathering approved the development of a retreat programme for the clergy (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika 2002b:627). Currently I am negotiating with the assigned commission to be part of these programmes, where I will emphasise women’s experiences and needs in this regard.

5.3.6 Literature

Some of the co-researchers felt that there are no books for them to read and instruct them on how to handle different situations. Ironé even tried to get hold of literature regarding the diverse dilemmas clergymen’s wives’ encounter. Although university papers have been written on this subject, they are not at all readily available to us. Ironé feels that the Synod knows what we are going through, since most of them are, or have been, clergy. She feels that all of this is part of the ‘stil is goed en stil is soet’ phenomenon.
I sent a draft copy to all 15 participants and they found this dissertation to be helpful at various levels. Ironé made me promise that this research journey would not only end up in a university’s library where the women that could benefit would not have any access to it. In this regard I have sent the draft copy of this dissertation to quite a few people that were interested in this research journey and this I will continue to do until we decide to publish the findings of this research journey in Afrikaans.

5.3.7 Synod structures

Schmucker (1979:97) claims that in times when clergymen’s wives are depressed, the ‘clergy wife and her feelings are only important to the officials because they are involved in whether the ministry is preserved or lost. She is not a priority for her own sake’. Not being a priority for my own sake is certainly what I have experienced. The lack of any form of support system for the wife married to a clergyman stands as evidence against the Dutch Reformed Church in this matter.

Mace and Mace (quoted by Morris & Blanton 1995:31) say that ‘Protestant clergy and their families have indicated that they perceive a risk of losing status or security if personal and family difficulties become apparent’. Many wives have told me that they do not want to impede their husband’s position either in the congregation or with regard to denominational structures.

Some of the co-researchers have no faith whatsoever in the ability of the Synod and the structures of the Church to address this matter satisfactorily: ‘They will do nothing for us. All that you will get is that they will knock you over the head with the Bible. If there were to be a forum for clergymen’s wives it has to be outside these structures’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXIX). Mickey and Ashmore (quoted by Morris & Blanton 1995:40) confirm this when they indicate that ‘uncertainty’ best describes the confidence level among clergymen and their wives regarding denominational support.

Some of the participants felt that the Church has chosen to stay behind in the way it thinks. Many clergymen’s wives, by contrast, are growing constantly and keeping in touch with the transformations in society. As a result, divisions in marriages would be inevitable if the Church does not stay in touch with these transformations in society, especially when it comes to society’s view on women.

Despite the distrust of denominational structures some experience, other participants believe that these structures would be more willing to listen to them than the elders on the Church Boards.

This research journey had as one of its aims to provide more descriptive narrative information to help the Dutch Reformed Church decide what support services would be most useful. The clergymen’s wives that
have participated in this journey have taken a step of faith in clearly communicating their needs. How will the Church benefit if it takes these recommendations seriously?

I believe that clergymen and their wives will ‘experience more confidence in their denominational system when they perceive a greater match between the services being provided with those that they perceive most useful and meaningful to their lives’ (Morris & Blanton 1995:40). Not only will the confidence levels towards the denominational system increase, but, if denominations are sensitive to all members of the clergy family system, they ‘will experience reciprocal benefits from their provision of support services designed to assist the entire clergy family system’ (Morris & Blanton 1995:41).

As a group of writing clergymen’s wives (Swart & Associates 2003)), these women mostly did not present a complimentary portrait of Christian institutional support of the ministry. Will the justice of these women’s plea fall on deaf ears in a patriarchal religious society? Will their accounts be discounted?

5.3.8 The congregation’s role

According to data collected for *Kerkspieël VI* (Bischoff 2003), a majority of 93,7% of the clergy indicated that their spouses support them in the ministry. Will congregations take the hands of clergymen’s wives in their obedience to Romans 16:1-2? Will congregations be willing to be ‘educated about the realities of life in clergy families and the ways in which they can collectively enhance or diminish the satisfaction of clergy families’ (Morris & Blanton 1994:194)?

Most of the co-researchers argued that they must experience freedom, security and space in their marriage and in the congregation. They plead for acceptance as human beings with all their gifts and shortcomings. They believe that a woman married to a clergyman must have the freedom to utilize her gifts where she feels called to make a difference. If in the end she does not want to be involved anywhere, that must also be accepted.

Elsa believes that when congregations set clergymen’s wives free, then the *Dominee* label also gets smaller and the husbands also have the room to employ their gifting and calling.

It is important for most of the participants that the congregation must know that the minister is in their service, but they do not have any claims on his wife and children. They have called the clergyman/clergywoman to the congregation, not both of them.

Saartjie believes that the wife of a clergyman should be welcomed and visited like any newcomer to a church. She must then be introduced to all the opportunities to serve in the congregation and she must be
given the freedom to serve, if she so wishes, in any ministry that would utilize her gifting and calling. She pleads with congregations not to force clergymen’s wives to put up a fight before they can serve where they feel led to serve.

### 5.3.9 Support from Church Boards

Some co-researchers believe that support from the Church Board “gives them wings”. A Church Board should confirm officially that they want the minister’s wife to be the same as any Church member. They should address the expectations of people who expect the minister’s wife to be an unpaid office bearer. And, if they want her to do work, they must pay her well.

### 5.3.10 Forum

During the conversations with the second group of co-researchers, my supervisor, Dr Johann Roux (2003), shared the following ideas with regard to a forum and the voices of clergymen and women that have to come together and form one big voice:

Sometimes clergy couples come into a context that is driven by years and years of ideas in terms of how it should be run. The power within such a community is enormously bigger than the two people entering that context. If you should look at the history of the context of that congregation [referring to Louise’s situation] it is most probable that these people have been ruling there for years and years. The unfairness of the situation is that in the end it is like the war between America (context and culture of the congregation) and Iraq (clergy couple). Therefore it would be added abuse to tell clergymen’s wives that they must stand up [alone] and make their own decisions with regard to their involvement in congregations. How you have managed to make the decisions and choices to stand up against these forces are already a measure of resistance. In very creative ways you will have to put your voices together to present a collective voice, not an individual one. This collective voice subsequently has to be conveyed via Synods and local cultures to then start the struggle [Afr. die stryd aan te sê]. Therefore if this could become a context where men and women together could become a voice for the wives of clergymen, this will even be better. Because lots of times it is men doing this to women. Women’s resistance against abuse has grown from women that stood together. I believe that when men are responsible for the abuse, men must also take responsibility to stand against other men who abuse women. It must be addressed in the context of community. What I have heard today is that there is a connection with other clergymen’s wives, but there is also a lot of isolation. The more you are isolated, the more you stand alone against the enormous. Disillusioned is it you that said that it is the first time that you have had such a context to say the things that you have been saying? The big question then remains: What are the things that sustain and maintain these ideas and that prevents these kinds of
conversations from happening? The more you try to address these issues alone, the more isolated you become. It is as good as telling an eight-year old to go and play a rugby game against a provincial team. We will teach you a few tricks, how to kick and throw the ball and there you go. The context in which you stand and against which you must resist is just much bigger. It is not only the women but also the men and the local cultural context around us. It is a lot of church tradition and the only way out is to create contexts like these where one can experience solidarity with each other so that later your voices can be heard. Your individual accounts speak of abuse but also of resistance. Again I say that the resistance you are already doing is brilliant, but if we want to really change this then it asks for wider contexts.

Emma agrees with this idea of a collective voice when she writes that members of a congregation have to be gradually made sensitive about the demands that are sometimes innocently and unknowingly put onto a pastor's wife, without embarrassing her or overly exposing her soul. This must, ideally, be done with the support of the Synod, the Church Council and the pastors in the congregation. For a pastor's wife to attempt this on her own could be a futile and, more importantly, counter-productive exercise. This could not, however, happen overnight, and the minister and his wife must be prepared to walk the road with the members of the congregation while changing attitudes and shifting roles. Emma thinks that the Church is currently ripe for change, and when gently led by the Synod, other women and the Church Council, is prepared to change attitudes towards the expectations imposed on clergymen's wives. This will, however, not, in her opinion, happen easily or overnight, but will take time, patience and guidance from Church authorities.

This dissertation is but one of the steps to put together a bigger and collective voice. Given all these inputs, another side of the alternative story could be caring communities for the wives of clergy via the Internet or e-mail, as these women are often isolated in terms of the geographical regions in which they live. The challenge is to constitute a community of care and concern in which these women could experience care and hope in a non-patronizing way. As Weingarten (2000:402) says: ‘Hope is something we do with others.’

5.3.11 Ministry matchmaking

Ministry matchmaking is an effort to make meaning of the experience of some clergy couples that somehow a match between their own beliefs and ecclesiology and that of the congregation is made. Perhaps this has been a gradual process of teaching and conversing with the congregation or just something they found to be present when they arrived there.

‘The pastors doing a good job are those who seemed to be handpicked for that specific job. This emphasizes the need for the Church to do more in terms of the correct placement of ministers in certain situations’ (Müller
& Howell 2003). Could this correct placement depend on the different practical theological approaches of both the clergy and the congregations?

Might Miekie's (Swart 2003:XXIII) experience of feeling ‘dumped’ in her current community illustrates that this matter needs serious attention. During the last couple of months I have repeatedly heard of young couples that have been ‘dumped’ in congregations with quite a different approach to the praxis of ‘doing theology’ (Bosch 1991:424) from what they prefer or can identify with. Time and again congregations have spoken of ‘raising’ these youngsters to become a ‘real’ clergy couple. Are the limited callings and positions offered within the Dutch Reformed Church making these youngsters into the cheap labour force of the Church?

As a result most of these couples have felt that even only after a few months they have no other alternative than to leave the Church. Will the Dutch Reformed Church make room for these youngsters by giving them the support to plant new churches within other practical theological approaches?

In this regard Emma (Swart 2003:XVII) says that if she had to be in a ‘one-man congregation in a rural area, I would have jumped from a cliff’. For Emma and her husband the match of congregation was a perfect one for them as a couple. In a way they seemed to have been hand-picked for the specific job.

Then there is also the need for some women like Magrietjie (Swart 2003:XXX) to start over. Will the practice of standplaasruiling (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid Afrika 2002b:630-631) bring relief in this matter? The practice of standplaasruiling occurs when two congregations and the two clergy involved agree to switch congregations. This has become an option within the Dutch Reformed Church because of the limited opportunities for the clergy to move to another community. This, however, is a lengthy process and the concept is still in its infancy.

I therefore believe that a ministry fit or matchmaking is one of the most important factors in making life in a congregation an energizing and invigorating ekklesia experience. This kind of ekklesia experience is something that most clergy families long for with all their hearts.

### 5.3.12 Husbands must support their wives

Most of the women believe that their husbands must convey to the congregation that their wives are ordinary members of the Church and have the freedom to be themselves, follow their careers and attend church activities, as they want. The husband must actively take part in giving his wife the room to be herself. Some of the women also felt that it is the husband's duty to protect his wife from abusive practices and expectations.
Quite a few of the participants felt that when both the husband and the wife serve according to their gifts and callings, the marriage relationship could really become something that congregational members identify with.

Others plead that the husband must be honest with regard to his expectations of his wife. Saartjie believes that a lot of the heartache that has been portrayed in this dissertation could have been avoided had the husband been clear about his own expectations of his wife. Not only does the husband need the wife's support, but she also needs his support.

5.3.13 Treat us as human beings

Quite a few of the participants want to be treated as human beings, not necessarily as women. They do not want to be seen as a heavenly being that is compared to all the women that came before them. Some of the co-researchers believe that if men see women as human beings, the situation would improve in the Church. But these things have to be evident in men's lives. They should “walk the talk”.

Elsa also believes that there will be hope for the Church when members of the Church are no longer treated as man-Christians and woman-Christians. When the discrimination and sexism leaves the Church, men and women can be treated as equals and no longer according to their gender. If men and women are seen as equals, they could be equally employed in the Church.

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON PARTICIPATION IN THE JOURNEY

Reflecting after the research journey is done is very important because the reflecting process never ends, even after the dissertation is written up.

It is important that the deconstructing of patriarchal discourses is also attended to by giving clergymen's wives a voice also in the reflection process. As a result I sent the draft of the dissertation to the participants and asked them to comment on their participation in this journey. Participating in this research journey has inspired the participants in various ways.

Cynthia was inspired to start writing on various subjects to Church magazines and journals. In this manner she can become more visible in the Church and prepare the way for other women.

Elsa has gained a more reflexive position on the label *Mevrou Dominee*, which has empowered her. Participating in this research process has opened a part of herself that she has not given much attention to. She also came to know of sparkling events in her story which she had not previously been aware of.
The therapeutic letters as discussed in Section 2.8.6 have helped various participants to gain a reflexive position on their lives and the plan God has for their lives.

For others, participating in this journey has made them realise that they are not alone in their daily experiences of life and struggle in the parsonage. Some even felt reassured that they are not going mad. The camaraderie of the other participants meant a great deal to several of the co-researchers. Emma says there is an understanding amongst clergymen’s wives that does not depend on too many words. The isolation of the participant’s experiences was broken through with rays of solidarity, sanity and a choir of voices.

Cleo said that the writing of the story has pulled open some of the hurts and bitterness again. In another sense it has confirmed that she has done the right thing. It has confirmed for her how bad her previous life was for her.

Most of the participants said that it was the first time that they could say it all. Disillusioned said that talking about her experiences might have helped to format some of the files that now enable her to continue with her life. In this regard One Of Them wrote that telling her story was somehow healing and she got nearer to forgiveness and reconciliation.

Ria said that participating in this journey has given her words for the things she did not have words for. It has also helped her to identify ‘Invisible’ as the culprit in her life. During the conversations Ria has also been able to voice her feelings towards her husband for the first time.

A few of the participants felt privileged to be able to live and serve in their communities and also counted their blessings with regard to their situations. But this counting of her blessings also led Rosy to believe that something must be done to improve the situation of some of these women. She believes that the narratives must continue to be told until something gets done. Rosy also believes that this project will open up conversation on topics that have not always been talked about honestly. Participation in this journey has helped her to see the situation from different views and emphasized the complexity of the situation.

Miekie claimed that the research journey has also taken her on a discovery in terms of her own identity. Initially she was afraid to start a new life outside the Church, but the co-researchers have inspired her to venture outside the walls of the Church. She has realised that both her marriage and her relationship with God would be locked inside the walls of the Church if she did not venture to go outside. Through the co-researchers she saw that she has to make a life for herself with the gifts and passions the Lord gave to her. In this manner she could become the woman God intended and support her husband in an appropriate way.
Saartjie has realised that it is OK to say no and that one can be happy while serving in a congregation. She believes that this research journey has also taken her husband on a journey of growth and made him realise that the wife of a clergyman can do her own thing.

Michael was touched deeply by the cries that said: "I am human, please respect me for that." He heard the age-old cries of women abused and used by men, in this instance, the men who make up the bulk of the decision-making bodies in Church. Although these women must pull their weight in chairing the cookie-baking committees that supplement the congregation's funds, they must be docile, not protesting too much and above all, not insisting on a life of their own, not to mention a professional life. He feels privileged to have been accepted into the circle and to have been made aware of the tremendous power of men to affect a gathering such as ours. Men can so easily become the problem personified and present, manipulating and making their wives believe that all is well. He also learned that there is an undertow of unrevealed and/or unheard stories that women keep hidden for fear of being ...well, maybe, punished by their husbands for feeling what they feel.

For most of the participants, the research journey has given hope, a kind of hope that you can take with you. Saartjie said that Emma's story had given her hope and helped her to have a more positive outlook on life in the parsonage.

As can be seen in the above reflections, partaking in this research journey has encouraged a re-authoring of their lives and agency of self (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:10) that have left these princesses of the magic wand with hope.

5.5 REFLECTIONS ON MY OWN REFLEXIVITY

5.5.1 Snippets from my journal

Last year David Epston (2002) handed out some research questions (see Section 2.8.11) during a workshop for ITD students in Pretoria. These questions continuously guided and helped me to reflect on where I am in the journey. I will now share some of my answers on the questions as I reflected on them during the research process:

What would surprise research?

14 December 2002: I am surprised that the women are not standing in line to be part of me. Are they scared of me? Is this too different for them? Are they busy? Is it not important for them or not an issue for them? Am I too masculine? Do they not believe that their voices are important, that it might help other women?
9 April 2003: These women are not so much scared of me as the consequences this speech might have for them. Then I have also realized that these women are very busy, and feel privileged that in spite of busyness’s demands on their lives, they have decided to participate.

*If we would interview your research, what would research say?*

9 April 2003: The women are starting to trust us and are talking to us about their joys and struggles. I am very excited because this is only the beginning of a new journey, one of voice, not silence.

2 May 2003: We took a new turn yesterday; there is a need for negotiating teams, labour consultant teams, a library with literature. The story-time is over, desperate action is needed. Marriages are suffering, innocence has been lost and naivety has been laid aside; the longing for a community that loves one another is needed; and children are suffering. Women are just bailing out, either writing letters of resignation to Church Boards, or writing letters on behalf of their husbands. Most of the couples represented yesterday have considered leaving the ministry and doing other jobs.

### 5.5.2 Reflections on my own reflexivity

The following section has not been co-authored, because it has to do with my own self or selves that has/have acted and re-acted in the research journey.

Because of my own struggles with the label and the reality of being a woman married to a clergyman, I often try to ‘pan for gold’ (Wylie 1994) in others’ stories to find the hurt and wounds there. I sometimes assumed it should be there, and was quite taken aback when it was not present. I had to learn to respect women’s different realities, theologies and life philosophies and not force my own on them. Therefore I had to question myself a great deal about not showing favour to the women’s stories that can relate more with my own experience of my reality. I had to work hard at this, trying always to be open and learn and even connect in a participatory consciousness with these women.

Perhaps my own, long silence and disempowerment has left me desperate to tell women that it is safe to speak, to tell it all without any judgement or patronizing statements to follow. I wanted to tell these women that they are not going mad and are not imagining things. Silent compliance has been very much a part of my life and in that sense maybe I pushed for women to speak when they were not yet ready.

At times I felt helpless, as if this research journey will not be in time to help some of the participants. For the first time I was challenged by co-researchers who are tired of talking, for whom the telling of their stories is not enough. Therefore this research journey is giving me a sense of solidarity, a sense of not being alone.
and of not being crazy. Time and again I was amazed and felt privileged that the women trusted me so easily and some of them spoke so frankly.

I had to learn through this research journey to be heard as a woman without being aggressive, or harmful in my approach in the text and conversations with others. I am a woman and am aware of the greater discourses in a still male-dominated religious society, where women are talked about as equal, but are still expected to be self-sacrificing. At times I felt irritation and frustration in the conversations because of the real effects I could see the dominant discourses and theologies had on these women's lives and their views of themselves. Occasionally I felt the urge to rescue them and fix their lives for them.

My hope lies in the fact that I might be part in helping to bring about transformed communities of care and responsibility. The journey has been a rich one for me and the process is continuing....

5.5.3 The influence of the research process on my practice as pastoral therapist

How will pastoral therapists benefit from the collecting of narratives co-constructed by these wives of clergymen? I will try to answer this question, which I posed in Section 2.5.2, by telling the story of my own experience through this research journey.

Women who are married to clergymen have various ways of exercising their spirituality. From the conversations and interviews we had, I conclude that most of these women's relationships with God are very important to them. Their relationships with God give meaning to their lives, form part of their preferred realities and help them to cope. Including God in the conversation would therefore be a practice welcomed by most of these women, although some of them plead that they do not want to be ‘knocked over the head with the Bible’ (Swart & Magrietjie 2003:XXIX). A ‘reformed’ or ‘fundamentalist approach’ (Roux et al 2001:37-39) to pastoral therapy would therefore not be experienced as care by some of these women. As a result, this research journey has taught me to be cautious about the way I use the Bible when I collaborate with people in therapy. I have learnt not to use it as a prescriptive tool, but as document ‘taking part in this inter-related conversation’ (Roux et al 2001:46).

As I journeyed with these women I wondered if these women's openness and frankness in telling their stories has anything to do with my participatory approach (see Section 2.4.6) as a pastoral therapist. Does this participatory approach to pastoral therapy enhance my approachability? Could it be that a contextual and participatory approach to practical theology opens up more space for clergymen's wives to experience understanding, care and support in a non-patronizing way?
Avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with the princesses was a top priority in my being with them. I have found that a thirst to learn from and discover with these women has helped me to avoid the urge to control them and has helped me to experience a sense of connectedness and solidarity that I have taken with me from our conversations.

I also discovered how ‘my curiosity to learn’ and my position of ‘not-knowing’ (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:38) opened up conversational space in a situation where I could have been perceived as the expert and as the so-called knowledgeable one. Although I also have my own story as the wife of a clergyman, I felt that these women sometimes told their stories to me as though I was an outsider, a journalist or a scribe. I do wonder how different this research journey would have been had I not treated these women as the experts of their own stories and if I had presumed that I knew what their stories were all about.

Because guilt so often comes and lives with us as women married to clergymen, I tried to avoid blaming people, and I used externalising language to refer to a problem. Consequently this research journey has made me more aware of different discourses, especially in the religious community of which I am part and the influences of various discourses on people’s lives. Although I could not collaborate much with these women to challenge oppressive discourses and negotiate ways of living in an ‘ethical and ecological accountable way’ (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8) as I envisaged, I regard this last chapter, especially Section 5.3, as achieving collaboration. This journey has made me very determined to deconstruct discourses not only in therapy, but also in my day-to-day conversations with people.

I have also learnt about the ability of problems to isolate people, and with clergymen’s wives this was especially true. Although I enjoy collaborating with people in a one-on-one therapy conversation, I was challenged by this journey to welcome more witnesses into the therapy room, so that the power of ‘Isolation’ would no longer be prevalent to such a large degree. I agree with Avis (1991:198), who she says that working with women who share similar issues is an extremely successful way to counteract the ‘individualization of women’s problems, in providing both support and challenge, and in empowering through connection with other women’. This has definitely been my experience during the last year.

The journey with the princesses of the magic wand has turned out to be an enriching ‘lived experience’ (Reinharz 1992:258) that has inspired and influenced my work as a pastoral therapist.

5.6 THE JOURNEY HAS ONLY BEGUN

I have again been invited to speak to clergymen’s wives at the next conference for clergy in the Kruger Park, which will take me back to the place where this whole journey started.
I have also been asked to join a commission that will explore the place of women in the Dutch Reformed Church and I feel privileged to be a part of this commission which will allow us to wonder together about negotiating change for women in this denomination.

The writing up of the research journey has now come to an end but in a certain sense the journey for transformation and voice has only now begun.

**5.7 CLOSING REMARKS**

This work has been a collaborative, co-authoring, and transparent exercise, where we have worked together at addressing the issues of our realities as women married to clergymen. Accountability and responsibility to the women who are directly influenced by this research project have constantly guided me and played a major part in this research journey.

Our conversations have produced new insights and knowledge. In a sense we as women were reconstructing tradition. As we probed the themes that affected us, our knowledge about others and ourselves grew. With this knowledge came a commitment to strategies of resistance and hope. Women who had never done so before began to articulate their theologies and narratives. ‘The practice of speaking out, of entering into conversation, of retelling and rethinking and speaking again, leads to the discovery of new layers of meaning. New pain is unveiled and fresh grace is revealed’ (Ackermann 2000:10).

We want our voices to be heard before other women have to endure the hurt that some of us have experienced. Our hope is that our narratives will encourage other women to speak theirs. This journey is not only about telling these women’s stories, but also about starting a political current where we can bring about a change in our situation. Together we can dare to translate our hopes into actions for a better way of life for the women that will come to know of the magic wand.

I experienced this time of study as transforming my story, a time-out to work things through and to make meaning of my position in the religious community where I live and move and have my being. This research journey is part of my resurrection story, a story that speaks of resistance, of doing hope with other women in the same position and making meaning in the writing of an alternative story about our power, knowledge, label, discourses and marginalisation. The turning of the gaze of the magic wand on itself is bearing fruit in our lives, giving the princesses of the magic wand ‘hope in an age of cynical reason’ (Kinchloe & McLaren 1994:154).

We now invite the Church to write a new story of caring and hope in the lives of the princesses of the magic wand!
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ADDENDUM 1

Wie sorg vir Mev Dominee?

Chéné Swart, MTh-student in Pastorale Terapie, Posbus 151, Witrivier 1240, telfaks (013) 751-3488, skryf:

EENDAG lank, lank gelede was daar ‘n groep prinsesse wat ‘n vreemde ding oorgekom het. Eintlik het dit die prinse met wie hulle getroud was, oorgekom. Hierdie vroue se lewens sou nooit weer dieselfde wees nie. Hulle mans het ‘n nuwe titel gekry en van daardie dag af het hierdie titel soos ‘n towerstaf oor hulle lewens geswaai en is hierdie prinsesse gekroon tot Super Christenvroue.

Die prinsesse het onmiddellik al die genadegawes ontvang en kon van daardie oomblik af Bybelstudies lei, basaars organiseer, berading doen en ‘n baie goeie sekretaresse wees. Sommige van die kragtoertjies van die towerstaf was bemagtigend en ander weer het die prinsesse ingeperk. Daarom het die mag van die towerstaf vir sommige vroue nuwe geleenthede en groei beteken, en vir ander het dit trane, depressie, isolasie en gevoelens van “ek is nie goed genoeg nie” gebring.

Soms het die prinsesse baie alleen gevoel, maar as Supervrou het sy tog sekerlik nie sorg nodig nie. Daarmee saam raak sy nooit moeg of beleef enige negatiewe gevoelens nie. Hierdie prinsesse praat nie graag nie, want in die wêreld van die towerstaf is die towerwoorde, veral vir vroue: “Stil is goed, en stil is soet!”

Onlangs het ‘n paar vroue/prinsesse wat met predikante getroud is, bymekaar gekom en oor ons leefwêreld gesels. Alhoewel ons omstandighede dikwels wêrelde verskil, is ons dit eens dat ons daaroor moet begin praat, bymekaar moet leer en vir mekaar moet begin sorg. Vir die meeste van ons was dit die eerste keer dat ons met vrymoedigheid en binne ‘n veilige ruimte oor ons belewenisse kon praat.

Die band wat daar tussen ons gesmee is, is ‘n teken van die moontlikhede vir voortgaande versorging. In ons nadink oor versorging, het ons besluit dat ons hierdie geleenthed wil deel met ander vroue van predikante en hulle ook op die hoogte wil hou en uitnooi om deel te word van hierdie sáám wonder.

Sover ons kennis strek, sal dit die eerste keer wees dat die vroue van predikante séf riglyne aangaande sorg vir hulle unieke konteks en situasie opstel.
Ons het saam gepraat oor die invloed van ons getroud-wees met 'n predikant op al die verskillende verhoudings waarin ons staan. Saam het ons ook ons stories van hoop met mekaar gedeel.

Die vroue wat deelneem aan hierdie navorsingsprojek, “Die verhale van die vroue van predikante in die NG Kerk”, het toestemming gegee dat ander vroue van predikante ook die gesprekke van ons naweek kan lees en ook hulle insette verder daaroor kan gee. As dié vroue dus belangstel om op so 'n manier betrokke te raak, is hulle welkom om e-pos te stuur aan chenico@acgcc.co.za en ek sal die inligting vir hulle aanstuur.

Dié e-posadres kan ook gebruik word as vroue van predikante wil gesels oor hulle belewenisse in die bediening. Alle inligting is vertroulik.

Ek kan ook op my selnommer geskakel word as dié vroue ondersteuning nodig het (083 467 1891).

Mag dit die begin wees van nog baie gesprekke en saam met mekaar wonder.

*Die Kerkbode* 23 May 2003, 170(7), 11.
ADDENDUM 2

LAMENTATIONS AND BUTTERFLIES

SOME NARRATIVES BY WOMEN MARRIED TO CLERGYMEN

Chéné Swart & Associates

2003
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As writing and speaking women married to clergymen, we would like to dedicate this book to all women who are still silent! We hope that this book would inspire other clergymen’s wives to tell their stories, whether that story is one of pain, survival or hope.

We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to everybody who contributed to this book in various ways:

Thank you, Russel Botman (2003), for helping us to name our experiences of pain using the biblical term Lamentations. We also want to thank Magrietjie for sharing the story (2003:XXX) of the pastor who caught butterflies. You gave us a metaphor for hope (Butterflies), and as a result, provided part of the title of our book.

We would like to thank Dr Johann Roux, the researcher’s supervisor, for sharing our concern for clergymen’s wives and helping us believe that this is important enough to write a book about. Thank you for all the advice on possible questions. Your insights have added to the richness and quality of this book.

Thank you, Idette Noomé, for changing this ‘Afrikaans-English’ text into something that we can present boldly.

We want to thank God, who sustained us through our stories of pain, hope and survival.

We want to thank Cleo for the works of art that portray the title of our book in a way that words are unable to. Cleo explains the story and meaning of the paintings as follows:

“The first painting, Vision 1, came about as a result of an experience of pain. This was the first self-portrait I ever did. This painting speaks of truth and the painful experience of learning to know the truth about yourself. The eyes speak about the blindness that often accompanies discovering the truth. The blue/purple material that is wrapped around the head is symbolic of the truth that sometimes presses you down [Afr. wat mens soms vasdruk].

When a woman is free is a painting I did a year before I decided that my marriage with my clergyman husband was something of the past. But this is how I would mostly describe my life now. I have learned and achieved so many things during the last year.”
INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, there were some princesses whose lives came to be influenced by an extraordinary event. This wonderful event occurred in their husbands’ lives, but it swept over the princesses’ lives like a magic wand to change it forever.

The magic wand’s supernatural power mysteriously crowned these princesses as the Superwomen of the faith communities they lived in. As a result, these princesses never became tired, felt despair or had any ‘negative’ feelings. The magic wand bestowed spiritual gifts, boundless energy, as well as organisational and leadership skills on these women. Each of these princesses then became an example of the perfect wife, the perfect mother and the perfect spiritual woman. And the people in their communities expected them to stay that way.

At first, the spell seemed to be a gift, but gradually, the princesses felt that the magic gifts were not all they appeared to be. Apart from all the expectations people had of them, there was one aspect of the spell woven by the power of the magic wand that weighed heavier than all the other things: silence…..Most of these women grew up in a community where the following Afrikaans saying is still applied, especially to women: ‘Stil is soet en stil is goed’ (Uys 2002) [to be quiet is well behaved and to be quiet is good].

In the year 2003, at last, 15 of princesses who had felt the power of the magic wand received an invitation to journey from all parts of the country and from different generations and contexts to gather together to Speak! Some volunteered, some wrote letters, and others talked over the phone, but they all made sure that they did not miss this opportunity.

Because these princesses’ stories had never been recorded in any book, one of the women decided that she could be the scribe that would put these words on paper and make them live forever. This woman, herself a princess, did not only write down their words, but she also asked questions about the influence of the magic wand on the princesses’ lives and relationships. And so, the spell of silence was broken at last. The themes that re-occurred through all the conversations were then used as headings in the chapters of this chronicle of their stories, which is called: Lamentations (stories of pain) and Butterflies (stories of hope): Some narratives by women married to clergymen.

For a very long time I have been busy with my own struggle as a clergyman’s wife in the Church\(^1\), but in this book, I invited other wives to participate and tell their stories and to explore the meanings they attached to their experience. I divided the content of our conversations into themes. I also used these themes in the text of this book to help readers to understand our joys and sorrows.

\(^1\) In this book, when the Church is capitalised, the term refers to the Dutch Reformed Church.
This book therefore consists of excerpts of the translated transcripts of the conversations wherein 15 clergymen’s wives talked about their realities. Occasionally, my own voice is indicated in the text in **bold italics**, usually when I want to include the question asked, to help readers to understand the answer better.

This form of writing, also called ethnography (Bochner & Ellis 1996:18) appealed to me because I did not want to stay stuck at the level of mere data. I wanted to be a ‘storyteller’, someone who used narrative strategies to transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think’ (Bochner & Ellis 1996:18).

So often it happens that in the writing up of a research journey the participants become mere subjects of research. They do not participate. My choice to be a ‘storyteller’ is therefore a political one in the sense that I wanted to give a voice to these participants within the written academic discourse. I agree with Foucault (1980:81) when he talks about ‘a return of knowledge’ wherein it is not ‘theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality’. Du Preez (2000) has already ventured on such a journey in his dissertation and therefore my supervisor, Dr JP Roux, and I had a conversation in which we decided that I would include the participant’s voices as written up in this book.

I would now like to introduce these princesses to you reminding the reader that most of the participants chose pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Chapter One contains narratives gleaned during a weekend of conversations with three clergymen’s wives, Saartjie, Emma and Rosy.

Chapter Two consists of the narratives of a group of women married to clergymen living in the same area. They are Ironé, Miekie, Magrietjie, AnnaMart, Louise and Disillusioned. Dr Johann Roux, my supervisor, also joined part of this conversation and his contributions to the conversation are also included.

Chapter Three consists of conversations I had with clergymen’s wives living in very different circumstances. One Of Them stands at the end of her road as a clergyman’s wife and reflects on her journey. Cleo is an artist who is divorced from her clergyman husband. Rita is a young woman who grew up in a parsonage and is now also married to a clergyman. Elsa is a professional who conversed via e-mail about her experiences of Mevrou Dominee trying to enter her workplace. Cynthia and Ria are both trained clergywomen in their own right and they are also married to clergymen. Both of them are employed as ‘tentmakers’ within the Dutch Reformed Church, which means that they are not serving as full-time ministers of the church.

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2 This is the name that congregations often use when they refer to clergymen’s wives within the Dutch Reformed Church. These words literally mean the wife (Mevrou) of the clergyman Dominee).
These stories can therefore 'serve as vehicles to carry people’s dilemmas and ethical choices, including the effects of those dilemmas and choices on other people. The more of these stories we have, the richer the possibilities that could guide people’s struggles to find ways in which to live at the margins of clarity about what is good and/or evil' (Kotzé 2002:21). The stories that are recorded in this book are therefore a way of sharing the richer possibilities that could guide women married to clergymen in their struggles.

We now invite the reader into the worlds of the princesses touched by the magic wand.

Chené Swart

Scribe and participant

October 2003
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A COLLAGE OF JOURNEYS
CHAPTER 1

STAND UP FOR THE CHAMPIONS

‘This communication of a women’s self to her friends works to contrary effects, for it redoubles joys, and cuts griefs in half.’ (Rosy)

SAARTJIE’S STORY

I come from an era in which men still believed that the ‘man is the head of the home’ and therefore women had to go along with that. I married this man because I loved him, without really knowing what lay ahead of me. There you are, 23 years of age, and now you are Mevrou Dominee. I found this very difficult. Fulfilling the expectations of the congregations about me was the proper thing to do: I was chairwoman of the Vrouediens3 and the children’s ministry (JKJA); I did fund-raising and led Bible study groups. Because I am a good organizer and it is my gift, I was satisfied doing that. Since my husband was out every evening from Monday to Friday and I was mostly thrown on my own resources; it was very difficult in our first congregation. Every Saturday evening he prepared his sermon and on Sunday evenings he was busy with the young people.

In our second congregation the children and I took to the dirt roads on Sunday afternoons and we went window-shopping, ate ice cream and entertained ourselves, while prayer meetings were held on the farms in the wards [Afr. wyke].

When we moved to a bigger congregation with five clerical couples I saw for the first time that there could be a different way of being a clergyman’s wife. It was at this point that I, also for the first time, said that I did not want to be the leader of all the meetings anymore. I started to study again and took up a part-time job.

When we moved to our current congregation, I took on a full-time job as a lecturer at a technicon and experienced the five most rewarding years of my life in terms of job satisfaction. The job at the technicon saved my life because I could climb into my car and just leave town for the day. It was good for me to be out of the town we stayed in because there was a lot of gossip and the people made it very difficult for us. After

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3 The Vrouediens, directly translated means ‘women’s service’. This ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church consists of women that serve in various areas of the Church life. If you are a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and you are a woman, you are automatically part of this ministry that usually organises the bazaars and teas for funerals, does mercy work and fund-raising and also provides spiritual care for the women of the Church. Traditionally, the clergyman’s wife is responsible for leading this ministry in the Church. Some congregations no longer have a Vrouediens, but have ministry teams consisting of men and women doing the above-mentioned services instead.
two years we nearly packed our bags and left. If the lead elder had not talked us out of it, my husband would have left the congregation.

Although I was still the leader of the Vrouediens, I felt that it had become merely a fund-raising activity. I started asking myself if being busy organizing ladies to raise funds the whole time was really what I should be doing. When I resigned as chairwoman of the Vrouediens, the women pleaded with me to be the chairwoman again – just to keep them out of one another's hair! Because I felt guilty, I took over the chair again, but at times I slipped up on a few things that I could not get to, and again wondered why I had to bear these things.

I had nobody to talk to about my personal and family life because, if I did open my mouth, my husband's reputation could be damaged. So what do you do? If you should bare your soul to a congregational member, they might not feel at liberty to come to your husband again if they had problems.

One evening during the church service I looked over the congregation, and realized that I saw these people as my enemies. I told my husband that I wanted to go to a psychologist even though I had always said that I would never go to a psychologist in this small town. I sat in her office for six months and cried a lot. I never thought that I could feel this way. I spoke about the fact that I felt that I was not good enough. In my conversations with the psychologist, a lot of the negative things that had accumulated over the years came out. For example, I had remained silent. I had never said what I thought or felt. I had accepted my lot and had just done what I thought I had to. The psychologist suggested that we look at the role expectations with regard to a clergyman's wife and she also suggested that I ask my husband about his role expectations about me. His answer was a terrible revelation. After 27 years he said that I had not supported him in his ministry. These were the most awful words I had ever heard in my life. To think that I had been chairwoman for all those years and it had no meaning for him! Because what I did was not good enough for him I decided that I would not be the chairwoman of the Vrouediens any more. I did not do it to spite him, but I took the liberty of no longer struggling and wrestling with holding that position. I really struggled a lot with this Mevrou Dominee thing. Because of this entirely stressful situation that I had gone through, my hands are full of eczema. And this is how my hands have looked for the last year. I went to a homeopath with these hands, and he told me that sometimes one must take a step of faith and leave behind the things that cause the stress in your life.

I have learned that I am allowed to be myself. I am an introvert and I hate to enter a situation where there are a lot of strangers. I'd rather die, but when you are the clergyman's wife this is something that is expected of you, many times.
It was a very difficult time for my husband when I became a different me – someone who says what she feels about things. One of my children once said to me that he never knows what is going on in my head. I think it has to do with being a clergyman’s wife and having to put up a front. When my husband understood what was going on, he was very supportive. After all these years we are only now talking about our experiences.

We are close to retirement. Sometimes I wish that my husband’s term would end, so that it would all be over. If we were to go to another congregation, I would be chairwoman of the Vrouediens, but I would not lose myself again.

I was never really called. I married the man I loved and did what was expected of me, and what I expected of myself. One day my husband said that I should have known that this is what my life would consist of, so why then am I moaning like this? If a clergyman is unhappy in his ministry, it affects his wife.

EMMA’S STORY

I have also experienced some bad things in the ministry, but not many. Perhaps the things that I brought with me will say something about my experiences in the congregation. I have brought thank-you cards from social workers; a newspaper article about the blankets for AIDS orphans we are busy with; a receipt book with receipts for about R 20 000 which I received for projects and our congregation’s year programme full of exciting projects and people and events. This is my experience of our congregation. We’ve been in the congregation now for 13 years, but it took a while to get there.

We married at the end of my husband’s final year of studies and I was the breadwinner for the first six years of our married life. When we received the calling to our current congregation, everything changed. A person changes in the ministry. My whole perception of who I am changed and I discovered new passions. The status of being a clergyman’s wife gave me the opportunity to go on stage and talk about 250 children that go hungry and have to choose which meal they want in a day. I made an appeal for money to buy some gifts and a week later I stood with R6000 cash in my hands to buy those gifts. These are the kinds of positive thing that I find overwhelmingly empowering.

The congregation do not visit us too much. They give us our private space and I can be who I want to be. Therefore my experience of being a clergyman’s wife is that I am who I am, and nobody peeps over my shoulder.

When I go to church I feel that the people love us. There might be people that say negative things, but I either do not hear these things, know about them or pay any attention to them because the majority of these
people have a sense of moving forward as a congregation. A large part of the congregation has moved forward together, and the women’s ministry has also made progress, especially during the last five years.

I feel proud to be part of this congregation and we are very happy. I think that God would have to send the angel Gabriel if he wanted to remove us!

There are other positive clergyman’s wife stories as well, not only stories of difficult times.

**ROSY’S STORY**

We got married when my husband still had four years of his studies to complete. Over the years I was involved in the Vrouediens, in Bible studies and with small groups of teenagers and I made it clear from the start that this would be my involvement. I have also brought mementos from all the years in ministry: thank-you letters, cards and photo albums.

It was difficult for me to leave our first congregation, because I think that first one always holds a special place in one’s heart. The night that we were welcomed in the new community there was constant talk about the difficult people of this town. That evening we let them know that we were not going to be involved in conflict and quarrels but that we were there because the Lord had called us. The congregation was only six years old when we were called to the congregation and when we arrived we realized that the previous clergyman was their hero. Therefore it took a while for us to win the trust of the congregation.

The other traumatic experience was the ‘church on wheels’ that went through our town. A large group of people from our congregation were baptized and from that moment my husband and I were put on their prayer lists for people that still needed to be converted! These are things that made a deep impression on me. It was awful, especially the fact that one is evaluated and judged before you get to be accepted in a group. Some of the people, even some of our friends, left our church.

Being a clergyman’s wife has not been a bad experience for me. I feel that when you go into a congregation you must be honest about your vision and gifts and therefore about what you are prepared to do. It is no use being burdened with all the things you do not want to do. My husband and I said to one another that we just wanted to be ourselves without any pretence or reservations.

After such a long time in a congregation it is difficult to stay creative. There are days when you grow tired of the congregation and financially you have to count your pennies.

For most of the ladies, it was the first time that they could speak freely about their experiences as clergyman’s wives.
Together we then explored the following questions: *How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?*

**Your relationship with yourself**

**Rosy:** The members of the congregation have affirmed me. They have given me room to do certain things, which gave me opportunities that I would not have otherwise had, and skills I would not have developed – opportunities to meet people that I would otherwise not have met. On the other hand, it does influence me when even my private and financial matters are open to see and discuss.

**Emma:** It has been a positive influence in relation to myself, because the position gives you a platform. This power makes me feel special, because people appreciate what I do. They frequently ask how they can help me. Therefore it has given me enough self-confidence to ask people to help me with projects, something that is normally very difficult for me to do. My position within the congregation has given me the confidence to organise functions and to do it without making a big issue about it. I am not a princess who suddenly has all the gifts. I think it is important that you actively rewrite and redefine who you are. Therefore I am not merely Mevrou Dominee in our congregation. I experience myself as multi-faceted. I am one person, but with different facets such as being a mother, a musician, a teacher, a clergyman's wife.

**Saartjie:** Being a clergyman's wife has influenced me negatively, because I always had to put up a façade. I think the absence of positive affirmation could be the reason for the space where I am at this stage. All the things that your husband is exposed to eventually have an influence on your life as well. It is easier said than done when both husband and wife are fighting for their own well-being. The other day one of the Church Board members said that 'one just has to get to know Saartjie, she is not as grumpy as she looks'. I don't even know why I am discussed in meetings. This was said after we'd been in the congregation for ten years! I do not have a friendly outgoing personality, and one struggles with that in a congregation.

**Your relationship with your husband**

**Rosy:** It was difficult for me to let go of my husband, especially in the beginning of our ministry, because I wanted to have him to myself. It used to be difficult for me when my husband left early in the morning and I was only able to see him again late that night. Our relationship in our marriage is very important to me. You know that it is going to be different being married to a clergyman, but you have no idea how different it is going to be. Being a clergyman's wife has made me more possessive. The ladies like their Dominee very much, and of course I also seek attention from him. Therefore it is important that my husband hugs and kisses me in public to show that I belong to him. When you are ‘down’, it might be more difficult for you to handle it when other women are behaving in a flattering way towards the Dominee. This claiming of the
clergyman becomes something very personal for me. It is as if it invades my personal space. Being a clergyman's wife has also influenced me in the sense that I have become selfish with regard to my privacy, and the attention of my husband and children. My family and privacy are very precious to me.

Emma: Does the congregation come first on the list of priorities? Is his calling the most important, then his wife and only then the children? This process of sorting out priorities took about a year; maybe more, and we had lots of conversations about it. If you have sorted out what is important to you and your relationship with your husband, then you know how to handle your role and the demands of the congregation. I eventually felt secure in our relationship and I am not angry with the congregation for taking him away from me. This has helped me to have a positive attitude towards my husband's work.

Saartjie: Something I experienced as positive in being married to a clergyman is my husband's spiritual leadership. He is a committed Christian and this has meant a great deal to me in our relationship.

During one of the sessions Saartjie came up with the following question: ‘Do you enjoy being married to a Dominee?’ [Afr. Is dit vir julle lekker om met ‘n Dominee getroud te wees?] These were the responses.

Emma: Because we experience the calling of the Lord to be in this congregation, I do not have a problem with being married to a clergyman. From the start of our marriage I stood up for my own independence. I do not walk a step behind my husband [Afr. ’n treetjie agter Dominee] and he knows it. I get very aggressive if men treat me as if they think I should stand back for my husband. Then I become obstinate and do the opposite of what is expected of me. My husband gives me room to do the things that I want to do. This is a combination of the space you give to another person and what you achieve together. If I feel that my husband is on my side, then it is easier to walk that extra mile with the congregation. To be married to a clergyman brings with it some very specific demands, and it is therefore very important that your husband does not leave you out in the cold.

Rosy: Being the only minister and his family in the congregation places much more responsibility, pressure, stress and tiredness on you and your marriage. Some days you feel as if the job is too much. The occupation of being a clergyman places him under a lot of stress that can lead to his becoming a man that you do not like anymore.

Saartjie: If I must be honest, I would have chosen the same husband, but not the Dominee part.
Your relationship with your children

Saartjie: There was a time when my relationship with my children was better than my relationship with my husband. They were better friends to me than my husband was at that stage.

Emma: We decided to put our children in a primary school outside the area of our congregation. The high school they now attend is close to our home, but we believe that their identities were formed in the primary school. At their primary school they were treated like any other children.

Rosy: Sometimes our children had their own difficulties. Some of the other children used to tell them that they were very rich, because of all the money that people threw into the collection plates every Sunday. Every so often the teachers would also say, ‘but you are the clergyman’s children’. I do think that people watch our children more carefully.

Your relationship with your dreams and fantasies

Saartjie: I wanted to be a lecturer at a university. If you are married to a clergyman and you get a calling to a rural area there is no other option but to be a teacher at a school. In terms of your career it does impede you in a sense. The five years when I lectured at the technicon have given me back my dream. To a great extent I idealized the position of clergyman’s wife, thinking it would be something wonderful.

Because I did not have an income for quite a while we had to live off the travelling allowance that a clergyman receives. Therefore I made my own clothes and also clothes for the children and to this day I find it difficult to buy myself a new piece of clothing. My husband's dream was to retire at 55, which seems impossible now, because you are penalized so much in terms of your pension if you retire earlier.

Your relationship with friends

Saartjie: There is one friend from another denomination whom I can really trust, who truly cares for me and keeps everything confidential. She will also phone me and find out how things are going. This is worth all the gold in the world. My husband is not their minister, so when I say something that might put my husband in a bad light, I feel free to say it. I wonder about this. Isn't it just our own perception that we have to keep quiet about our husbands? Aren't you allowed to be a normal husband and wife with problems? It is difficult for me to keep up a façade the whole time.

Emma: Because we have been living in the same place for so many years, we are privileged to have friends from long ago who are not members of the congregation. We also have family close by and with them we are
just family. In the congregation we are normal people, but we are very cautious, when making friends inside
the congregation, not to discuss sensitive aspects, because certain things remain private.

Why must we be so cautious? What can happen?

Rosy: It is not that you do not trust people, but you might lead that person into the temptation to tell the story
to others. Because your husband is the clergyman, your story remains a juicy bit of gossip to convey to
others. In a moment when you feel a deep need to talk to somebody, you say something and the other
person can’t keep it to himself or herself. Even when the conversation is about a topical subject, one must be
very careful about speaking out because people easily draw their own conclusions about what you say. This
isolates you in terms of friendships. You get very busy and life just goes on, and in the everyday business of
life you sometimes wish there was someone.

What does that do to you?

Rosy: You feel lonely, sad and isolated. At a given moment you might not necessarily want to talk to your
husband, you are looking for somebody else to talk to.

Saartjie: When I taught at the school, I enjoyed the conversations at break amongst the teachers about day-
to-day stuff. And I realize now how much I miss those conversations. One cannot exist alone.

Your relationship with God

Rosy: The Lord has always been very special to me. I know that is where I get my strength from, but
sometimes one gets so involved with the work of the Lord that one does not get time to connect with the
Lord. The Bible study groups help me to connect with God at a very deep level. Many a time I have begged
the Lord to help me through situations that I did not have the energy for. This ties me to the Lord in a very
special way – knowing that he is always there to give me the strength that I need.

Emma: In the last couple of years I have come to recognise the church’s focus on the needs of the world.
Currently this forms the heart of my Christian experience. Every day when a task lies ahead of me, I feel that
I cannot do it with only my own strength. My focus has shifted to the questions: ‘What difference do
Christians make in the world? What difference are we making for the poor and needy that are living not so far
from us?’
Where and when did you make the change? How did it happen?

Emma: At one stage a decision was made that our church wanted to be a mission church. A certain percentage of the income of the church would go out of the congregation to people in need. I realised that I am not in the world for myself and I asked myself: ‘What difference are you going to make in the world? Are you prepared to go where the Lord wants you to go?’ At this stage all these ideas form the foundation of my relationship with the Lord. I am more of a doer than a thinker. With the projects that I am involved in, I feel that things just move. The people that are involved experience so many blessings.

Do you think the fact that you are a clergyman’s wife has brought about a change in your relationship with the Lord?

Emma: Yes, it did. The sermons, the ministry… you experience a sense of being closer to God and to yourself.

Are there doubts in your lives at times?

Saartjie: There was a stage in my life when I have wondered if this going to church and believing was worth it. Is there really something after this life? Then you look around, you read the Bible and you realize that it must be true. If you look at other religions…our God loved and sacrificed. Even other devoted Christians helped me to start believing again.

How do you doubt?

Saartjie: Things had no meaning for me. This is where doubt came to me, the meaninglessness of things. I am a bit of a perfectionist. Sometimes I feel that I am not good enough, not even for God. Not to mention that I am not good enough in the congregation’s eyes. In the Bible studies I attended, there where other women that had the same struggles that I had. Perfection is a problem for us; it feels as if we never make any progress. If I measure myself in terms of what they say, then I know they are also wrestling with this.

How do you feel in God’s eyes at this stage?

Saartjie: I think positive. I feel good enough. You are who you are. The moment you compare yourself to others, you feel that you are not good enough. It is wonderful to know that in God’s eyes I am good enough, and therefore I am also good enough for the people around me.
Other themes that entered our conversations:

What in the current Church experience for clergymen's wives must change to make it better or more acceptable?

Emma: If congregations move to the Body of Christ model, everything does not depend on the clergy anymore, and consequently not on the wives either. In our congregation the clergymen are called by their names and not Dominees, as is the case in many congregations. Even when some of the congregational members do use the word ‘Dominee’, they are corrected and asked to call the clergyman by his name. For the clergyman, this is the foundation for his relating with the members of the congregation; they are all working as equals in the kingdom of God. The clergymen are therefore not ‘up there’, but part of the team. They might specialize, be busy full-time; they might facilitate and might have more knowledge, but they are part of the team.

Role expectations

Emma: I have marketed my specialized field in the congregation thoroughly and told them what I can and can't do. I do not have theological knowledge, but it sometimes seems as if people expect you to know what is written in your husband's sermons and books, as if it mysteriously rubbed off on you.

Rosy: Sometimes traumatic situations come your way. Occasionally your husband is not there and people tell you their whole story. At other times I have been expected to bring people news of a death in the family when my husband was not available. It is something that I find very difficult to do and that has had a tremendous impact on me. Then I am very angry with my husband that he is not at home to handle the situation. It is a big issue for me because it is so awful to do.

Interesting though that there are so few expectations about a clergywoman’s husband and his involvement in the congregation.

Emma: He has a full-time job – how can he also work in the congregation? The same goes for the wife. But if you look carefully, you will see that the husband cannot have a full-time job, run the household and look after the children, but it is expected of women.

Saartjie: This is all part of a tradition where a clergyman's wife never had an outside job. The Church has fallen behind society in this matter.

Rosy: Yes, she is still seen as the nurturer.
Talking about the Vrouediens

Saartjie: I am shielding my husband. I am scared of what should happen if the Vrouediens dies. Perhaps this is not a fear with any foundation, but I am afraid that the work done by the Vrouediens would fall upon my husband. I am not sure whose responsibility it is, his or mine.

A few months ago my husband and I went to another interview. I knew that if I said that I wouldn't lead the Vrouediens, I would impede my husband's chances of getting the opportunity to work in that congregation. When the lead elder asked me about the Vrouediens, I said that I would lead it, but not in the traditional manner. The Vrouediens must not be about raising funds; it must rather be about building women up spiritually.

Emma: We do not have a Vrouediens in the traditional sense of the word, but we do have a women's ministry. After a few years we realized that the women want something for themselves. The women of the congregation want the clergyman's wife to take the chairwoman's position. I have made my peace with that, and we have all had to make peace with that. The backbone of this women's ministry is equipping ourselves spiritually, and eight times a year there are such opportunities for the women of the congregation. The other part of the ministry is our outreach programme. This is my job. We have started making tracksuits for poor children, because of my position as clergyman's wife. I think we have moved in a direction that makes sense to the women in our congregation.

Coping with pressure

Saartjie: I don't think that we are all equally strong, strong enough to do lots of things. You get supervwomen that can work, and do hundreds of things in the congregation, and everything in their houses also runs successfully. When the pressure to earn money also pressed down on me, I was not strong enough to carry it all.

Self-care

Emma: One owes it to oneself to care for yourself, to do the things that you enjoy and to say that this is how it is, to say that this is my time, or this is the amount of money that I will spend on myself.

Saartjie: I think that in the times we are living in it is easier for a woman to do her own thing. It is acceptable these days for a woman to pursue a career and do things that she enjoys.
Fishbowl experiences

Saartjie: You cannot get away from the fact that you are married to a clergyman. Especially in the rural areas a woman is linked to her husband's occupation.

Geography

Emma: If I had to be in a one-man congregation in a rural area, I would have jumped from a cliff. I don't know if my husband and I would have made it. We need some sort of anonymity – a place where you can be who you are. You cannot be a clergyman and his wife the whole time and we do not have that experience in our church. We are called by our names. We have freedom to follow up on what we are passionate about.

Interviews, moving and growing old

Saartjie: My husband would like to move to another congregation, but because of his age he is in a very difficult situation. He has applied for quite a few posts, and we have had to go to a small number of interviews. Every time I was asked to go to the interview and every time I was asked how I support my husband in his ministry. It has been very tough for us repeatedly to hear that we had not made it. The uncertainty about staying or going has also caused the eczema on my hands.

Two years ago we were on a list for a probable calling to another congregation, which expected me to work closely with my husband. Although I love him very much, I cannot work closely with him because his organizing style differs quite a lot from mine. He can procrastinate till the last moment, while I function differently. At that time I began to feel that there must be something wrong with me.

When he was interviewed for a second time, about going to another congregation, I asked him the following: ‘What about me, what am I going to do there? What kinds of jobs are there for me to do? What am I going to do in that congregation?’ This was very hard for him, because he believes that a wife must go with her husband to wherever his occupation leads him.

My husband wants to take early retirement, but the pension fund penalizes you tremendously if you do this. He does not want to be in this congregation anymore, but I do not have the faith to believe that the Lord will care for us. I feel like the one that does not want to grant him this life. Clergymen believe differently from other people. He believes the Lord will care for him while he writes his books. I am more realistic; I do not know how this will work. I sometimes feel that a clergyman’s job is more holy than other jobs, as if it should have a higher priority than other things. At times this has made me very negative.
Empowering experiences

**Saartjie:** The positive thing about being a clergyman's wife is that you can pray boldly for someone that is sick. This was liberating for me. When I was a bit hesitant to do it, I realized that in a sense I have the right to do it. In a sense it is expected of me.

**Rosy:** One must never disregard the influence, authority and power a clergyman's wife does possess. The congregation's women are very willing to work with her.

*In what ways do you live differently from the way the congregation expects you to?*

**Rosy:** I do not live up to these expectations and therefore I do not attend weddings, funerals and all the social functions in the congregation. I make life fun for myself. I love reading, treating myself to a facial, joining a book club, etc. This helps me to survive. I do not allow the congregation to come into my personal space. This is the only space where I can really be myself and enjoy life fully without other people's knowing what I am really doing.

**Emma:** I make a point of telling people that I am not Mevrou Dominee. If people introduce us I say that I am Emma and I am just an ordinary member of the congregation. In my day-to-day actions in the congregation I try to show that I am not Mevrou. But there are women from the older generation who enjoyed the title, status and accompanying power of the label Mevrou Dominee. I believe that we are a new generation that does not work like that anymore. We live in a normal house and do normal things. Being a clergyman is my husband's whole life; it is only one dimension of my life and of our children's lives.

**Saartjie:** I am not doing what my husband's current congregation expects me to do. This morning I decided that I am going to do things that bring me joy. The things that I want to be part of must be so enjoyable that I will look forward to doing them.

*What made you decide to take this step?*

**Saartjie:** The joy that Emma is experiencing has inspired me. This morning I also read about Paul's view on the joy that we should get from what we do. I then realized that this is what I am looking for.

*How does this 'looking for' work in your life?*

**Saartjie:** I am going to let another year go by until I feel that I am mentally healthy again. I am purposefully going to keep my eyes and ears open in terms of what I am going to do.
**What small steps of resistance are visible in your life?**

**Saartjie:** When I do not want to answer the phone, I do not do it. At the moment I hate it when the telephone rings. I am standing up for my rights now. I told my husband that when he is at home he must answer the telephone and I will answer it when he is not there. I realize now that I did not take enough care of myself at an emotional level. I have told my husband that I will go with him to another congregation, but I will moan and groan if it is too far away. Nevertheless I will go with him. I am not going to keep quiet again. One dies when you keep quiet.

**In what ways do you question what society expects you to do?**

**Saartjie:** When I talk to other ladies in my position that are frustrated, I tell them to go on a journey to search for what they would find fulfilling to do. In that sense I am questioning society’s expectations, by saying that they do not have to do the stereotyped things. If a woman is a good deacon, it is not necessary for her to be and do all the other things as well.

**What will people that know you well say when they hear what you are saying now?**

**Saartjie:** Perhaps they will be surprised. If I think that I know somebody, and after 20 years I hear that this is what this person has been going through and this is what she likes and dislikes and I did not know this, I would feel like a dog. My first reaction would be that I did not know you. I knew your name, but I did not really know you. You did not trust me with what is going on.

**What is the meaning we make of these small steps of resistance?**

**Rosy:** It is a question of survival and balance for me. I can be myself and enjoy being human. This enjoyment speaks of having control over your situation.

**Saartjie:** For other people it might be stupid or insignificant, but it is important to be assertive and to be who you are. It reminds me of a rope that is thrown out to someone who is drowning; you know you are safe when you grab hold of the rope.

**How do the enjoyment, freedom and survival influence your life as a clergyman's wife?**

**Rosy:** It makes the other things that are expected of you enjoyable. It compensates for things that are expected of you in the extra things you are giving.
Saartjie: It should make you more positive in the sense that you do have some control over your life, and what is happening around you. When the circumstances control you, then you experience constant chaos. I would like to have control over my life.

We want to thank Saartjie for sharing the following poem with us after the weekend of conversations we had:

**NOG ‘n KANS**

Kap uit die boom, sê die eienaar,
Vir 3 jaar lyk dit alte naar.
Meneer, sê die tuinier,
Kom ons gee dit nog ‘n uur.

Ek gee nog bietjie kompos en water
Dan kyk ons weer later.

U, die groot Tuinier,
Gee U my nog ‘n kans?
Breek U vir my ‘n lans.

Gee U lewenswater, blaas U Gees
in my swakke vlees.

Laat ek die genot van koninkryksarbeid smaak
Sonder dat dit vir ander saak maak.

Laat die tydjie wat nog oor is,
’n leeftyd van arbeid wees.

Laat my lewensboom die vrugte dra
wat U al lankal vra.
CHAPTER TWO

SHARING YEARS IN ONE MORNING

Magrietjie: I was 29 years old when I came into the parsonage. I thought that I knew myself and that I was sorted out. But ten years later I am confused. It is terrible when you feel that you have lost yourself and now you have to guide your children so that they do not lose themselves. And this is in the Church! The church is the place where you should be nourished and nurtured [Afr. koester]. Therefore I want my pseudonym to be Magrietjie because it is the name of a flower that has to grow in any soil without any care or nurture. But I would rather want to be a sunflower with my face to the sun bearing lots of seed.

AnnaMart: I was still very small when I received a calling to stand in the service of the Lord. I never thought it would be as the wife of a clergyman, but when I met my husband I just knew that I wanted to go on this journey with him. I was young and thought that I could change the world. In our first congregation, our colleague's wife was one of those women who cast out demons. When we came from Namibia with our African-style furniture we heard from congregational members that our furniture had to be exorcised so that it would have no demonic influence on our ministry. Therefore these colleagues never came into our house because of the furniture we had! Later it became too much and the district released my husband from the congregation so that he could receive a call from other congregations. During that time my husband was very ill and I felt that everything was our fault. When we moved to a new congregation, things went very well but I tend to take over in situations. I just wanted to blow some life into the people. At one stage my husband's colleague asked from the pulpit where the clergyman's wife (referring to me) got the right to do certain things. Gradually my enthusiasm disappeared and at that time I would find myself in the car just prompting myself not to think, but just to do. I was chairperson of most of the committees in the church and I did this to the point where I got burnt out. Gradually I realised that I did not feel like doing these things anymore. I began asking myself – who is AnnaMart if she is not the clergyman's wife? I fled the ministry by starting to teach again and gradually dropped everything that I was busy with in the congregation.

Disillusioned: My crisis is that I took in all the things that happened to me over a long time and then suddenly I realised what I have been through. For me the calamity is that it is as if one gets hypnotised in some mysterious way and then suddenly you wake up and realise what they are doing to you. You go into the ministry and you do everything because you think this is how it should be. Then suddenly you realise that you have lost yourself along the way. You have become a puppet on a string. It is at this point that you become rebellious and you are left with this heap of issues that you didn't deal with because you did not
realise what the congregation did to you, and how do I cope with that? Therefore my greatest need is to work through these issues and to sort them out. I wrote a letter to the Church Board in which I told them precisely what I think of them because I was really angry. After they had received the letter, the leading elder came to visit me and he tore the letter up in front of me and told me that they are going to ignore the fact that they had received this letter. Even your statement is ignored! I then decided to leave and resign from everything, because my priority is to protect my husband. I could no longer go along with people who stab my husband in the back. If I am part of that church then I feel that I am also standing with them against my husband. Currently I handle my situation by cutting myself off from the congregation. I have started working from home and it has become my excuse, because I can say that I am busy, and this protects me against the negativity that sometimes surrounds the ministry. And this is my story in a nutshell.

Miekie: We have been in the congregation for two months now. I am 21 years old. If I had known earlier what I know today, then I would never have married this young. I have to be poured into this mould by handling the Vrouediens. I have already baked koeksisters, something I would never have imagined in my wildest dreams. Last year I was busy doing a service year for Christ and my husband ministered in dynamic ways to young people in another congregation. Both my husband and I love children and feel passionate about working with them. However, now the Lord has dumped us in this old congregation. Here they hold prayer meetings, Bible studies, Church Board meetings and sell koeksisters. This is what these people do and it gets to me [Afr. Dit vang my]. Currently I do not have an opportunity to create my own world. We live between nothing and nowhere. I hear everything that all of you are saying and to a degree it scares me, but I try to stay positive! I tell myself that it might be different if I only do this or that, but I don’t know. And then my mother-in-law tells me that I must chat to the people of the congregation when we drink tea after church, but I do not want to do it because they watch you the whole time. I am sick and tired of the members of the congregation referring to me as the new unknown 12-year-old girl sitting in the church on Sundays. It annoys me that people label me because of my age. I do not know where to start creating my own life. I am experiencing an identity crisis.

Ironé: The story of not knowing who you are…Immense disillusionment…constantly being reminded that you are not good enough because of this and because of that…

Before I say all these negative things, I should add that there are good, supportive people in the congregation and I thank the Lord for them because they carry you through this. But when I open the church door and breathe in the air, the smell of the building makes me sick to my stomach. It wasn’t like this.
The rug was pulled out from under me when the chairlady of the Vrouediens and a very good friend of mine came to tell me that I was not good enough, that what I did was not good enough and that my relationship with the Lord was very bad. When they told me this, I decided to draw the line. As a result I informed the leading elder, the chairlady of the Vrouediens and a friend she had brought along that I would be withdrawing from the Vrouediens. This incident helped me to gain a new perspective of the important things in life: I realised that my first priority lies with my husband and my children. Only after this priority has been attended to can the congregation claim its place. Family life and its high priority were also stressed in the report to the General Synod in 1998.

Louise: I was 22 years old (married for three months) when I entered my husband's ministry with him. If I knew what I know now, I would never have married him. All that helps me to hold on is when my husband tells me that he knows that it was the Lord's will that we got married. Divorce has never been an option for me, but yes, currently it has become one. I never knew what would be expected of me, nobody prepared me for this. I got a fright the other day when I told somebody at work that the ministry is a dead end for me. That night I went to the Lord and said to him that I was sorry because I know that what I had said cannot go by unpunished. There is no hope for me in the ministry, no financial future. I have gone so far as to say that I will go out and find a professional job where I can earn a reasonable salary so that I can support both of us.

Since the elder told me that I am an embarrassment to my husband because I do not want to be the chairwoman for the Vrouediens, life has been very difficult for me. I struggle to forgive this man, I plead with God just to be able to go to communion again. Over and over again the thought crosses my mind: ‘Isn't it true that I am an embarrassment to my husband?’ What can I do? There are no solutions; we live in a sick structure! I am sick and tired of listening to everybody's problems. You must listen to your husband's problems, the church's problems, but who listens to you? I am always negative about our situation to the point that the people at my work resent our church. These are the people I talk to. I flee away from the congregation to my work. At work I can get out and be myself [Afr. myself uitleef]! At my place of work I am not seen as a clergyman's wife, I am Louise in the professional position that I hold there. My work is something I enjoy tremendously. Now the church has realised this and currently they are starting to put down my work as well. They do not want me to work on Sundays anymore because I am never in church and they say that I use my job as an excuse. This does not make sense to me, because at the rate that they are reducing my husband's salary, I will have to work more and more.

At university my friends used to call me 'sunshine' because I used to be this busybody who loved everyone. I always laughed, cheered everybody on and always made jokes. I organised fund-raising cycle tours for missionary work and now I hate the Church. My husband and I cycled thousands of kilometres for missionary
work. Now we’ve hung up our bicycles and they are just gathering dust. At this stage my work is my salvation and my way out. I am just asking myself, to whom can I talk and who would make it better?

**Johann:** What made you think of your bicycle?

**Louise:** I thought about the fun we used to have. At that time it was still pleasant to work for the Church. We worked very hard and begged people for money for missionary work.

**How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?**

**Your relationship with yourself**

**Magrietjie:** I do not know who I am. I fight and yell. I told my husband that perhaps I must go for a personality analysis so that somebody else can tell me who I am and what my gifts are. I am cut off from people. I isolate myself. I am alone. I have withdrawn.

**Louise:** I feel that I have lost myself. I do not even know what kind of clothes I like or feel comfortable in anymore. I cannot remember the last time I laughed, I even feel guilty if I laugh. I am depressed and I am currently on anti-depressants. I have to pay that account. I have to carry the shame of asking the doctor and the psychologist to help me. It is unacceptable that in the end I have to go for therapy. In addition the persons who do this to you do not even know about it. It is so strange, they have thrown you into this dilemma, but you are on your own in getting yourself out of it. Therefore I avoid people; I do not answer the telephone anymore. I have withdrawn from the congregation.

**How has the congregation contributed to the way you see yourself?**

**Ironé:** A young girl’s puberty is one big question mark: Who am I? What am I going to do? And the questions continue. However, once you enter the ministry, there is a huge question mark all over your whole life again: Am I a Christian? Am I a good enough Christian? Do I really have a relationship with the Lord? May I practise my occupation? Which occupation may I practise? May I wear this dress to church? Are my children dressed properly enough? You start to question everything all over again. It’s like going through puberty again! It is frightening to question yourself and your beliefs like this.

**Louise:** It has become an issue for me to go and buy food, because members of the congregation watch what I buy. Things that should be mundane are becoming more and more of an issue.

If somebody tells you that you are an embarrassment to your husband, you start to blame yourself and you begin to wonder whether this comment is not perhaps true. I ask myself questions like: ‘Have I said
something wrong? Did I wear the wrong clothes? Was I an embarrassment again today for somebody? I am killing myself with self-blame. I am also wondering whether I heard the Lord correctly. Was I the one who had to marry my husband? Am I really the right woman to stand at my husband’s side in the ministry? I feel that to be a clergyman’s wife is not my place and I do not fit in. I also feel that I will never measure up to the standards that are set for these women. Being a clergyman’s wife influences your lifestyle, day in and day out. Expecting criticism every day, to be constantly experiencing it and handling it is not the life I want. One gets so negative that nothing seems good anymore.

Your relationship with your husband

Louise: As husband and wife you are one, and it is awful when they mess around with your husband [Afr. droogmaak] like they do. You want to protect him from these people that have this awful attitude towards him. You cannot help him with his problems and he cannot help you with yours. You are in a Catch 22. Your marriage suffers tremendously because of the ministry; especially our communication has suffered a terrible blow. I feel guilty if I also demand some of my husband’s time. When I ask him to quickly come and do this or that with me, I feel guilty because the church has the right to his time. I literally have to make an appointment with my husband.

Disillusioned: As husband and wife you work one another up and you both get so depressed.

Your relationship with your children

Ironé: My children had to bear a lot of impatience from me during the years when I was more involved in the congregation.

AnnaMart: I have three teenagers at home, and my daughter and I fought every day because of all the issues I had.

Louise: I have come to the point where I have told my husband that I do not want children anymore. I love children and work with children every day, but I cannot imagine exposing my children to such a mess. I will cry myself to death if I fall pregnant now, because currently I am thinking – how one can do this to a child?

Your relationship with God

AnnaMart: The congregation could not take away our love for the Lord, but our enthusiasm for using that love is gone. I have these talents and gifts but not the enthusiasm to share them inside the Church.

Louise: At the end of the day my faith and my relationship with the Lord have suffered as a result of the situation. I get angry with the Lord because he allows this to happen. Not only that, but I do not want to read
the Bible anymore. I cannot believe that the Lord allows you to walk into the ministry this naïve. Your intentions are to spread and proclaim his word and to extend his Kingdom, and then people kill you in the process. In this regard my husband keeps on telling me about the humiliation Christ had to suffer when he was on earth, but I am not Jesus! I am willing to be the Lord’s servant, but I am sorry, the price you have to pay is too high. It will take a lot to convince me otherwise.

Your relationship with the Church

Magrietjie: I feel guilty because I am negative towards the Church. At this stage I would understand if my children tell me that they do not want anything to do with the Church anymore, because I would have to agree with them.

AnnaMart: I am very negative towards the congregation and very negative towards the Church. I said to myself this morning that I hate the structure of the Church. The most hurtful critics are the colleagues in the ministry that tell you that you are not good enough.

Ironé: In our first congregation I was treated as if I was inadequate and incapable and my husband had to pay the price for my shortcomings. The big picture of the ministry is quite tragic. It is saddening that so many people (not only the clergy, but also members of the congregation) experience such a lack of brotherly love within the Dutch Reformed Church, a place that should be the community of the saints.

Louise: I never realised how angry I was with the whole structure and the frustration that goes along with that. I am tired of talking, questioning and wondering. I want something to be done now, and if it is not, I am sorry, but I am finished with this! I am not threatening; it is a genuine fight for my survival. I want to leave the ministry and I want my husband to leave as well because I do not see any future within the ministry. You are robbed of your joyfulness and at this stage I do not trust anybody in the congregation. I was so naïve and innocent when I came to the congregation.

Disillusioned: After our first year in the congregation I could not explain my feelings towards the congregation other than as hatred. I wanted to paste pictures of the members of the congregation against the wall and throw rotten tomatoes at these pictures. This is how you feel, powerless. Because nowadays I am cut off from the congregation I do not really know what is going on most of the time. My husband does not tell me what is going on anymore, because I stir up strife [Afr. stook hom op]. There have been quite a few times when I have typed and printed his letter of resignation to the Church Board. That is how far I have gone. He just had to sign on the dotted line. Perhaps that is the reason he does not share his difficulties with me.
anymore. But sometimes I do hear about things and then I can feel these issues rising to the surface again. I get angry all over again.

I switch off my brain because that is my only form of self-preservation. After our first year I hated this congregation and I decided rather to withdraw, because I cannot be an example to them as the clergyman’s wife. I have this powerless feeling, I know somewhere I have to let go of all this anger. You don’t know what to do or how to sort it out. Who do you go to? You suddenly realise that you go through all these issues and calamities, but you sit with the telephone in your hand and you do not have a clue whom you can phone.

**Other themes that entered our conversations**

**Talking about being in the Church and the Church context**

*What in the current Church experience for clergymen’s wives must change to make it better or more acceptable?*

**AnnaMart:** I consider the work of the clergy to be teaching the congregation to live out their own calling and be involved in the ministry. If I take a lead in the ministry, I take the opportunity to serve away from other men, women and families in the Church. There is hope when congregational members are really empowered to serve, because the clergy will not have to feel guilty for not being everywhere all the time any more.

**Talking about the Vrouediens**

**Magrietjie:** Because there was so little interest I decided that there would be no more Vrouediens in the congregation. As a result, the unspoken thing is that I am not acceptable and therefore I am not good enough. For that reason, I use my job as my excuse, because it brings the bacon home.

**Louise:** I feel that we are so young, and the congregation actually exploits this. Sometimes I feel that they strongly abuse [Afr. verkrag] the fact that we are young. I do not want to lead the Vrouediens and I have told them that I will stick to my point of view. In spite of my refusal I still do everything that the Vrouediens would have done. I am the clergyman’s wife and no matter what I say, this is what they expect me to do. Then they play these mind games by putting the stuff into my husband’s hand, and what must he do with it? In the end he gives it to me and I land up doing it anyway.

**Role expectations**

**Magrietjie:** AnnaMart, I have realised this morning that although you were prepared to be and do everything for the congregation, they said ‘no thank you’ to you. We are a new generation of clergymen’s wives that
would like to choose how we minister in congregations, but they are also saying ‘no’ to us. Because they are saying that we cannot choose, but must do what is expected of us, I have realised that we are in a checkmate situation.

Ironé: These expectations are unformulated and are scarcely negotiated with the clergyman’s wife. This is World Trade Centre stuff!

Magrietjie: Years ago the role of the clergyman’s wife was discussed, but I have no faith whatsoever in the ability of the Synod and structures of the Church to address this matter satisfactorily. They will do nothing for us. All that you will get is that they will knock you over the head with the Bible. If there is to be a forum for clergymen’s wives it has to be outside these structures.

Johann: Most of the time new ideas originate alongside the universities when people come together and form small communities of resistance. Therefore I don’t think that you have to wait for a Synod context created for women, although it would be nice. You could form a forum outside the institutional structures. A forum that unites women via e-mail, sms messages et cetera. There are a lot of structures you can use.

Self-care

AnnaMart: My sister-in-law was a very prominent woman within the structures of the Church who worked very hard for the Church. On her deathbed she told me: ‘AnnaMart, look after yourself, care for yourself, provide for your own personal growth because you will not find it in the Church.’ I have found this to be the true and I am applying it in my life.

Ironé: Consequently, I agree that it is time to expend some energy on yourself, remembering what you use to like, your talents and interests, and to find out what your spiritual gifts are.

Magrietjie: At this stage I am tired of being negative and I am tired of talking. I want to find something positive for my body.

Forgiveness

Disillusioned: There are lots of people in the congregation against whom you hold a grudge and this is never dealt with or worked through. This is my whole issue; it might be an incident that happened a year ago, but you cannot forget.

Louise: This makes it difficult when you have to go to communion.

Disillusioned: Precisely, when some of these people walk towards me, I cannot forget.
Magrietjie: Even now I can still see them. The way these women stand in their little circle busy gossiping. You just don’t know what to do with that. I can forgive, but I am not going to expose myself again.

Johann: Can I ask you a question? How much of the stuff that happens to you is done by men? Perhaps this will differ from context to context. What role do men play with regard to the subtle atrocities that happen to you? For example, Disillusioned – the letter that you wrote that was torn up?

Louise: After one of the Church Board meetings they summoned two of the members (both men) to come and talk to me because of the fact that I am not involved in the congregation. This was mentioned in the minutes and my husband refused to sign them. Their reaction was that they would approve the minutes whether my husband was going to sign them or not. Therefore I feel that they steam-roller you, just as Disillusioned experienced in the tearing up of her letter.

Mevrou Dominee

AnnaMart: Even in my work as teacher I was seen as Mevrou Dominee. I was not allowed to get angry, raise my voice or take a strong stand – if I did, I was labelled aggressive.

Miekie: Our congregation believes in Mevrou Dominee and therefore even though I am only 21, I am addressed by this label. This has been a tremendous adjustment for me.

Making mistakes and starting over

Magrietjie: I realise that I have also made lots of mistakes. As much as I would have liked to, I do not stand lily-white before you. I wish I could just start over. I need to start over! I want to start new relationships with people. I had so much aggression against so many women because they did not participate. I was cross with so many people because of so many things. I would like to build new relationships and this time I would do it very differently.

In what ways do you live differently from the way that society (the Church community) expects you to live? What small steps of resistance are visible in your life?

Magrietjie: I once read an article (Müller & Howell 2003) about a minister who worked very industriously for two years in the congregation. After these two years the Church Board called in the clergyman and told him that they weren’t satisfied with his work. Subsequently, the clergyman decided that for the next two years he was going to catch butterflies. He started catching them in the veldt and this became his hobby. His family became a priority again and they enjoyed one another’s company once more. After two years the Church Board called in the clergyman yet again, but this time they praised him for the excellent job he was doing.
This story made me think and I started to question my perceptions of what I think people expect me to do. In all the time I have been in this congregation, ten years, I haven't made anything. I also need to be creative, to create something that is beautiful, something that I can look at, something that shows me what I have done with some of my time.

**In what ways do you question what society expects you to do?**

**Miekie:** My husband and I have made a conscious decision not to do our shopping in this area. We need time to walk in town like two normal people. We have also decided that when the tension between the two of us mounts up, we will climb in the car and go some place together. We owe that time to ourselves, and we need time together away from the congregation in a place where we can just be human. Furthermore, I can say that luckily we have lots of family in the vicinity that is not affiliated to a church. This is a blessing because I am allowed to be myself with these family members. My husband’s cousin has become my salvation in the last couple of months. She does not live too far away; therefore I can drive to her place and curl up on her couch and cry. I can tell her that I think life is unfair. She does not answer me with Bible verses and soft talk, but only says that she agrees. This has turned out to be very valuable to me.

**Ironé:** I decided by the grace of God to venture on the reconstruction and development process of my faith journey. As a result I make an effort to pay attention to my special time with the Lord, which I neglected terribly in the time when I was active in the congregation. This year I am spring-cleaning my house and I lavish attention on my husband, my children and my faith journey. And if after this year I am never active in Church life again, that is also OK. I still play the piano in Church services, but they have to take what I am prepared to give. The buck stops here.

**Magrietjie:** I want our family to go out and play and just enjoy life while we carry out the Message in our every day lives, since what we are currently doing does not work.

**Disillusioned:** When everything became too much for me, I just switched off from the congregation, which meant that I withdrew and switched all my attention to my family. I do not feel guilty about this and I am enjoying it tremendously.

**Louise:** I must go on a search for these butterflies, but sometimes I feel guilty even for taking the time to go and look for the butterflies. Perhaps I will find them if I look back on all the pleasurable things my husband and I did when we were still at Varsity.
CHAPTER THREE

A COLLAGE OF JOURNEYS

ONE OF THEM

I was only 23 years old when I entered our first congregation. It was hard for me to start in a foreign country because it was so far away from my parents. When I tended to ‘complain’ in the years that followed, as I do now, people would always tell me that surely the ministry has taught me many things – ‘therefore you are the calibre of person that we are looking for!’ Now this might sound like a consolation, but a large number of the things that happened to me remained with me [in a negative way].

How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?

Your relationship with yourself

When I come home from a function, I come home to myself. The woman (Mevrou Dominee) at the function has to be perfect because she is married to a clergyman. You always have to have an opinion about things. In addition, you are expected to give advice about things, even if people do not follow your advice. The other difficult thing is that you are not yourself. If, for example, you join a book club and difficult spiritual issues were to come up in the discussion of a book, because you are clergyman's wife, people would ask you, ‘What do you say about this issue?’ In that context I cannot say what the book meant to me personally, I must speak from the perspective of a clergyman's wife. This is not the way I would like to be treated, to be set apart, kept apart and not be included. This has made me hold back and not participate in the way that I would have liked to. It became too much for me and later I joined a book club outside the congregation where nobody knows me and I could speak for myself. Books are my passion! I had to find an alternative; one must never suppress your passion. How sad though that amongst friends and the women of your own congregation, you have to experience such feelings.

Your relationship with your husband

In the beginning my husband did put pressure on me, but now he confesses that he could have made it easier for me. We thought that this is just the way things should be. It is also true that in times of crisis my husband was never available – like the times when I had big operations. His absence on my children's birthdays was also traumatic. In times when you need your partner to be close to you, you had to accept that
it is not possible and will never be possible. After quite a few years in the ministry I knew that the children and I came second on my husband’s list of priorities. If you comply with this reality, then you can live. It was as if I experienced a sense of liberation when I realised this fact. Your husband is in this profession and he is doing his job. If you want to keep him happy then you have to live with the fact that you come second.

Nowadays my husband comes to the younger clergymen’s wives’ rescue, because now he realises that it is not their job. My husband thought of the congregation as an employer, and if an employer expects certain duties from the wife of the employee, then she must do what is expected. He cannot make a success if she does not do her part. We are a team.

Your relationship with friends

The other negative thing I experienced was the fact that once we used to live in our current congregation as ‘ordinary’ congregational members, but when we came back to this congregation as the clergymen and his wife, things changed. The friends that I used to have would only greet me from afar, they were not there when I needed them. I used to be close to them, we raised our children together, and we were friends. But as soon as I was the clergymen’s wife, everything changed. The heartiness was gone. I missed the invitations to come and drink a cup of tea. This was a terrible experience for me. I am a teacher, and the support and heartiness I got from my colleagues have carried me through some very difficult times. They accepted me for who I was, for my qualifications, the love for the children I have and the work I do as a teacher. Sometimes when I wanted to go and drink a cup of tea with somebody, I phoned one of my colleagues from school; they were very understanding.

Friendships usually last for about a year, and then you start building new friendships again. It sometimes feels as though people only want you to be their friend while there is something you can do for them and then that friendship is gone again.

Other themes that came up in our conversations

Talking about the Vrouediens

When my husband got an opportunity to serve within the organisational Church structures, I decided that I would support him in this new opportunity and started negotiating with women in the congregation to take over my job as leader of the Vrouediens. It took me 13 hours of negotiating to find women who were prepared to take over my job. There was lots of suspicion and distrust, and it took hours of prayer just for these women to be accepted by the congregation. For 26 years, up to that point, it was only a job that was done by the clergymen’s wife. I received a lot of gratitude afterwards from my colleagues for breaking this
tradition, but I also had to bear a lot of criticism for doing that and I still have to. Even now, when something goes wrong, some of the women blame it on the fact that there is no Vrouediens in the congregation. And by implication it is my fault.

**Role expectations**

I had an appointment in our first congregation even before my husband was called to be minister there. I did not know about it, but when I got there, my job was spelled out for me. In every congregation we entered (without exception), this was the same, even in the congregations in the cities. It is a dilemma in the sense that clergymen’s wives somehow do not have a choice. This system was implemented and you just had to fall in alongside your husband and just do it. But I still believe it is a privilege to hold the position that we hold. God definitely has a place for us in the congregation.

**Memories and forgiveness**

When you have had an unpleasant experience in the ministry and years later something similar happens, these experiences are linked in your mind and become much bigger. In your subconscious you have not forgotten, you might have forgiven, but the memories remain.

**What has helped you to cope?**

The religious aspect of it all and prayer. Also the fact that I am sure that I am a child of God. This is my anchor.

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**CLEO’S STORY**

When I look back, I remember how we prayed together and asked God whether it is his will that we should accept the calling to this congregation. We both believed that this was what God wanted for us.

Slowly but surely it happened that my husband was increasingly absent and I felt that he was married to the congregation. This reminded me of a talk by a seminary professor that I attended in 1989 in which he addressed clergymen’s wives. He told us that we must remember that in the first place our husbands are married to the congregation. I now look back on that statement and wonder what kind of adultery this man or the Church is proposing.

I told my husband that I had emotional problems and doubted his love for me. I have experienced little tenderness in our relationship and hungered for a gentle touch [Afr. velhonger]. My marriage relationship was
empty and I no longer knew who I was. After I had mentioned my needs with regard to these matters to my husband, we went for therapy with three different therapists.

After a few sessions in my individual therapy I knew that I had to get out of the milieu I was in and also away from my husband. For the first time, divorce seemed to be the only way out. I broke the news to my husband that I was going to leave our marriage. I felt that the children were losing it [Afr. rafel uit] and I had to find a place where I could be human again. I did not care any longer about how I did it or what people would call the experience; I just knew that I had to get out. It came as a shock to my husband, but he still had a show to run, because the congregation knew nothing about our struggles. All I knew was that I was in the wrong bus and I decided to jump off, even if I broke my neck. I could no longer pretend. I was always a prim and proper [Afr. sagmoedige Neelsie] student, but my Self wanted to leap out!

I have a lot of hurt with regard to the congregation. About a year ago I went back to get a few of my things. One of the ladies told me that many of the members of the congregation blamed me for leaving my husband, but she thought that this was because of the fact that they had never come to know me as I really was. When I entered the parsonage to get my things, I could only see a prison. In secret, inside the walls of this house, I could be myself, but on the outside there were eyes that looked upon me with many expectations and for that reason there were two different persons: one inside and one outside the prison walls. I realised that the congregation had stolen my husband from me, but he had also allowed the congregation to steal him away from me. I threw my youth and innocence away for this congregation – everything, but it was not good enough. I sometimes feel like a snail without a shell. If I look back now, I knew that I would have committed suicide or something equally terrible if I had stayed there.

When I finally moved out of the house, a commission of inquiry was launched. The aim of this inquiry was to be reassured that I felt remorse for my actions and that my relationship with the Lord had been restored again. For the first time in fourteen years I felt that people were interested in my relationship with the Lord. I wrote a letter to the congregation and told them that I thought they expected too much of my husband. They accepted the letter and rebuked my husband in a friendly way, and that was the end of it.

How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?

Your relationship with yourself

I am an artist and have often tried to do something in this line, but it does not seem to match up with my role in the Church. People often commented that it was nice to have art as a ‘hobby’, but for me, art was/is like
breathing. My husband always supported my art, but I was never able to make a living from it, because of the way people in that context saw art. The intellectual narrow-mindedness of the people became too much for me.

**Your relationship with your husband**

I saw how my husband would care and nurture [Afr. koester] others, but experienced less and less of that closeness and cherishing in our marriage and relationship.

In the end my husband said that he always wished that I would be more of a Mevrou Dominee. Which meant that he expected me to give more guidance to and take a leading role among the women of the congregation.

**Your relationship with your children**

Another factor, which also led to my decision to separate from my husband, was the influence of my husband's absence on my children. One of my children became very aggressive, heartbroken and despondent. He was diagnosed with depression due to the tension in our marriage, as well as middle child syndrome. The lack of closeness that I felt in my relationship with my husband was also felt by my children. I felt that my husband never gave of himself to us in the way that he would give of himself to the congregation. The really intimate things [Afr. klim uit jou siel goed] were never there.

**Your relationship with God**

Although God is a true reality to me and I experience his care in a different way from before, I do not want to be associated with the church in general, or even with Christians for that matter. In my current job I see my colleagues as part of my congregation. I feel that I receive genuine care, love and concern from them.

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**RITA’S STORY**

I am 27 years old and I am a mother with two babies, 3 and 17 months old. Currently I am on maternity leave, but I am a geography teacher. My husband and I have been married for five years and we have been living in our current congregation for three and a half years. We live next to the church in a nice big house and my husband’s colleague is still young and he has a lovely wife. My husband and his colleague get along very well, which I have heard is quite an exception. They bend over backwards for each other. The congregation are favourably disposed towards us and we experience congregational life as positive. It is an adaptable system in which we feel we are given a lot of space by the congregation, both by the congregation
to the clergymen and their families as well as amongst one another. Because I grew up in a parsonage, I had a very good idea of what I was letting myself in for when I married my clergyman husband. Therefore it hasn't been a shock to me in any sense because that was all I knew.

**How would you describe your experience as a clergyman’s wife inside the Dutch Reformed Church?**

On the one hand, my experience is a positive one because in our congregation the system creates space for different people. On the other hand, I am not the kind of person that would allow people to force me into anything that I do not want to do. I have a big mouth and make myself heard, especially when I do not like something.

**What are your husband’s expectations regarding your involvement in the congregation?**

My husband does not have all kinds of expectations from me. He knows, respects and agrees with my point of view on the role expectations regarding a clergyman’s wife. I see my role as clergyman’s wife as supporting my husband in his work, being an ear and a sounding board to him, using my talents in a place that I enjoy and where I am needed in the congregation.

**Friendships**

I have had the experience though that one does not easily make friends. I have made friends at the school I teach. The school is a place outside the congregation where I can just be Rita. In all circumstances I refrain from telling people that my husband is a clergyman, because I know that often people react differently to you if they know that you are. Eventually they did find out at school, but by then they already knew me for who I am. On the other hand, being the clergyman’s wife makes life easier for you because you are immediately part of a system and are drawn in because it is expected that you will participate and be there.

**In what ways do you live differently from the way the Church community expects you to live?**

The telephone does ring often and 99% of the time it is for my husband. Therefore when my husband is not home, I do not pick up the phone. If my mother or friends are looking for me, they can phone me on my cell phone. I do not enjoy cooking or baking, but I do not mind washing the dishes. I openly joke about the fact that I often burn food and do not possess a mixer or a sieve. I talk openly about it and sometimes even jokingly speak about my experiences as a clergyman’s wife. There was once a lady who spoke to me about her expectations of me as a clergyman’s wife and I told her that I couldn’t go along with her expectations of me. I am not afraid to speak out and I did not have any bad feelings after this conversation.
How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?

Your relationship with God

It comes as a privilege and advantage to have free access to a person that has knowledge about the Bible. One does live close to the Lord, because you constantly experience his influence and that his work needs to be done. Perhaps this is the life of every believer, but I cannot speak for people that have not grown up in a parsonage.

Afterthought

My husband and I laugh a lot about all the things that happen to us. I think in 100% of the cases that is our salvation. My life is much less serious and stressed. We manage things as they come our way. Many a situation has been made easier by these jokes. My husband and I do a lot of talking, which helps us to work through things.

ELSA’S STORY

Elsa (2.7.3) wrote me letters about her experiences as Mevrou Dominee in her workplace and tells the story in the following way:

Elsa’s first letter

I was busy demonstrating a listening skill in a group, asking the group what they expected to learn in the workshop. Then I listened to their responses and at the same time demonstrated the skill. While I was listening to a lady who disclosed quite a lot of personal information (in other words the skills demonstration worked well), the lady commented: ‘I will never be able to listen so patiently. In fact I cannot think that it is possible for any person to listen in this way. I also do not think that you are really sincere when you do this. I think you are only acting it out. This morning before I came down for the workshop, someone in the office commented that today we were today going to be trained by her clergyman’s wife. I once had a Mevrou Dominee who also had the ability to listen in this way to the members of the congregation. Perhaps this is a skill Mevrou Domeees have, but I do not think it would be possible for me to do this without faking it.’

At that stage I realised that if I did not ‘kill off’ [Afr. slaat haar dood] Mevrou Dominee right there and then, I could just as well pack up my books and go home. I then said that Mevrou Dominee has f-all [Afr. fokôl] to do with what the training and listening to one another would be about. The group then burst out laughing.
Another HR consultant who attended the training session said: ‘I knew Elsa before she married the Dominee. She was actually a professional person long before she got married!’

Chené, I found it very interesting that the HR consultant felt that she had to cover for me, as if I was somebody quite different or more real before I married my clergyman husband. It sounded as though after my marriage I could be contaminated in some mysterious way.

I also thought about the externalising conversation we had and realised (this helped me the most) that my response came automatically, which confirms the fact that I would not tolerate her (Mevrou Dominee) in my life. I was surprised though about the intense response she aroused in me when she tried to make her way into my life, work and group. This shows me the extreme POWER she has. Especially because she ignored all the vibes of not being welcome or tolerated in my and consequently also my mother's life. In spite of these vibes she dared to infiltrate and I cannot but see her as particularly thick-skinned and stubborn [Afr. besonder dikvellig en hardkoppig]!

What is also interesting to me (my own interpretation) is what the woman in the group meant when she spoke about Mevrou Dominee. It seemed like a mixture of admiration, distance, not being real, fake, respect, and the almost magical powers this woman (Mevrou Dominee) has! Somebody that can do things mere mortal human beings are unable to do. An important person that is inaccessible, or on the other hand maybe somebody that might be isolated from ordinary people. If this woman should reside with you it sounds like it would be very difficult to break out of the mould and to connect! It remains difficult for me to understand what the lady meant.

Well, the end of the story is that nobody brought Mevrou Dominee into the conversations again. She was ‘killed off’ in the group, with very good results both for the group and my future intervention in the company. This was a pilot group and the company decided to continue the training. I still wonder what would have happened if I had not ‘killed’ her off?!

Chené, when you externalised Mevrou Dominee in our conversation, it helped me to put this incident into perspective. It helped me to understand my intense response because I had never experienced anything like this incident in any training programme. What a powerful woman!

Thanks for the opportunity to tell my story in this way.

**The second letter from Elsa**

I feel that I owe you a sequel with regard to the previous story.
When the participants introduced themselves to me during my second workshop (at the same company) I saw this lady that looked like an old-fashioned congregational woman [Afr. ‘n regte ou-wêreldse gemeente-vrou]. After she had told us her name, she gave me that look, the look that expects me to know her, and then she continued by saying that she lived in Dominee Kallie’s ward behind the SPAR. For a fleeting second I thought, forgive her for she does not know what she is doing. I thought that I would ignore what had happened but then I realised that it would let her majesty (Mevrou Dominee) have her way by again quietly sneaking into my workshop!! Perhaps because I was calmer after my previous victory, I was able to show her up in a much more refined and civilised manner. Consequently, after everybody had introduced themselves I stated my position. I explained that some of the people attending the workshop knew that I was married to a clergyman. I told the delegates that I am crazy about my husband and that I am glad that I am married to him, but I also said that sometimes people do not understand this correctly. I then asked the participants if they knew Mevrou Dominees and how they see them. (There were also two Muslims and one Jewish lady that attended the workshop.) I asked them if there were similar people in their churches. Everybody then joined in the conversation and described these women as inaccessible; up above somewhere [Afr. daar boiewers]; sacrosanct [Afr. hoog-heilig]; somebody one cannot easily talk to; someone who, if one talks to her, must have all the right answers; and someone who presents herself as pious but that it is not something that is necessarily true.

At that moment I told the group an understated version of the story of what had happened in the previous group. In addition I told them how the group had invited Mevrou Dominee into the conversation and how I had to chase her out. They enjoyed the story thoroughly and burst out laughing. (I used the same words as in my first letter to you.) I also told the group that I had never allowed Mevrou Dominee into my life and that I would not allow her into my workshops either, because this is a place where we can converse honestly and openly with one another. I continued by explaining to the participants that part of the magic of my being is that I can facilitate an honest and open process. After this introduction the group work was a great success and Mevrou Dominee never made her appearance again. I even received an e-mail from the member of the congregation that had attended the workshop in which she thanked me for the wonderful course.

**Elsa’s third letter**

It is so interesting that this serial just continues. For the first time ever I did this same workshop (the one I spoke about in my previous letters) for an HR Manager of an organisation who is also a member of my husband’s congregation. Because this business is situated inside our ward, quite a few of the delegates at the workshop were members of the congregation. Needless to say, I followed the same recipe with ‘her
Majesty, Mevrou Dominee, with very good results. I realised that she definitely does not enjoy humour. I posed the following question to the group: What comes to mind when you think about Mevrou Dominee?

The group immediately started to paint her in hyperbolic and humorous ways. This time her appearance also came under scrutiny. She was depicted as an old lady with a chignon [Afr. *bolla*] who organises the bazaar and *Vrouediens* in a very militaristic manner and who bosses everybody around [Afr. *hiet en gebied almal!*]. After we had all had a good laugh, we closed the book on Mevrou Dominee! I think I have previously ignored her potential presence in the groups I had facilitated in the hope that she was not there. I am still unsure about whether she was present, but now I do not take that risk anymore. Currently, she is helping me to present myself for who I really am.

**Elsa’s fourth letter**

Perhaps I can begin this letter by telling you more about the favour Mevrou Dominee is currently doing me. Because she is trying to enter into my workplace, I am now putting more of an effort into introducing myself to the groups I facilitate than I previously had.

Last week I presented my third workshop at the company where Mevrou made her first appearance. I used the same recipe to start the workshop as I explained in my previous letter. Jannie (a concerned member of the congregation) took his gap after I had sent Mevrou Dominee out of the workshop. He told me that I did not have to feel bad because I work, as lots of Dominees’ wives work nowadays. He then explained about his aunt, also a Mevrou Dominee, who thought that she had to combine her teaching profession with the traditional obligations of a clergyman’s wife. His uncle Dominee then had to help his aunt with her preparations for the prayer meetings [Afr. *biduurtjies*], as she sometimes did not have the time to prepare. She often rushed out of the house only to rush back and shout: ‘What is the reading again?’ I felt that these comments were very patronizing. At this stage I felt that Jannie had taken too much ‘airtime’ for himself while hiding behind Mevrou Dominee [Afr. *agter Mevrou se rokspant*]. I then answered him by saying that the only difference to his aunt would be that I am the one writing my husband’s sermons for him. Everyone had a good laugh and I immediately continued with the workshop.

On the second day Jannie brought me a bunch of red roses to thank me, because he said ‘nowadays there are not many people who are prepared to do this kind of job’. I am still unsure about the meaning of this sentence. The only thing I could do is to politely say thank you and to continue with the workshop. As to the flowers, my gut feeling is still that ‘she’ tried to sneak into my workshop again. The only strategy I could think of was to use humour, to ignore the incident and to cut short the conversation.
Somewhere at the back of my mind there is a soft voice telling me that Mevrou collected a few more points in this session than I am willing to admit. The camouflage was excellent, even with a touch of romance. I must say in my own defence that the rest of the workshop went well and that it did not look as if the incident had influenced the participants in a negative way.

Another positive spin-off from her Majesty’s appearances is that I am writing this much!!!!

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**CYNTHIA AND RIA TELL THEIR STORIES**

*What are your needs? How does being the wife of a clergyman influence you, as you are also clergywomen yourselves?*

**Ria:** In the congregation in which I stand I am known as my husband’s wife, not as a real Dominee, and this is my problem. In the previous congregation in which I served, I was the Dominee to whom people would walk and talk. I was the one who preached and did counselling. My photo hung in the consistory. And when I came to this congregation as tentmaker, I became invisible.

*How has the fact that you have been married to a clergyman influenced the following aspects of your life?*

**Your relationship with yourself**

**Cynthia:** What has been an unpleasant experience for me has been our care group. This is something I think my husband cannot understand to this day. At one stage I felt I needed care from people that are my age, speak my language and look and dress like me. My husband was also the clergyman in this congregation before I became one. In this group I felt a need to share my theological ideas, just like my husband did, on the same level as he did. In this group I had to grit my teeth because I felt that I was silenced or that my opinion was not held to be as valid as that of my husband. In the end I landed up being just his wife. Every time I came away from the group I was so upset, but I could not put my experience into words. I did not experience it as care when people did not even listen to my opinion. I am a theologian and even achieved better marks than my husband at university, but still they just asked his opinion. When I did say something, I felt there was an attitude among them of ‘What do you know’?

**Ria:** This dilemma of not being seen as a theologian equal to my husband is eating away at my self-confidence. I had to move to this congregation, but yes, ‘Invisible’ is the word to describe my experience. This pushing of myself to the fore to become visible tires me; at this stage I just want to be. When you feel
that you are degraded, you do not feel that you are not good enough, it is more like an injustice being done to you.

**Your relationship with your husband**

*Ria:* I have these outbursts because I am jealous of the opportunity my husband has to be a clergyman since I am also capable of doing the job. I even hurt my husband with my words because of this jealousy I have.

*Cynthia:* When people would say my husband's name with regard to everything he does, it made me resent him. I would lash out and use foul language. People always want to talk to my husband and it made me so jealous! I could also do pastoral care, but no, they wanted to talk to my husband. Sometimes I think the best thing I could have done is to go out and do my own thing away from my husband's ministry.

**Your relationship with your dreams and fantasies**

*Ria:* I want to be a real clergywoman in the Church with a full appointment. I want to hold onto my dream; perhaps I am stupid to do this. What happens is that you try to prove yourself the whole time. I preached a sermon in church last Sunday and it went well, but to prepare that sermon, I spent quite a few hours. I do not preach in an ordinary manner because if I do, I am invisible again.

**Your relationship with friends**

*Cynthia:* If I go with my husband to any place, he is seen as the *Dominee*, even in our social relationships. Even among my peer group I was invisible as a clergywoman. I had a friend who was a lawyer and everybody would ask her advice, but I was a nobody. It becomes so intense, like something that burns inside of you. It is very difficult to describe this to you.

**Your relationship with the Church**

*Cynthia:* I am much happier where I am currently ministering. I live in a world where I meet dynamic women that have no problem with the male colleagues that they work with. It is a world that inspires and motivates me. Currently I am treated as a person in my own right. People have respect for me; they refer to me as ‘reverend’. The people in my own church do not even have that kind of respect for me because I am a clergywoman. Never in my life have I been as empowered as I am now. Since I have ‘left’ the Church I have felt empowered for the first time in the ministry I am currently leading. I can talk, I can do more and more, and I am afraid of no one anymore. I feel as if there are things behind me like legislation. In the Church I had nothing behind me, it has been the most disempowering experience of my life to be a clergywoman in the Church. I just knew that I was worth more than this congregation and the Church thought I was. I realised that in the Church I was both invisible and exposed. You have nothing behind you that will protect you. I am
in the first place a human being, not a woman. In the Church I did not receive respect. I was just my husband’s wife.

Other themes that entered our conversations:

**Being the wife**

**Cynthia:** I stand next to my husband but I am invisible. They would come up to my husband and talk to him as *Dominee* as if I did not exist, even though I was standing right next to him.

**In what ways do you question what society expects you to do?**

**Cynthia:** When people do have appointments with my husband, it is not my responsibility to bring the tea; he goes into the kitchen and makes the tea for his guests.

**Ria:** One evening my husband wanted to invite over all the people in our townhouse complex that are also in the congregation. Perhaps I am overreacting, but I asked him to do it one evening when I am not there. I do not want to be *Mevrou Dominee* that brings the tea. You overreact in the end about things that shouldn’t even be an issue.

**Who are the team members in your team of hope? Who are the people that are not surprised about these steps of resistance in your life?**

**Cynthia:** My husband has always pushed me in the sense of saying, “be more, be what you really are”. He motivates me and supports me. He gave me the opportunity to be more and more myself. I did not even know that I could do some things. I drive about 2000 km per week and I am totally empowered. In this sense I think my husband has played a tremendous role.

**Ria:** My husband and I are soulmates. Where in the whole world can you get this?