Chapter 4: Women Who Care

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I focus on women in ministry as the agents of caring and the context within which they perform their caring work. I will draw on information supplied by the 19 women in this research and try to locate this within a broader socio-political framework. On the one hand, I acknowledge the extent of the need for caring within our post apartheid social context to which women in ministry are responding. On the other hand, I will draw on the insights of the previous chapter to expose some of the destructive aspects of caring for women when co-opted into a patriarchal agenda.

My intention is to see whether there is a way between the overwhelming need for care within our context while, at the same time, ensuring that women’s needs for liberation and self-care are not sacrificed, i.e. that justice is done for all – carer and those who are being cared for. In doing so I wish to desist from placing women in a situation where they remain as victims of an overarching patriarchal system within the church, but rather to seek out the ways that women have found to resist such intentions and create their own balances in their local situations.

4.1 CAMEOS OF WOMEN WHO CARE

In the next few pages I present brief descriptions or cameos of the women who participated in this research project. The information comes from their questionnaires and also the transcripts of my interviews with a number of them. To preserve their anonymity I have avoided identifying them but have provided general information about their singlehood, marriage and family situation, their denomination, role in the church and context for ministry, as well as the reasons they gave for studying theology.

A is studying theology in order to be ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran church. She is active in a rural parish which is poor and where unemployment is high. Many of the grandmothers are supporting families on their pensions. She is married with five children. In addition to her home responsibilities she occupies various leadership positions within her church. She says of the women in her community: ‘Women keep the families together. They pull very hard under oppression but something must be done.’ She is involved in many activities with women and says that if women get skills and stand together, ‘they can change the world., but women also oppress one another’.
B is an Anglican woman, training to become a deacon. She started studying theology in order to ‘refine my prayer life and be well equipped in the world’. She is currently involved in various liturgical and pastoral roles in her parish. Located in an affluent suburb, the parish has extended a particular ministry to homeless people in the surrounding area. B works in this project where she preaches, prays with the people, provides food and medical care, and counsels them. She is married and has four children and chose to study ‘to be more fulfilled in my own personal life’. She says: ‘In raising my family - people don’t seem to understand the woman’s role, more so the African woman’s position.’

C is a married woman with two children. She works as the church secretary in one of the Methodist churches in a middle class suburb. She also facilitates workshops for the church. She describes her fascination with theology from an early age, and how this was fostered by a woman minister in her church who was ‘dynamic and had women’s issues very close to her heart’. She speaks about her desire to work with women to help them discover ‘hope in being created in the image of God, not man’.

D is a retired professional woman confronting a new stage of life as a widow. Her decision to study theology was driven by her interest, not for diploma purposes. She has two adult children. She keeps up with her reading, facilitates a bible study group in the local Anglican Church and applies her study and research in preparing for them.

E is training to become a religious sister in the Roman Catholic church and is required to study theology. She is also a qualified teacher and her main ministry has been within the school environment, teaching for a time in a squatter settlement where she confronted the sexism of a male principal and teachers and where, ‘We had to do all the junk work and the dirty work’.

F is an ordained Anglican assistant priest who has completed her theological studies and is now working full-time in a suburban parish. She is married with two adult children. She describes the range of duties she is required to do – preaching, presiding at liturgies, pastoral work and other priestly work, and describes the exhaustion and the problem of burn-out generally among clergy people.

G is the rector of an Anglican parish in a semi-rural area. She has completed her theological studies but tries to keep up her reading. She is a single woman who felt called since the age of 12 to full time ministry. ‘I think I was also called because I really resisted...every step of the way I questioned, what do I want? Do I want another struggle?’ In addition to her priestly functions she is involved in projects aimed at addressing unemployment, teenage pregnancies, and initiatives to build skills and self-esteem particularly among the women.

H is a single woman and a newly ordained Anglican priest based in a busy township parish. She has completed her diploma in theology and plans to study further. Her parish duties include preaching, visiting the sick, teaching Sunday school, baptisms and burials. She sees her ministry as ‘equipping and empowering others and journeying with them’. She stresses that ‘women are leaders too, and must be given time and space to prove themselves.’

I is an Anglican priest who has completed her theological studies. She was recently appointed as rector to a mission in a poor rural area with high unemployment and an escalating HIV and AIDS rate. She is also a religious sister and lives with her community of sisters. She speaks about the support she has received from her community, the parishioners and fellow clergy.

J is a single mother with three children and is an Anglican deacon. She is completing her BTh Honours in Biblical Studies. Her responsibilities include preaching, visiting the sick and aged, administering the chalice, baptizing and conducting burials. She describes how some of the men
will not take wine when she is administering the chalice, and also that she is not allowed to bury the men.

K is an Anglican deacon preparing for ordination to the priesthood. She has completed her diploma and is working on her Honours through Unisa. She is married with three children. Her tasks include evangelism, counselling and pastoral work. She describes the way some of the parishioners have undermined her, refusing to accept her leadership, seeing her ‘as someone who cannot manage a church’. She sees her appointment to a new parish as a challenge where she can ‘show how women can work.’

L is a married woman with three adult children from the Methodist church. She is still busy studying for her diploma in theology. In addition to lecturing at a college, she is active in her church as a local preacher and pastoral carer. She also works with those living with HIV and AIDS in an informal settlement. She is active on church councils where she has had to challenge their attitudes towards women.

M is a single parent with three children, and an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran church. In addition to studying for her diploma in theology, she also serves a rural congregation, and is in charge of eight parish communities. She speaks about doing everything in the church as a spiritual leader. She had wanted to be a pastor since she was a teenager, but had to wait for 21 years having no freedom of speech or leading no congregations.

N is doing a diploma in theology as part of her training to become a religious sister in the Roman Catholic church. She is a qualified social worker and has worked with abusers. She reflects on how power and responsibility in the (Catholic) church is not equally shared; and that women are not allowed to be ordained.

O is a deaconess in the Methodist church. She has completed her diploma in theology and plans to do an honours degree through Unisa. She has three children and cares for her sick husband. She preaches, leads the choir and the prayer ministry, is in charge of pastoral care, and has a particular ministry to old people. She describes how she left school before completing her Matric, and at the age of 48 went back to school and completed her studies and a diploma in theology, and is now looking towards doing an honours degree in theology.

P is an ex-school teacher and now an Anglican deacon in a parish. She has nearly completed her diploma in theology. She is married and has two adult children and a grandchild. In addition to her duties as a lay minister, she leads a bible study group, is a bereavement counsellor at the local hospice, as well as caring for senior citizens and visiting the sick. She has become involved in support for rape survivors.

Q is a retired nurse and community worker. She is also the wife of a minister and has been involved in numerous community and women’s projects as an educator in cooking, arts and crafts and designing. She has started studying to become a local preacher in the Methodist church. She is actively involved in counselling around abuse, family conflicts and substance abuse.

R is a music therapist and an artist. She is also a lay minister in the Anglican Church in a suburban parish, running women’s discussion groups, prayer and bible study and creativity groups. She has completed a few of the courses of the theology diploma. She describes herself as ‘hovering’ at her church which ‘is not particularly women friendly’. ‘There’s always some reason why a women shouldn’t be ministering.’

S has completed her diploma and has recently been ordained in the Anglican Church. She is a single parent and has a teenage son. Her ministry is among homeless people establishing support
and training programmes and helping them to create income-generating projects. She says of her work: ‘God made me so uncomfortable about doing nothing that I had no choice. So it wasn't entirely of my own volition – it is not a comfortable ministry, but I couldn't do anything else.’

In summary, the 19 women represent four Christian denominations, viz. Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), Methodist (MCSA), Roman Catholic (RC) and Evangelical Lutheran (EL). They are either single, single with children, married or widowed. Of the 19 women, seven have young children still dependent on them; seven have grown-up children; and five do not have children. They minister in a range of contexts – rural, peri-urban, township and suburban, either as ordained priests/ministers (6), ordained deacons or in training (6), parish workers (5), or as novices in training to become religious sisters (2). Some are in full-time and others in part-time ministry. Nine of the women are financially supported by their parish/diocese/religious congregation, while 10 are self-supporting. At the time of this research five of the women had completed their studies and were in full-time ministry; the remaining 14 women were studying part-time as well as working in their churches.

4.2 CARING IN THE CONTEXT

As stated earlier the women in this research are spread geographically across six regions in South Africa. Although each region reflects its own particular micro socio-economic imperatives, the following social and ethical issues were identified by most of the women as being of concern to them and the people with whom they work in the church.

- HIV and AIDS including the needs of the sufferer, as well as those of the family and orphans, burden on grandmothers, the need to educate the community and develop a climate of tolerance for those who are sufferers;
- Economic issues – poverty, unemployment, retrenchments, homelessness, hunger, prostitution, crime, shortage of money in the church;
- Violence – domestic, rape, child abuse, widow abuse, sexual harassment, crime;
- Family problems – single parenting, marriage, divorce, abortion, teenage pregnancies, drug and alcohol addictions among young people;
- Women’s low self esteem, and need for training, depression and anxiety, loneliness, stress;
- Racism and gender discrimination in society.

Of the range of issues, I have chosen to pay attention to the three key issues that affect many women on a daily basis, viz. poverty; violence and abuse; and health and
HIV and AIDS. I have chosen these issues amongst a range of others because they are survival issues for many women in our society at this point in time. Although they are issues that affect all people, women experience them in a particular way. They are also issues that our government does not seem to be able to get right despite a great deal of media coverage and pressure from non-governmental agencies in civil society.

In the analysis that follows I hope to illustrate the way gender power relations manifest themselves in relation to these issues in our society. This provides an important point of connection for the women in ministry who care for others that are affected by them, but who may also experience these issues themselves.

4.2.1 Women and poverty
South Africa follows many of the global economic trends with regard to wealth and poverty and so some broader global perspectives are described, as well as their application in our own context in South Africa.

4.2.1.1 Global trends
Statistics indicate that approximately 70% of the world's poor are women. The global capitalist economic system serves to reinforce the poverty of women in a number of ways. In the capitalist model, the responsibility for the reproduction of the population is placed largely on women's shoulders and this includes both the responsibility for the dependent sections of the population (children – many of them AIDS orphans, sick and old people) as well as the survival, well being and happiness of adult males.

As Ward (1995:67-71) suggests, in developing countries most of women's activity is concerned with household consumption (producing food crops, collecting firewood, gathering fodder etc.). This work takes place in the non-wage economy and it is estimated that poor women may spend up to sixty hours per week in unpaid domestic work. But women also work in the productive sphere, most often in dead-end jobs with low wages. This is because most women have a lower level of education compared to men, and also women have to balance the demands of the home and other reproductive functions, and so their availability for promotion or for jobs that take them away from home for long periods, is limited.
In industrialised contexts, many women are involved in three working situations: in the formal (employed) sector; in the home; and also many women take on extra work in the informal sector to earn additional money. This is the triple shift that many women have to work. For example, women may move from a job in a factory during the day, to household chores in the evening, with the possibility of some paid piecework to fit in as well.

Despite attempts to stimulate economic growth, women still form part of the 'hard core' poor around the world. Economic policies which have led to the transfer of resources from the subsistence sector to the export sector in order to generate more income to service foreign debt, have meant that less is available for social security, education and welfare – aspects of life where women carry the burden. As a result, women are forced to work longer hours, both for the market and for the home, as well as continuing with all the reproductive work in caring for the children, the sick and the aged.

These economic policies have had a devastating impact on women:

- Cuts in education have led to an increase in illiteracy among women and girls, and in many developing countries the dropout rate of girls has increased.

- Cuts in spending on health mean women have had to take care of the sick in the family. Also they have led to an increase in maternal deaths.

- Elimination of food subsidies, falling wages and rising prices have reduced women's spending power as food providers.

- In some countries globalisation has also led to a growth in the service industries such as tourism and entertainment. Coupled with spreading global poverty this has forced many women into the prostitution industry. In Thailand, for example, 10% of women are involved in prostitution. Most women who work as prostitutes do so because they need the income and have no other job opportunities.¹

### 4.2.1.2 South African trends

In line with global trends South Africa's economic policies since 1996 have been aimed at fostering economic growth which the government argues is essential to secure its commitment to the upliftment of the poor. However, this has led to greater privatization of essential services, a focus on greater productivity for export, and an attempt to

¹ Supplement to *Workers World News*, March 1997 p. iii.
liberalise the economy so that the market has more freedom to operate without restrictions. All of these factors have directly impacted on women’s lives and many of the global trends are experienced here as well.

Poverty and unemployment remain the major economic challenges facing government. Even though the social security net has been expanded to provide 7.4 million beneficiaries with assistance, unemployment as a percentage of the economically active population currently stands at about 42 per cent, and poverty affects roughly 40 per cent of the population.2

A report in *The Sunday Independent* (November 7, 2004, p.2) notes that improved delivery of services has meant that the very poor are not getting poorer, but the number and the proportion of middle poor are increasing in direct proportion to job losses, indicating the clear link between unemployment and poverty. Black rural women and children are the poorest; recent South African statistics illustrate the following:

- Women experience higher unemployment rates than men, who also receive a higher hourly wage;
- Employed women spend more time than employed men engaging in unpaid tasks, e.g. collecting water;
- Between the age groups of 25 years and older, 18% of African women have no formal education;
- 80% of female headed households have no wage earners;
- 2 out of 5 African households are headed by women;
- 3 out of 5 female-headed households are poor;
- 70% of South African children under 6 years of age live below the poverty line;
- 93% of all children living in poverty are African, 6% Coloured, 0.5% Indian and 0.5% white;
- The majority of children living in poor conditions are denied their right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and welfare;
- The majority of these children are living in households with only one parent, in most cases the parent is a woman;

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Landman et al (2003:5) challenge the popular use of 1$ a day as a measure of extreme poverty, saying that it is not helpful as clearly the value of $1 varies across different economic contexts, and also its recent devaluation does not mean that levels of poverty have decreased. Using this level as a benchmark, 46% of South Africans live in poverty. As they suggest these statistics do not make South Africa the poorest country in the world, but South Africa’s Gini co-efficient (which measures the gap between rich and poor in a country) is one of the highest in the world.
• Black female-headed households within rural areas are seen as among the most vulnerable groups within South Africa today. Moreover, because women usually assume the role of primary caregiver to their children, the well being of women is inextricably linked to the well being of children.³

Measures that the government has taken to recognise poverty experienced particularly by women include: the Poverty Alleviation Fund introduced in 1997 with the key objective of job creation. In the 2005 Budget, government announced additional increased allocations in government spending to pensioners, children and the disabled.⁴ The number of people who receive social grants will now reach 11 million people. The Child Support Grants (CSG) introduced in 1998 for children under the age of seven are to be extended to children until they reach the age of 14.⁵

Women who are employed experience other problems at work that do not affect men in the same way. For example, women often have to take off time from work when children are ill, and they stand the risk of losing their jobs. When at work, women worry about their children, or the sick and elderly at home which adds to their stress. When they get married they sometimes lose their medical aid and other benefits they had when they were single, and are forced to join their husband’s scheme. If the marriage fails then it is difficult for them to re-join (The Women’s Handbook 1991:288).

Until 1994 domestic women and farmworkers, many of whom are women, were not protected under labour legislation. Although they now both fall under the Basic Conditions of Employment Act which regulates minimum wages and conditions of work, it is very difficult to ensure compliance with these laws, as a result many employers disregard these conditions (:292).

From the above we can see that poverty and work take on a genderised character where women and women-as-carers are affected in particular ways and are most needy.


⁵ Discussion still continues on the proposed alternative to the Child Support Grant – the Basic Income Grant (BIG). The Taylor Committee recommended a phased introduction of BIG, guaranteeing every South African citizen R100 per month. This proposal was rejected in favour of an increase in the Child Support Grant.
These are conditions that affect many women in the churches and the question needs to be raised as to how well ministers are prepared in their training to respond to the survival needs of people, and particularly women. Haddad (1996:199) describes the lives of many women: ‘Making a way out of no way is what ordinary African women in South Africa experience every day of their lives. It requires risk. It requires faith. It is a quest for survival’.

4.2.2 Women, sexual abuse and violence

Violence against women expresses itself in a number of ways including: domestic abuse, rape, femicide, and sexual harassment. Statistics about abuse vary, some studies suggest that one in four women, and others one in six women, are regularly abused by their partners and, in at least 46% of these cases the men also abused the children in the situation. Aside from the physical hurts that are inflicted on women in wife beating, the experience evokes fear, apprehension and depression, hopelessness and a sense of daily unease in case any incident will provoke the violence again. Yet for so long, this form of violence has happened behind the protected walls of the home, out of sight and sound of the community's disapproval.

The social stigma attached to exposing wife battery is one of the reasons why many women stay in abusive relationships. Other significant reasons, especially in South Africa, are the economic realities of most women’s lives where they are financially dependent on their partners for survival and lack the skills and education to secure jobs that would make them independent. There are also legal factors: fear of losing custody of children, lack of knowledge of the law and legal rights. Also, one cannot underestimate the strong emotional factors keeping women in these relationships - feelings of isolation and fear that she will not be able to cope alone and low self-esteem. There are also a host of social factors like shame and embarrassment, plus cultural and religious factors which censure women's experience and view divorce or separation negatively. In many cases, wife battering ends in severe physical harm and even death. It is estimated that in South Africa a woman is killed every six days by her intimate male partner.

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6 *Women Abuse: The Basic Facts*, Johannesburg: POWA [s.a.].
Widespread use of rape as a weapon of war has been reported in recent conflicts: in Rwanda between 250,000–500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide. In Bosnia, more than 200,000 women were killed and some 60,000 were either raped, kidnapped, or forcibly made pregnant.\(^7\) In the conflict in the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) women were systematically subjected to multiple rapes by both soldiers and militia. Many of these women were taken into captivity and became pregnant as a result.\(^8\) A similar situation prevailed in the current conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan.

South Africa is known to have the world's worst peacetime record of violence against women, despite the government’s refusal to accept national and international statistics.\(^9\) Amina Mama speaks about South Africa topping the chart as one of the world’s ‘most deadly environments for women’:

Statistical evidence tells that [in] post-apartheid, South African women are more likely to be murdered, raped or mutilated than women anywhere else in the democratic world, including the rest of Africa. Their assailants are not foreign invading armies demonstrating conquest, or even members of ‘other’ racial groups in the still divided post-apartheid locales of the new nation. They are South African men, most often the very men with whom South African women live in intimate relations.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) The Star November 24, 2000, p.6.

\(^8\) The Sunday Independent newspaper (19 September 2004).

\(^9\) A newspaper debacle towards the end of 2004 over rape statistics involving rape activist Charlene Smith and President Mbeki and a number of other voices attests to this. In her article entitled ‘Rape has become a sickening way of life in our land’ (The Sunday Independent 26 September 2004, p.5), Smith challenged the understating of rape statistics by the police and suggested that those published by Interpol, the Medical Research Council and the Law Reform Commission indicated increases in rape, gang rapes, and HIV positive girls as a result of rape. Mbeki attacked Smith’s article claiming it as a racist attempt to discredit South Africa as ‘a nation of rapists’ which ‘defines the African people as barbaric savages’ (reported in The Sunday Independent, 3 October 2004, p.3). The subsequent editorial in the Mail and Guardian (October 8-14 2004, p.26) accused Mbeki of living in an ‘imagined country’ where all women are safe. Lisa Vetten of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation suggested that realistic statistics are more likely to be had from Crime Victimisation surveys rather than from police reporting, but these are also contradictory. Two such surveys have been completed – Statistics South Africa found that 1 in 2 rape survivors reported being raped to the police while the Medical Research Council found that 1 in 9 women reported. Thus statistics released in 2003/4 of 52,733 rapes is more likely to be in the region of 104,000 - 470,000 she says, of which about 1/3 are gang rapes.

Sociological profiles of the victims of rape indicate that poor women are more vulnerable because they have no access to transport, or live in areas with no street lighting and have jobs or working hours which mean they have to travel in the dark. In many cases, the perpetrator is known to the victim and can include the woman's partner or husband. Although the Family Violence Act of 1993 means that marital rape is a criminal offence, few prosecutions, convictions and sentences result.

Gender activist Charlene Smith refers to the difficulties that rape survivors experience in accessing medical care. A recent survey conducted by the Medical Research Council found that there is a perception among medical professionals that rape does not represent a serious medical problem.

26% of doctors and nurses interviewed who treated rape cases didn’t think them ‘a serious health problem’ and this despite the known risks of STIs, HIV/AIDS, other infections, pregnancy and psychological scarring. Some doctors refuse to treat rape cases as it means testifying in court and is time consuming. This is a critical issue, as survivors need to be given treatment to prevent HIV infection within 72 hours of the rape for the medication to be effective. Also, few pharmacies stock the necessary antiretroviral drugs. To report a rape and secure a conviction requires great courage and persistence on the part of the survivor who has ‘to do battle with’ the police, doctors, psychologists and the courts to get the justice she deserves, and to protect the next woman or child.

The impoverishment, exploitation and systematic violation of women’s bodies in our world are public knowledge and stare at us unflinchingly. There is no shortage of coverage on the media around the issues of rape, domestic violence and child abuse. The horror of incidents, the outrage and pleas to government for more effective policing, more compassionate care of survivors, easier access to medical attention and necessary drugs, and a more efficient and effective legal system which will lead to prosecutions, are frequent. However, as Lisa Vetten from the Centre for the Study of Violence insists, the connection between rape and sexual violence to gender power relations is less popularly discussed and is precisely where the problem needs to be tackled:

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11 The UNISA Health Psychology Unit/Centre for Peace Action's ongoing Rape Surveillance Project (1997).

Virulent gender inequality, which knows neither racial nor cultural boundaries, plays the most significant role in causing rape in South Africa, as is the case around the world... We need to understand the complex interplay between race, class and gender in a more subtle way if we are to address the causes of rape, and challenge societal responses to the problem.13

There is no doubt that South Africa has a history of brutalising people - apartheid policies separated men and women from one another through the migrant labour system; and our society has used torture, murder and rape as instruments of terror and repression. These methods, once legitimised by the state as instruments of control in the political arena, are now making their own return within the domestic terrain. But, as Ackermann (1996:147-148) says, this argument takes away moral agency from those who perpetrate these crimes. This is important, but as Vetten (2004:4) argues, we need to look at the way our highly patriarchal society has shaped male morality, and how men have been socialised to define their power in terms of owning women and their sexuality, across all boundaries of race, class, ethnicity, and political or religious persuasion. The culture of rape and violence against women is underpinned by a patriarchal legal and policing system which are only now being challenged. The social norms that allow this type of behaviour have to be challenged, particularly by men, as a taboo and unacceptable, and only then will this culture change.

While Vetten is correct in drawing together the intersecting dynamics in society of race, class and gender as significant in analysing the causes of rape, we also need to examine how our theologies, attitudes and practices in the church contribute towards negative attitudes towards women. This is of particular importance in this study and will be developed further.

4.2.3 Women, health and HIV and AIDS

For me, if I were asked to choose two words/issues which are at the heart of the human experience of Aids where I live, they would be survival and gender... Survival is the only issue for millions of poor people in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is that issue which has to shape our articulation and application of moral and ethical values in this pandemic (Dowling 2002:3).14

Aside from the range of health problems that affect all South Africans, there are a number of health problems that are particular to women and requiring special care. These include: menstrual, post partum and menopausal conditions, ovarian, cervical and breast cancer, stress, and depression and emotional illness related to their role as women in their families and communities. Pregnancy, giving birth and issues of fertility also affect women’s health.

Women often first take care of others in the family and community before they will take care of themselves. Most times women do not take enough time to rest and for many women their work is physically arduous, particularly in rural areas where women and girl children fetch firewood and water, and plough the fields, in addition to the cleaning, cooking and nurturing work they do. Women in cities often suffer from stress as a result of juggling the different demands of family and work.

But in addition to all of these issues HIV and AIDS now represents an even greater health risk to women. HIV and AIDS figures released by the South African Department of Health in its 'HIV and Syphilis Antenatal Sero-prevalence Survey' for 2005, states that between 6.29 million and 6.57 million people had been infected with HIV by 2004. According to the report, 29.4 percent of pregnant women attending state-run clinics last year were HIV-positive, up from 27.9 percent in 2003. Women in their late 20s and early 30s were the worst affected, with almost 40 percent of those aged between 25 and 29 years being found to be HIV positive. The annual survey of pregnant women receiving antenatal care in the public sector is an important indicator of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in the general South African population.15

It is clear from the statistics that most of the people infected by HIV and AIDS are women. As Ackermann (2001:20) suggests, it is ‘an embodied reality’ that affects women’s bodies:

The HIV virus enters, lurks, then makes forays into the immune system until it ultimately destroys the body. This pandemic is all about bodies - especially about female bodies.

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14 Kevin Dowling is the Catholic bishop of Rustenburg diocese. This is an extract from his paper delivered at the Christian Institute for International Relations, London, November 2002 entitled ‘Making Connections: The Challenges of HIV to Faith Communities’, p.3.

There is a clear connection between gender relations in our society and the spread of HIV and AIDS. In South Africa, women’s status in marriage or relationships makes it very difficult for a woman to negotiate safe sex with her partner; many women find it extremely difficult to refuse to have sex with their partners for fear of violence or marital rape. Also, given the extent of violence against women in our country, young girls are particularly vulnerable - for many of them their first sexual experience is forced. This is partly a result of the myth that, by engaging in sexual relations with a virgin, a man will be cleansed of the virus.\textsuperscript{16} In addition the female anatomy lends itself to the transmission of the virus as the female’s body retains the semen, increasing the risk of the transmission of the virus if the sexual partner is HIV positive; women are more likely to have hidden lesions inside the vagina which can lead to transmission; and the practice of dry sex is also likely to cause lesions in the vagina, facilitating entry of the HI virus.\textsuperscript{17}

There are also a number of cultural issues attached to the HIV and AIDS-gender debate that should be noted. One concerns the cultural controls around young girls and sexuality and the issue of virginity testing. This is a traditional Zulu practice which has been resumed in both rural and urban areas in an attempt to stem the tide of young girls becoming HIV-infected. Bruce (2003:51) suggests that a major reason for the resumption of this practice by the older women or grandmothers is because they are the ones who have had to bear the brunt of caring of the AIDS orphans of their children who have contracted and died from the disease.

At the same time this practice is open to abuse and raises a number of questions. Besides representing a breach of constitutional laws that protect rights of privacy and bodily integrity (Commission for Gender Equality report, 2000), there have been incidents reported of employers reserving jobs for those girls who test positive and some community leaders are making money from the girls by demanding payment for testing or levying fines on families of girls who do not “pass”.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} PACSA Factsheet no. 46 November 1999, p.2.


\textsuperscript{18} Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, a social anthropologist at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal who has recently released a report on the resurgence of virginity testing. Report in \textit{Mail and Guardian}, 6 August 2004, p.37
Bruce (2003:67) argues that while it is important to reconsider the value of virginity as an aspect of Christian sexual morality, this has to be done in ways that are not harmful to women, or which reinforce patriarchal controls over women. Masenya (2003:125-126) concludes that there are oppressive elements in both Christianity and African culture which sanction men’s control over women’s bodies. In the context of HIV and AIDS she challenges those cultural expectations that all women should marry and where singlehood is not an option for African women. She affirms the model of mosadisadi – ‘a female African person who though conscious of the corporeal mentality of Africans and respecting it, can stand on her own and affirm her full humanity as one created in God’s image’ (:125), and where the criterion for her worth is not her marital status or childbearing capacity, but rather her relationship to God and faith in Jesus Christ (:126). I agree with Bruce and Masenya when they suggest that these cultural practices need to be reevaluated, and also reiterate my earlier discussion about the way that women themselves participate in uncaring roles in relation to other women (chapter 3, 3.2.3.1). I will also refer to this later in this chapter (4.2.4.5) when I discuss the way that some women oppress other women.

It is clear from the above discussion that issues of poverty, sexuality and HIV and AIDS take on a different hue when viewed through the lens of gender. The sheer scale of each of them, as well as their overlapping and intersecting impact on women’s lives, is what Gebara (2002:12) refers to as the ‘geography of evil’ which characterizes the life of women, especially poor women, everywhere. Thus we are not only dealing with socio-economic issues but with moral issues that affect the lives of women and which require a gendered ethical response. As I will demonstrate in the next section, where these moral issues manifest themselves in the local sites and day-to-day experiences of people’s lives, women who are in ministry are exercising their moral responsibility and responding as carers.

### 4.2.4 The way women care in their contexts

The women who were interviewed in this research care about these issues and are concerned about healing and making a difference. When they described the qualities they
wished to develop in their ministry, they used words like ‘empathy, sympathy, caring, compassion, willingness to sacrifice and servant leadership’. They also spoke about their caring work in relation to these issues.

4.2.4.1 Developing women's self esteem and confidence

A number of the participants were working with other women to develop their self-confidence and a positive sense of themselves.

‘... self-esteem, when they think of themselves, it's really very bad in this area. I think people, women, still feel, you know in terms of the culture, that they have been beaten up by their husbands, it's not such a big issue you know, and being violent in that sense. Either verbally or, and then but it's definitely to do with self-image and that's what I'm hoping to do this year to work with women specifically in terms of their self-image. I think of all the people that I have baptized in the last six months, 80% of them have been single mothers. So there is no marriage structure ... I can't prove this as I'm here too short a time, but having the child adds to their status as women you know... And I think it's got a lot to do with the poor self-image they have, and so they look for external things to you know boost their self-images.. and so I'm very much into this because that's been my own journey, to say that your self-image comes from within. If that's strong, or if that's on-going and developing, then you don't need so many outside [things], and you certainly don't need the men to give you that, you know.’

'I have the privilege of giving adult instruction (religious education)... I am encouraging women to use their voices and tell their story – this has been and still is a challenge for me as I want them to grow as I have.'

[Due to this course] I was able to encourage and help other young women and youth to grow in self-confidence...’

'[In the Wild Women Course that I run] For me, there is one truly great highlight. That is seeing the healing that takes place in the lives of some women.’

4.2.4.2 Local actions against poverty

Several of the women were working among very poor people in their areas including starting vegetable gardens with some of the grandmothers in a rural parish; a project with homeless people in the inner-city; skills training programmes among unemployed young people; training programmes and income-generating projects amongst the unemployed. A

19 They also describe other ethical values and virtues like: ‘responsible, truthful, versatile, confident, democratic, humble, intelligent, tolerant, honest, fair, friendly, open, accepting, discerning, have authority, faith, relationship with God/Christ, vulnerable, listener, loving, approachable, integrity, commitment, self discipline, down to earth, courageous, flexibility, wisdom’.
few of the women had dedicated ministries to the sick and the elderly as well. One woman spoke about herself as a ‘social worker who is working with social problems’.

4.2.4.3 Actions directed at violence against women and HIV and AIDS
A number of the women were involved in counselling and support of victims of abuse and violence. One woman described the way her ministry had been broadened from a primary focus on the elderly to providing practical support for a home for battered women. Another spoke about her work in a rehabilitation project with male abusers. Two women described their work in counselling women who have been abused or raped. Another had developed a public display with a group of artists at an art gallery to expose the extent of child rape in the province. Several of the participants were involved in HIV and AIDS education in their areas.

4.2.4.4 Discovering difference
Several of the women spoke about discovering the way that women experience issues differently depending on their age, cultural and racial background.

‘[The course] challenged my arrogant belief that all women feel the same as I do. It helped me to accept the differences that come up. I also looked at older women with a newfound respect. They had a harder time being independent, yet there are some beautiful wild women amongst our older women.’

‘[The course led me to the] realisation that I had never fully understood the problems of women of a different colour.’

‘[The course] certainly opened my eyes to social issues – although I have had dealings with people of other groups I am not always entirely “in touch” with the real world.’

4.2.4.5 When women’s work is not caring
As I have noted previously (chapter 3, 3.2.3.1) women are not always caring of others (Gebara 2002:139; Ehinger 1993:401; Baier 1991:234). Barr (1999:7) points to the contradictory nature of oppressive power relations, for example where women who are oppressed also oppress other women.

One participant spoke about the church’s practice of sanctioning pregnant, unmarried women by refusing them access to the Eucharist until they have participated in a penitential process, a practice which does not apply to the men. When asked to
comment she does not analyze it as a form of discrimination but dismisses/accepts it as an aspect of culture:

[If a young girl is pregnant] she’s not allowed to take Holy Communion. And every responsibility - she is just a member. Until she goes through the penitential process. We are also calling the boys. But because of.. I don't know how to explain it... may I say because of the culture or the tradition, what was used before, they see it as a ... many of them refuse to come to the office of the pastor ...

Similarly, in a discussion of domestic abuse, one participant believed that it was not her business to get involved. She explained it in terms of respect for the private space of the family.

'It [domestic abuse] is none of my business because that is their legal issue, their home affairs, not mine. ...I can advise them, if it is a woman coming to me. If it's a serious issue I won't involve myself, I would pray about it. If it's not a very serious, confidential issue I can bring the two of them together and talk about counselling. It helps; it works.'

Before proceeding to the next section, three questions surface from this discussion of women’s consciousness and engagement in their local situations which have implications for women’s theological education: Firstly, whether the caring responses of these women is sufficiently grounded in careful analysis of other women’s experiences – the complex causes which play themselves out at a local level and require particular responses if they are to be transformative for the women there. Secondly, whether there is sufficient integration between the theology and ethical theory these women espouse and the issues in their context to which they are responding, i.e. whether the dynamic interplay between theory and praxis is sufficiently embedded. And thirdly, whether their theological education has provided them with the requisite skills and practical knowledge to equip them as carers for the realities that have been discussed. Some examples are: how to help people navigate government departments to access Child Support Grants and other welfare benefits; how to accompany a woman who has been raped through the necessary medical, legal and therapeutic steps; how to assist a woman who has been abused to obtain a retraining order on her partner; how to counsel a person who has tested HIV positive etc; how to access the networks that exist in local areas, both governmental and NGOs. These are some of the issues that will be raised again in chapter 5.20

20 I note with appreciation the work of Musa Dube in the development of an HIV and AIDS Curriculum for Theological Institutions under the auspices of the World Council of Churches 2002 and in association with MAP International and UNAIDS. In Phiri et al, African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities,
However, what must be acknowledged is that when these women pray, weep with and console, counsel, support, and respond to immediate needs for food, money and shelter, when they provide information and raise awareness, and educate other women about their dignity and human value before God, they are caring; all of these actions are ‘embodied acts of care, comfort, support and acceptance’ (Ackermann 2001:22).

These women are doing caring work in the church; but are they being cared for by the church?

4.3 HOW WOMEN SEE THEMSELVES WITHIN THE CHURCH

The women used a number of indicators to measure their degree of comfort or acceptance within the church, viz. official recognition of their leadership abilities, specifically through ordination; the degree of acceptance by fellow clergy and parishioners; the type of work they were given to do; and discriminatory attitudes towards women expressed as biblical or theological truths.

4.3.1 Official recognition

In chapter 2 (2.2.1.2) I spoke about exclusion from leadership positions as one of the expressions of patriarchy. This refers to marginalising women from structures and offices where they can make a contribution towards policy and decisions about allocation of resources and the general well being of the community. Exclusion happens in the church either by excluding women completely from these positions, i.e. disallowing ordination as in the Catholic Church, or by maintaining women in positions of lower levels of authority. Both of these strategies are evident from this research and from others who have done denominational research.21

(Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003) pp. 209-239. The curriculum outline suggests an integrated approach to the issue – incorporating information and knowledge about the disease, theological and biblical reflections from a gendered perspective, practical support and care, and financial and management skills to ensure sustainability of this work.

21 I refer to three pieces of research: (1) Ralphs (1999:74-76) writing about women in the Roman Catholic Church states that while Catholic women are officially excluded from ordination as deacons, priests and bishops in the Catholic church, they are involved in a number of ministries. These include leadership roles in structures and in women’s organizations; teaching roles with children and adults; liturgical ministry; pastoral care and counselling; social justice and outreach activities; youth work; fundraising and administration; spiritual direction and formation.
One of the Anglican women spoke about having to wait four years after the CPSA took its decision to ordain women before her name was put forward to the selection committee. She described how senior clergy prevented her (and other women’s) applications from going forward for selection. She also reflects on how apartheid had inculcated a sense of passivity into people of colour which influenced the way they saw all authority figures, including those in the church:

‘It was 1992 when women were given the right to be ordained, you know, for five years after that there was no selection conference. We went to the first selection; that was in 1996. Now you tell me why didn’t that happen? You know ... there are all sorts of ways of keeping out.... And our clergy told us there’s no way they were even going to hand in our names. This was my clergy person saying to me, ‘I will not even hand in your name until the province decides. And you see what we didn't know, [was] that there were other avenues. We could have gone to the Bishop; the Bishop could be different and ... we didn't realise, that's where apartheid told you there is no choice. Then we didn't ask questions.’

The two Catholic participants spoke about the exclusion of women from ordination as contradictory to the value of equality of men and women made in the image of God:

‘Power and responsibility in the church is not equally shared in my church (RC). Women are not allowed to be ordained.’ 'Why when we are created in the image of God and seen as equal before God are we seen as “lesser beings”?'

‘[In the Roman Catholic church] women are not allowed to read the gospel or preach in the church. Sometimes the men are sexist and discriminate against women because of their own background or church doctrines.’

(2) Powell (2002) says that although women have been ordained since 1992 in the Church of the Province in Southern Africa (CPSA) there are no women bishops. The perception that transformation has slowed down is borne out by a report she presented to the Transformation Board of the CPSA at the 2002 Provincial Synod. In the report she drew attention to the fact that by 2000, of a total of 2 000 priests and 28 bishops, 130 were women priests and there were no women bishops in. According to Powell, ‘Women’s late entry into the priesthood, the prejudice they face within the church, and their chronic under representation at all higher levels of church governance, are an insult to women and a denial of God’s wish for them to fulfill their potential as human beings’. Powell concludes that as the church structures are top heavy, the church is inherently incapable of transformation, because of vested interests. Further by implementing the Transformation Board the CPSA ‘is giving a false impression of working towards transformation’.

(3) Venables (1998), writing from the Methodist context, argues that although the MCSA accepted women into ordination in 1972, there is still discrimination. Women ministers are excluded from certain types of ministry; there is a lack of opportunity for promotion, daily abuse and discrimination. The results of her survey amongst women ministers showed that whilst the majority considered themselves to suffer discrimination, not all women ministers were equally conscious, and of those that were, there was no unanimity over what to do about it. Some felt that they were helpless to change their situation and should either comply or leave the ministry altogether; and a small group felt that something should be done to change attitudes and structures but, despite this, they hadn’t managed to ‘do much to appease this oppression’ (:84). In 1992, The MCSA set a target of 40% of all structures to be represented by women, a goal which Venables (:107) says has not nearly been achieved, although there is one woman bishop.
One of the women who was not ordained set up a telephonic prayer ministry, as a way of exercising ministry, which she cannot do formally because she is not ordained:

‘I minister to other people maybe telephonically. Those who are away can phone and many of the women who are not even in our church, it doesn’t make a difference. But it’s something that I cannot disclose to my ministers. They will tell me, “You are not ordained.” It’s a problem.’

Other women who were preparing for ordination seemed to think that ordination would make the difference to women’s position in the church, for example one said:

‘My voice cannot be heard especially as an ordinary woman. After ordination they will hear my voice.’

One participant spoke about wanting to be ordained her whole life and the pain she experienced in an abusive marriage where her call to minister was ridiculed.

‘My life has been in ministry. So I’ve been doing ministry, that is, in my own way – he [her husband] was the ordained minister and I assisting him with the women. I’ve always had this urge wanting to do ministry or being trained in the same way because at times there are gaps when you are involved with women. But I think I did experience a lot of patriarchal oppression when I got married everything on my side got stamped out with the ministry. ...I was always scared to do things that I thought only male ministers could do, so that is patriarchal oppression. But in any case I practised.’

However, a few of the women who were already ordained in the Anglican Church (CPSA) spoke about the limits placed on women once they were ordained:

‘Although lip service is paid to our equality, the top structures are predominantly male.’

‘The church is carried by women therefore we need to be leaders: bishops, priests and deacons.’ And ‘…you can see it in the synods, immediately there are women’s issues, men have got their set ways that it’s never going to change, not in this era. It shows you how much work there is to do.’

‘I’m so tired of being a threat to people just because I’ve learnt to ask questions, not to take things as is, and you know and I will be the first person to say - the fact that I’m ordained does not mean that there is no patriarchy you know.’

This view is supported by Venables’ research in the Methodist Church which has had ordained women since 1972, as well as the observations made by Cathy Powell vis-à-vis Anglican women (see footnote 21, number 2). This seems to suggest that access to official structures in the church through ordination does not ensure the full inclusion of women, or their recognition in leadership and shaping policy in the church.
4.3.2 Attitudes of the clergy towards women

Those who were ordained as deacons or priests commented on the resistance they experienced either from their male colleagues or from people in the church. Although negative attitudes towards women’s leadership seemed to be a general problem that affected all women, the black women had to deal with more resistant attitudes and abuse. One woman commented on how she saw her colleague struggling:

’It’s very subtle. I mean they are not doing half as much for women at this moment. We have one black woman. I think she had enormous problems; nobody is supportive because of the attitudes of the other clergy. Every time I see her, she is almost in tears.’

Others spoke about their own experiences:

’I feel that I get no voluntary assistance from our priest – he inherited me from our previous priest who was very supportive. I feel excluded from activities that I think he could include me in... The Anglican Church does encourage the ordination of women. These feelings, however, are not supported by all priests. Some feel threatened by the fact that women are “trying to take their jobs” and consequently they feel that their role is no longer defined.’

’There still are a few who struggle with the issue, and I have met a few who struggle, male priests. But I don’t take offence because I am doing God’s work and it’s not my problem if they feel like that and they must deal with it and sort their minds out. ...I believe emphatically that I was called and I will do what God tells me to do and no man…’

’[The priest] is of the old school, old training and he wanted to test the children himself to see if they were ready to move on; he didn’t trust or believe what I had done.’

’[We need this course] to convince the older priests to accept women as humans, like men, and not to think that the only job for them is in the kitchen not in the church.’

For this particular woman, resistance to women’s leadership seemed to come more from the clergy than the people in the congregation:

’I actually really don’t think congregations have problems. I think it’s the clergy. I think you know when people are dying and when they need ministry, they want somebody to listen to them; once you are there and you’ve proved yourself, you are there for them in their need, I think that gets the word through.’

One woman described her disappointment that her colleagues who had been with her in the apartheid struggle did not support her women’s struggle in the church:

’... and so I think there was a lot of pain in the ordination in that I was really shocked that those guys really couldn’t understand that ordination was also a justice issue,... that’s very sad because you see I think some women have come into the church and they’ve just become men with vaginas. Is that because I’ve lived in apartheid, and then
now in ordination I think there are many ways to get, I think I’m wise, you know. I have
all this oppression that’s made me extremely wise because if you find ways if you not
given the thing you find ways of doing what you want to do anyway.’

She makes the connection between her theology of justice and the struggle for women in
the church:

‘You see I think ordination for me was an issue of justice, you don’t exclude people from
anything just because of something they cannot change you know your gender. ...I was
also called because I really resisted this is the thing you know. It did me the world of
good because I didn’t suddenly come into ordination and so it was really good for me
because every step of the way I questioned, what do I want? Do I want another
struggle? Why another that I have to fight in I thought I was just finished? So I you
know my theology is very based on Amos’ justice, justice, justice and righteousness.’

4.3.3 Attitudes of the parishioners

Some of the women who were in office described the way people in the church viewed
them:

‘At first some of the men would not take wine when I [was] administering the chalice. In
the funerals some of the families would not allow a woman to bury their
fathers/brothers, but if it’s a woman who is to be buried, they do not mind.’

‘I have experienced difficulty in my ministry because it is still hard for people to accept
me as a woman. They say that they will not take an order from a woman.’

‘Some men who come into the church office have the “little woman” mentality. It is a
challenge to remain polite and compassionate when I’d be much happier smashing their
face... In a mixed group, there are sometimes men and women who are not comfortable
with a woman being the facilitator. It is harder to keep such a group on track as they
look to the strongest, oldest male for guidance. When this happens the minister is
usually called upon to help the woman facilitator cope with the group mentality.’

One participant described her experience of having to disguise her femininity in order to
be taken seriously in her ministry:

‘I kind of made a decision that I had to cut my hair because I needed to look as
unfeminine as possible and look as unwomanly as possible. I didn't want people to
belittle me because I looked feminine and that's a message I was getting there, which is
strange.’

Another woman spoke about having to choose between marriage and children, or a career
in the church - a choice that married male priests do not have to make. However, she sees
her singlehood as offering a positive role model to young women in her community who
have not been exposed to other options other than marriage and having children:
‘I mean you know but my career was always more important, was always trying to get that thing done ‘cos I think that’s a very difficult issue to have a family, as a woman to have gotten this far I think it would have been more difficult for me. Because you have dual loyalties I think. So that’s quite exciting for me, you know, that in a sense just my role modeling is giving them another choice you know there is another choice. But there is a lot to do with self–image because I think if they are not strong enough they wouldn’t see what I have chosen as a career.’

When asked to describe the qualities they aspired to as leaders, the women in the research spoke a lot about listening to others, being open, democratic and fair, empowering others and sharing leadership. And yet, from the observations made previously, it is clear that many of these women do not experience this kind of leadership and have to face varying degrees of resistance both from their male colleagues, as well as their parishioners. Many do not feel totally comfortable in their leadership positions and have to make ‘adjustments’ to their identity as women, in order to be accepted.

4.3.4 Women’s work
A few of the participants commented on the traditional ‘service’ type work that women were expected to do:

‘At a function to entertain the bishop, how many men does one see helping to serve the tea?’

‘I became aware of how women are cast in traditional roles, e.g. make and serve the men’s breakfast, even when we are not invited to participate....’

‘I challenged the way women were regarded as fundraisers, flower arrangers, Sunday school teachers but were scarcely given chance for ordination. Although this has been allowed by the Anglican Church, the local churches are delaying this by not sending women to theological seminary. They will say there is no money when it comes to a woman.’

Another participant spoke about the expectations placed on clergy wives:

‘... it also involves the wife in parish visiting and doing a lot of counseling, often pastoral work, also get involved in Sunday school, in the black parishes.’

4.3.5 Discrimination and theological justification
Many of the women spoke about the way they were discriminated against in the church, and how scripture and church teachings were used to justify this treatment.
‘Women are not allowed to be leaders. They are told what to wear and what not. They are expected to be quiet.’

‘There are some who believe that women should cover their heads, and women should listen to their husbands. I have been seeing the oppression of women in the church. And I said “we are going to take the lead now”.’

‘Women are only heard and not listened to. [The church is] not inclusive though it appears to be – women are still very much on the perimeter.’

Most of the women agreed that women are oppressed by the Christian religion in some way (15). In relation to the use of scripture, they (17) did not accept as normative for women those texts that demanded women’s submission (1 Timothy 2:11-12). They noted that scripture was often used out of context against women, and often those quoting the scriptures ignored the more egalitarian texts that encouraged the inclusion of women e.g. Galatians 3:28.

‘Certain parts of the bible have been taken by the church fathers and used to keep women oppressed. Jesus’ words and actions have conveniently been ignored when it comes to women. In churches today, words are cheap. People talk about women having been liberated and yet patriarchal language is still very prevalent. Our young people still believe that God is male and that’s just the way it is.’

‘I’ve come to understand that patriarchal images do violence to women and result in them denying their own sexuality before they have access to God. Church symbols cannot accurately describe God. Church doctrines and teaching should be challenged to be gender sensitive and all inclusive.’

4.3.6 Violence and sexual abuse in the church

As indicated by one of the participants and further supported by research (Phiri 2000, Cormick 1997) many women who are in ministry are also subjected to violence and sexual abuse by their own partners or priests/ministers in the church. And even if aware of these abuses, the church is often silent about them, when they occur within their local church community.22 In these situations the church is actively siding with the oppression and exploitation of women.

22 Phiri (2000) describes her research on domestic violence in Christian homes. Her research findings are based on interviews with 25 Christian women in a Durban church whose husbands held some kind of office within their church. All of the women had experienced some form of abuse – physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual or emotional. In most cases they had turned to their pastor for help and had not received much support. Most of the women ‘spiritualized their pain and glorified their suffering. They looked at themselves as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ’ (p.108). However, as Phiri points out, this is in contradiction to their (Pentecostal) theology which claims that Christ took on all the suffering and they have been freed to walk in victory.
As I have shown, a number of limitations are placed on women’s full contribution within the church through a range of strategies: silencing their voices, limiting their actions and movements, and obstructing women’s presence in places of influence so that they cannot challenge the status quo. Applying Foucault’s (1982:223) analysis of the features of power relations (chapter 3, 3.3.3.3) to women ministers in the church, it can be noted that the ‘system of differentiation’ of male domination is maintained in order to ensure male privilege and power. It is enforced in different ways, for example by incorporating women into the system through ordination thus establishing a measure of consent; through coercion, i.e. imposing certain restrictions on roles, duties, dress, behaviour, what can be spoken about etc. It is further enforced through ‘systems of surveillance’ or monitoring either by senior clergy or parishioners. These mechanisms are institutionalised via defined structures and protocols in the church and they are given theological justification through the (ab)use of scripture and theology. Thus the church legitimates asymmetrical gender relations which are at the root of oppressive and exploitative treatment of women. For many women in the church and in ministry who are socialised into these practices and justifications, they are accepted as the way things are; they represent ‘truth’. This presents a challenge for the moral formation of women who need support to analyse their socialisation in order to respond as critical and conscious moral agents in resisting its destructive tendencies.

This research shows up the contradiction - the church can be a toxic and uncomfortable environment for women who are in ministry. Yet, despite this, women continue to do their caring work. The question is at what cost to themselves; and do women only develop strategies to survive, or do they find ways to resist and thus assert their agency within the discourse of patriarchal power? In the next section I examine a number of responses that the women in the research presented in an attempt to answer these questions.

See also Cormick, Dina *Feminism and the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa* in which Cormick exposes the extent of abuse by priests of religious sisters and female parishioners in churches in South Africa. (Pretoria: HSRC, 1997).
4.4 AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S STRATEGIES

In chapter 2 (2.1.3.3) I drew attention to Kaufman’s (1993) view of evolving moral agency and that the first moral imperative is to secure one’s human agency. Only then is it possible to speak about moral agency – the capacity to reflect and to take responsibility for one’s actions. In this context where many women experience dehumanising conditions – are abused, dominated, exploited and alienated - women’s primary responsibility is to secure themselves in order that they may become moral agents and be responsible and accountable. Thus, actions that women take to heal, protect and free themselves are important in realising women’s moral agency.

My aim here is to look carefully at the way that women respond to patriarchy in the church as an aspect of securing their human agency. Then, using some of the criteria and cautions about women and caring raised in chapter 3 (3.2.3) as well as James Scott’s discussion of different forms of infrapolitical resistance (3.1.3.3), I will evaluate whether these strategies assist them in balancing their desire and commitment to care while at the same time establishing some of the boundaries that make it possible to meet their own needs for care.

4.4.1 Different strategies

A number of strategies are evidenced in this research indicating that women are not totally victims of patriarchy in the church. But, as Barr (1999:75) suggests, women often occupy contradictory positions within the discourse of power where they may both ‘resist and reproduce their subject positions’.

4.4.1.1 Awareness

Most of the women demonstrated a level of awareness of the effects of patriarchy on them and other women. For some, participation in the Women’s Studies course helped to raise this awareness; for others the course helped to reinforce what they already knew.

‘I found that I was surprised at how subtly women are reared into male domination often through simple customs, e.g. always addressing a letter to Mr and Mrs., not Mrs. and Mr…!’ and ‘I never realised how much my own attitude had to change.’

‘I really feel that the way we are socialised as [African] girls gave us this stereotypical view that you know, my mother was a housewife, that means also when I reach her age
I’m going to the housewife stage. That mentality that, you know. Our fathers used to say ‘you don’t have to educate a woman because that's somebody who is going to get married and go. Then when I grew up I used to say to myself, ‘Oh no, that means I have to get married in order to secure the house, you must be a good girl to this man, you must be submissive, obedient to your husband,’ and there was this certain age you must get married.

I was looking at my mother - the treatment that she got from the in-laws and how she grew up, the sacrifices she had to do, to enjoy as a woman. And I looked at that, and so the era of 2000 began and I said to myself ‘I won’t live the life that my mother lived.’

In contrast, one woman described the positive socialising influence of her mother, who after raising her own family, refused to take on the traditional role of caring for her grandchildren. Instead she pursued her career in church music:

‘Where I come from, was a family where we’re all career people... and my sister has two children, and she [my mother] said initially “I’m not looking after your kids; I did that.” So, she set the pattern there. And then I think she was quite formative in that way, in terms of, for us you know, and so you know that pattern was broken. Because she had a career that's the main thing, she had a passion for church music so she was the organist in church. And I think that's what helped to break up the pattern because she had [a life] beyond family as well, whereas other women wouldn’t.’

4.4.1.2 Expressing anger

In the questionnaires and interviews different women registered their anger and frustration at patriarchy’s impact on their lives.

‘I am experiencing fierce feelings about the established church – challenging myself and others.’

‘I went through moments of anger and frustration at the thought of so many wasted years of not having known how to have a relationship with God. Of having grown up as a second-class citizen. Of being led to believe that here on earth men have all the answers.’

4.4.1.3 Counselling and healing

Many of the women spoke about seeking counselling and healing to deal with their experiences of abuse in the home and the church. A few of the women in the interviews who had not disclosed these experiences previously were encouraged by the support in the focus group interview to share their stories. One participant spoke about the healing she had sought in order to work through some of the effects of the apartheid system and her feelings of worthlessness.
4.4.1.4 Seeking support

Most of the participants described the support they received either from women’s groups in the church or from mentors, senior ministers or older women. One woman spoke about new friendships and relationships with women, for example:

‘This has been a radical revelation for me. When I was younger, I had few women friends and it was always a competition when we were together. Then I met women who started believing that they were valuable and it opened my eyes to friendships of equality and positive regard.’

This participant sought out a support group of women clergy but was critical of the seeming triviality of their discussions. She wishes to be selective about groups that will provide her with the support she is looking for.

‘But there’s no support I don’t think, I think the women are too far way from each other and also the women’s needs, you know. And I think that's where women fail each other. When we talk... we spent two hours talking about fridges, you know. And I said, ‘Ladies listen, I can’t come here and talk [about] fridges’... Now I think that's where I’ve shifted away from... because I have an urgency about my ministry, because I don’t have a long time to go, you know and my life doesn’t stop at a certain age, but I do want to make the most of this ministry. You know with that group we could be talking about something. ... I had to work hard to get into that group... If it’s not gonna be a support to me if I have to choose, because you choose where to put your energy.’

4.4.1.5 Speaking out

A number of women discussed examples of speaking up and challenging male domination.

‘Now I assert myself when I think it is necessary... I no longer merely accept their [people in church] views but like to challenge their thinking... Now I am more pro-active about women’s issues... I’ve learnt to question actions far more. Also to insist on gender balance on committees etc... [At the college] I work closely with the students I teach. I encourage them to be more assertive and to know their rights... I question when something is done merely because that is the way men do it.’

Another participant described how her questions at the male-dominated clergy meetings disturbed the status quo:

‘I mean it’s very hard to be different in this society, in this career that I’ve chosen. How I’m always aware, you know because I do ask questions in meetings and I know, my blood pressure goes up, my ... and I’m aware this is like new territory, and you know, I know it’s ... what do they say, 'holy ground’ for the men.’

One woman described the way she challenged the bishop:

‘It’s only 5000 years that we’ve had this patriarchy so we have to break it down - we, have to break down that patriarchy, ...I talk - to the bishop – all the time I challenge. I’m
not a confrontational person; I used to be a very quiet, withdrawn. I’m not scared any more of what I want to say.’

Another participant shared how she had to assert her priorities as both a single parent and as a minister with her bishop:

‘... this is new territory. If you think about it, there’s a few women, ordained women in the ministry, they are women in their 40’s and 50’s so they are past their child-bearing age. We are a new generation of young women who’ve come in with children and we’ve got to make a way for ourselves and I think we’ve got to be...clear about boundaries and about who you are and what’s important. You’re not a priest that can ask your wife to look after the children while you go around and do your pastoral calls. You’ve got to work out your list of priorities and your boundaries and I actually said to the Bishop - ‘my first priority is God, I serve God, my next priority is my child because that’s my family ministry, after that I serve the church and it has to be that way until he’s grown up, it has to be that way.

... But this is a whole new issue that only deals with women and ministry who have children because as far as I’m concerned being in the ministry you have to be first for your family. Otherwise when you’re serving God he doesn’t call us to forsake our children for him...

... He [the bishop] was very accommodating and he’s very prepared to listen to people. And so .. but he doesn’t see it that way himself because he is a man and when I told him about my child at my first meeting ‘I’m not sure if I’m called now or whether I must wait for 10 years until he’s older,’ he said ‘No! If you’re called, you’re called now.’ And I said ‘what happens if my child needs me?’ and he told me a story about, once his child broke a glass window so he took some time off to take him to hospital. And I thought, ‘clearly for him this is new territory, because he had a wife.’ I’m the wife, I’m the pastor and the wife, so I have to make my own rules as I go along.’

One participant chose to minister in a rural area where she can ‘protect’ her ministry from people who might report on her if she deviated from orthodox approaches, e.g. in the liturgy:

“So I specifically asked to come to a rural area. You know, in cities I think you get a lot involved in politics.... I really want to protect my ministry at this time and going bang smack into a city parish - a lot of gossip happens, a lot of politics happens, a lot of striving for ambition for this position. And I only have 12 years before I retire and I want to minister. You know it’s taken me my whole life to get here, so I want to minister. And you see that’s the difference. For instance I think being in the country I get away with a lot more than in a city where the next church is about 5 km-10 km away. Because in the city you’re so into one another, so people always know what you’re doing. And if they don’t like what you doing they’ll tell the Bishop... or they will spread the issue. Like for instance you know doing the Bible studies... with the baptism and the confirmation class. Other clergy will say what about the liturgy? ... the confirmation kids are supposed to learn about Catechism, like doctrine, sure! But I’m saying they first of all need to learn to think, and contextualize the word of God into their own issues. What’s the sense of learning Catechism if you haven’t even done that?’
4.4.2 Analysis

Gilligan (chapter 3, 3.2.1) suggested that an ethic of care evolves from a position of non-caring or withdrawal, to total giving and caring, to a position of balance between caring for others and setting personal boundaries to ensure self-care.

It is clear from the previous section that the actions of most of the women in this research indicate that they do care. But when women in ministry retreat into formalism and preserving orthodoxy in which their own and other women’s experiences of suffering are not integrated into the life and liturgy of the church, this could be said to be uncaring. It could also be suggested that the choice to obey the rules of culture and church and to block out or refuse to see the pain they cause other women, is also uncaring. (Examples of both these have been cited in section 4.2.4.5.)

There are also signs of women trying to strike a balance between their caring responsibilities and their own needs. For example, when the one participant above chooses to minister in a rural parish to ‘protect my ministry’ away from the ‘surveillance’ of her bishop, she may well be taking care of herself in order that she may take care of others. Likewise when the single mother/priest asserts her priorities to the bishop, she is taking care of herself in a situation where she has to juggle the different demands of caring – for her children and her ministry.

Puka (1989:24) questions whether such individualised strategies which seem not to analyse the sexist nature of the institution or lead to a sense of solidarity with other women, are in fact liberating for women. While these strategies do secure some gains for these women on an individual basis, they may not lead to any collective action with other women in support of the issue. I agree, but they may constitute an important first step which can lead to later collective action. Or, on the other hand, they may be the only forms of resistance possible to women at times.

Scott (1990) has provided another way of analyzing women’s responses in his discussion of the hidden transcript of subordinate groups and their infrapolitical resistance (chapter 3, 3.3.3.3). As described previously, infrapolitical resistance refers to small, disguised and ‘low profile’ forms of resistance (:183). Sometimes these erupt into the public transcript; as Scott (:206) suggests, the moment when the hidden transcript is
made public is the moment of ‘breaking the silence’ and with it comes a degree of freedom.

Most of the women in the research are members of churchwomen’s organisations or have close associations with them, for example the Ladies Kingdom (Evangelical Lutheran Church), Anglican Women’s Fellowship (Church of the Province), the Women of St Anne (Catholic Church). In these organisations women pray together, provide mutual support and encouragement, fundraise, perform service tasks in the church e.g. cleaning, flower arranging, and catering for functions, and pastoral work. One of the women expressed her criticism of a clergy women’s group to which she belonged and which she describes as sometimes ‘discussing trivial issues like “fridges” and not providing substantive support to one another.’ Mary Daly (1994:126) warns about ‘the sisterhoods’ of patriarchal society which she considers to serve male purposes. For ‘sisterhoods’ or women’s groups to be radical, they need to be united against their common experience of ‘the hierarchy and domination of authoritarian religion’

But, in the light of Scott’s analysis of how the hidden transcript works, this could be seen as an example of infrapolitical activity which has the potential for further subversive work. The discussion of fridges could be considered to be ‘the gossip’ in Scott’s theory which is part of the hidden transcript in which disguised forms of resistance occur. Haddad (2003:158) suggests that most South African women have to disguise what they do to survive. Sometimes what may seem to be compliance is in fact an act of resistance as part of an infrapolitical response to domination.

Scott (:224) argues that in order for covert arts of resistance to become overt in the public realm, there has to be sufficient cohesiveness within the dominated group. This has also been noted by Venables (1998:126) who suggests that women (ministers) in the MCSA (Methodist) should be forming a women ministers’ coalition which would be different to other societies and women’s groups, allowing for networking, support and strategising.

There have been indications of group mobilisation, e.g. a call for Anglican women to unite came during the 2002 Anglican Women Breaking the Silence Conference to celebrate 10 years of ordination of women. WOSA, in its purple ribbon campaign, is issuing a similar call to mobilize Catholic women around the issue of women’s
ordination. Another aspect of women’s organised resistance is the ‘unofficial’ power of
the women’s organisations or *manyanos*. As one participant commented with reference to
the Anglican Mothers’ Union:

‘...what’s interesting ... the women in the Anglican Church are actually the ones that are
powerful - the Mothers’ Union... there was a white woman, single woman based in a
parish and the women, the Mothers’ Union very obviously went through the approval
process and they let her know they’d approved her. Once they’d approved her and gave
her all the support there - because she understood about roles and power and who holds
power.’

Haddad (2003:158) says that successful action for change in these women’s
organisations requires that women overcome some of their internal differences. These are
often complicated by cultural norms of deference to older women and those who are
married. Other issues of race and class, the question of rank and seniority, and whether
the woman is ordained or not, also divide women.

The resistance expressed by the women in the research seem to be individual,
immediate and local, taking place in the parishes, at church meetings and during
workshops, within interpersonal relationships with other clergy and parishioners. For
example, when one woman raises questions about representation on committees, and
another dares to open her mouth at a clergy meeting – these are what Scott calls
‘eruptions’ into the public space, of breaking the silence and are actions of taking care.

But the resistance is also weakened by being scattered and spontaneous. Haddad
draws attention to the external constraints that make sustained public resistance difficult.
She refers to church theology which is about obedience to authority and church
leadership as ordained by God (:159). What can be added from previous discussion in
chapter 2 is also a theology of sin and guilt and the stress on virtues of self-restraint and
submissiveness that keep women from speaking out in their own interests and those of
other women. Thus it would seem that the work that needs to be done is both at the level
of engendering the theology that women are taught (Haddad 2003:162), as well as

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23 *WOSA* stands for Women’s Ordination South Africa whose aims are to create a forum of discussion,
raising awareness, sharing and affirmation for the ordination of women into a renewed priestly ministry in
the Roman Catholic Church. It is part of the international movement WOW – Women’s Ordination
Worldwide. One of WOW’s actions is the Purple Stole campaign which is an invitation to women to wear a
purple ribbon or scarf or stole to church where purple is a symbol of the ‘royal priesthood of the people of
God. It also proclaims sorrow for oppression and neglect of women in the church, as well as being an
ancient symbolic colour of *metanoia* and a new beginning. (Attachment in *WOSA* Newsletter No 1, 2005.)
developing more organised and collective forms of resistance. In pointing ahead to the next two chapters, I suggest that the formation of women for ministry needs to prepare women for a critique of the power relations and it needs to convince women of their need for a community to support them once they are in the field, in order to sustain their critique and to raise the level of resistance in the public realm.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has demonstrated that caring is essential in a context characterised by extreme conditions of human suffering, and especially for women. In this case the discussion has been limited to an examination of three critical issues that affect women’s lives – poverty, violence and rape, and HIV and AIDS. What I have indicated is that the women in this research, who are in the ministry of caring, are also affected by these conditions. They care while they also need to be cared for. Their caring takes different forms including support for the personal development of other women, projects among the unemployed and homeless, counselling and healing work among those who have been exposed to violence or are coping with HIV and AIDS, and developing supportive relationships and friendships among women.

I also drew attention to those situations when women do not care, for example when women do not support other women, or when women in leadership positions impose cultural customs or religious rules that harm others.

What has strongly emerged in this chapter is that the church seems not to care for women, and that women experience and analyse this lack of care in different ways. For some, this provokes a struggle for equality and representation within the church, for example, some women seek ordination believing that this will secure them a ‘place in the sun’. Others attest to discriminatory mechanisms which make women feel unwelcome once they are in leadership roles in the church. A few recognise more layered ways that gender and politics intersect in the church, which points to a deeper struggle over power, and one within which they are embedded.

Despite this lack of care within the formal structures of the church, the women described ways that they seek care for themselves, either through counselling, support groups, or developing their own awareness. Some actively resist the lack of care, and
here I referred to Scott’s (1990) theory of the ‘hidden transcript’ as a way of understanding their acts of resistance which are often hidden from the public gaze. Suffice it to say, a transformative ethic of care for women in ministry needs to take into account the critical issues that impact on women’s lives, and the power dynamics affecting relationships in the church.

My intention is to see whether there is a way between the overwhelming need for care within our context, while at the same time ensuring that women’s needs for liberation are not sacrificed and justice is done for all – the carer and the ones who are cared for. I do not believe that women are simply passive victims of patriarchy in the church, even if their position is contradictory. In support of this position I have tried to present a nuanced picture of women’s various locations within the discourse of power and their various strategies for remaining as conscious agents within the church. There is enough evidence to show that women do seek ways to resist, to protect themselves, to care for themselves, whilst at the same time responding with care to others. But this needs strengthening and support within an environment that often directs women’s caring in particular ways. My conclusion is that any training for women in ministry must take seriously their needs for care and adopt a more considered approach to analysing their situation in the church.