

THE COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE METHODIST
CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA AND HER MINISTERS: A
WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE.

by

DONALD MURRELL WILLIAMS

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SUPERVISOR: PROF W. BENTLEY

JOINT SUPERVISOR: PROF C. LANDMAN

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DECLARATION

Student Number: 2160978

I declare that 'The covenantal relationship between the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and her ministers: A Wesleyan theological critique' is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Williams', written in a cursive style.

Donald Murrell Williams
September 2015

SUMMARY

The covenant relationship describes the unique relationship entered into between the church and ministers within the Methodist tradition. The study examines the polity, ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry, influences within the Methodist movement and the factors within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) which influenced the adoption of the covenantal relationship, as it is termed, in the MCSA.

The experiences of ministers are researched to understand the impact of the covenantal relationship on their ministry and their wellbeing. Ezekiel, chapter 34, is analysed to discern a model of the expected roles of a shepherd to lead, feed and protect his covenant flock, roles which would be expected of the MCSA in the shepherding of their covenant ministers.

By applying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to the covenantal relationship using Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, the study concludes that the MCSA should move from a *covenantal* to a *covenant* relationship.

KEY TERMS

Covenant relationship; covenantal relationship; doctrine of ministry; employment; Methodist Church; Methodist Church of Southern Africa; shepherd metaphor in Ezekiel 34; Wesleyan theological method.

ABBREVIATIONS

I will be using the following abbreviations in the study:

DEWCOM	Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee
EMMU	Education, Mission and Ministry Unit
MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
SMMS	Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Ministers are ordained as presbyters into the Methodist Church of Southern Africa¹ with the words, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I declare that you have been ordained as Presbyters² of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ...Remember your call...Be shepherds to the flock of Christ” (Methodist Church 1999:308). The relationship established at ordination between the MCSA and her ministers is described as a “covenantal relationship” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:94), which is neither “contractual” nor is there a “legally enforceable contract” entered into between the parties (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30).

The Methodist Church chooses to use a theological concept of God entering into a covenant relationship with people to describe the relationship between the church³ and her ministers. Such a claim has implications for both the MCSA and ministers with whom there is a covenantal and not an employee relationship. Whilst the MCSA is able to claim that the relationship is analogous to covenants entered into between two parties and is not a legally binding contract, the consequence is that such a relationship can, and does, leave ministers feeling vulnerable and hurt.

The impact of the covenantal relationship became clear during 2012 when my wife and I spent the year touring South Africa in our caravan following my retirement after forty years in ministry with the MCSA. Numerous meetings with ministers of various denominations were enjoyed during which it became clear that many of these ministers are carrying deep hurts, often affecting their ministry. A concern for the ministers led me to pay closer attention to what fellow Methodist ministers were saying regarding the covenantal relationship as being a factor in their painful experiences. In such times they felt vulnerable and intimidated

¹ The Methodist Church of Southern Africa will henceforth be referred to as the MCSA.

² The Methodist Church of Southern Africa holds to the threefold pattern of ministry of bishops, presbyters (elders) and deacons. The terms ‘presbyter’, ‘elder’ and ‘minister’ are used inter-changeably within the Methodist tradition.

³ The usage of the word ‘Church’, with a capital letter, refers to the universal Church, differing from ‘church’ in the lower case representing the local congregation and the MCSA represents the denomination.

by the MCSA, in whose hands all the power rests, and did not experience the relationship as God-honouring or life-breathing.

But God's Spirit was at work kindling a desire to research the relationship between the MCSA and her ministers, the impact of the covenantal relationship on ministers and their families and then to appraise the covenantal relationship in the light of Scripture and Methodist tradition.

1.2. The research problem

Why undertake such a study? The term 'covenantal relationship' has a specific meaning within Methodist Church theology and polity when referring to the nature of the relationship established at ordination and reception into Full Connexion⁴ between the MCSA and her ministers. Each minister is now in a specific and unique relationship with the Conference⁵, authorised to function as a minister under the authority of the Conference in those circuits⁶ to which they are appointed; enjoys the collegueship of other ministers in the Connexion⁷ and for whom the MCSA "...recognise(s) its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30).

Over the past 15 years the nature of the relationship between the MCSA and her ministers has received growing attention from both the church and ministers. From the turn of this century the MCSA has been asserting that this relationship is not a normal employer/employee relationship but one in which the relationship is founded on a covenant between the parties (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2001). However, some ministers do not experience the relationship as them being in a covenant nor being in a relationship, especially when a dispute arises between the church and the minister. In those circumstances the ministers feel vulnerable and intimidated by the MCSA, in whose hands all the power is perceived to rest, and do not experience the relationship as caring, God-honouring or life-breathing. In addition, some families of the ministers are left hurt and, often, disillusioned with the church.

⁴ Full Connexion refers to the relationship of the ordained minister with other ministers and the Conference of the MCSA and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

⁵ The Conference provides direction and inspiration for the MCSA and is the MCSA's governing authority and supreme legislative body. Conference is the sole and final authority in respect of the doctrines of the Church and their interpretation (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:53).

⁶ Districts are divided into Circuits each consisting of a number of Societies. Circuits oversee and coordinate the work of Societies and promote and ensure the implementation of the mission imperatives of the MCSA throughout the Circuit (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:73).

⁷ The South African Connexion comprises those ministers who serve in South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Swaziland as different from those in Britain or the United States of America.

Ministers are questioning the theological premise on which the church describes the relationship as a ‘covenantal relationship’. As theologians they have doubts as to how consistent and compatible the MCSA’s interpretation of the covenantal relationship is with the covenants God entered into with humankind as recorded in the Scriptures. They ask whether the MCSA is justified in using theological terminology to describe what appears to be an ‘employment’ practice.

Ministers seek clarity on a number of issues including: what it means to be in a covenantal relationship; with whom are they in a covenantal relationship – the Presiding Bishop, their colleagues, their circuit?; what are the implications of being in such a relationship?; why does the MCSA insist on entering into a covenantal and not a contractual relationship?; and is the MCSA using the covenantal relationship to justify a labour practice? Ministers do not experience that satisfactory information is readily forthcoming from the MCSA. Other questions ministers are asking include: Is the covenantal relationship working? Whose interests are being served? Why does the MCSA prohibit ministers from turning to courts of law but they do so when challenged by ministers?

For over a century ministers of the Christian Church have challenged the legality of their relationship with church denominations in courts of law. In the Southern African context, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa turned to the Labour Court for redress against a minister (*Church of the Province of Southern Africa Diocese of Cape Town v Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration and Others*. (C619/2000) [2001] ZALC 141) and the covenantal relationship has been challenged by ministers of the MCSA at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) (*C Wentzel and The Methodist Church of South Africa* (GAJB 16127-10 [2011])⁸). The findings in both instances in favour of the churches inform the MCSA as to the legality of the covenantal relationship. However, whilst the relationship may be legal, ministers are asking whether this practice is just in the Christian Church in 2015? (Respondent 6).

The MCSA is clear as to the nature of the relationship – it is a covenantal relationship, not an employee relationship, a relationship into which ministers enter voluntarily, at their request, and are informed of the conditions under which they will fulfil their calling from God (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). On the other hand, this is not necessarily the understanding or experience of ministers whose experience is that when the covenantal

⁸ These cases are dealt with more fully in section 2.7 of chapter 2.

relationship is tested or strained, the MCSA uses the relationship as a labour practise, acting in a manner that is not appropriate for parties in keeping with biblical covenant relationships. For them the church defaults into a position of power and authority leaving them feeling vulnerable, intimidated, wounded and uncared for. The question they are asking is whether the ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry of the MCSA is in keeping with biblical theology in the Church of Christ? The experiences of ministers are examined in sections 3.3 and 3.4 of chapter 3.

I have noted that some important concepts in covenant theology and the understanding of other Methodist Conferences regarding covenant relationships are not incorporated in the covenant relationship in the MCSA. I believe that not incorporating those elements into the covenantal relationship leads to the inappropriate use of the covenantal relationship by the MCSA, contributing to the ministers feeling vulnerable and aggrieved. These matters are dealt with in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 of chapter 5.

1.3. The research question

The primary question to be asked is: If there is an inappropriate use of the covenantal relationship, how do we discern a model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, restorative, life giving and in keeping with Methodist tradition? The proposed model needs to meet the following criteria: take into account covenant theology in both the Old and New Testaments; is in keeping with biblical theology, ecclesiology and the doctrine of ministry in the Church of Christ; incorporates the beliefs, traditions and practices of the Methodist Church regarding covenant theology; will be restorative and will strengthen the relationship between the MCSA and ministers. I am exploring the theological premise on which the MCSA uses covenant theology to describe the relationship with her ministers and the implications this has for the ministers. The experience of ministers in relation to the ecclesiology and polity of the MCSA is to be researched by means of personal interviews. This discussion of the covenantal relationship, therefore, falls within the discipline of Systematic Theology with the emphasis on how the covenantal relationship is to be understood in terms of the ecclesiology of the MCSA.

For clarification of the research question, the following matters will be investigated:

1.3.1 Covenant theology in the Scriptures

Both the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant) record God entering into covenant relationships with humankind (Ex 19-24; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Scripture records God entering into covenant with God's people for the specific purpose of establishing the kingdom of God. A closer look at covenant theology in Scripture will determine the role and meaning of covenant theology and covenant relationships in the Bible. Factors to be clarified include who initiates the covenant, what is expected of those with whom the covenant is made and how does God deal with people when the covenant breaks down. Determining covenant theology in Scripture will lay the foundation on which to build and assess covenant theology and the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

1.3.2 Covenant theology in the Methodist Church

As this study relates to the covenantal relationship in the MCSA, it is necessary to determine what the theology and practices of the MCSA reveal about covenant theology, the doctrine of the church, ministry, ordination and the covenantal relationship with ministers in the MCSA. The study will determine the influences and traditions which inform covenant theology in the MCSA. An examination of how covenant theology is incorporated and expressed in the life, practices and liturgies of the Methodist Church and their impact on the ecclesiology, doctrine of ministry, ordination and the covenantal relationship will be conducted to determine the role of covenant theology in the MCSA.

With the MCSA defining the relationship with ministers as a covenantal relationship, the core components of the relationship are to be determined in order to clarify on what basis, for what reasons and why the MCSA enters into such a relationship. A question which needs to be clarified is on what basis does the MCSA claim to be in a covenantal relationship and not a contractual relationship with ministers? There are implications for both the church and the ministers and these will be clarified. As the MCSA forms part of a larger Methodist family, it will be helpful to evaluate and learn from where the constitutions of the British and American Connexions are similar and where they differ from that of the MCSA regarding the covenant relationship with ministers. Comparing the various descriptions of the covenant relationship will contribute to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

Determining the covenant theology and the covenantal relationship in the MCSA is important as the covenantal relationship has not been extensively researched in the Methodist Church denomination, including the MCSA. Even with the assistance of the Unisa Library Services, it is evident that there is a paucity of published literature evaluating or critiquing the covenant relationship in any of the Methodist Church Connexions. This lack is complicated by the different understanding and implementation of the covenant relationship in the various Connexions.

However, by defining the role of covenant theology in Scripture, the role of covenant theology in the MCSA and the role of the covenant relationship with ministers will assist in determining a model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, restorative, life giving and in keeping with Methodist tradition.

1.3.3 The experience of ministers

How do ministers experience the covenantal relationship? A qualitative study was chosen in order to gain meaning from the personal experiences of the ministers during their ministry that could not be gained by means of a quantitative study. The experience of ordained ministers in the MCSA regarding the relevance, understanding, impact, importance and theological justification of the covenantal relationship was researched by means of an empirical study using personal and group interviews. Their personal understanding and experiences encountered during their ministry and the impact of the covenantal relationship on them and their families were also investigated. Written responses to questions and a telephonic discussion with the Director of Human Resources of the MCSA, Rev Dr. Mehana, clarified the understanding of the MCSA. The responses of the ministers helped to answer the questions, “Is the experience of ministers different from that which is intended by the MCSA?” and “Whose purpose is being served in the adoption of the covenantal relationship?”

1.3.4 The wisdom of Scripture

How can the wisdom of Scripture assist in this research? The critique of the shepherds of Israel and the expectations of a shepherd, as recorded in Ezekiel 34, serve as a model to review the covenantal relationship in the MCSA. Ezekiel, as did the prophet Jeremiah, turns to the shepherd and flock metaphor, one well known in the Ancient Near East, to describe the

expectations of the owner of the flock, God, of how the hired shepherds, the leadership of Israel, are to tend the flock, the people of Israel, with whom God is in a covenant relationship.

What is the significance of the Ezekiel model for this study? The Methodist Church claims a place within the universal Church of God (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:13) and authorises ministers, with whom she has a covenantal relationship through ordination, "...to act in its name and on its behalf" (2014a:20). In this metaphor, as the shepherds are held accountable by God, so the MCSA is accountable to God for the shepherding of the ministers. And, as God's primary concern is the well-being of the flock, the model of how the MCSA should shepherd the ministers is provided in the Ezekiel model of leading, feeding, protecting and dealing with power relationships within the re-established covenant relationship. This model does, therefore, provide a tool for the Methodist Church to re-evaluate her present ecclesiology, the theology of ministry and the covenantal relationship with her ministers.

1.4. Outlining the hypothesis

The study serves to evaluate the influence that the ecclesiology of the MCSA has on the covenantal relationship with ministers and their experiences during their ministry. It is the hypothesis of this research that when the covenantal relationship functions on the theological premise to lead, feed and protect the flock, as required in the Ezekiel model of Ezekiel 34, then the outcome will be an amended ecclesiology leading to theologically sound, life breathing relationships.

The premise is that the theological basis of the covenantal relationship does not incorporate all the aspects of covenant theology from Scripture and Methodist tradition. The consequence is that practices emerge that are not always in keeping with God's intentions, as outlined in, for instance, the Book of Ezekiel, leading to the covenantal relationship being used inappropriately by the MCSA. This research will, therefore, formulate proposals for a new model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, restorative, God-honouring and life-giving for both the MCSA and her ministers and in keeping with Methodist tradition as defined in *The Methodist Book of Order* (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a).

1.5. The research method

The data sources for this research are literature and the experiences of ministers. The research method is a comparative and theological study to place the research question in a Wesleyan systematic theological context with specific reference to the ordained full-time ministry within the MCSA. Both primary and secondary sources are reviewed.

The experiences of 42 ministers are researched in forum discussions and personal interviews to discern their understanding and experiences relating to the covenant relationship whilst serving as ministers in the MCSA. The data from the interviews, including my personal observations, is processed, analysed and applied to formulate a proposal to the MCSA regarding the covenant relationship. Both in asking the questions and the interaction during the interview, I need to ensure that the fact that I am a white, male, retired, minister of long standing in the MCSA is not allowed to influence the responses from the respondents. The interview questions have been standardised and additional questions will be added during the interviews and forum discussions. Finally, this research will be offered to the Human Resource Unit of the MCSA who have been tasked by the Conference to develop resource material "...that will seek to clarify the implications and obligations of being in a 'covenantal relationship' with the Church and not an 'employee'" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2013:85).

1.5.1 Literature sources

The available literature has been critically analysed in order to provide data relating to:

- Covenant making in the Bible - both in the Old Testament and New Testament as Pauline theology of covenant is particularly relevant.
- The Methodist Church – its ecclesiology, doctrine of ministry and ordination as well as the role and expressions of covenant theology in the Wesleyan tradition with special reference to the covenantal relationship with ministers in the MCSA.
- The prophecy of Ezekiel regarding the covenant relationship between God and Israel as expressed in the shepherd metaphor in Ezekiel 34 and other related texts such as John 10.

As the focus of this study is on the covenantal relationship in the MCSA, references to the covenant relationship in other Conferences of the World Methodist Council are not as extensive and are used for comparative purposes.

The primary sources consulted are the *Bible*, *The Methodist Book of Order*⁹ (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a) together with the annual *Yearbooks* of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The secondary sources include Biblical commentaries, worship liturgies of the Methodist Church, journal articles, publications, submissions to the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the MCSA (DEWCOM), the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 2* (Methodist Church 2013) of the British Conference and the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (United Methodist Church 2012) of the American Conference as well as judgments handed down in courts of law both in South Africa (Church of the Province of Southern Africa Diocese of Cape Town v Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration and Others (C619/2000) [2001] ZALC 141) as well as in Britain (Methodist Conference v Preston [2013] UKSC 29). I entered into email correspondence with individuals in positions of leadership in the MCSA, for example the General Secretary (Morgan 2015) and the Director of Human Resources (Mehana 2014) to clarify data from both primary and secondary sources.

The internet was used extensively to search for literature from which data was extracted as well as from those references provided by the Unisa library services who conducted a literature search. The Unisa library also downloaded articles from journals with restricted access – both of these services were helpful in the research.

The *Bible* serves as the testimony of God entering into various covenant relationships with people; providing the primary inter-text from Ezekiel 34 and the associated passages such as John 10. It is the standard against which the covenant relationship in the MCSA was to be measured to ensure its theological soundness. The Biblical commentaries and journal articles clarify the context and meaning of Ezekiel 34, provide depth and context for the metaphor of the ‘Shepherds of Israel’ and the covenant relationship entered into between God and God’s people. What is helpful for this study is not only the judgment of the shepherds for their unacceptable behaviour but the prophet’s emphasis on God’s restoration with God assuming the requisite roles of a shepherd in terms of the re-established covenant. This combination of the roles of God and shepherd is a foretaste of how Jesus Christ would become the shepherd of God’s flock, a prophecy fulfilled in the words of Jesus who calls himself the “...good shepherd” who “...lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11).

⁹ Future references to *The Methodist Book of Order* will as the *Book of Order*.

The *Book of Order* (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a) regulates every aspect of the MCSA's life and ministry including its doctrinal beliefs and polity relating to those who feel called by God to serve as ordained minister. The annual *Yearbook* records the decisions of the annual Conference, amendments to the *Book of Order* (2014a) and reports tabled at Conference. The *Yearbook* serves as an extension of the *Book of Order*. (2014a).

These sources, together with the worship liturgies, as for example the *Methodist Worship Book* (Methodist Church 1999), provide the data with which to understand the ecclesiology of the MCSA and the covenantal relationship with ministers. However, whilst the Methodist Church in Britain and America also describe the relationship as a 'covenant relationship', their understanding of the covenant relationship differs from that of the MCSA. Their regulations and provisions are set down in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Volume 2* (2013) and *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (2012) which are used for comparison with the *Book of Order* (2014a).

The secondary sources, such as the annual *Yearbook*, *Methodist Worship Book* (1999), the *Ordination Service of 2014* (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014c), provide data indicating that within the Methodist Church the concept of being in a covenant relationship is used not only to describe the commitment of the individual believer to God in Christ but also to describe various commitments to ministry and holiness of that believer. Examples are the annual Covenant Renewal Service (Methodist Church 1999) and the Ordination Service of ministers (2014c). The concept of the individual believer initiating a covenant either with God, or in ministry, or with a fellow believer is readily accepted and adopted into the practices and usages of the Methodist Church.

These sources also reveal a different application of being in a covenant relationship when people make a commitment to a specific group and then hold themselves accountable to each other as in the Methodist Class Meetings which John Wesley introduced in the early 1740s. A similar model is used in the commitment made by the staff and seminarians of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) in the '*SMMS Covenant*'. (Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary 2014).

There is a dearth of literature critiquing the covenantal relationship in the Methodist Church. One source is that of the Reverend TB Attwell who, in May 2007, presented a paper to the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the MCSA (DEWCOM) critical of the theological justification of the covenant relationship as well as the lack of responsibility of

the MCSA towards ministers in fulfilling the requirements of a covenant relationship in the “creation, recreation, sustenance, restoration and reconciliation of its ministers” (Attwell 2007b: 5). In addition, the author is of the opinion that the covenant relationship “...seems to be a fiction, employed only when it is convenient in secular courts of Law” (2007b: 5). Attwell’s challenges help to evaluate the theology and application of the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

The legality of the covenant relationship has been challenged in courts of law in South Africa and Britain¹⁰. The majority judgment, handed down on 15 May 2013 by the United Kingdom Supreme Court in the case of *Methodist Conference vs Preston* (Methodist Conference v Preston [2013] UKSC 29), determined that Methodist ministers are not to be categorised as employees. The judgment concluded that the employment status of Methodist ministers “...is to be found in the constitutional provisions of the Church and not in any arrangement of the kind that could be said to amount to a contract.” (UKSC, 29 2013: para 34). Whilst this judgment was from outside of South Africa, a similar judgment was handed down by the Labour Court in Cape Town in the case of the *Church of the Province of Southern Africa Diocese of Cape Town v Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration and Others*. (C619/2000) [2001] ZALC 141). These findings are in keeping with the *Book of Order* (2014a) of the MCSA which specifically excludes the intention of a contract being entered into with ministers.

However, the dissenting finding of Lady Hale in the case of *Methodist Conference vs Preston* (Methodist Conference v Preston [2013] UKSC 29) is significant on a number of counts. She concluded that there is every reason to believe that the relationship appears to be contractual, without sufficient protection for the minister from eviction or financial redress. She also found that a “...distinction has to be drawn between being a minister – being in full connexion with the Methodist Church - and having a particular 'station' or 'appointment' within it” (UKSC, 2013 29: Paragraphs 46-49). Her conclusion was that the Methodist Church in Britain needs to ensure that there is a separation between the church’s relationship with ministers through ordination and the church’s responsibilities towards those ministers in the appointments where they are stationed.

Lady Hale challenges the Methodist Church, and thus the MCSA, to ensure that the relationship with ministers is in keeping with the modern-day approach to contracts and

¹⁰ The findings of courts of law outside of South Africa are not binding on the MCSA. However, they are helpful in informing the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

employment practices in a constitutional State. Legal judgments and the polity of the Conferences outside of Southern Africa will assist in discerning a covenant relationship that is both legal and just for the MCSA.

1.5.2 The experiences of ministers

The experience of ministers in relation to the ecclesiology and polity of the MCSA is to be considered. An empirical study is chosen in order to gain meaning from the personal experiences of the ministers during their ministry that could not be gained by means of a quantitative study.

The empirical study draws on personal interviews conducted with the sample of about 42 ministers or until data saturation is achieved. The sample represents 5.6 percent of ministers in active service (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:16) and is chosen with the intention of being racially and gender inclusive, of ministers from both urban and rural congregations, including of people not only known to be in a hurting relationship with the MCSA and across as many ethnic groupings of the Southern African population as possible. These ministers are drawn from across the Connexion but are concentrated in the three northern Districts of the MCSA to minimise costs for travelling and accommodation. The three Districts comprise the Provinces of Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga as well as those ministers serving in Botswana and Swaziland.

The interviews are conducted with the written consent of The General Secretary of the MCSA (Appendix A) and with each participant in his/her own location or by means of a recorded telephonic interview (Appendix D). Biographical details are to be obtained from participants regarding their age, sex, length of time in the ministry, whether they received additional allowances above their minimum stipend or not and their cultural background. (Appendix C).

Ethical matters relating to voluntary participation, anonymity of each participant and the confidentiality of data are to be adhered to. The participants were provided with the proposed topics for discussion (Appendix B) prior to the interviews. Permission was obtained to take notes, make observations during the interviews and to record, analyse and utilise the findings for research and publication purposes. All the requirements of Unisa stipulated in the Ethical Clearance Policy were met in the interview process.

This process began in August 2014 with the Bishop of the Limpopo District inviting me to lead a forum discussion with the Superintendent Ministers of the Limpopo District¹¹ on ‘The Covenantal Relationship’. The fifty one ministers present helped clarifying the research problem in a forum environment, providing insights in drawing up meaningful interview questions and eighteen ministers committing themselves to participate in the individual interviewing process. The insights of many of these ministers were gained even though they did not form part of the interview sample.

The three specific areas to be investigated with each minister relate to their understanding of the nature of the covenantal relationship, their experiences during their ministry and their suggestions regarding a possible way forward. The guideline to be used during the interviews is the ‘Topics for discussion and sample questions’ (Appendix B) which will be forwarded to the participants prior to the interviews with additional questions for clarification and expansion of their responses to be put to them during the interview.

The field notes and relevant portions of transcripts are to be written up, using the recordings for clarification purposes, and assigning a number for each participant to ensure anonymity. These transcriptions will be analysed and cross-referenced to determine emerging patterns of topics which will be grouped to form themes/categories and then grouped into sub themes/categories. The themes will then be analysed to extract the relevant data which will be processed to formulate the findings of the meaning and experiences of ministers as well as their suggestions as how to amend the covenantal relationship. The findings of the interviews with the MCSA officials are used to clarify the understanding and reasoning of the MCSA for describing the relationship as a covenantal relationship.

The findings of the interviews will be made available in electronic format to the participants for their information and to give them an opportunity to raise any matters of concern before being incorporated into the final analysis of the research project.

All electronic data will be transferred to a memory stick and placed in a sealed envelope and secured in a fire-proof safe for a period of two years and will then be destroyed. The same protocol will apply to hard copies of all documents related to the interview process.

¹¹ Districts are divided into circuits with a Superintendent Minister being appointed by the Conference to oversee the work of that circuit. The Limpopo District is divided into 41 circuits.

1.5.3 The Ezekiel model of the shepherds of Israel

The concept of “the shepherds of Israel” as recorded in Ezekiel 34 and other passages of Scripture provide a model with which to evaluate the theology and practices of the covenantal relationship in the MCSA. The components of the Ezekiel model to lead, feed, protect and deal with power relationships in terms of the re-established covenantal relationship will be applied to the covenantal relationship in order to present a re-established covenantal relationship with ministers that is just and life breathing.

1.6. Evaluation of the data using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

As this research relates specifically to the Methodist Church for whom the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is the accepted methodology of theological reflection drawing on Scripture, tradition, reason and experience is to be applied to evaluate the covenantal relationship. John Wesley believed that “the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason” (United Methodist Church 2012:80). The term was not coined by Mr Wesley but by Outler (1985:7-18) to describe the theological method employed by Mr Wesley and incorporated into Methodist thinking and tradition. “It was intended as a metaphor for a four-element syndrome, including the four-fold guidelines of authority in Mr Wesley’s theological method” (Outler 1985:11).

‘How do we discern a model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, restorative, life giving and in keeping with Methodist tradition?’ is the research question. The methodology is to research the core components and the role of covenant theology and covenant relationships in the Scriptures. This is followed by investigating how covenant theology is incorporated and expressed in the Methodist tradition in order to evaluate the influence of covenant theology on the ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry in the MCSA, including the covenantal relationship with ministers. In addition, the experience of ministers of the covenantal relationship is researched. The wisdom of scripture, using the Ezekiel Shepherd model, will then be applied to the covenantal relationship as understood by the MCSA and as experienced by the ministers.

The outcome of using the Quadrilateral is to formulate proposals for a new model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, incorporates covenant theology from the Old and New Testaments as well as from the practices of the greater Methodist Church and is

restorative, God-honouring and life-giving for both the Church and her ministers as defined in the *Book of Order*.

1.7. Outline of the chapters

This chapter has introduced the problem encountered with the covenantal relationship in the MCSA, the purpose of the research, an analysis of the research problem and the methodology to be adopted to test the hypothesis.

Chapter 2 will research the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church, the doctrines of ministry and ordination, the relationship between ordination and entering into the covenantal relationship with ministers and the implications for both the MCSA and ministers.

Chapter 3 will explore the experience of the covenantal relationship by ministers whilst serving in the MCSA by conducting an empirical study by means of personal interviews with a representative number of ministers and officials of the MCSA.

Chapter 4 will examine the critique by the prophet Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 34, of covenant theology in the scriptures and the expectations of how God wishes God's people to be shepherded by those with whom they are in a covenant relationship. This study will assist in formulating a model with which to review the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

Chapter 5 will propose a new model, titled: A Wesleyan theology of covenant in the MCSA. The data relating to the traditions of the MCSA, the experiences of ministers and the insights of Scripture from the Ezekiel model will be applied, using reason, to evaluate the theology and the covenantal relationship as practiced by the MCSA. The chapter concludes with recommendations to the Conference regarding possible amendments to the covenantal relationship and polity of the MCSA as recorded in the *Book of Order* in keeping with an ecclesiology of ordination and ministry that is consistent with scripture and Methodist tradition.

Chapter 2

The covenantal relationship in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

2.1. Introduction

The term ‘covenantal relationship’ has a specific meaning within Methodist Church theology and polity, describing the unique relationship entered into between the church and the ministers at ordination and reception into Full Connexion. The MCSA does not describe that relationship as a ‘covenant relationship’, similar to the covenants established between God and God’s people as recorded in Scripture. Instead they use the term ‘covenantal relationship’ which appears to be a typology of a covenant from Scripture. What is a typology? The *Collins English Dictionary* (n.d.) defines a typology as “...(mainly Christian theology) the doctrine or study of types or of the correspondence between them and the realities which they typify.” The covenantal relationship is, therefore, a type of covenant, not necessarily a biblical covenant. Whilst ministers may understand the relationship as a biblical covenant, the MCSA does not claim that it is based on biblical covenants.

Is there an analogy which can be applied to the ecclesiology of the MCSA which leads to the ordination of ministers and to their covenantal relationship with the Church? The analogy of marriage can well apply, remembering that no analogy is perfect. Up until ordination the relationship is much like a couple dating each other, discerning whether the other is to be their life partner or not and then making a commitment to become engaged. With the engagement the responsibilities and commitment of each to the other increases leading either to marriage or a withdrawal from the relationship. Marriage in turn changes that relationship as the partners make their vows, committing themselves to each other, through thick and thin, for life. With the words “With this Ring, a token and pledge of the Vow and Covenant now made betwixt me and thee, I thee wed ...”, the *Book of Offices* (1936:22) of the Methodist Church describes the couple as being in a covenant relationship. The call of God on persons to the ordained ministry and the processes leading to ordination is analogous to that of the love relationship leading to the covenant of marriage.

However, life continues after marriage. Whilst the relationship is tested, there is the opportunity for growth and to enjoy married life as a couple and as a family. Couples need to

work at their relationship. Sometimes couples don't feel 'particularly married', expectations are not always met and tensions arise. One partner can dominate the other causing distress and unless couples re-establish their bond, a breakdown and loss of trust can result.

As in marriage, the covenantal relationship is a type of covenant relationship which brings together, in a unique bond, the MCSA with her ministers, one which can, and does, bring life to both the church and the ministers, but which can also leave ministers feeling vulnerable or let down in the relationship.

What is the understanding of the MCSA regarding the covenantal relationship? I will investigate that question in this chapter, which will be followed by interviews with ministers and officials of the MCSA in order to discern how they experience the relationship and then look at a way ahead to enrich the relationship when there are tensions or a breakdown in the relationship.

2.2. The covenantal relationship in the MCSA

The covenantal relationship in the MCSA is a dynamic concept, determined by the decisions of Conference from time to time. Ministers are not employees of the MCSA but in a relationship where the MCSA provides an opportunity for ministers to fulfil their calling from God and to do so with the authority, care and protection of the church. In return, ministers are subject to the discipline and authority of the Conference. It is this bi-lateral relationship which the MCSA terms a 'covenantal relationship'.

The dynamic nature of the covenantal relationship is evidenced in that the first recorded reference to the terminology of entering into a covenantal relationship is in 2001 in the Application Form (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2001) for those wishing to offer for ministry in the MCSA; thereafter in the documents of the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) in 2007 and in the *Yearbook* of 2009, requiring probationer ministers to "...understand and acknowledge the covenantal nature of the ministry as contrasted with the contractual nature of most other forms of employment" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2009:86). The description of the relationship as a 'covenantal relationship' was introduced into *Laws and Discipline* only with the 12th edition in 2014, now titled *The Methodist Book of Order: The Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of*

*Southern Africa*¹², stating, “A minister who is so called has a covenantal relationship but not contractual relationship with the Church. The church provides ministers with the opportunity to practice their calling in or through this covenantal relationship” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30).

When candidating¹³ for the ministry, and repeated prior to ordination, each minister promises to adhere to the “... policies, decisions, practices and usages of the Church” and accepts the “...discipline and decisions of the Conference and the Connexional Executive” (2014a: 31, 36). For her part, the MCSA recognises “...its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers” (2014a:30) and by accepting ministers into Full Connexion¹⁴ with the Conference provides ministers with “...the care and protection of Conference especially in regard to the provision of opportunities of service in the Circuits” (2014a:37). The details of this relationship will be looked at in sections 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 of this chapter.

But why does the MCSA call this a covenantal relationship and not simply an employer-employee relationship? I believe that there are three influences on the thinking of the MCSA to describe the relationship as a covenantal relationship - Scripture which records God entering into a covenant relationship with humankind; tradition influenced by the thinking, theology and practices of John Wesley and the Methodist movement, as well as legal challenges by ministers relating to their employment status. Those influences will now be examined.

2.2.1 The influence of Scripture on the covenantal relationship

The first influence is that of Scripture with parties entering into a covenant relationship with certain responsibilities and obligations by each partner. One of the recurring themes of Scripture is that, out of God’s love for humankind, God enters into a covenant with people and invites them to respond in love and obedience. The covenant refrain is heralded throughout the Old and New Testaments, as for example in Exodus 19:5, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.”

Foster (2010: 205–208) describes the characteristics of a covenant as “...a (1) chosen (2) relationship of (3) mutual obligation, (4) guaranteed by oath sanctions” and indicating that

¹² From here, I will refer to the 12th edition of Laws and Discipline as the Book of Order.

¹³ Candidature is the formal processes by which a person approaches the MCSA to be accepted and trained as a probationer minister.

¹⁴ Full Connexion refers to a minister's relationship with the Conference.

“...the obligations were not necessarily equal but that both parties bound themselves to do something for the other, to treat one another in certain ways” (2010:205). These characteristics are contained in the covenants made between God and humankind as recorded in Scripture where God reaches out in love to bless and bring life to people. Stemming from their love for God, the people respond to God’s invitation to enter into a covenant relationship, a relationship, however, conditional on God’s people being faithful to God alone and living righteous lives in order that they will be “...for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6).

God’s covenant with the people of Israel was taken a step further with God establishing the ‘new’ covenant through the reconciling life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:15). That Jesus intended this ‘new’ covenant to extend the covenant relationship confirmed with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:8), yet giving a new meaning to the covenant relationship, is evident in the words at the Last Supper with Jesus referring to the cup on wine as “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28 and 1 Cor 11:25). God initiates and enters into covenant with people with the purpose of restoring and reconciling broken relationships.

Attwell (2007b:1-5), for whom the covenantal relationship is an analogy drawing on the covenants recorded in the Old and New Testaments, identifies the following principles which are prerequisites for the MCSA to call the relationship with ministers a covenant:

1. The Covenant is initiated, sustained and renewed by a dominant party
2. The purpose of the dominant party is to give life, to sustain it and renew it
3. The submissive party obeys the dominant party and finds life in that obedience
4. The submissive party, in turn, acts as a mediator of the creative, restorative work of the dominant party
5. The purpose of the Covenant is to bring a new creation into being in human society and in the relationship between human beings and non-human creation and human beings and God. (2007b:3).

He continues stating, “It must be observed, however, that the relationship between the MCSA and Ordained Ministers is “Covenantal” by analogy only. This is because the MCSA is not God. In this sense, it can, at best be said that the relationship between the MCSA and its Ordained Ministers is “like” the Covenant between God and all humanity, God and Israel and

God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the New Humanity” (2007b:3). In clarifying these statements, Attwell (2014) added, “...the relationship is *analogous* to a covenant, but is not necessarily a covenant in the scriptural sense of the word.” (Attwell 2014). The implications of this understanding by Attwell will be explored further in chapter 5.

A recurring theme in God’s covenant making with humankind is that God remains faithful to those with whom a covenant relationship is established, even when the people fail to keep their commitment to the covenant. (Hosea 11:1-9). The breaking of the covenant relationship is a consequence of the actions of the people and never initiated by God. Even then, God reaches out in grace to renew, restore and bring reconciliation with sinful humankind. “Time and again, the prophets announce the judgement of God on the recalcitrant nation, but even in the severest of these, the ultimate purpose of God is the restoration of the relationship between Himself and His people” (Linington 2003:59).

The influence of Scripture is seen in some of the characteristics of the covenants recorded in the Scriptures being included in the covenantal relationship of the MCSA. However, certain features essential to covenant relationships in Scripture are missing in the covenantal relationship of the MCSA, and it is those factors which, I believe, are contributing to the inappropriate use of the covenantal relationship by the MCSA.

2.2.2 The influence of tradition

Tradition, particularly the influence of the thinking and theology of John Wesley and the practices which arose at the beginning of the Methodist movement, has influenced the present understanding of the covenantal relationship. These traditions include:

2.2.2.1 Accountability to the Conference whose decisions and powers are absolute

The first tradition is the accountability of ministers, initially to Mr Wesley and then to the Conference, for all aspects relating to their ministry. Mr Wesley could be described as something of an ‘autocrat’ in matters relating to ‘his preachers’ as he controlled their admission, removal, spiritual development, doctrinal beliefs as well as where they were sent to minister and for how long. “He [Mr Wesley] gathered and trained large numbers of lay preachers who were responsible to him and subject to his guidance and assignment”

(Matthews 1985:70). He insisted that, whilst he was alive, the preachers, also known as ‘helpers’, ‘assistants’ and ‘travelling preachers’, were accountable to him - not even to the Conference. “To *me* the preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to ‘serve me as sons in the gospel’. But they are not thus engaged to any man, or number of men, besides” (Rack, 2011:330). As far as Mr Wesley was concerned:

- Each had voluntarily approached him “...to serve me as sons”
- Would accept “...to labour when and where I should direct”
- “Had the power to go away when he pleased; as I had also to go away from them”, and that
- He had the power to “...tell any if I saw cause, ‘I do not desire your help any longer’” (2011:328).

Forever the pragmatist, Wesley set down what has come to be known as the ‘Twelve¹⁵ Rules of a Helper’ in which he prescribed how the preachers/helpers were to conduct themselves as they went about their duties, and for which they were held accountable to him and the Conference. (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:181). In addition to their submission to Mr Wesley, preachers/helpers were required to submit to the decisions and discipline of the Conference. Each preacher was given, annually, a copy of the *Minutes of Conference* which recorded the decisions of Conference and which set out the understanding of the Conference regarding the doctrine and polity of the people called Methodist to which they were bound. These Minutes have “...been the official means of communication between the Conference and the People” (Bowmer 1975:166).

The acceptance of the Deed of Declaration which was registered in the Court of Chancery in 1784 gave legal status to the annual Conference of one hundred men, the ‘Legal Hundred’. The role of Mr Wesley towards his preachers became that of the Conference to whom all ministers are subject regarding their appointments, doctrinal beliefs and discipline to this day. “This corporate group became Wesley’s successor” (Matthews 1985:84). Methodist preachers, then and now, are subject to and accountable to the Conference whose powers are absolute.

¹⁵ These Rules are known as the “Twelve Rules of a Helper” (2014a:191) or as “The Rules” (2014a:181-182) and have been translated in various forms over the years. I have chosen to use the title “Twelve Rules of a Helper” as this is the common usage in the MCSA.

2.2.2.2 Being accepted into Full Connexion

The second tradition introduced by Mr Wesley and adopted into the Methodist Church was that of accepting those approved as preachers in the Methodist movement into “Full Connexion” with the Conference. Those accepted into Full Connexion were ministers who had been ordained in Christian denominations and now aligned themselves with the work and witness of the Methodist movement. Others were lay persons, therefore not ordained, but who offered to become Mr Wesley’s helpers and committed themselves to full-time service assisting the ordained ministers. As these travelling preachers were not ordained, Mr Wesley regarded them as preachers and not as ministers and they were not permitted to administer the sacraments. The ordained ministers from other denominations and those accepted by the Conference as preachers were accepted into Full Connexion with each other and with the Conference to whom they were accountable for their work in the Methodist movement. (Davies and Rupp 1965:230-234).

Over time, and with the expansion of the Methodist movement, it became necessary to ordain preachers to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Only those who were accepted into Full Connexion with the Conference were ordained by the Conference. In the words of George (1978), acceptance into Full Connexion and ordination meant that “...those whom the Church believed to be called by God became both Travelling Preachers in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion and Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the Church of God” (Davies, George and Rupp 1978:155). Baker (1965) reminds us that “A Methodist preacher attained full status not by ordination but by his reception into Full Connexion” (Davies and Rupp 1965:250).

This tradition and practice of separating acceptance into Full Connexion with the Conference from ordination continues to the present. Full Connexion emphasises the relationship of ministers with the Conference and with each other as different from ordination by which the MCSA grants authority to function as a minister. However, within the MCSA we are clear as to the meaning of ordination but have not spelt out what being in Full Connexion means or the distinction between the two.

2.2.2.3 Spiritual and material care of preachers by the Conference

A third tradition and influence of Mr Wesley was that the Conference accepted responsibility for the spiritual and material well-being of the preachers in return for their services and accountability to the Conference. Regulations and procedures were set in place for the spiritual nurture of all helpers which included their direction by Mr Wesley (Rack 2011:328) and their accountability to the Conference. “Despite the intrusion of special matters, the major regular items of business [of the Conference] were clear: admission, retirement, and the deaths of preachers; examination of their characters; stations; statistics of membership; and the major funds and allocations from them” (Rack 2011:32). Following the death of Mr Wesley, the Conference assumed responsibility for the care and welfare of ministers in terms of the Deed of Declaration of 1784 which granted legal status to the Conference.

The Conference was committed to care for the material needs of the preachers either through the circuits or from Conference funds. Rack (2011:48-56) traces the development of circuits required to provide a stipend for the preachers, an allowance for the families, education of a preacher’s children and a pension from the Preachers’ Fund “...for those too worn out to preach at all” (2011:54). Rack also records the expectation of the Conference of 1769 that each circuit is to provide preachers with “...horses, saddles, and bridles” as “...they cannot be supposed to buy them out of their little allowance” (2011:375). Unless ministers had other means of income, they and their families suffered, as Baker (1965) reports, “Some preachers, however, did not in fact receive these allowances, and were in real need” (Davies and Rupp 1965:235).

2.2.2.4 The influence of Methodist Connexionalism

A fourth influence and tradition was that of the emphasis on connexionalism in the Methodist movement.

Within the Methodist Church, connexionalism describes the connectedness of ministers with each other in the Connexion but has been broadened to include the concept of societies and circuits being in a connexional relationship with each other. The meaning of the word ‘connexional’ and its influence on the Methodist Church is described by Bowmer (1975:193-197) as, “In origin, it goes back to the Religious Societies which came within the law if they met ‘in connexion with’ a clergyman of the Church of England. So the early Methodists met ‘in connexion with the Rev. Mr John Wesley. While he lived, the Methodists were still

officially ‘in connexion’ with him, and after his death the word persisted and Methodism continued to be referred to as a ‘Connexion’” (Bowmer 1975:190). In the Methodist movement, therefore, ministers are in connexion with the other ministers of their Conference and are appointed to a connexional post by the Conference.

Connexionalism also ensured that Methodist members, societies and circuits were not independent of each other but inextricably linked with a common discipline, doctrine, organisation and accountability to the Conference. “No Society or Circuit was independent of the whole, of which the Conference was the ruling body” (Bowmer 1975:60). Mr Wesley was convinced that ...“it was folly to preach without ensuring Christian society for his converts. He was equally convinced that the Methodist societies needed linking together if they were to grow in spiritual strength and efficacy” (Davies and Rupp 1965:230).

Bowmer (1975:193-197) speaks of six characteristics of connexionalism which influence the relationship between ministers and the connexion. Connexionalism provided *episcopé*, oversight, as “members were accountable to Class Leaders, Class Leaders to Ministers, and Ministers to Conference” (1975:193). Secondly it ensured “itinerancy” as each preacher was frequently moved from one circuit to another by the Conference” (1975:193). Thirdly, it ensured “mutual help” where “Methodism pooled its resources, the strong helping the weak through Connexional Funds”, for example the Auxiliary Fund (1797) for the relief of aged preachers and their widows. (1975:195). He also mentions that connexionalism was able to “enforce discipline...evenly and impartially in every Society, to ministers and laymen alike, free from local prejudices”; and to maintain unity of doctrine as “Wesleyan ministers were one as preachers of a common doctrine. Year by year the question was put to every minister in Full Connexion, ‘Does he preach our doctrines and observe our discipline?’” (1975:196).

Mr Wesley’s emphasis on connexionalism continues within the Methodist movement to this day, influencing the ecclesiology of the MCSA in the emphasis on the connectedness of ministers with each other and with the Conference, that the stationing of ministers is to a connexional appointment and that those societies and circuits are in a connexional relationship with each other.

The traditions of preachers being accountable to the Conference, being accepted into Full Connexion, acceptance by the Conference to care for the spiritual and material welfare of preachers and the emphasis on connexionalism are all incorporated into the covenantal

relationship of the MCSA without the relationship being termed a ‘covenant’ or ‘covenantal’ relationship by Mr Wesley or the early Methodist movement.

Is there another influence of Mr Wesley and the Methodist movement which could have influenced the MCSA adopting the terminology of the ‘covenant’ or ‘covenantal’ relationship? Yes, I believe that there is in the understanding of Mr Wesley regarding God entering into a covenant with God’s people and the appropriate response to that act of God in the annual Covenant Service.

2.2.2.5 The influence of Mr Wesley’s covenant theology

Whilst celebrating the various covenant relationships recorded in the Old Testament, it is the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ through which God enters into a relationship with God’s people in order to bring about reconciliation and restoration which is the foundation of Mr Wesley’s covenant theology. (Wesley 1950:693,831). Even when describing God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:7, Wesley (1987) places the emphasis on the new covenant of grace, stating:

The covenant of grace is everlasting; it is from everlasting in the counsels of it, and to everlasting in the consequences of it. And the external administration of it is transmitted, with the seal of it, to the seed of believers, and the internal administration of it by the Spirit to Christ's seed in every age. This is a covenant of exceeding great and precious promises (1987:40).

For John Wesley and the Methodist movement, the relevance and emphasis of God entering into a covenant with humankind is on God’s redeeming grace in Jesus Christ. In ‘A Treatise on Baptism’ (1830:188-202), Wesley emphasises that baptism is:

...the initiatory sacrament, which enters us into covenant with God. It was instituted by Christ, who alone has power to institute a proper sacrament, a sign, seal, pledge and means of grace, perpetually obligatory on all Christians. And it was instituted in the room of circumcision. For as that was a sign and seal of God’s covenant, so is this (1830:188).

There are two implications resulting from this emphasis on God’s covenant grace for the covenantal relationship. Firstly, covenant theology is not used by either Mr Wesley or the

Methodist movement to describe the relationship between the Conference and ministers. Their emphasis is on connexionality and the accountability of ministers to the Conference.

Secondly, whilst grace is the intention of the covenant, holiness and ministry are the expectation of all who enter into that covenant with God in Christ through baptism. “They who will have God to be to them a God, must consent to be to him a people” (Wesley n.d.). For Mr Wesley, God’s people are called to a life of scriptural holiness, ministry and service.

As a result of the influence of the English Puritan tradition, and of his mother, the annual Covenant Service, first celebrated in August 1755, provided the opportunity for those who had experienced God’s grace to commit themselves to be used by God in ministry wherever God chose by making “...a personal yet corporate covenant between themselves and God” (Jackson 1992:177). In the Covenant Service the members are reminded “Beloved in Christ, let us again claim for ourselves this covenant which God has made with his people, and take upon us the yoke of Christ. This means that we are content that he appoint [sic] us our place and work, and that he himself is our reward” (Methodist Church 1999:289). The response of the members to God’s invitation is, “I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I endure...” (1999:288).

The ethos and total commitment of those who have been called by God to holiness and service, as portrayed in the Covenant Service, has provided a useful model to apply to the commitment of ministers to the MCSA in the covenantal relationship.

With the influences of Scripture and tradition on the covenantal relationship having been considered, our attention will now turn to the influence of legal challenges to the employment status of ministers in the MCSA and the covenantal relationship.

2.2.3 The influence of legal challenges to the employment status of ministers

For near to a century legal challenges regarding the employment status of a minister of religion of various denominations have been heard by courts of law in numerous countries. The same question has arisen within the MCSA, exacerbated by the increasing number of legal challenges by probationer ministers in the past 20 years, a premise supported by two ministers during the interviewing process and reported on in chapter 3. In response to these challenges, the MCSA first named this relationship as a covenantal relationship in the Application Form of the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit (EMMU) of 2001.

(Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2001). The applicants were required to acknowledge that “I understand that my relationship with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a covenantal relationship, rather than contractual: *Laws and Discipline* (1997) para 4.3...” (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2001). It should be noted that the description of the relationship as a ‘covenantal relationship’ is not incorporated into paragraph 4.3 of *Laws and Discipline* of 1997, only that “...no legally enforceable contract shall exist at any time between the Church or any of its Circuits on one hand and a Minister on the other hand, in respect of the payment of stipends or any allowance” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1997:26).

The Conference of 2008, in dealing with the business of probationer ministers, affirmed “...the covenantal nature of the ministry as contrasted with the contractual nature of most other forms of employment, and that appropriate means of appeal are provided for in the structure of the church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2009:86). Both probationer and ordained ministers were increasingly challenging their status in appeals to the internal Arbitration processes of the MCSA as well as to the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), leading the Conference of 2014 to introduce a new paragraph into the *Book of Order* (2014a) stating that “A minister who is so called has a covenantal but not contractual relationship with the Church. The church provides ministers with the opportunity to practice their calling in or through this covenantal relationship” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). Whilst legal challenges influenced the adoption of the terminology ‘covenantal relationship’, the legality of the covenantal relationship will be examined in section 2.7 of this chapter.

The MCSA has brought together into the covenantal relationship the elements of Christ followers who, in response to God’s call on their life to the ministry, are accepted into Full Connexion with the Conference and ordained; are subject to the decisions of and accountable to the Conference which is responsible for their material and spiritual welfare; and are not regarded as being in a contractual relationship. The need for the clarification of the nature of the relationship was hastened by litigation of ministers against the MCSA. Turning to the covenants of God with God’s people, the MCSA found a type of covenant relationship, calling the relationship with ministers ‘covenantal’.

Whilst there are elements of Scripture and the Wesleyan tradition expressed in the covenantal relationship, the MCSA does not incorporate the essential element of mutual responsibility of

covenant theology without which the covenantal relationship is able to be used by the church to their advantage, especially in dealing with sensitive labour issues.

Scripture, tradition and legal challenges to the employment status of ministers have all impacted on the covenantal relationship between the MCSA and her ministers. That relationship, however, is part of the bigger picture of the ecclesiology of the MCSA and so I turn now to discuss the relationship between Methodist ecclesiology and polity on the covenantal relationship.

2.3 Methodist ecclesiology and polity

The *Book of Order* (2014a) regulates every aspect of the Methodist Church's life and ministry, including its doctrinal beliefs, regulatory procedures and institutional requirements. The annual *Yearbooks* record the decisions of the annual Conference, amendments to the *Book of Order* and reports tabled at Conference. The *Yearbooks* are both a primary and a secondary source of data, serving as an extension of the *Book of Order*.

Chapter 1 of the *Book of Order* (2014a:11-13) describes the ecclesiology of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) which is expanded in the *Yearbook* of 2002 under the Conference statement "A Theology of Ministry for the MCSA" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002: 8-16) as well as in other formal documentation. These documents define the ecclesiology and doctrine of ministry of the MCSA resulting in the covenantal relationship with ministers. The Methodist Church believes that God established the Christian Church as God's instrument of bringing to fruition the work begun in and through Jesus Christ. Within the universal Church of Jesus Christ, the Methodist Church "...holds a true place" and seeks to fulfil God's calling to "...spread Scriptural Holiness" through the proclamation of the evangelical faith in word and deed (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:11). How is God's call to missional ministry undertaken?

2.3.1 Doctrine of ministry

2.3.1.1 Priesthood of all believers

The MCSA holds to the doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers' (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:10) declaring that the total body of Christ is called to the ministry of love and service in the Church. Through baptism each person enters the priesthood of all

believers, "...into the congregation of Christ's Church... to be Christ's faithful *soldier* and *servant* unto *his* life's end" (Methodist Church 1936:95). Every follower of Jesus Christ is called to the ministry of service (Jn 12:26) and, together with other Christ followers, to be a community of priests (1Pet 2:9). "Ministry is, therefore, the task of the whole Church" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:10) who continue the mission of Christ in the world.

2.3.1.2 Ministry of the 'laos'

The *Yearbook* of 2002 emphasises that ministry is the task of all Christ-followers declaring, "Because all believers are called to servanthood and priesthood it follows that the ministry of the Church is carried out through the ministry of ordinary Christ-followers. They are the "laos" – the people of God. This is the ministry of the Body of Christ" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002: 10).

Wherever Christ-followers find themselves in the world, they are to be the salt and light of Christ through their deeds and words (Mt 5: 13-16). Together with other Christ-followers, the *laos* is called to "...exercise ministry in the Church, through its collective ministries and in fellowship and partnership with other believers" (2002: 11). All forms of ministry must be expressed both within the Church and in the world, not relying on the strength or capabilities of the believer but in dependence on the power and guidance of God's Spirit.

The MCSA believes Jesus Christ entrusts ministry and mission to every member of the body of Christ. In turn, God calls and gifts some people from within the *laos* to particular non-ordained forms of ministry. The Methodist Church recognises these callings by God and commissions such persons to ministries such as Local Preachers, Evangelists, Biblewomen and Children's Ministries. The MCSA requires an assurance that the Christ-followers have been called by God to ministry, their acceptance of the discipline, authority and doctrinal beliefs of the MCSA, as well as a commitment to the spiritual formation of themselves and of others. In addition, Local Preachers are required to "...preach nothing contrary to the doctrines of the Methodist Church" (Methodist Church 1999:333).

2.3.1.3 Ministry of the ordained

However God calls some believers through an inner conviction of the Holy Spirit, and whose calling is then tested and affirmed by the Church, to be "...set apart by the Church for particular forms of ministry of various kinds" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:2). The Methodist Church recognises two orders of ministry into which persons are ordained, the presbyteral¹⁶ and the diaconal. Those ordained to the presbyteral ministry are ordained and "...set apart for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and the pastoral oversight of the People of God" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:20). Deacons are ordained to the ministry of Word and Service. Whilst both ministers and Deacons enter into a covenantal relationship with the MCSA, the emphasis in this dissertation is on the covenantal relationship with presbyters. Presbyteral ministers are the 'shepherds of God's flock' (1Pet 5:2), pastoring and overseeing the flock as servants of Jesus Christ.

Wellings (2005:57-74), drawing from documents tracing the history of presbyteral ministry in the British Methodist tradition, presents the unique features of the ministry of the ordained stating:

Within the ministry of the people of God, the ordained focus, express and represent the ministry of the whole. Presbyteral ministry encompasses word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility, exercised in the spirit of the servant ministry of Christ. Although many aspects of this ministry are shared with lay people and deacons, in combination the features are exclusive to and definitive of the presbyterate (2005:74).

The ordained ministry, however, is not superior to or more significant than the ministry of the *laos*. God calls both laity and clergy to ministry that is distinctive, reliant on and supportive of each other. "The MCSA upholds the co-equal and mutually dependent role of lay and ordained ministers, yet accords a special responsibility to those who are called and set aside to the ordained ministries" (Forster 2007:2). Together, clergy and laity co-operate to fulfil the Mission Statement of the MCSA that "God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:2).

¹⁶ The terms 'presbyter' and 'minister' and 'elder' are used inter-changeably within the Methodist tradition.

2.3.2 Doctrine of ordination

How does the MCSA understand the ordination of presbyters?

2.3.2.1 Ordination of presbyters

“Ordination is the act by which the Church authorises Christians to act in its name and on its behalf in certain ways” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:13). In the Methodist tradition, “Ordination is by prayer and the laying on of hands and takes place within the context of Holy Communion” (Methodist Church 1999:297). The Presiding Bishop is authorised to ordain the ministers on behalf of the Conference and is assisted by other presbyters. As hands are laid on each minister, the Presiding Bishop prays, “Lord, send your Holy Spirit upon, for the office and work of a Minister in the Church of Christ” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014c:12¹⁷) These actions represent the entering of the minister into the order of the presbyterate with the authority to minister on behalf of the Church of Christ. The granting of authority to fulfil that ministry is symbolised in the giving of a Bible to each minister and being charged to “Take authority for the office and work of a minister in the Church of Christ” (2014c:12). Ordination thus confers authority to fulfil the work of a Christian minister in the Church of Christ.

2.3.2.2 Who is ordained as a minister?

The Conference will only ordain to the presbyterate those who have met the requirements as set down in the *Book of Order* (2014:36-37) and the *Yearbook* (2015:130-131). Ordinands must satisfy the Conference that they are called by God, academically qualified, practically competent, theologically sound and committed to the policies, authority, discipline and doctrines of the MCSA. EMMU monitors the progress of ministers from the time they candidate for the ministry to recommending them to Conference for ordination having successfully completed the requirements set down in the document ‘Exit Procedure from Probation to Ordination’ which is included in the ‘Handbook for Probationers’. (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2014b:5).

Having affirmed their commitment to the authority and discipline of the Church, ordinands are received into Full Connexion¹⁸ with the Conference. The Ordination Service of 2014

¹⁷ The document ‘Ordination Service, Durban, October 2014’ received from the MCSA has no page numbers. The page references in this dissertation are to the page as it appears on the screen of the electronic version.

¹⁸ The meaning and implications of Full Connexion are dealt with in section 2.2.2.2 in this chapter.

emphasises that Full Connexion has to do with fellowship and discipline within the Church. “Reception into Full Connexion is the act of welcoming an Ordained Minister into the fellowship and discipline of the Methodist Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014c:9).

How does Full Connexion differ from ordination? Ordination has to do with the authority to serve God through the office of a minister whilst Full Connexion has to do with the relationship established between the minister and the MCSA. Although reception into Full Connexion and ordination are two separate procedures, the *Book of Order* (2014a:37) conflates these procedures by stating:

Full Connexion refers to a Minister's relation to Conference and includes authorisation to perform the work of a Minister in the Circuits and to administer the Sacraments; a Minister in Full Connexion shares the fellowship of other Ministers and, subject to para 4.3, enjoys the care and protection of Conference especially in regard to the provision of opportunities of service in the Circuits. It confers both privilege and responsibility on the Minister (2014a:37).

If ordination has to do with the authority to serve God through the office of a minister whilst Full Connexion has to do with the relationship established between the minister, MCSA and fellow ministers, then I have a concern that this conflation has blurred the distinction between the two procedures. I believe that this conflation is a contributory factor to the misuse of the covenantal relationship by the Conference as it has removed the early Methodist emphasis on the fellowship, accountability and oversight of members of the presbyterate over one another in a Ministerial Session¹⁹ of Synod and Conference. This responsibility is presently vested in the general Sessions of Synod and Conference or by officials in the Methodist Connexional Office.

If the early Methodist emphasis of accountability as a result of being in Full Connexion was re-introduced into a Ministerial Session of Synod, presbyters will need to take responsibility for holding each other accountable for their beliefs and actions. This is the practice in the British and American Connexions with some ministers in the MCSA also urging that this practice be re-introduced into the Southern African Connexion.

¹⁹ Refer to sections 2.4.2.5 and 5.5.6 for a fuller discussion of the Ministerial Session of Synod in the South African Connexion and of other Connexions.

2.3.3 Who ordains?

Only when the requirements of EMMU are met by each of the ordinands and they are accepted into Full Connexion with the Conference, are the ordinands presented to the assembled community at the ordination service, a community who represent the Church of Christ. This community of the people of God, in addition to the Conference, must first agree to their ordination in response to the question of the Presiding Bishop, “Do you believe that they, by God's grace, are worthy to be ordained?” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014c:11). Following this agreement by the people of God, the Presiding Bishop will proceed to the act of ordination.

“Who ordains?” is a question to be answered. “Ordination is an act of the whole Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:13). The MCSA is clear that whilst the Presiding Bishop is authorised to conduct the ordination of ministers, it is neither the Presiding Bishop nor those laying on their hands who ordain. “It is the presence of the Church and the whole liturgy which ordains” (2002:12). Edwards (2012:1-18), explaining the understanding of the United Methodist Church regarding ordination, states “Ordination is chiefly understood as the act of the Holy Spirit. As a liturgical act, ordination is also understood as the public prayer of the church confirming the Spirit’s call to individuals and asking for them gifts and power for the ministry of deacon or elder (*presbyter* in some churches)” (2012:8).

The laying on of hands is the outward sign of entry into the order of the presbyterate by the Church of Christ. Ordination, together with being received into Full Connexion, establishes the covenantal relationship between a minister and the church, a relationship that is binding on both parties. Consequently, those ordained are in a covenantal relationship with the whole church, not only the Conference or the Presiding Bishop, the implications of which are not always integrated into the ecclesiology and practices of the MCSA.

2.3.4. Ordination is to the office and work of a minister in the Church of Christ

To what is a minister ordained? For what purpose does a minister enter the presbyterate? Ministers are ordained to the office and work of a minister in the Church of Christ. Those ordained hold the office of a minister within the order of the presbyterate and fulfil the work of a minister within the Church of Christ, subject to the authority and discipline of the MCSA. The office of a minister determines the work of a minister. “In the Methodist church

they are set apart for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and the pastoral oversight of the People of God” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:20).

2.3.4.1 The office of a presbyter

The Methodist Church has adopted the three-fold form of ministry reflected in the New Testament and Christian Church over the ages, namely that of bishops, presbyters (elders) and deacons. (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:12).

Within the order of the presbyterate, it is the office and work of a minister which differentiates the ministries of ordained ministers from those serving in other orders, such as the Diaconate and the order of Evangelism. This office also separates presbyters from the ministries of those who hold the office of a Local Preacher or Society Steward in a circuit. The office of a minister expands as the responsibilities, duties and accountability increase when appointed by the Conference as a Circuit Superintendent or to the office of a District Bishop.

2.3.4.2 The work of a presbyter

The work of a presbyter is directly related to their being set aside to the ministry of Word, Sacraments and pastoral responsibility under the authority and discipline of the MCSA. The liturgy of the *Ordination Service* of 2014 reminds ministers of their unique work as a presbyter:

As Ordained Ministers you are called to share in this ministry of the whole Church in a particular way:

- By preaching and teaching the Word of God as expressed in Holy Scripture;
- By rightly administering the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion;
- By leading God's people in worship and prayer; [Pastoral responsibility]
- By your counsel, direction and vision, giving order and purpose to the life of the congregation (2014c:10).

The ‘Duties of Ministers’ are stated in a similar manner in the *Book of Order* including the provision that “Ministers shall observe and implement the provisions of Laws and Discipline

and all other policies, decisions, practices and usages of the Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:42).

The work of a minister has to do with the mission of the Church of Christ through which “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:2). The MCSA emphasises five imperatives of Mission, namely “Spirituality; Evangelism & Church Growth; Justice & Service; Human & Economic Development & Empowerment; and Education & Christian Transformation” (2014b:2). These imperatives are to be the emphases in the ministry of a Methodist presbyter. A minister has co-ordinating, equipping and participatory roles in order to “...express, enable, and focus the ministry of the whole people of God” (Grassow 2010:1), whilst Forster (2007:1-5) reminds us that “All such ministry is service; service to God, service to the Church, and the world. It is the pattern of Christ’s ministry and so must be evident in the ministry of every believer, and every presbyter” (Forster 2007:4). Being in the covenantal relationship, ministers are accountable for their functioning as a presbyter to the MCSA whose task is to fulfil the goals and mission of the MCSA and not their personal mission or passion.

2.3.4.3 Ordination is into the Church of Christ

Ordination is not into the Methodist Church, or the MCSA, but into the Church of Christ. At their ordination, the pronouncement is, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I declare that you have been ordained as Presbyters of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Christ” and are charged to “Be shepherds to the flock of Christ” (Methodist Church 1999: 308). Presbyters in the MCSA are not ‘Methodist ministers’ but ministers of Jesus Christ serving within the structures of the MCSA and doing so with the authority of the Church of Christ.

Being a Connexional church, the MCSA ordains presbyters into the itinerant ministry where ministers are subject to the decisions and authority of Conference²⁰ as to where and when they will do the work of a minister. The work of “...finalising the stationing of ministers...” is that of the Connexional Executive whose recommendations are authorised by the Conference (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:61). Whilst ministers may have an

²⁰ Common usage is to refer to both the Connexional Executive and Conference as the body responsible for stationing of ministers.

input into where they serve, the final authority of where that will take place lies with the Conference.

By entering into the covenantal relationship, ministers are accepting that Conference will determine where they will fulfil the work of a minister within the Connexion of the MCSA and that they will do so under the direction and discipline of the Conference, even if such an appointment has negative implications for the welfare of the minister and his/her family.

2.3.5 The relationship of an ordained presbyter with the Church and with the *laos*

Ordination establishes a new relationship between a minister and the MCSA. The presbyter and the church are not equal partners in the relationship. The MCSA provides the minister with the opportunity to practice his/her calling under the authority and protection of the Conference. In return, the minister pledges to abide by the decisions and authority of the Conference, to submit to the discipline of the church and to be accountable to the Conference. Each minister voluntarily submits to the procedures, usages, doctrine and polity of the MCSA and commits to be obedient to the MCSA whilst ministering on its behalf. Should that person wish to withdraw their services, he/she may resign from their connexion with Conference and offer their services elsewhere.

Whilst recognising that pronouncements on the covenantal relationship from courts of law outside of South Africa are not binding on the MCSA, the finding of Lord Sumption (2013), in the judgment of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, is a succinct description of the relationship of a presbyter to the Conference. “Neither the admission of a minister to full connexion nor his or her ordination are themselves contracts. Thereafter, the minister's duties are not consensual. They depend on the unilateral decisions of the Conference” (UKSC, 29 2013:para. 20).

Ordination also establishes a new relationship of the minister with the people of God. As the shepherd of the flock, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, ministers have pastoral oversight of the *laos*. “[T]hey are given authority to care for the people of God, to teach and disciple them and to lead and equip them for mission and ministry” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:14).

However, the ministry of the presbyterate is not superior to that of the *laos*. The *laos* and the presbyterate minister equally, yet distinctly, in the Church of Christ. “The Church is not the Church when made up of clergy only. The Church is not the Church when made up of laity

only. The Clergy embody and serve the Church in its gathering, the Laity embody and serve the incarnate God and become the Church as the Body of Christ when it is dispersed among the nations” (Attwell 2007a:6).

2.3.6 The accountability of ordained presbyters

Who are ordained minister accountable to? Ministers are accountable to God through their baptism; to the Church of Jesus Christ through ordination; to the Conference of the MCSA through being accepted into Full Connexion; to the covenantal relationship through ordination and Full Connexion; to their ordained colleagues in the Order of Presbyters and to the Leaders’ Meeting as shepherd of the flock in the circuit to which they are appointed.

In summary - Margaret Crain reminds us that “Our concepts of ecclesiology shape our understandings of what it means to authorise, ordain and validate persons for ministry” (Crain 2007:10). The ecclesiology of the Methodist Church determines that ministry is the task of all baptised persons but that God calls certain persons to be ordained in the Church of Christ to the full time ministry. The MCSA will ordain and accept into Full Connexion those who wish to serve God under the authority and discipline of the church and in terms of its doctrinal beliefs and procedures adopted by the Conference. These ministers are regarded as being in a covenantal relationship with the MCSA, the nature of which will now be investigated.

2.4. The covenantal relationship in the MCSA

What does it mean that those who are ordained and received into Full Connexion are in a covenantal relationship with the MCSA? It is important to note that whilst the concept of the covenantal relationship between the Methodist Church and ministers has been spoken of and adopted by Conferences other than the MCSA, as for example the Methodist Conferences of Great Britain and the United States of America, the MCSA has only adopted and described the relationship as a covenantal relationship in the new millennium. Let me trace that progression of the formulations by the Church.

The 9th Edition of *Laws and Discipline*, published in 1997, first introduces the clause that “...whilst the Church recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers...no legally enforceable contract shall exist at any time ...in respect of the payment of stipends or any allowance” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1997:26). The Church insisted that no contract existed with specific reference to “...the payment of stipends or any

allowance.” This clause remained unchanged in the 10th Edition, published in 2000. The 11th Edition, published in 2007, however, expands on those aspects over which there is no contractual relationship by adding, “...in respect of the payment of stipends, allowances or any other material benefit, in cash or kind, the provision of a station, or any benefit of any kind which may have at any stage accrued to the minister” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2007:29). The 12th Edition, published in 2014 and renamed the *Book of Order*, introduces the terminology ‘covenantal relationship’ in a new paragraph stating that the presbyter “... has a covenantal relationship but not contractual relationship with the Church.”²¹ The church provides ministers with the opportunity to practice their calling in or through this covenantal relationship” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). The implications of each of these provisions for the covenantal relationship will be dealt with more fully in the upcoming sections.

The question to be asked is, “Why has this emphasis only been introduced into the MCSA in the past 20 years?” As discussed earlier in this chapter, the tipping point was the increased number of challenges by ministers leading to arbitration, the increased threat of litigation against the MCSA by ministers and judgments handed down by courts of law. What is the covenantal relationship? What is the understanding of the MCSA and the implications for both the church and ministers? These questions will now be investigated by turning to primary and secondary sources.

2.4.1 The relationship is not contractual but covenantal

The MCSA has no intention of entering into a contractual employer-employee relationship with ministers, either prior to or post ordination. This is borne out in paragraph 4.4 of the 12th edition of the *Book of Order* (2014a):

The Church recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers. Nevertheless, notwithstanding any provision contained in the Laws and Discipline or the decisions of Conference or of the Connexional Executive which seem to indicate the contrary, no legally enforceable contract shall exist at any time between the Church or any of its Circuits on one hand and a Minister on the other hand, in respect of the payment of stipends, allowances or any other material benefit, in cash or kind, the

²¹ Both the MCSA and other authors are not consistent in the use of upper and lower in their use of the word ‘church’.

provision of a station or any benefit of any kind which may have at any stage accrued to a minister (2014a:30).

No contractual agreement has been entered into between the MCSA and the ministers. Instead the Church describes the relationship as ‘covenantal’. “A minister who is so called has a covenantal relationship but not a contractual relationship with the Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). This relationship does not establish an employment contract between the parties but an arrangement which enables presbyters to perform their ministerial functions with the authority and protection of the MCSA. The commitment of each party in the covenantal relationship will now be examined in greater detail.

2.4.2 The covenantal commitment of the MCSA to presbyters

In terms of the covenantal relationship, the MCSA is committed to the presbyters in the following ways:

2.4.2.1 To provide opportunities for ministry

The MCSA offers those called by God, with a belief in Methodist doctrine and committed to the Methodist discipline, an opportunity to fulfil that calling under the authority of the Conference and subject to the decisions of Conference. In the wording introduced at the 2014 Conference, “The church provides ministers with the opportunity to practice their calling in or through this covenantal relationship” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). By means of the administrative processes of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, District Synod, Connexional Executive and Conference, the MCSA attempts to provide an appropriate appointment for each minister which is reviewed and confirmed annually by the Connexional Executive.

The MCSA is committed to train and equip ministers for an effective ministry. The Church will assist in the training and equipping of ministers in a circuit environment and at the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) to meet the specified criteria as laid down by the Education Mission and Ministry Unit. However, once probationer ministers have completed their studies, their appointment to a circuit is dependent on the Connexional Executive and the availability of stations. The implications of not being afforded an opportunity to minister are investigated further in section 2.6.2 of this chapter.

2.4.2.2 To care for and protect ministers

The covenantal relationship provides ministers with “...the care and protection of Conference” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:37) where they are stationed. Ministers are now authorised to conduct meetings, preach, teach, shepherd the flock and conduct the business of the MCSA, backed up by the authority, constitution and usages of the Church as set down in the *Book of Order*.

Ministers enjoy the protection of Conference as, for example, should a doctrinal or misconduct charge be laid against them, the MCSA’s constitution sets down the procedures to be followed in order that the findings become binding on the parties concerned.

In addition, the MCSA is committed to its pastoral obligation towards ministers stating, “The Church recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers” (2014a:30). What this commitment entails is not set out in a single corpus within the formal documentation of the MCSA. The *Book of Order* (2014a), however, makes provision for the material needs of ministers, including:

- Provision for a minimum monthly stipend, the sum to be published in the *Yearbook*. In addition circuits may agree to provide an additional stipend allowance as well other allowances, such as assistance with the costs of education.
- The ministerial family is provided with “...suitable free, furnished accommodation” (2014a:114). A “...reasonable furniture allowance shall be made when ministers provide their own furniture’ (2014a:114) and the circuit will bear the costs of insurance of the household contents” (2014a:108).
- A travelling allowance, as determined by Conference and published in the *Yearbook*, to ministers who supply and use their own vehicles (2014a:112).
- Assistance for medical costs through the TopMed Medical Plan (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2015:104) funded by contributions from the circuits and ministers calculated at “...6% of their Basic plus Additional Stipend with a maximum of R975 per month for 2015... The required contribution from Supernumeraries who receive a pension greater than R5 000 per month will be R150 per month” (2015:104-105). The contributions from ministers and circuits are paid into the Circuit Assessment Account of the general accounts of the Methodist Connexional Office (2015:347). The monthly amount contributed by ministers “goes into a church fund to cover medical expenses of

Supernumeraries, ministers beyond South Africa, etc” (Morgan 2015). The MCSA then “pays TopMed *en bloc* for all its members” (Morgan 2015).

The cost to the MCSA exceeds the contributions of the ministers and circuits resulting in the MCSA subsidising the medical costs for ministers from the Circuit Assessment Account. In addition, the MCSA funds that monthly portion for supernumerary ministers which would have been met by the circuits in order not to place a financial burden on retired ministers. All ministers, therefore, receive assistance from the MCSA with their medical costs.

- A monthly pension on retirement funded by contributions of both the circuit and the minister into the Supernumerary Fund (2014a:116).
- Conference also regulates the provision of annual leave, long leave every 6 years of service, sick leave, compassionate leave, examination leave, a weekend off once every quarter and a day off once a week (2014a:112-114). Provision is also made for maternity leave prior to and after the birth of a child (2014a:41).
- Other provisions include a Bursary Fund for tertiary education of the children of ministers (2014a:121), a funeral grant at the death of a minister (2014a:116) and a school uniform allowance for those ministers moving to a different circuit (2014a:116). The spouse and family of a deceased minister must be cared for pastorally and consideration must be given to the needs of the family regarding the “...occupation of the manse and education of their children” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2011:101).

2.4.2.3 To provide spiritual and personal formation

The MCSA is committed to the ongoing spiritual, mental and physical well-being of ministers. According to 4.82 in the *Book of Order* (2014a:42), “for accountability purposes, every Minister’s work shall be reviewed bi-annually through an interview process (Review of Ministry)” as well as participate in “Continuing Ministerial Education” in the form of “post-Ordination training”, provided for by the District Bishop (2014a:42). Ministers are encouraged to be able to converse in an African language (2014a: 42).

Ministers, as are all lay members of the MCSA, are also responsible for their own spiritual formation by their commitment to the Methodist Rule of Life, including “...that of ‘attending upon all the ordinances of God’. These include public worship of God, observance of the

Lord's Supper, maintenance of Christian community, private prayer, reading the Scriptures, and habits of self-discipline" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:26).

2.4.2.4 The administrative support of the Methodist Connexional Office

The Methodist Connexional Office (MCO) is the executive and administrative centre for the MCSA housing the Office of the Presiding Bishop together with all units and departments of the church, including the Human Resources Unit, the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit and the Finance Unit. On the dedication of the new offices of the Methodist Connexional Office in July 2014, Bishop Siwa, the Presiding Bishop, prayed that the new MCO would be "...a place of covenanting with one another and with God" (The New Dimension 2014:7).

The Human Resources Unit focuses on policy, practices and programmes relating to those in a covenantal relationship with the MCSA as well as giving advice on labour related matters for lay members of staff (Methodist Church of Southern Africa. 2014a:94).

The Finance Unit sets as its first objective the 'Care for Ministerial staff and their families' by providing advice and information to presbyters. Its strategy is to "Provide Ministerial staff with information about the facilities the Church offers them in their Ministry, such as facts about the itinerant ministry, stipends and allowances, pension benefits, income tax, health care, retirement planning and how to buy a vehicle, house or investments" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:103). In addition to their advisory function, this Unit performs the administration of all the fiduciary and financial affairs on behalf of each minister including stipend payments, pension and medical provision as well as the tax requirements of the South African Revenue Services.

2.4.2.5 The incorporation of ministers into the fellowship of colleagues and the Conference

The covenantal relationship joins together ministers into a fellowship with their colleagues. Collegiality, fellowship and oversight are concepts that are foundational to Methodist practices and incorporated into the covenantal relationship which unites a minister into a "...fellowship of other Ministers" who then "...enjoy(s) the care and protection of Conference" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:37). Fellowship with colleagues

includes the mutual oversight of each minister which begins with the District Bishop "...the principal pastor of the District" who is to "...provide for the pastoral care of the clergy and their families" (2014a:67). The Superintendent of each circuit is also appointed as the "...pastor to the Ministers in the Circuit and their families" and is "...to arrange the regular meeting of Ministers" (2014a:78).

This aspect of the covenantal relationship differs from the Connexions of the Methodist Church in Britain and the United Methodist Church of America where that relationship is more than a fellowship of ministers but a mutual accountability of ministers to each other. These Connexions hold separate ministerial sessions of Synod and Conference at which ministers are accountable to their colleagues. In the MCSA separate Ministerial and Representative Sessions of Synod and Conference were held until 1995 when they were combined into a single session of Synod and Conference to whom ministers are held accountable.

The covenantal commitments of the MCSA to providing opportunities for ministry; training, equipping caring and protecting ministers; providing for their material, spiritual and personal needs; supplying administrative support of the MCO, together with the incorporation of ministers into the fellowship of colleagues and the conference, all contribute towards the MCSA supporting their claim to be in a covenantal relationship with the ministers. The question of whether these provisions equate to an employment relationship and not a covenantal relationship will be dealt with in section 2.7 of this chapter.

2.5. With whom are ministers in a covenantal relationship?

The question of with whom ministers are in the covenantal relationship is one that is frequently asked by ministers - with the Conference, Presiding Bishop, District Bishop, circuit superintendent, colleagues? It is Conference who authorises presbyters to be ordained and receives them into Full Connexion. The covenantal relationship is, therefore, established between ministers and the Conference or between ministers and the Presiding Bishop who acts as the Conference between the meetings of Conference. However, the *Book of Order* (2014a) states that "...a Minister in Full Connexion shares the fellowship of other Ministers" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:37), indicating that ministers are also in a covenantal relationship with their colleagues. The implications of ministers being in the

covenantal relationship with both the Conference and the ministers in the Order of Presbyters will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter.

2.6. Implications for presbyters

The MCSA is committed to the ministers in terms of the covenantal relationship. However, there are implications and consequences for ministers which are to be investigated. These include:

2.6.1 There is no contract established between the MCSA and presbyters

Whilst ministers are in full-time work and ministry, the covenantal relationship states that they are neither in a contractual nor an employment relationship with the MCSA. A presbyter is not in a similar relationship with the MCSA as an employee is with his/her employer. Ministers in the MCSA have no contractual agreement, binding themselves to the authority and discipline of the MCSA in return for being entitled to minister under the care and protection of the Conference.

The MCSA ensures that ministers are aware of the non-contractual nature of their relationship from the time of their application to enter the ministry. This is clearly stated on the ‘Application Form’ for submission to the Education for Mission and Ministry Unit on which each minister declares that they understand “...that my relationship with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a covenantal rather than contractual relationship” (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2015). On this Application Form prospective candidates for the ministry also confirm that he/she will adhere to the undertakings as set down in the *Book of Order* (2014a), paragraph 4.17, stating:

- I will adhere to the Laws and Discipline and all other policies, decisions, practices and usages of the Church;
- I will accept and obey the discipline and decisions of Conference and the Connexional Executive;
- I will go to whichever Circuit or Station I am appointed;
- I will not malign this Church, its Ministers, doctrines or practices;

- Should I leave the Ministry of this Church for any reason, I will not conduct another Ministry in the Circuit or area to which I was appointed.
- Should I leave this Church, I will not encourage any member or adherent of the Church to follow me;
- Should I leave this Church I will accept the decision of the Connexional Executive or of the Presiding Bishop governing the termination of my service and my occupancy of Church property (2014a:32).

Ministers declare that they are aware of the covenantal nature of their relationship with the MCSA by signing the ‘Application Form’ at the time of their candidature and then answering the undertakings of paragraph 4.17 of the *Book of Order* set out above on three occasions – at the Synod when applying for acceptance into the ministry (2014a:32), at the Synod which recommends they be ordained (2014a:36) and then at the Conference prior to their ordination.

From 2001 the nature of the relationship is clearly defined as a covenantal relationship. Probationer ministers are required to acknowledge “Their understanding and acceptance of the covenantal nature of the ministry as contrasted with the contractual nature of most other forms of employment and that the appropriate means of appeal are provided for in the structure of the church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2009:86). To ensure that this covenantal relationship is applicable to all ministers, and not only probationer ministers, the Conference of 2013 resolved that “Conference affirms the principle of a Covenantal (not contractual) relationship between a Minister and the Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:94).

Ministers serving in the MCSA have covenanted to accept the discipline and decisions of Conference in all matters relating to their ‘employment’, including that all appeals should be handled in terms of the internal processes provided for in the *Book of Order*. In addition, there are no provisions for ministers to hold the MCSA accountable for any actions taken against them or to have a decision reviewed by an independent body outside of the church, and least of all by a court of law.

In contrast, however, the MCSA turns to courts of law to take action against ministers when they believe that such action is necessary. In addition, the MCSA challenges the legitimacy of courts of law such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) to hear matters regarding the employment status of ministers, as for example in the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) hearing in 2011 between

*Wentzel v The Methodist Church of South Africa*²² (2011 GAJB 16127-10). The MCSA argued that the CCMA is not competent to hear the appeal by Rev Wentzel as he was not an employee of the MCSA. Whilst the Commissioner found that ministers of the MCSA should be regarded as employees, in terms of the covenantal requirements that all disputes are to be dealt with in terms of the provisions in the *Book of Order*, the Commissioner ruled that “The CCMA has no jurisdiction over the matter” (2011:Paragraph 4.5). The effect of this ruling is that all the power is perceived to be in the hands of the MCSA confirming the statement by Attwell (2007:1-5) that the covenantal relationship “...seems to be a fiction, employed only when it is convenient in secular courts of Law” (Attwell 2007b:5).

The implications for ministers not being in a contractual relationship will be discerned in the interviews which are to follow and which will be analysed in chapter 3 and applied in chapter 5.

2.6.2 Presbyters are not guaranteed an appointment each year

Whilst the MCSA is committed to “...the provision of opportunities of service in the Circuits” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:37), the MCSA is under no obligation to provide an appointment for a minister, either in a Circuit or a Connexional post. The MCSA requires that ministers are appointed to “a Circuit or a Connexional office” (2014a:40) and provides that a circuit may invite a minister to serve for a period of up to five years (2014a:76). However, Conference reserves the right to appoint or not to re-appoint a minister and may choose not to appoint a minister to a station at all. Conference may act outside of the agreed invitation time frame between circuits and ministers. Being in a covenantal relationship does not ensure an appointment for ministers as all appointments are at the discretion of the Conference, sometimes leaving ministers and their families in a vulnerable position.

The decision of the Connexional Executive is final and a minister “...does not have the right to be heard by the Connexional Executive” (2014a:40). During the time that a minister is without an appointment, which may be for up to two years, they are not entitled to a stipend, accommodation or any other benefits and may not take action against the Church. However, an application may be made to the Presiding Bishop that “...an ex gratia [sic] allowance be

²² The reference in the title of the ruling of the CCMA is incorrectly referred to as the Methodist Church of South Africa and does refer to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

paid to the Minister for a period of 3 (three) months from 1 January from the year immediately following [not being stationed]” (2014a:115).

2.6.3 Presbyters may be deemed to have resigned by the Conference

Ministers are able to resign from their connexion with the Conference should they decide not to serve under the authority and discipline of the MCSA. However, presbyters can be regarded as deemed to have resigned by the Conference and shall no longer be regarded as a minister in Full Connexion with the MCSA, even if they did not submit a formal letter of resignation. In terms of paragraph 4.71 in the *Book of Order* (2014a), “Should the Connexional Executive decide to leave a Minister without appointment to any Circuit or Connexional office for a 2 (two) year period, it may ask such Minister to resign from the Ministry of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa. If the resignation is not made, the Minister shall be deemed to have resigned on expiry of such a period” (2014a:40). The Conference will then no longer recognise that they and the minister are in a covenantal relationship and that the minister “...ceases to be a Minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and may not perform any of the functions of a Minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa” (2014a:43).

The present prescriptions surrounding ‘deemed to have resigned’ in the *Book of Order* (2014) differ from earlier editions. The 8th edition of *Laws and Discipline* (1992) included criteria for which a minister could be left without appointment and then be deemed to have resigned if they did not take that step stating, “A Minister who is left by Conference without appointment to any Circuit or Connexional office on grounds of unsuitability, lack of efficiency or lack of general acceptance among Circuits, as to which Conference in its Ministerial Session shall decide – and its decision is final and conclusive – may be asked to resign from the Ministry of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, failing which the Minister is deemed to have resigned on the expiry of twelve months from the last day of the relative Session of Conference” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1992:43). These provisions are not included in all future editions of *Laws and Discipline* and the *Book of Order*. The implication of the deletion of the defining criteria for which a minister could be left without an appointment means that there are no provisions in the MCSA for dealing with unsuitability, lack of efficiency or lack of general acceptance among circuits. Ministers have

no recourse to challenge what they believe could be an unfair dismissal or an unreasonable reason for them not being stationed.

There are other circumstances whereby a minister can be regarded as deemed to have resigned by the Conference. Ministers who "... fail to take up their appointment or who have absconded from their appointment shall be deemed to have resigned under charges that affect their moral character" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:43). The MCSA makes provision that "Any Minister on Leave of Absence who fails to answer the Discipline Questions as required is guilty of not having observed our discipline and may be deemed to have resigned from the Ministry" (2014a:46). This also applies to a minister who "...takes up a party-political post or any other appointment that Conference or the Connexional Executive considers as compromising the independence of the Church in its witness, shall resign from the ministry failing which they shall be deemed to have resigned" (2014a:43).

Are presbyters bound by the decision of Conference regarding them no longer being recognised by the MCSA as a minister? Yes they are in terms of their covenantal commitment made with the MCSA on frequent occasions stating that "Should I leave this Church I will accept the decision of the Connexional Executive or of the Presiding Bishop governing the termination of my service and my occupancy of Church property" (2014a:32). What provision does the MCSA make for a presbyter to appeal against that decision? For ministers "...the appropriate means of appeal are provided for in the structure of the church" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2009:86). Ministers, therefore, have no statutory recourse other than following the procedures as set down in the *Book of Order* (2014a), remembering that the final authority is vested in the Conference.

2.6.4 Presbyters are not guaranteed to receive material benefits due to them

Whilst the MCSA "...recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30), a minister has no claim against the MCSA if they do not receive their stipend, travelling allowance, suitable accommodation or any other benefit which they believe is due to them whilst performing their ministry. The *Book of Order* (2014a) makes provision for the church to intervene administratively and pastorally to relieve the situation but the MCSA is absolved of being accountable for those outstanding benefits.

How prevalent is it that presbyters do not receive their stipends or allowances? The *Yearbook* of 2014 indicates that a third of all ministers could be affected by this provision reporting that "...119 of 340 Circuits are in arrear" with their monthly assessments to the MCO, totalling over a million Rand (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:101). Many of these 119 ministers will, therefore, not receive their monthly stipend or other benefits.

Attwell (2007b:1-5), in the presentation to the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church (DEWCOM), states:

There are no statutory provisions for the housing, welfare, nurture or healing of Ordained Ministers. To be sure there are mechanisms, some regulations and procedures in place to provide for many needs of ministers, but they are not enshrined in the MCSA's definition of itself in its Laws and Discipline...Indeed the Laws and Discipline explicitly excludes the right of Ordained Ministers to expect even a stipend as his or her right. This appears to me to be an explicit abrogation on the part of the Church of a very basic element of the nature of the relationship between the dominant and the submissive parties in a Covenantal relationship (2007b:4).

When we consult the constitutions of other connexions, the difference between the MCSA and those connexions becomes apparent. Whilst the Methodist Church in Britain and America also describe their relationship with the minister as "...being in a covenant" (Methodist Church 2013:530) and "...in covenant" (United Methodist Church 2012:218), their understanding of the covenant relationship differs from that of the MCSA. Whereas the Southern African Conference excludes certain responsibilities and accountability towards ministers, the British and American Conferences hold themselves accountable for the material provisions which ministers require to fulfil their ministry. This distinction is borne out in paragraph 700(2) of the British *Standing Orders* (2013) stating, "By receiving persons into Full Connexion as Methodist presbyters the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry" (Methodist Church 2013:530).

Ministers cite that not receiving their stipends or allowances places a financial burden on them as well as their families causing financial embarrassment, marriage difficulties and affects their creditworthiness. The experiences of ministers in this regard are reported in chapter 3.

2.6.5 There are financial implications for presbyters

All matters relating to the financial administration of presbyters is undertaken by the Finance Unit of the Methodist Connexional Office who administers the funds and disbursements in accordance with the laws of all countries within the Connexion. There are, however, financial implications for ministers being in a covenantal relationship, some of which will now be investigated.

Ministers are bound by the policies of the MCSA in their financial dealings with circuits, being limited in negotiating a financial package with the circuit. The *Yearbook* (2015:102-104) sets down the Conference agreed percentage increase of the minimum stipend allowance, the proposed total increase in stipends received by ministers, the travelling allowance for the ensuing year as well as the contribution ministers are to make towards the medical expenses of Ministers, Supernumeraries, Deacons, Evangelists and Bible Women. Some ministers find these stipulations a constraint on their family's financial sustainability. One consequence is that the ministerial couple becomes separated from each other for financial reasons, especially when the partner is in a professional post and they are not able to find suitable employment in close proximity to each other. Such a situation is not healthy for marriage and family relationships.

Whilst provision is made for assistance with medical costs, because the TopMed Medical Plan is a medical plan and not a medical aid scheme, the monthly contributions by ministers are not tax deductible and the portion contributed by the circuits is regarded as income to the minister and is, therefore, taxable.

The MCSA makes provision for ministers to receive a monthly pension on retirement through the Supernumerary Fund, a registered Fund with the Financial Services Board. (2014a:116). The reality of ministers not receiving their stipends or only receiving a minimum stipend is that the pension of those ministers is adversely affected. That supernumeraries are only required to contribute towards the costs of medical benefits if they receive a monthly pension of above R5 000, indicates that there are supernumeraries who do not receive that amount per month.

As ministers are not employees in a contractual relationship, no contributions are made to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, which means that ministers will not receive any assistance in the event of their resignation from the MCSA or being regarded as deemed to have resigned by the Conference.

The MCSA assists ministers with the cost of their circuit and seminary training. However, when they signed the Application Form to candidate for the ministry, ministers agreed to “...bear a percentage of the annual cost of my training. Full repayment must be made within four years of Ordination...This amount is currently 30% of the cost per probationer in the respective phases of training” (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit, 2014a). The amount which a student is liable for the 2015 seminary year is R18 120 (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2015:109). In addition, a minister who does not serve for a 5 year period after ordination is liable for the total cost of their training with a 20 percent reduction for each year completed after ordination and any amount already repaid to the Church (2015:109).

Whilst the MCSA is committed to the welfare of their ministers and seeks to care for the ministers pastorally, the provisions for benefits recorded in the *Book of Order* (2014a) and the *Yearbooks* are not binding on the MCSA should ministers not receive those provisions. The lack of accountability by the MCSA in this regard is a cause of discomfort and concern for some ministers.

2.7. The legality of the covenantal relationship

The following questions are of concern in this research undertaking. Is the covenantal relationship in keeping with the South African Labour Relations Act, Act 66 of 1995? And what of those member countries who are part of the MCSA, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia?

2.7.1 Church and clergy relationship in South African law

The employment status of ministers is raised in the *Yearbook* of 2003, under the heading ‘Ministers Employment Status’ stating:

The Connexional Executive requests the Secretary of Conference to communicate the information and its implications to ministers in terms of the Labour Court Judgment of Case C619 – 2001, relating to ministers employment status within the MCSA and to notify all serving ministers of the implications of this ruling as it relates to paragraph 4.3 of the Laws and Discipline as well as notifying all Candidates of the same (2003:170).

The reference is to the judgment in 2001 (C619) of the Labour Court in the case of the *Church of the Province of Southern Africa Diocese of Cape Town v Commission for*

Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration and Others which ruled that a contract was not in place between a licensed priest and the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.

The Court (2001) found that "...a contract of employment is necessary for purposes of establishing an employment relationship and that there was no legally enforceable contract of employment between the Applicant [Church of the Province of Southern Africa] and the Third Respondent [L Z Mathebula], the parties are not an employer and employee as defined by the LRA and consequently the First Respondent [CCMA] has no jurisdiction to entertain the alleged dispute referred to it by the Third Respondent [L Z Mathebula] (Church of the Province of Southern Africa Diocese of Cape Town 2001:Paragraph 38).

Two important principles of Law were highlighted in the judgment. Firstly, that "...in a church and clergy relationship, the crucial question is whether, at the time the parties concluded the offer and acceptance, they intended to create a legally binding contractual relationship, i.e. the mere fact of an offer and acceptance did not equate to a binding contractual relationship: the offer and acceptance had to be accompanied by the intention to create the contract" (2001:Paragraph 24). Secondly, that the church and clergy relationship "...was governed by ecclesiastical law" (2001:Paragraph 34). The implications of these principles will be dealt with in the coming sections.

2.7.2 Church and clergy relationship in the MCSA

How do the two principles of law established in the judgment of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa impact on the legal status of the Church and clergy in the MCSA? The MCSA is clear on both these counts. Firstly, the MCSA has no intention of entering into an employer-employee relationship. Paragraph 4.4 of the *Book of Order* expressly states that "...no legally enforceable contract shall exist at any time between the Church or any of its Circuits on one hand and a Minister on the other hand..." (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30). This principle of there not being a contract was confirmed in correspondence with the Director of the Human Resources Unit of the MCSA, the Rev Dr Mehana, who stated, "This provision clearly states that you as a Minister you have no contractual relationship with the Church" (Mehana 2014).

Secondly, the MCSA believes that by answering the questions set down in paragraph 4.17 of the *Book of Order*, ministers are committing themselves to perform their ministry in accordance with the doctrines, discipline, policies, practices and usages of the MCSA. The

MCSA believes that the covenantal relationship is binding on ministers in terms of the procedures laid down in the *Book of Order*, being confirmed in correspondence with Dr Mehana (2014) who stated, “Also, please note paragraph 4.17, especially the undertakings any Minister makes to the Church, such undertakings establishes a relationship that is informed by this covenant an individual Minister makes with the Church, hence it is said that (from the legalistic point of view), in the absence of a contractual relationship, this undertaking establishes a Covenantal relationship between the church and an individual Minister” (Mehana 2014).

2.7.3 Support for the legality of the covenantal relationship

These two principles of law have been upheld in various courts within South Africa in cases specifically relating to the MCSA as well as other denominations.

2.7.3.1 In South African courts of law with specific reference to the MCSA

The principle that there must be an intention to enter into a contractual relationship has come before various courts in South Africa. In addition to the Labour Court ruling of 2001, other judgments²³ handed down in applications by ministers regarding their employment status, have upheld that ministers are regarded as employees only when the parties have the intention of entering into a contractual employer/employee agreement.

The principle of the church/clergy relationship being governed by the relevant ecclesiastical law has been upheld in three judgments in the past five years with particular reference to the MCSA. The most recent is the Award by Judge Combrinck in the Arbitration hearing between the *Rev Demetris Palos and others v The Conference of the MCSA and others* (2015) in which the arbitrator, Judge Combrinck found that:

Conference, in terms of clauses 5.1 and 5.2 of the Laws and Discipline “...is the Church’s governing authority and supreme legislative body. ...Conference has the power to alter its Constitutions to make Rules and regulations for the good governance of the Church and for the due and proper exercise of its jurisdiction, and to do all such acts,

²³ *Schreuder v Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Wilgespruit and Others* (J 273/97) [1999] ZALC 31 (5 March 1999); *Salvation Army (South African Territory) v Minister of Labour* (2005) 26 ILJ 126 (LC) and *Strange v Queenstown Baptist Church* (2003) EC244-01.

matters and things as are expedient and necessary [for] the maintenance, advancement and benefit of the church and its object[s] (2015:Paragraph 29).

The second judgment is in the case of *Ecclesia De Lange v The Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa* (726/13) [2014] ZASCA 151 before the South African Supreme Court of Appeal. The submission of the Presiding Bishop of the MCSA was that Conference is the final authority of the MCSA and that the submission before the court should be evaluated in terms of the internal rules, policies and doctrines of the MCSA. The Presiding Bishop submitted that:

The issues in dispute ... go to sensitive matters of Church doctrine and governance. I am advised that these are issues that the Church should be left to determine domestically, as far as is possible, without interference from the Court. The Court should only become involved in the dispute where it is strictly necessary to do so. Even then, I am advised and submit that it will refrain from determining doctrinal issues, in order to avoid religious entanglement (2014:Paragraph 30).

The verdict of the court was that matters relating to the doctrine and discipline of ministers of the MCSA are to be determined in terms of the constitution of the MCSA and not by courts of law ruling, “As the main dispute in the instant matter concerns the internal rules adopted by the Church, such a dispute, as far as is possible, should be left to the Church to be determined domestically and without interference from a court” (2014:Paragraph 39). The judgment continued stating, “...individuals who voluntarily commit themselves to a religious association’s rules and decision-making bodies should be prepared to accept the outcome of fair hearings conducted by those bodies” (2014:Paragraph 40).

The third judgment is the ruling of the CCMA in the Arbitration between *C Wentzel and The Methodist Church of South Africa* (GAJB 16127-10 [2011]) in which the MCSA argued that “The CCMA has no jurisdiction on grounds that the Applicant was not an employee as the Applicant was a minister and enjoys a covenantal relationship with the Respondent and not an employment relationship” (2011:Paragraph 4.1). The Commissioner ruled that “I find the Applicant to be an employee of the Respondent. However, the parties are bound by paragraph 3.18 read with paragraph 5.11 which stipulates that: *The mediation and arbitration process and forums prescribed for by the Church for conflict dispute resolution (Appendix 14) must*

be used by all Ministers and members of the church. In view of this clause, the CCMA has no jurisdiction over this matter²⁴” (2011:Paragraphs 4.3 to 4.5).

These rulings uphold the principle that the doctrinal and ecclesiastical stipulations of the church are to be upheld in matters relating to the relationship between ministers and their denomination. As a consequence of these verdicts, the MCSA is in a powerful position when enforcing the discipline, polity and procedures, and ministers need to abide by those stipulations.

But what of those member countries who are part of the MCSA Connexion - Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia? As the covenantal relationship has not been disputed in a court of law in those countries, the MCSA holds that those ministers who serve outside of the borders of South Africa are in a covenantal relationship with the MCSA. This understanding is supported by the response of the General Secretary stating, “The relationship, as we understand it, is an issue between the church and the individual” (Morgan 2015).

In contrast to ministers who are not in a contractual relationship, all lay staff employees of the MCSA, including non-ordained persons involved in ministry such as Youth Workers and Pastoral Assistants, are “...subject to the relevant Labour Laws of each member country of the Connexion with regard to their employment” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:94). In South Africa this would mean the society or circuit must enter into a labour contract with these persons.

2.7.3.2 In South African courts of law with specific reference to other denominations

In examining the essence of the employment status of ministers of religion in South Africa, Olivier (2008:1-15) reminds us that:

From the judgments on this matter, it can be inferred that unless the canonical documents (including the church constitution) clearly indicate an employment relationship, the courts will not readily assume employment status. While there may be a mutual commitment to the relationship between the minister or priest and the church, this is not a bilateral and enforceable civil contract, but rather an ecclesiastical or spiritual agreement regulated by the constitutional and canonical documents and not by secular

²⁴ The paragraphs referred to are sections of the Laws and Discipline (11th edition).

law. Such a minister, therefore, is a holder of an ecclesiastical office whose rights are not defined by contract but by ecclesiastical law. Therefore, being bound by the terms and provisions of church constitutions and canonical documents does not generally flow from a contractual arrangement to this effect, but from the fact that the minister voluntarily accepts and submits him/herself to the specific ecclesiastical legal framework applicable to the functioning of office-bearers in the particular church (2008:4).

Both the principles of an intention to enter into a contractual relationship and the understanding that the church and clergy relationship is governed by ecclesiastical law, as indicated by Olivier (2008), were upheld by the Labour Appeal Court of South Africa, Durban, in the judgment handed down on 28 July 2015 in the case of the *Universal Church of the Kingdom of God v Myeni, Mxolisi Justice* (ZALAC DA 3/14 [2015]). The court determined that:

It is settled law that the intention of the parties in any agreement - express or tacit - is determined from the language used by the parties in the agreement or from their conduct in relation thereto. Further, that not every agreement constitutes a contract. For a valid contract to exist, each party needs to have a serious and deliberate intention to contract or to be legally bound by the agreement, the *animus contrahendi*. The parties must also be *ad idem* (or have the meeting of the minds) as to the terms of the agreement. Obviously, absent the *animus contrahendi* between the parties or from either of them, no contractual obligations can be said to exist and be capable of legal enforcement (2015:Paragraph 44).

The court found that Mr Myeni, who offered his services as a volunteer to serve God under the direction of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and who signed a 'Declaration of Voluntary Service' with the church, was not an employee of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and that "...the mutually agreed relationship between Mr Myeni and the Church was one in which Mr Myeni rendered voluntary devotional service to the Church, under circumstances where both he and the Church never intended that such relationship would constitute an employment relationship between them, producing legally enforceable rights and obligations under the LRA" (2015:Paragraph 54).

Judge Ndlovu remarked that, "I think it is time that the resolution of disputes of this nature, with religious spiritual connotations or arising from internal church doctrinal governance, be left to the leadership of the church concerned, unless there is a real compelling reason for a court to get involved. In my view, the constitutional rights to the freedom of religion and of

association would be better served and enhanced if that were to happen” (2015:Paragraph 53). Significantly, in support of the premise that the church and clergy relationship is governed by ecclesiastical law, the judge quotes a similar finding from paragraph 39 of the Supreme Court of Appeal case between *Ecclesia De Lange and The Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church of SA* (726/13) [2014] ZASCA 151, “As the main dispute in the instant matter concerns the internal rules adopted by the Church, such dispute as far as is possible, should be left to the Church to be determined domestically and without interference from a court” (2015:Paragraph 53).

Whilst not binding in South Africa or on the MCSA, for reference purposes, it is noted that both of the principles of an intention to enter into a contractual relationship and the understanding that the church and clergy relationship is governed by ecclesiastical law are upheld in the majority judgment handed down on 15 May 2013 by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in the case of *The President of the Methodist Conference v Preston*. The court determined that there is no contractual relationship between ministers and the Methodist Church in Britain. Further, Lord Hope concluded that the employment status of Methodist ministers “...is to be found in the constitutional provisions of the Church and not in any arrangement of the kind that could be said to amount to a contract” (UKSC, 29 2013:Paragraph 34). The court accepted that ministers of the Methodist Church in Britain are in a covenant relationship and are not in an employer/employee relationship.

In summary – constitutionally the MCSA believes that a covenantal relationship is neither a contractual relationship nor contrary to the South African Labour Relations Act, Act 66 of 1995, an understanding that is supported by the findings of courts of law in South Africa as well as the understanding of the Methodist Church in Britain. However, whilst the covenantal relationship in the MCSA may be legal, is it just? (Respondent 6). The flock belonging to this shepherd are feeling vulnerable and oppressed. I believe that the words of Saint Paul in Romans 14:19 are relevant to this study, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”

2.8. Critical voices of the covenantal relationship

Are there voices evaluating the covenantal/covenant relationship in the Methodist tradition and theology? Yes there are but, even with the assistance of the Unisa Library Services, the paucity of published material evaluating the covenantal/covenant relationship in the Methodist Church is to be noted.

In 1990 a *Quarterly Review* Roundtable Discussion was held discussing the “Ministerial Covenant in the United Methodist Church Today” (QR 10/1 (1990) 3-35). However, whilst there are marked differences in the understanding and implementation of the covenant/covenantal relationship between this Conference and that of the MCSA, one of the matters common to both Connexions is that “...there is no real biblical precedent for a special relationship among members of the clergy” (Hels 1990:8).

In the paper presented to the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the MCSA in 2007 on the covenant relationship in the MCSA, the Rev TB Attwell emphasises the life giving, restorative and redemptive purposes of God entering into covenant with people, as referred to in section 1.5.1. Using the model of covenants entered into between dominant and submissive parties, as expressed in Scripture, Attwell (2007b:1-5) is critical of the MCSA for not fulfilling its responsibilities and commitments as the dominant party in the covenant relationship stating:

The purpose of the dominant party in the Covenant (God) is to give life, to restore, reconcile and make new, enabling the submissive party to “have life in all its fullness.” By effective analogy, the purpose of the MCSA is (should be) to give its ministers life, to restore them, to reconcile them, to make them new and enable them to “have life in all its fullness.” ...The provisions of the Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in its widely available edition (10th edition) do not contain any clear provisions for the recreation, restoration or reconciliation of Ordained Ministers. Indeed the Laws and Discipline explicitly excludes the right of Ordained Ministers to expect even a stipend as his or her right. This appears to me to be an explicit abrogation on the part of the Church of a very basic element of the nature of the relationship between the dominant and the submissive parties in a Covenantal relationship (2007b:4).

Attwell (2007b:1-5) argues that “...the relationship between the MCSA and Ordained Ministers is “Covenantal” by analogy only. This is because the MCSA is not God. In this sense, it can at best be said that the relationship between the MCSA and its Ordained

Ministers is “like” the Covenant between God and all humanity, God and Israel and God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the New Humanity” (2007b:3). His argument in 2014 is that, “What is implied is that the relationship is *analogous* to a covenant, but is not necessarily a covenant in the scriptural sense of the word” (Attwell 2014).

However, even if the covenantal relationship is not explicitly modelled on the Biblical covenants and may well be a type of covenant, as I have argued in the introduction to this chapter, or an analogy as argued by Attwell (2007b and 2014), the MCSA must ensure that the core elements of covenant responsibilities and covenant relationships are incorporated into the covenantal relationship of the MCSA. Attwell supports this requirement stating that “...the MCSA must carefully review its formal legislation with regard to the creation, recreation, sustenance, restoration and reconciliation of its ministers” (Attwell 2007b:5). In 2014 he expands on this obligation stating:

Clearly, to my mind, whether the relationship remains analogous to a covenant, i.e. ‘covenantal’, or becomes an explicit ‘covenant’ relationship, the implications of the relationship for both parties (MCSA and ministers) must be incorporated into the written terms of reception into Full Connexion, clearly agreed to by all parties before Ordination and reception into Full Connexion and expressed in whatever liturgies and acts of reception into Full Connexion may be observed (Attwell 2014:1).

2.9. Other expressions of being in a covenant relationship in the MCSA

Is the covenantal relationship with ministers the only expression of being in a covenant relationship within the MCSA? No, it is not. I now turn to two others that are of significance for the Methodist Church – that of the liturgy of the annual Covenant Service and of accountability groups.

2.9.1 The annual Covenant Service

The concept of being in a covenant relationship is expressed in the liturgy of the annual Covenant Service, introduced into the Methodist movement by John Wesley in 1755, and which continues to the present.

The liturgy reminds us that the covenant which God made with the people of Israel was renewed in Jesus Christ through whose life, death and resurrection God’s grace and life-

giving love and acceptance are made freely available for everyone. It is in response to God's gracious love that the people commit themselves to serve God declaring "...by the help of the Holy Spirit, we accept God's purpose for us, and the call to love and serve God in all our life and work" (Methodist Church 1999:287), culminating in the words so familiar to Methodist people, "I am no longer my own but yours..." (1999:288).

The covenant commitment is a response to God's love to obedient service as God's people no matter where that leads to or how difficult the challenge. "In obedience we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you. We are no longer our own but yours" (1999:288). The people of God then commit themselves to their covenant God in the words of the covenant prayer stating:

I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I endure...Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven (1999:288)

It is important to note that whilst the service is called 'The Covenant Service' and that God's reaching out in grace and love forms part of the liturgy of the 1999 version, the 1936 version of the service emphasises the bi-lateral commitments of God's loving commitment to us in Jesus Christ which leads to a response of service and commitment by God's people "...to live no more unto ourselves, but to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us and has called us to serve Him that the purposes of His coming might be fulfilled." As a consequence of the love of God, the thankful response of the people is "I am no longer mine but yours" (Methodist Church 1936:123, 132).

The insight provided by Attwell in December 2014 is that "I note with interest that the declaration of the prior love of God in Jesus Christ, on the basis of which the covenant prayer is said, becomes progressively shorter and more perfunctory in successive Covenant Service liturgies. In other words, obedience is less and less a glad response to the love of God in Christ and increasingly mere self abnegation [sic]" (Attwell 2014:2).

The influence of the Covenant Service on the covenantal relationship is evident in that the MCSA uses theological language to describe the relationship with ministers; the response of

the ministers is obedience to what is expected of them by the Church; obedience is expressed in service and ministry as and where the MCSA directs; there is an obligation to holiness and accountability to the MCSA; a commitment to fulfil the covenantal promise no matter where or what the consequences may be; that many ministers referred to the Covenant Service as the basis for the covenantal relationship during the interviews and, lastly, requiring ministers to ask Conference to accept their commitment to the covenantal relationship in order that they may be accepted into Full Connexion and be ordained. The words of the Covenant Service, “I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I endure” (Methodist Church 1999:288) epitomise how many understand and experience the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

The implications of the influence of the Covenant Service on the covenantal relationship and the change in emphasis from responding to the love of God to a response of obedience will be examined more fully in chapter 5 together with the challenge of CB Firth who, in 1961, critiqued the theology of the Covenant Service in the journal, *Theology* (1961:245-246), as follows:

Personally I find the service difficult to accept for the following reasons:

1. It tends to confuse the meaning of the word “covenant”. Admittedly, support can be found in the Bible for the idea of engaging oneself to be the Lord’s; but there can be no doubt that the predominant meaning is not this. The predominant meaning is the covenant made by God, and the other is a secondary meaning.
2. It tends to make the climax of the service, i.e. the making of the so-called covenant, an act of the human individual by himself. He makes it and God is asked to ratify it (1961:245).

2.9.2 Covenant accountability to others in a group

A different application of being in a covenant relationship is when people make a commitment to a specific group and then hold themselves accountable to each other, as in the Methodist Class Meetings which John Wesley introduced in the early 1740s. This practice has been adopted by the staff and seminarians of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) who are committed to Mr Wesley’s concept of accountability for their conduct in the *SMMS Covenant* (2014) which declares:

Seth Mokitimi Seminary is committed to forming people to live as Christ-followers. Our personal conduct and the character of our life together must therefore be shaped by Christ, upholding the highest standards of integrity. We, the staff and seminarians of SMMS therefore make covenant, individually and corporately, to hold ourselves and each other to these standards of Christian conduct, and to embody truth, integrity and mutual respect in every aspect of our life together. ...Breaches of this community covenant are grievous matters, affecting us all (2014:1).

A similar commitment is that of the ministers of the Central District to attend the ‘Ministers’ Fellowship and Training Events’ scheduled by the Bishop, as circulated in the District Diary for 2015, declaring, “We have covenanted as a District to attend these gatherings, and have agreed that they would not be optional but that we will regard them as a commitment to each other” (Witbooi 2014:1).

2.10. Conclusion

For the people called Methodist being ‘in covenant’ is a concept which is adopted and adapted into the life of the church with a variety of contexts from being in covenant with God in Christ and with other people to describe the relationship of ministers in the MCSA. The ecclesiology of the MCSA holds that all Christ-followers are called to ministry and mission in the Church of Christ, and that some are called to be set aside to be ordained as presbyters. In the Methodist tradition there is a strong emphasis on being in covenant with God and others. It would thus seem to be a natural choice by the Methodist Church to adopt covenant terminology to describe the relationship with ministers.

However, it is not consequential for the MCSA to use the covenant concept and apply it to the relationship with ministers in a manner that is not very covenantal in important aspects. The MCSA needs to take these concerns into consideration in producing a relationship in which both shepherd and flock flourish to their full potential. Whilst the MCSA describes the relationship as being ‘in covenant’, what does it look like in practice? The answer appears to be that ministers are left feeling vulnerable and powerless (Respondent 32).

This chapter has set down the theological basis, and shortfalls, of the covenantal relationship with ministers emanating from the doctrine of the church, ministry and ordination. Theological and practical implications of the covenantal relationship have also been highlighted. We will now turn to the understanding and experiences of ministers whilst

serving within the ministry of the MCSA by means of personal interviews. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of the leadership of the MCSA to determine their understanding and practice of the covenantal relationship.

Chapter 3

The understanding and experiences of ministers of the covenantal relationship

3.1. Introduction

The words, “The covenant relationship is not well researched, is not well received by ministers and is not well explained to Circuits and Quarterly Meetings” (Respondent 16), were the introductory words of a minister to our interview which was conducted early in the interview process. Little did I realise how frequently these three elements regarding the covenantal relationship in the MCSA were to surface during the interviews. It was significant that only two ministers spoke of a ‘covenantal relationship’ whilst the others described the relationship as a ‘covenant relationship’ similar to the covenants recorded in the Scriptures or the response to God in the annual Covenant Renewal Service. It became evident that what the MCSA meant by the covenantal relationship was not necessarily how the ministers understood or experienced the relationship.

3.2. Methodology

In order to explore how ministers experienced the covenantal relationship, the research methodology is a qualitative study by means of personal interviews, together with personal observations, of a representative sample of ministers, in their own location and ensuring their anonymity and confidentiality. A qualitative method is chosen in order to gain the meaning and understanding of ministers which would not have been possible using the quantitative methodology.

3.2.1 The sample

The sample comprises forty two ordained ministers which comprise 5.9% of the “711 active serving ministers” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014b:16). In order to be as representative as possible, the sample included 29 male ministers and 13 female ministers. 19

described themselves as white, 19 as black, and one as coloured. Three ministers declined to indicate their race or ethnicity. 12 of the ministers are serving in rural areas, 23 in urban settings and seven who have a ministry that is both rural and urban. The ministers interviewed have served a total of 650 years in the ministry of the MCSA following their ordination ensuring that the findings are credible and reliable. 19 of the respondents have ministered for 1 to 9 years; 9 for 10 to 20 years; and 14 for 21 to 40 years in order to gain the experiences and understanding of as wide a range of ministers as possible. Whilst the sample is drawn from ministers from 3 of the 13 districts comprising the Connexion of the MCSA, I believe that the sample²⁵ is sufficiently representative of the larger population of the Connexion. Many of the ministers interviewed have served in other districts in the Connexion and have experience in cross-cultural ministry and ministerial teams so their responses will include their experiences beyond where they are presently stationed.

The procedure followed for the selection of participants began in August 2014 when the Bishop of the Limpopo District, the Rev Themba Mntambo, invited me to speak to the superintendent ministers of the Limpopo District at the District Superintendent's Consultations on the covenantal relationship after which 19 ministers offered to be interviewed in their own locality. Permission was sought, and granted, from the General Secretary of the MCSA, Reverend Vuyane Nyobole, to interview ministers of the MCSA and to use the information in the dissertation on condition of anonymity (Appendix A).

The Bishops of the Limpopo, Highveld and Swaziland and the Central Districts, comprising the old Transvaal Province, together with Swaziland and Botswana, were approached to suggest names on condition of maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of those interviewed. Bishop Anderson suggested some names, some of whom were contacted but not others, and he offered to be interviewed. Bishop Mntambo didn't offer any names but offered to be interviewed and suggested that I could use the District's Summer School in February 2015 as an opportunity to interview ministers. Bishop Witbooi declined to offer names but forwarded all the documentation regarding the research project to the ministers in his district, resulting in three ministers offering to be interviewed and one minister responding by means of an email.

Using the *Yearbook* of 2014, I selected a range of ministers from the three districts and drew up a list of 103 potential participants which was then reduced to 75 and again to 58. The

²⁵ The research population does not represent the demographic composition of Methodist clergy. The study is not a comparative study between white and black ministers, but a study on clergy and the church.

variables taken into consideration included the participant's gender, race, years of experience as reflected in the number of years since their ordination, urban/rural appointments, superintendents and serving ministers, proximity of ministers to save travelling costs, persons who have served in the structures of the church²⁶ at district and Connexional level, attempting to ensure that the sample was not over-represented by persons whom I identified as persons who had been affected negatively by the covenantal relationship.

In December 2014, 58 emails were sent to ministers requesting their participation and I received 29 positive responses and 3 persons declined to participate. In early January 2015 the list of potential ministers was revisited, realising that there was an imbalance of insufficient women ministers and too many white male ministers. Potential women ministers were approached to participate as well as ministers who had not responded to the email in December, resulting in 46 acceptances to participate.

During January 2015, appointments were set up with the ministers, excluding four white male participants who were thanked for offering to participate, and the interview process was conducted over a six week period, from mid-January to the end of February, concluding with interviews at the Limpopo District Summer School. 36 interviews were conducted – 1 in a focus group consisting of the 4 ministers of a circuit; 2 ministers, 1 black and the other white, who minister together in their local church, as well as a clergy couple.

3.2.2 The structure and conducting of the interviews

All interviews, except for two telephonic interviews and the one email response, were conducted either in the ministers' homes or their church offices. Before each interview proceeded, permission to record the interview by means of an electronic device was confirmed with each participant. Each interview lasted a maximum of 60 minutes using the standardised questions 'Topics for discussion and sample questions' (Appendix B) which had been made available to them. The interviews centred around three areas relating to the covenantal relationship: Their understanding of the nature of the covenantal relationship; their experiences of the relationship during their ministry and their thoughts and suggestions as to an appropriate policy for the relationship between ministers and the MCSA.

²⁶ The word 'church' in this chapter refers to both the MCSA and the local congregations where the ministers serve.

During the interviews I was constantly aware that my being a male, white, supernumerary, of 40 years' experience and who has held positions in the structures of the MCSA must not allow any of those factors to influence the interview or the responses of the respondents. I did, however, experience one minister whom I felt was providing answers that I wished to hear but have, in all cases, accepted the data from the answers provided as being factual of their experience and understanding of the covenantal relationship.

At the completion of each interview, the respondent was asked if he/she was comfortable with the interview and if he/she had any concerns regarding the interview. There was none. We then proceeded to update any outstanding information on the 'Biographic Details' form (Appendix C) and completed the 'Informed Consent' forms (Appendix D). The interviews concluded as I prayed with each respondent.

It was important to gain the understanding of officials of the MCSA regarding the covenantal relationship in addition to what is recorded in the *Yearbooks* and the *Book of Order* (2014a). In October 2014 the offices of the Presiding Bishop and the General Secretary General were approached to participate. The General Secretary referred me to the Rev Dr Mehana, the Director of the Human Resources Unit of the MCSA, who was approached for an interview as well as for clarity on certain matters which was provided telephonically.

3.2.3 Ethical clearance application

The prescribed Ethical Clearance was sought and approved by Unisa. Throughout the interviewing process the required ethical considerations were adhered to. Respondents were assured that all notes and electronic data relating to the interviews would be stored in a secure safe for a period of two years subsequent to the completion of the dissertation and then destroyed and that every effort would be made to protect their anonymity²⁷.

3.2.4 Content analysis of the interviews

Using the definition of Babbie, the grounded theory methodology was applied in the analysis to "derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational data" (Babbie 2012:336). This inductive approach enabled

²⁷ In order to respect the commitment of confidentiality and anonymity, no transcripts of the interviews are attached as an appendix. Verification of the data is possible by means of access to the information stored in safekeeping.

various viewpoints of the respondents to be expressed, often at variance with each other, in order to generate findings with which to evaluate the understanding and experiences of ministers of the covenantal relationship with the MCSA.

I have not verified that the data provided by each recipient is true and have accepted the integrity of each respondent with them being ordained ministers of the MCSA. The methodology is a content analysis of their responses to the standardised questions and their stories relating to their experiences of the covenantal relationship. The interviews are coded according to common themes which are then analysed and interpreted in the light of the research problem and the findings are reported as this chapter of the research project. In terms of the commitment to the respondents, the findings of the interviews were made available to each respondent in electronic format for their comment before being included into the dissertation. No respondent asked for any changes to be made.

3.2.5 Variables taken into consideration

The variables included in the research are gender, race, length of time in the ministry and locality of ministry. Length of time in the ministry was chosen as a variable rather than the physical age of the respondents as ministers enter the ministry from their early twenties to middle fifties. Whether a person is 25 or 55 years old, all ministers undergo the same training, formation and stationing procedures. Length of time in the ministry was considered to be more significant than physical age. The income of ministers was not considered as all ministers receive the same minimum stipend and travelling allowance. The variable is additional allowances which differ from minister to minister and circuit to circuit. The ministers, however, were asked if there was a time when they did not receive their stipend or allowances and what influence this had on them and their families.

Did the data indicate a discrepancy in the responses between white and black respondents? Whilst all ministers experienced the impact of the covenantal relationship as a result of stationing or disciplinary procedures, more black ministers have been stationed in non-viable circuits and have not received their stipends and/or allowances over a more extended period of time. They have, therefore, faced more financial distress than their white colleagues who often received their stipends but not their travelling allowances. Accordingly, black ministers will receive reduced benefits on retirement. The black ministers were more vociferous in their

criticism of the covenantal relationship and in their demands for more accountability by the church for the relationship to be of meaning to them.

Was gender a factor in the analysis of the data from the ministers? Our female ministers expressed disquiet at the way in which they are discriminated against by the structures of the MCSA in struggling to be invited to viable circuits, placing financial pressures on them and their families. They also feel discriminated against by their male colleagues, particularly male superintendent ministers. However, these concerns did not deter them from exercising their ministry, even if it caused pain and dis-ease. Whilst both male and female ministers want changes to the covenantal relationship, the women ministers want there to be changes but are less inclined to ask for a contractual relationship than their male colleagues.

Neither the length of time in the ministry nor the locality in which the ministers served appear to influence the responses of ministers to the covenantal relationship. The covenantal relationship has impacted the whole spectrum of ministers as many have been stationed in both rural and urban settings. What has impacted on ministers who were ordained prior to the year 2000 is that the understanding and terminology used to describe the relationship has only been clarified in recent years. These variables will be investigated further in the following section.

3.3. Research findings

What are the findings of the research project? Seven broader findings relating to the covenantal relationship will be discussed and then specific findings regarding how the covenantal relationship has impacted the ministers, their families and their ministry. The broader findings will now be discussed.

3.3.1 The incorporation of the covenantal relationship terminology is a new millennium phenomenon

The interviews confirmed the data gained from the *Book of Order* (2014a), *Yearbooks* and documents from EMMU that prior to the new millennium the terminology ‘covenantal relationship’ was not used to describe the relationship between ministers and the MCSA. Those serving in ministry prior to the year 2000 understood that their relationship was different from a standard employment arrangement. ‘I have been called by God’ was their understanding. There was no talk of a covenantal relationship. They acknowledged that they

were volunteers and not employees and they could not take legal action against the church. In return they trusted the church to take care of their needs during their ministry and into retirement.

In contrast, those who applied to enter the ministry from 2001 confirmed that they were made aware of their covenantal status from when they applied to the MCSA, during their formative training and again prior to their ordination. The implications, however, of being in a covenantal relationship only became clear when they or other probationer ministers did not receive their stipends and/or allowances, were disciplined or not advanced during their probation years and when EMMU made decisions, without consultation, which affected their journey in the ministry.

From the mid-2000s the term ‘covenant relationship’ was being heard more frequently in the life of the MCSA and was introduced into the *Yearbook* in 2009 and the 2014 *Book of Order* to describe the relationship between church and ministers. Consequently, every minister interviewed was aware of the covenantal nature of their relationship with the MCSA but were not always informed about the implications of being in such a relationship.

It is not only ministers who are unclear of the implications of the covenantal relationship. Circuit officials, society officials as well as congregation members are unclear of the covenantal relationship and question how the MCSA could summarily “move their minister” and ask “why the church did not fire that minister?” (Respondent 13). In addition, the families expressed their concerns at how the church could treat ministers the way they do.

How do ministers understand the covenantal relationship? Both pre and post millennial ministers understood that they were responding to God’s call into the ordained ministry within the MCSA, and were offering their services to the church, subject to the rules and regulations as laid down in chapter 4 of the *Book of Order* (2014a). In return the MCSA would take care of their welfare and place them in a station to fulfil their calling. The relationship was a relationship of trust, not without its pain and distress.

One minister summed up their understanding stating:

It is the opportunity for one to exercise their calling which is validated by the body and through the body to allow those offerings that you bring to flourish. The call is from two places - God calls but also the church calls. Where the church calls is where you translate how you understand your calling and your relationship with God and how you then translate that into being in the body of Christ, being within a particular institution within a

particular theological persuasion. You then enter into a covenant relationship that you will then, as you belong to this fold, protect the integrity of both your call and how your call unfolds within the body where you offer your gifts and graces (Respondent 29).

The description used most frequently is that “we are volunteers, called by God, serving in the MCSA” (Respondent 37). One minister explained their understanding saying, “When I came into the church my understanding was that I will give up my job and the church will care for me and my family until I retired. And then the pension fund should look after me” (Respondent 24).

A respondent asked the question, “So why did it [the covenantal relationship] come onto the church's radar?” and then proceeded to answer, “As a consequence of a decade of appeals by probationers, arbitrations and pastoral commissions. The church was challenged with questions of employment and the signing of agreements which seemed to be a contract. It came from the church's need to clarify the question, “what is the relationship?” (Respondent 8). This understanding is supported by another who stated, “The covenant relationship is not an old term. We have always known ourselves ‘to be called’. It surfaced as result of discontents, concerns, disagreements regarding labour issues and the interpretation of the church in the past 10 years. It is invoked when there is a dispute” (Respondent 16). However, this person then set down a number of questions, “If people are constantly going to arbitration, is there not something wrong? Are ministers, therefore, not at a disadvantage? Who is this covenant serving? Who is the beneficiary? Whose agenda is being served?” (Respondent 16).

3.3.2 The covenantal relationship impacts ministers when action is taken against them

The covenantal relationship is not an issue for and does not affect ministers during their ministry when everything goes well, when ministers get on with their ministry, receive their stipends, are moved with adequate consultation and have faced disciplinary processes which they experience as fair and transparent. However, for those who are moved to a circuit without adequate consultation, are stationed in a financially non-viable circuit and do not receive their stipends and do not experience the discipline of the church being administered in a fair, just and equitable way, the covenantal relationship becomes an issue.

Ministers are unhappy that the MCSA has the power to move ministers at their discretion, often without consultation and not taking the minister's family into consideration. And

should that appointment be to a financially non-viable circuit, it results in financial stress, marital tensions, anger and a feeling of insecurity. “I did not receive a stipend or allowances for the first four months in Phase 1²⁸. I felt vulnerable. It drained me of all my financial resources” (Respondent 38) and “The MCSA applies the covenantal relationship only when it is convenient for their purposes. They use it to their advantage. It is tilted in their favour” (Respondent 19) are words of two ministers which express the sentiment of many of their colleagues.

3.3.3 Ministers do not experience the covenantal relationship as entering into a covenant nor into a relationship

Ministers are of the opinion that the MCSA does not have a biblical exegesis of covenant theology or of the covenant relationship. They do not experience having entered into a covenant as described in the Bible. Nor do they experience being in a relationship with the church. They reject that the covenantal relationship can be likened to or founded on the covenants recorded in the Old or New Testaments and experience the covenantal relationship as the MCSA using biblical language for a labour practice.

These understandings and experiences are portrayed in the following response:

For me the Methodist Church sees herself as a covenant church, a church that is on a covenant journey with a covenant God. God makes the covenant and it is our response to respond to that in obedience and to work that out. The covenant that the ministers have with the church, I am not always 100% sure that the church isn't trying to find a religious word for an agreement, an arrangement. If it is a covenant relationship, it doesn't reflect the Old Testament covenant. In the Old Testament covenant, God makes the covenant and we respond in obedience. In many ways if that's the picture of the church, then the church offers the covenant and I respond as a minister in obedience. I am not sure that all that much comes from the church's side of the covenant, though. So that's why I say that covenant is not a good word. I know that it is the word that is used but I am not too sure if it is not trying to find a religious word, a biblical word, for an agreement or an arrangement (Respondent 28).

²⁸ Phase 1 was the first year of training of a minister during which they received practical training in a circuit and communal training in Soweto dealing with spiritual formation and academic input.

Another minister's response was, "The covenant relationship in Scripture has elements of mutuality and mutual acceptance but I do not experience being in a covenant. The term is being used for convenience" (Respondent 27).

When asked on which covenant the MCSA modelled the covenantal relationship, ministers frequently responded "with the Covenant Service". They believe that the MCSA has taken the responses of the people to God in the Covenant Service declaring, "I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will..." (Methodist Church 1999:290) and have appropriated that response to the covenantal relationship. The following response supports this understanding, "There is definitely a link in the thinking of many ministers between the covenantal relationship and the Covenant Service. The Covenant Service reminds me there are some things I can't challenge and ask for. I am no longer my own...I am called. I trust in God and do what is expected of me" (Respondent 4).

Whilst ministers accepted the influence of the Covenant Service, they rejected the appropriation by the MCSA of the Covenant Service vows stating, "The problem is that the MCSA is assuming the role of God and expecting ministers to respond in obedience as in the Covenant Service. The church is acting as if they are God" (Respondent 18). Another indicated that "...in the Old Testament it is God who made the first move. It is God who said 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. People responded to 'I will be your God' from their experience of who this God is. This is the God who loves, who cares, whose heart is broken when we turn away but who welcomes us back. God's covenant is not about closing us in, about controlling us. It is an expression of God's love..." This minister then asked, "Is the church loving towards their ministers? Is the church giving that message to ministers?" and answered, "I am not sure" (Respondent 13).

The lack of experiencing a relationship by ministers is portrayed in their responses such as, "Whilst completing my assignment with the Theological Education by Extension College, I learnt about being in a covenant. But I am not experiencing that loving, maturing, growth-empowering relationship in the covenant relationship with the MCSA. It is not really a relationship" (Respondent 39). Similarly, "The corporate church has lost the vision of what their side of the covenant should offer. Individuals have that vision but the larger church not. The covenant relationship comes across as one sided. I am sweating blood but not getting

*hesed*²⁹ back from the church. The church needs to examine its relationship with ministers” (Respondent 28). And, lastly, “In the covenant relationship the church is supposed to be looking after us and not exploiting us. They need to ensure that their agents are taken care of in a similar way to what happens in a marriage relationship” (Respondent 5).

The feeling of not being in covenant and there being no relationship is compounded by ministers stating that there is no clarity as to with whom they have entered into the covenantal relationship. All are agreed that their primary covenant is with God and then with the MCSA which can be at connexional, circuit or society level as indicated in the following responses, “Technically it is with the Conference, through the Presiding Bishop and the Connexional Executive who deal with the stationing of ministers” (Respondent 1) and “If we speak of a covenant at all, it would be with circuits and societies. And then they do not even know what that means. It is at this level that ministers find caring and sustenance, not at the connexional level, except when a bishop does fulfil their pastoral responsibility” (Respondent 28). Another responded saying, “I am still trying to work it out” (Respondent 27).

In practice ministers experience that the relationship is an impersonal one, a relationship with the Conference in word alone. “I am a PF³⁰ number in a book somewhere” (Respondent 1). Another said, “The covenant relationship is with the church, but there is no face. The closest is with the circuit and they don't have a clue” (Respondent 11). When asked who the face of the MCSA was, one minister replied, “The face of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is non-existent. But in terms of the inter-face, the face is Conference and the secondary face is the *Laws and Discipline* from where the stuff gets its legal and polity framework” (Respondent 29).

The lack of clarity as to with whom ministers are in the covenantal relationship is compounded by the marked difference in the understanding between those ministers who constitute the so-called ‘black’ section of the MCSA from the so-called ‘white’ section of the church. Those from the ‘white’ section place their emphasis on their relationship with their local society and then, for administrative reasons, with the circuit, district and Connexion. In contrast, in the ‘black’ section, the covenantal relationship is experienced more with the circuit and Connexion than their local societies.

²⁹ *hesed* – A Hebrew word used in the Bible to express “God’s faithfulness, kindness, grace and lasting loyalty.” (Holladay, W.L. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. 1976. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).

³⁰ Each minister is allocated a PF (Pension Fund) number which is the unique identifier in the MCSA’s administrative system.

It also became clear that there is little emphasis on ministers being in a covenantal relationship with their fellow colleagues in the Order of Presbyters, as is the emphasis in the Connexions of the Methodist Church in Britain and the United Methodist Church of America. In the South African Connexion, whilst ministers appreciate the support of their colleagues in their circuit and district, they believe that they are accountable to the Conference and place little emphasis on accountability to their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters. The only formal accountability to their colleagues is in the answering of question 5.4 of the Order of Business for Synod which enquires if there is "...an objection to their moral and religious character" or not possessing "...competent abilities for our work?" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:188).

3.3.4 The understanding of ministers as to why the church insists on the covenantal relationship

When asked why ministers believe that the MCSA insists on entering into a covenantal relationship, five reasons are cited. The first is that the MCSA does so as a means of protecting itself from litigation by ministers in courts of law or independent institutions outside of the structures of the church. Ministers refer to the provisions of paragraphs 5.19 to 5.21 of the *Book of Order* (2014a) requiring ministers to use the internal dispute resolution processes and stating that they may not institute legal proceedings against the church. Their experience is that the MCSA turns to these provisions when ministers appeal to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) for what they perceive to be instances where the church has not acted justly in a labour related dispute. Whilst these provisions preclude ministers from instituting litigation against the church, the church turns to courts of law when it suits them.

The second is that the covenantal relationship allows for labour practices which would not be legally permissible in a contractual relationship. Ministers believe that the MCSA is using the covenantal relationship as a labour practice relating to the stationing and discipline of ministers who may only challenge those decisions by means of the internal processes of the church, as reflected in the statement, "It is used to offset a labour practice and to circumvent labour requirements" (Respondent 23).

In addition, the covenantal relationship entitles the MCSA to station ministers in those circuits which are not financially viable, knowing that the ministers will probably not receive

their stipend and/or other allowances and may not appeal for relief outside of the church structures. “You can’t go AWOL if you are not paid and two years later you are regarded as deemed to have resigned” (Respondent 1). “Ministers fight being moved because they don't know what the future holds” (Respondent 5). The ministers refer to the large number of circuits that are in arrears with their circuit assessments and where ministers are in danger of not receiving their stipend and allowances. This assertion is supported by the Lay General Treasurer who reported to the Conference of 2014 that “5 Districts have more than 40% of their Circuits in arrear [sic]” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2015:27). A minister who has been affected by this practice stated, “Some circuits are not viable yet we continue to send ministers. Only three circuits I have served in were viable. The church is killing the spirit and the energy of its ministers in these situations. The church can be caring but sometimes it can be the worst enemy of a minister” (Respondent 37). Another who had not received their stipend for a period of time stated, “That caused tensions in me. I need to be protected as at this stage of my life. I have no other income, support or back up” (Respondent 10).

The third reason stated was that the covenantal relationship enables the MCSA to “avoid the financial obligations to ministers who do not receive their stipends or allowances” (Respondent 29). Ministers see the covenantal relationship as the method adopted by the MCSA in order that they are not held liable for benefits not received by ministers. “The church is protecting itself financially whilst ensuring that stations are filled” (Respondent 26).

The fourth reason cited was that the covenantal relationship is a labour practice used by the MCSA to deal with unsuitable, under-performing or problematic ministers without going through formal evaluation or dismissal procedures. Many regard this as unjust. An associated concern of ministers is that the MCSA does not deal with the under-performance of ministers in a manner that is consistent, transparent and applicable to all ministers. “The church doesn't deal even-handedly with their ministers. For example, some perennial under-performers are shielded by those with whom they are connected, and they are overlooked. We have not got it right” (Respondent 36).

However, the value of this procedure for the MCSA is explained by one respondent saying:

We have a loophole in respect of labour practice. But how does one deal in a very public office with people who repeatedly prove themselves unsuitable to offer leadership to a church community? In our enterprise, relationships and treating people in a way that

leads them towards grace is what it is all about. But if a person consistently doesn't do that, they are unsuitable. And there is very little way in terms of the labour laws in this country, in particular, to demonstrate that and to dismiss them would be very, very difficult. How else do we do this when we have people who have behaved in a way that communities do not want them back again, and again and again?" (Respondent 33).

A fifth reason cited was that the covenantal relationship is essential to maintain the concepts of connexionality with an itinerant system for stationing ministers which are foundational to Methodist polity. The itinerant stationing system is only possible within a connexional church by insisting on the covenantal relationship for the stationing and removal of ministers, particularly to financially non-viable circuits.

In summary - The statements "The covenant relationship gives the church a back door" (Respondent 12) and "The dice is loaded against me. It suits the church more than it suits ministers" (Respondent 11) indicate the perception of ministers that the covenantal relationship is a convention which is not well received by the ministers as it places them at a disadvantage and that it ensures that the church's interests are cared for but not those of ministers. These findings indicate an unhappiness with the covenantal relationship as understood and practiced by the MCSA. The ministers are of the opinion that the MCSA misuses the covenantal relationship to enforce labour practices which can't be challenged outside of its structures and which bring financial and emotional distress upon the ministers and their families.

3.3.5. Ministers are not well informed about the implications associated with the covenantal relationship

Ministers are not well informed about Labour Law, contractual arrangements and how the covenantal relationship either does or does not comply with the statutory requirements. Being ignorant of case studies and legal findings, ministers make assumptions and draw conclusions which are not well informed, creating confusion among the ministers. For example, a number of ministers assumed that receiving a pay slip and having monies deducted for pension and medical benefits meant that they should be categorised as an employee. "If monies are set aside for pension and medical, is that not a contract?" (Respondent 16). This assumption is not legally correct and could have been verified by means of an internet search or asking the Director of the Human Resources Unit of the MCSA.

Ministers have not informed themselves nor has the MCSA adequately informed ministers of the facts surrounding the covenantal relationship, leading to false assumptions being made and contributing more heat than light into the discussions. Both the MCSA and ministers need to take more responsibility for parties to be better informed of the legal implications regarding contracts and the covenantal relationship, also bearing in mind that we are a trans-national church.

3.3.6 Ministers need to be held accountable for their conduct and performance

Whilst ministers felt that the MCSA needs to be held accountable for their actions and decisions, they equally believe that their colleagues need to be held accountable for unacceptable actions and behaviour. They also need to be held accountable for their performance as ministers. “Anything goes for ministers. Ministers duck and dive and just go 'missing in action'. Ministers’ hands are not clean. We need to deal with pride, ego and status among some ministers” (Respondent 17); “Ministers are stealing, being unfaithful, not consulting, lack accountability, are missing from their stations and wield power inappropriately” (Respondent 26) and “Ministers are 'eating money’³¹ because there is no integrity around what is fair for a minister to have” (Respondent 29). These are the words of three ministers, one from each of the three districts indicating the seriousness of the problem. Their concern is that these ministers seem to get away with not being held accountable for such actions.

How does the MCSA deal with such actions by ministers? Two provisions are made in the *Book of Order* (2014a), the first being the question 5.4.1 asked at Synod of every minister, “Is there any objection to their moral and religious character?” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:188). This question should hold ministers accountable to their colleagues - but this appears not to be so in practice. “Years back that question was taken seriously at Synod but that has been lost with the doing away of the ministerial session” (Respondent 11). In practice this is not happening with fear of victimisation and a mistrust of pastoral commissions and commissions of enquiry being cited as the reason ministers do not wish to get involved. “We have lost our honesty for political correctness”, was the response of another minister deeply concerned at the lack of accountability of ministers (Respondent 12).

³¹ ‘Eating money’ is a euphemism for theft.

If ministers are unhappy about the lack of accountability of their colleagues, they need to accept their responsibility in not ensuring the credibility of those in ministry. Another supported this concern stating, “When the work of ministers is mediocre, call is used as a means of shielding the minister by the people and colleagues. Once ministers are ordained evaluation stops, as does learning. Some ministers have sunk to mediocrity. We have not insisted on excellence” (Respondent 13).

The second process by which ministers should be held accountable is by means of the annual review of ministers in terms of paragraph 4.82.1 of the *Book of Order*. “For accountability purposes, every Minister’s work shall be reviewed bi-annually through an interview process (Review of Ministry)” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:42). This provision is experiencing resistance from ministers who do not wish to be held accountable to their colleagues and is not being implemented consistently throughout the MCSA. The review is being implemented only in one of the three districts which formed part of the research with varying acceptance from ministers reflected in comments such as, “The annual review – what’s that?” (Respondent 23); “The annual review is not appropriate as ministry doesn’t have job descriptions”; “A matrix from business does not fit” (Respondent 29), and “The annual review is a very good tool. The material, like all things, needs to be updated because it was created in the middle 90s and we are 20 years on” (Respondent 33). An associated issue is that ministers do not trust their superintendent minister as they are concerned at how the information they share is going to be used against them. “Ethnicity and tribalism are prevalent in our ministry” (Respondent 34).

However, ministers believe that all ministers should act responsibly and be accountable. Various options were suggested from a revised and updated review of ministry process; “Yes, but in the format of a discussion remembering the information can be detrimental to me” (Respondent 36); that the review should be at “the local level with trusted persons” (Respondent 28); and “The annual review must be linked with support structures. We need a panel to journey with the ministers... This will assist with formation post ordination” (Respondent 27). A minister who has been involved in ministerial training proposes that the Review of Ministry needs to be reworked and introduced prior to candidating for the ministry into the School of Vocation; during probation under the guidance of the District Convenor of Studies and thereafter into post ordination training. Three ministers suggested that ministers also be required to accumulate Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points, as is obligatory of other professions for their own development and accountability.

An associated concern was raised regarding the evaluation of the competence and call of ministers which “stops at ordination. We do not have a place where we regularly test whether a person is still called. Is that minister competent? Are our ministers still Christian?” (Respondent 24).

An implication of ministers not holding their colleagues to account for their conduct and there not being a regular or formal appraisal of the work of a minister is that the only processes open to the MCSA for the dismissal of a minister without getting involved in a legal tussle is for the church to use the provision of placing that person at the foot of stations³² as a prelude to them being discontinued from the ministry. As ministers are critical of the work ethic, the under-performance, lack of accountability, misuse of power and being absent from their circuits, they need to take more responsibility for the perpetuation of these practices through their resistance to being held accountable themselves. In addition, the MCSA needs to address their responsibility in this regard, particularly since this requirement is laid down in the *Book of Order* (2014a) but is being disregarded in most cases.

3.3.7 Appreciation of the covenantal relationship

Whilst ministers experienced the covenantal relationship in a negative manner, words of appreciation of certain aspects of the covenantal relationship were expressed such as “The covenant relationship has been an amazing relationship which gave me the opportunity to grow” (Respondent 36); “I treasure the connexionality, support of colleagues and the provisions of a stipend, pension and assistance with medical expenses which all give me a sense of security” (Respondent 38); “The covenant relationship provides a safe framework within which to work. It provides security even if there are disappointments” (Respondent 30) and “I am deeply grateful for the privilege the church has extended me of ministering to the people who make her the church. The deep privilege of that. I haven’t had to go and find a church, to look for people. I have had the privilege of them saying to me, ‘[name], here is where you may minister and a framework for that ministry.’ I think that framework is theologically sound and sound for me as a person. And it frees me to minister” (Respondent 28).

³² Foot of stations refers to those ministers who have not been placed in a circuit by the Conference and to whom the Presiding Bishop can turn should an appointment arise outside of the meeting of Conference.

3.4. Specific findings of how ministers are most impacted by the covenantal relationship

In addition to the seven broader findings relating to the covenantal relationship, the ministers highlighted that the covenantal relationship affects them in three specific areas - their families, finance and the misuse of power by the MCSA in the stationing and disciplining of ministers. Where and how ministers are stationed and how discipline and accountability are conducted in the church have implications for a minister, on their finances and for their families.

3.4.1 The stationing of ministers

The stationing of ministers by the church is a critical area where the covenantal relationship impacts on ministers. Many stated that they do not trust the church regarding stationing. They say there is too much politics and favouritism at play. Ministers are concerned that they are moved without adequate consultation or feel pressurised to accept a move rather than be left at the foot of stations, even if that means being separated from their families. However, bishops are under pressure to fill their stations and, in terms of the covenantal relationship, ministers have accepted to go to “whichever Circuit or Station I am appointed.” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:32), often leaving their bishop with no option but to place a minister, even in a non-viable station. “Ministers become disempowered through stationing. They hold on to stations as a change could result in future difficulties. Unfortunately the church asserts its power in a manipulative way” (Respondent 30).

3.4.2 The impact on financial security

Moving from one circuit to another impacts on the monthly income of a minister, creating financial insecurity when ministers are stationed in circuits where they do not receive their stipend and/or allowances regularly. Ministers also feel aggrieved that being moved to a circuit with a decreased or irregular income leads both to immediate financial stress and their future pension is impacted negatively. The views of two ministers are, “When you are moved you can drop as many as four levels of pension” (Respondent 16) and “You can never make up what you have lost” (Respondent 37). This minister also felt hurt that even when the financial position of a circuit has been resolved and is again viable, “you are moved and get

no benefit of having sorted out the financial problem. What you are owed doesn't get paid to you" (Respondent 37).

3.4.3 The impact on families

The covenantal relationship impacts families in numerous ways including financial stress, health problems, deteriorating relationships between partners and on children's attitude to the MCSA, even the Christian Church.

The research indicated that the impact of the covenantal relationship on families was most intensely felt when related to being stationed in a non-viable circuit putting financial, emotional and relational pressures on the families. This problem was exacerbated when ministers were stationed in situations where their partners were not able to find employment, resulting in separation from each other. Ministers and their partners became ill and depressed. "It made me feel that that I am not fair to my wife. I couldn't support her, affecting my sense of self-worth" (Respondent 14). Others responded saying, "My family is disappointed in me when I can't send finances home to them" (Respondent 41) and "My not receiving a stipend regularly affected my wife and caused tension between us" (Respondent 37).

Whilst the covenantal relationship impacted ministers in non-viable stations negatively, this experience was also a time for personal growth for some ministers as expressed in the words, "I had to decide how I was going to respond to the pain and I chose life instead of becoming negative" (Respondent 30). The following experience of a couple indicates that they have been able to deal with the challenges they faced, "Not receiving a stipend affected my financial position and I became dependent on my wife's income. A few years later when I moved to ...[name of a circuit] and she couldn't get a post and was financially dependent on me, she said that she now experienced what I had experienced earlier and accepted that now it was my turn to support her" (Respondent 21).

A source of concern is that eight ministers reflected that their children have withdrawn from the life of the MCSA and want nothing to do with the denomination; some even want nothing to do with the Christian Church. "As a result of where I was stationed and incidents in my ministry, my children will not darken a church" (Respondent 17). Children are concerned about the well-being of their parents with a child asking, "Where is the justice in the church allowing their own people to go without a stipend when they speak of justice issues all the

time? How can the church treat you in that way?" (Respondent 10) and another said, "It pains my children to see their mother working and then not getting her stipend" (Respondent 22).

The problem of being an absent parent is a danger in all relationships and in all professions, including the Christian ministry, which was addressed by a minister who reflected that, "Call makes us neglectful of our families. We want to be seen as good ministers" (Respondent 33). However, the response of children of other ministers is reflected in the statement, "You were present but were absent with your church involvement" (Respondent 27). Further investigation pointed to the pressures of having to succeed and bring in money for assessments or face being placed at the foot of stations as the primary factor contributing to the minister being an absent parent.

The covenantal relationship also impacts families positively with a minister commending the MCSA for responding to his letter when he was appointed to a station where his family couldn't join him and the church responded positively. "They acknowledged my work at ... [name of a circuit] and found a station here for me. When I have cried, both my bishop and the Presiding Bishop have listened" (Respondent 34).

3.4.4 Impact of the misuse or abuse of power in the MCSA

The ministers, almost without exception, expressed a concern at the impact of the misuse or abuse of power by all the structures of the church, including ministers, organisations, departments and circuit officials. "People in power, including ministers, get carried away in their positions and are not acting as servants" (Respondent 39).

3.4.4.1 Misuse of power by the structures of the MCSA

Ministers are adamant that in the covenantal relationship power is in the hands of the church leaving them feeling weak, helpless and vulnerable. Harsh words were spoken by ministers of how they experienced power being misused in terms of the covenantal relationship, one statement being, "I entered the ministry as a person who knew abuse and the church battered me more" (Respondent 17). Another expressed his/her frustration stating, "The covenant relationship leans towards those in power. They don't listen to the disempowered. They use that power for their own ends" (Respondent 2).

The dominant expression of the misuse of power by the structures of the MCSA is in the stationing of ministers, often into financially non-viable circuits or insisting on a move which is disruptive for the minister and their family. Ministers do experience the stationing process as disempowering. “What does it mean to 'go where you are sent being in a covenant relationship?’” a minister asked and then answered, “You can put your life at risk. It is the church saying, ‘We are not obliged contractually towards you. Tell you what, we own the turf. You need to function within the parameters of our space and we can do what we like.’ ...You almost have to become powerless... The church uses the covenant relationship as an unscripted labour practice” (Respondent 29). This sense of powerlessness was also expressed by another minister who said, “The church doesn't really listen to us and we are scared to be vocal and then land up without a station. If you speak the truth to those in power, you may land up nowhere. So let me suffer silently” (Respondent 42). Words such as “ubiquitous” (Respondent 28) and “abusive” (Respondent 37) were used to describe the manner in which being placed at the foot of stations is used to discontinue ministers. A different perspective in support of this action is presented in the response, “I really do believe that there are some people who really do not belong in our ministry because whatever they are going to do, they have got to a place where they're toxic” (Respondent 33).

Another way ministers also experienced the misuse of power is in the disciplinary processes such as the holding of commissions of enquiry and pastoral commissions, which seem to be on arbitrary grounds or as a means for the structures of the church to impose their will in a situation. Ministers are suspicious of pastoral commissions as they appear to be manipulated to serve the interests of the church and recommendations are not followed through when it does not suit the church. “My experience is that when the covenant relationship is applied through pastoral commissions, the church is seeking for a legal response and uses the legislation when it suits them” (Respondent 20). Another minister responded stating, “You get no recognition as a minister in the MCSA for living out your call. Yet should a couple of people be dissatisfied you suddenly find yourself being investigated in a pastoral commission. Where is the grace? And then proposals and findings of pastoral commissions are just swept under the carpet. They just disappear” (Respondent 30). A different perspective, however, was provided by the response that “pastoral commissions are helpful as they provide an opportunity for people to speak. However, the recommendations are ignored” (Respondent 26).

Ministers are of the opinion that too much power is centralised in a few people in the Methodist Connexional Office. Their perception is that as power has become more centralised in the life of the MCSA, so the exercising of power has increased accordingly, a process labelled as “the institutionalisation of the church” (Respondent 6). Some believe that the emphasis over the past decade on the covenantal relationship is a manifestation of the institutionalisation of the church. Ministers spoke of their concern that “We do not have a safe place to voice our convictions. No system protects me. I feel insecure” (Respondent 10).

Related to the centralisation of power is the critique by ministers that, whilst South African society has undergone a radical change in labour practices and become a more inclusive society where negotiation takes place, the MCSA is heading in the opposite direction to more legalistic, authoritarian and powerful structures. A minister pleaded, “Dilute the power in Methodist House. We live top down instead of bottom up. They don't serve us - we serve them” (Respondent 37).

Some ministers indicated that it is necessary for the church to have power to function as an organisation, particularly relating to the stationing of ministers operating within an itinerant system in a connexional context. “With our itinerant system, the church needs power to move ministers. In a crisis it helps but it can be disruptive for ministers. Yes, there is evidence of abuse of power. This needs to be balanced with the need for authority in order to function” (Respondent 21). The Methodist institution has power and needs to have power but these powers should not be unfettered for, “What we are looking for is consistency so that everyone is treated the same” (Respondent 34).

Whilst many spoke of a negative experience of the covenantal relationship, a minority were clear that their experiences of the use of power by the MCSA were positive and affirming, “I have never had a problem with the covenant relationship because there has always been consultation” (Respondent 26). A word of caution was sounded in ministers judging decisions by the church structures too harshly or too quickly, “Yes, power is dangerous and is being misused. However, we do not always know all the facts and so we make assumptions and perceptions that are not correct” (Respondent 10).

3.4.4.2 Misuse of power by ministers

Ministers are not immune from misusing their power and many spoke of the misuse and abuse they experienced from their colleagues. Women ministers spoke of being rejected by their superintendent minister being told, “I won't have a woman minister in my circuit. I don't want you. You will only be here for a year. The church made a mistake in accepting you” (Respondent 30). Another spoke of retired and serving ministers improperly influencing the invitation of ministers to a circuit and that they interfere in the business of circuits. Ministers are said to have expectations that are draining the financial resources of their congregations. The undue influence of ministers in the election of office bearers, such as Circuit and Society Stewards, is also a source of concern.

3.4.4.3 Misuse of power by units, organisations and circuit officials

Concerns were also raised about the misuse of power by units, organisations and circuit officials. Ministers cited the Education, Mission and Ministry Unit (EMMU) as an example of what they believed to be a unit misusing its powers. “Changes are just imposed which affected our lives” (Respondent 38).

They also spoke of organisations making demands of their members, such as “the Women’s Manyano ladies having to ‘fill the cupboard’ of the minister’s wife” (Respondent 31) and of circuit officials who misuse their power by lobbying and acting beyond their mandate in the invitation of ministers and influencing people to withhold their financial contributions as a means of getting rid of a minister. “In the black church stipends are used to get rid of ministers” (Respondent 40). Ministers who are single experience circuits exploiting their circumstances as “an opportunity to make money. For example they want to rent out the manse and hire a flat” (Respondent 1). Ministers are concerned that circuit and society officials are under the influence of persons or individuals with power and are not honest in their negotiations with ministers. (Respondent 11).

In summary - The misuse of power at all levels within the MCSA is cited as a consequence of the covenantal relationship causing pain and a feeling of insecurity among ministers. Two ministers indicated that the MCSA is dealing with a cycle of violence and that this cycle needs to be broken. They believe that the cycle begins during their formation years when they experience the misuse of power by their superintendent ministers, circuit officials, district officials and by EMMU. “If we are formed autocratically we will do that to others”

(Respondent 1 33). A similar understanding is discerned in the statement, “I learn from the way I am superintended” (Respondent 40). The cycle of the misuse of power needs to be broken by establishing more healthy relationships at connexional, ministerial, organisational and circuit levels.

The findings relating to the impact of the covenantal relationship as experienced by ministers have been set out in the preceding sections. Our attention will now turn to how ministers experience the pastoral commitment of the MCSA in terms of the covenantal relationship.

3.5. The welfare of ministers

In terms of the covenantal relationship, the commitment made to ministers in the *Book of Order* is that “The Church recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa. 2104a:30). The implications of this commitment are considered in chapter 2 under the heading ‘The covenantal commitment of the MCSA to ministers’. But how do ministers experience the pastoral commitment of the MCSA to care for their welfare?

Their responses indicated that this varies widely from minister to minister, circuit to circuit, district to district, bishop to bishop, the nature of the support desired and the expectations of the ministers. The lack of caring by the church structures when ministers did not receive their stipends or allowances was most frequently raised by ministers with only one minister speaking of a bishop applying for financial support to alleviate the stresses in not receiving their stipend. This response was closely followed by those who felt that they had not been cared for in times of pain or need and were disappointed that bishops are not able to give time to the pastoral care of their flock.

The dominant theme communicated during the interviews is that ministers are disappointed at the lack of general caring, concern and pastoring received from bishops and MCSA officials. Ministers are crying out for a shepherd to care for them with a minister stating, “Bishops are caught up in so much administration that they are not able to get to their pastoral functions. I want and need a pastor in my bishop. We need a pastor to the pastors” (Respondent 30). Another summed up the situation declaring, “The bishop can't care as we wanted. That light is not shining so brightly as it was in spite of him being a very caring man” (Respondent 28).

A different understanding by other ministers is that “ministers must take responsibility for their own personal care and development. Unless the minister does this, it doesn't happen.”

(Respondent 24). This view is supported by the response, “Ministers need to take responsibility for their own vocational health and well-being. Self-discipline and responsibility are important. Some ministers expect to be pampered” (Respondent 33). A third colleague summed up the situation by saying, “Somewhere the church is going to hurt you. You must take responsibility for dealing with those hurts. The problem is that we don't have adequate structures and those in structures are in positions of power and so people will not speak freely as this may affect their station” (Respondent 35).

The medical support provided by the church is a great cause of concern for ministers. The expectations of ministers regarding medical assistance are not being met and they cite that, when facing financial constraints, “having to pay up front is a problem” (Respondent 41). Another concern was the inability to pay the large co-payments for hospitalisation, spectacles and medication in terms of the TopMed policy. Some ministers report having been assisted by the church or their local society with their debt whilst others did not receive such support. A minister was unhappy that whilst “TopMed can't provide for my child's needs, the church won't assist me to transfer to a scheme where adequate cover is possible” (Respondent 30).

A particular concern is the inadequate provision for the mental health and well-being of ministers indicating that insufficient provision is made for psychological support or therapy. Some ministers questioned whether the MCSA took seriously the mental health of their ministers. The need for “a place where I can go for counselling, for health” (Respondent 40) or for a competent team of persons to assist with the mental health of ministers in each district was also raised.

My observation is that many of the ministers are unaware of the procedures relating to receiving grants through the TopMed scheme of the church and could be receiving financial assistance which they are entitled to if the procedures were followed. Some are comparing our ‘TopMed Limited’ scheme with the top of the range commercial schemes and expecting similar benefits. However, many ministers are struggling and are embarrassed financially as a result of the additional medical costs they are required to meet.

Whilst the condition of manses was raised by a few ministers, my observations on going into manses and church buildings in rural, suburban and city settings, is that our buildings are inadequately maintained and in a sad state of disrepair. Some might even be a health and safety risks to the minister and their family. Ministers expressed concern that the circuit structures do not take care of manses, even after the buildings are damaged by forced entry

from burglars. However, I also noted that some ministers are not always careful in their care of the interior of manses, the maintenance of the manse surrounds and allowing the properties to look unkempt. A further observation is that only two minister spoke appreciatively of the provision of a manse or of a housing subsidy.

It must not be assumed, however, that all the ministers experienced care by the MCSA in a negative way. Some expressed their appreciation for those in the church structures who did provide support and care. Examples cited include finding financial assistance following major surgery, the inclusion of a hand written note on the letter received from their bishop on their birthday and of contact initiated by the General Secretary. Two ministers who have completed their academic training at the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary expressed their appreciation with the one commenting, “When I was at seminary I was cared for amazingly so. They provided a roof over my head, a wonderfully comfortable place. They cared for me with unexpected medical costs. I am pleased that I went to college” (Respondent 38). The second minister experienced the SMMS Covenant as very helpful making statements such as, “We were all equal... My story was safe... There was accountability. My concerns were prayed for” (Respondent 39). Others expressed their appreciation at the support and caring of their superintendent minister and colleagues without which they would not have coped. Appreciation was also expressed for the administrative support for tax, medical and pension provided by the Finance Unit of the Methodist Connexional Office. Ministers were also appreciative of those superintendent ministers and circuit and society officials who did care for their welfare, ensure that their families were provided for, assisted in times of financial stresses with medical payments and consulted regularly with them and their families.

In summary - The finding of this research is that the ministers of the MCSA are more critical than appreciative of the commitment of the MCSA to care for their welfare. The analogy of a shepherd not ensuring that their flock was adequately cared for, fed or protected was either alluded to or referred to on occasions. However, the findings also indicate that the experience of ministers is subjective and dependent on circumstances and their expectations.

3.6. Preferences of ministers regarding their relationship with the MCSA

The third area on which the interviews centred was asking the ministers about their preferences regarding a covenantal or contractual relationship. Two questions were put to stimulate this discussion: ‘Is the covenantal relationship an appropriate policy for the Christian Church in 2015?’ and ‘What suggestions do you have to be considered by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa?’ An overview of the findings of the respondents regarding the nature of the desired relationship - covenantal, contractual or a revised relationship – will be examined together with suggestions to be considered by the MCSA.

3.6.1 The nature of the relationship between the MCSA and ministers

A statistical overview of the responses to the question ‘Would you prefer a contractual relationship with the church?’ indicated that a third of the ministers (12 respondents) prefer a covenantal relationship; a third (15 respondents) want a contractual relationship and another third (15 respondents) indicated that this is a complex matter and not an “either/or” scenario but that there need to be changes incorporated into the relationship. However, the majority of those who prefer a contractual relationship as well as those who want a covenantal relationship will accept a revised covenantal relationship that includes the accountability and responsibility of the MCSA towards ministers being clearly defined. The vast majority of ministers, therefore, are in favour of a change from the present prescriptions of the covenantal relationship.

Whilst both male and female ministers wish there to be changes in the covenantal relationship, the expectations of male and female ministers differ with the male ministers insisting on more fundamental changes than their female counterparts. Of the male respondents, 24% want a covenantal relationship, 41% want a contractual relationship, and a further 34% want a restructured relationship. In comparison, 38% the female ministers want a covenantal relationship, a further 38% want a revised relationship and 23% a contractual relationship. It must be noted, however, that the responses of both men and women indicate that the covenantal relationship in its present form is not well received by the ministers of the MCSA. What then are the preferences of ministers regarding their relationship with the MCSA?

3.6.1.1 A preference for a contractual relationship

A group of ministers have a preference for a contractual relationship. The primary reason is to incorporate accountability by the MCSA towards ministers. As the impact of the covenantal relationship is most keenly felt and experienced by ministers relating to stationing and discipline, the ministers are pleading for contracts with a means of appeal to an independent body outside of the church's structures. An example of this sentiment was, "Contracts will help ministers to know where they stand. Presently ministers have no recourse to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) or for referral to anybody outside of the church's structures. All structures are self-preserving" (Respondent 17). This viewpoint is supported by, amongst others, the statements that "Ministers have no recourse and arbitration is inadequate. The impression is that those who have gone that route find themselves negatively labelled and find themselves without a station" (Respondent 19); "We need to do it differently so that the church will accept its responsibilities" (Respondent 14) and "...for the church to be more accountable for its actions and decisions" (Respondent 20).

Other reasons cited to support a contractual relationship included, "We need contracts for financial security" (Respondent 21); "Contracts will provide a more secure structure to support the call of the minister to the Order of Presbyters" (Respondent 2); "Contracts will give us clearer job descriptions which are rather vague in terms of the covenant relationship" (Respondent 18) and "Contracts would help by putting more responsibility on me (the one called) and on the society and circuit (who called me)" (Respondent 36).

Whilst the accountability of the MCSA is presented as the primary justification for contracts, ministers also believe that contracts are necessary to hold both ministers and circuit officials more accountable for their actions and responsibilities. Some ministers were scathing of the poor work ethic of their colleagues and are critical of their lack of accountability to the church and their circuits whilst recognising that the actions and decisions of ministers are a major contributory factor to the breakdown of the covenantal relationship. "Ministers do what they like. We need to hold them accountable for their work performance and for them to take more responsibility for their actions and the outcomes of their actions" (Respondent 30). This minister also pleaded that circuit officials be held accountable regarding the condition of manses, the quality of the furnishings provided and the unsuitable working environment from which ministers are often expected to function. Another minister stated that contracts would

assist in dealing with two issues, “To get ministers to work more and to hold ministers more accountable” (Respondent 36).

However, a warning was cited by a respondent, “We need to have terms and conditions clarified. But if you go to contracts, there must be no small print hiding terms and conditions. The terms must all be on the table for everyone to see” (Respondent 27). This minister added that the contracts should not be a generic contract but applicable to each minister as situations vary so much.

3.6.1.2 A preference for a covenantal relationship

A second group of ministers are of the opinion that we should continue with a covenantal relationship. The primary reason for rejecting contracts was that relationships are at the heart of the Christian gospel and the emphasis must be on the relationships between ministers and the MCSA. One respondent stated, “I would prefer the covenantal one to work. The covenantal relationship implies relationship as opposed to a contractual thing if I am just an employee. I don’t want to be just an employee. I am not an employee. I am not God’s employee” (Respondent 24) whilst another said, “The covenant relationship allows me freedom to grow where I am stationed which a contract will not necessarily do” (Respondent 34). A third person responded, “Whilst a contract will provide guidelines and accountability, the covenant relationship provides the opportunity for the enhancement of a relationship which is not possible in a contractual environment” (Respondent 38).

A concern among some ministers is that “Contracts will lead to more legalism in the church. (Respondent 26). “Contracts will be too limiting for the contexts in which ministry happens vary so much” (Respondent 26). Another concern was that “If we go to contracts we will lose the important concept of servant leadership and we will end up with labour forums, such as unions and workers’ committees” (Respondent 42). Ministers were also concerned that contracts could contribute to a change in the work ethic of ministers. Others countered the proposal for contracts saying that “contracts would make us like a corporate” (Respondent 15) and “that contracts will detract from the primacy and significance of God’s call to the ministry” (Respondent 40).

Whilst these ministers indicated that they prefer a covenantal relationship, they are adamant that the present covenantal relationship was neither acceptable nor desirable. “The covenant relationship must be improved procedurally and applied with consistency so that everyone is

treated the same” (Respondent 34). A similar sentiment was expressed, “We need a covenant relationship, but then really a covenant relationship, with caring, support, true inclusiveness and no disparities which is implemented from both sides” (Respondent 42).

3.6.1.3 A preference for a restructured relationship

A third approach is that of ministers who believe that the way ahead may not be an ‘either/or’ scenario but rather ‘both/and’, accepting that the covenantal relationship is a complex relationship requiring caution in either accepting or rejecting the status quo. Responses such as “In some sense I don’t wish for contracts but in another sense I do” (Respondent 10); “I am not persuaded to either” (Respondent 12); “The covenant relationship is fair and it is unfair” (Respondent 4) and “I see the value of contracts as relating to discipline and structure but I would rather err on side of grace” (Respondent 35). Another respondent drew the distinction between theology and praxis stating, “Theologically I am in favour of covenant, but because we are dealing with human beings, contracts may be helpful” (Respondent 11). These responses indicate that ministers are aware of the complexity of the relationship and want a relationship that incorporates elements from both covenantal and contractual models. A sobering word is that of one respondent, “Any system depends on how it is implemented. What we need is better people management” (Respondent 26) which was supported by another who said, “The church needs to put flesh onto the bones” (Respondent 4).

The dominant finding of the research is that an overwhelming majority of ministers want the covenantal relationship to be revised in order to include mutual accountability and mutual responsibilities from both the MCSA and ministers. Ministers are seeking a relationship which includes procedures to hold the MCSA accountable; measures for dialogue and consultation before the moving of a minister; an inclusive and fair process before ministers can be discontinued from the ministry; mechanisms to provide more security of tenure for ministers and their families and for ministers to be held more accountable for their actions and fulfilling their responsibilities. It was suggested that “covenant is useful to come into the ministry but then we need structure to surround the relationship” (Respondent 30). A minister pleaded that “Whether we have an employment contract or the covenantal relationship, there must be an agreement. Presently there is no laying down of how we relate to each other” (Respondent 4). Whilst speaking about the need for a clear setting down of responsibilities of both parties, one minister commented that, “Even a marriage has legal documents”

(Respondent 8) and another continued with the marriage analogy and stated that, “no marriage relationship can flourish without boundaries and without meeting the expectations of each other” (Respondent 32).

In addition to a more inclusive accountability, ministers are sceptical of the MCSA’s covenantal commitment to care pastorally and believe that the provision made in the *Book of Order* should be more than a provision but a requirement of the church.

Whilst wanting a restructured relationship, some referred to this new relationship as a revised or renewed covenantal relationship whilst others were not keen that the word ‘covenant’ should be used in any form in describing the relationship. An insightful response from a respondent posed some questions in this regard, asking, “Is the covenant relationship the right way to describe the relationship? What is the covenant? Is the language helpful when we talk about the covenant? Can the problem be the language we use? Did we suddenly find this word, this helpful word, and put it in our *Laws and Discipline* and use it to deal with issues around labour and work, and stipends and tenure of ministers? Is this a word we keep somewhere there and pull out when we don’t have answers to questions? Is this the words we use in our families?” (Respondent 13). For many the description ‘covenant relationship’ has too many negative connotations and is not seen as theologically sound, so finding different terminology to describe the relationship may in itself be helpful for ministers.

An important factor to be incorporated into the relationship between the MCSA and her ministers is that we are a trans-national church and must ensure that the relationship between the MCSA and ministers is not in contravention of the Labour Law applicable in Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland. A possible way to discern this new relationship was suggested by two ministers proposing that the MCSA hold a Covenant Conference, similar to the Obedience 81 Conference³³, in order to produce a policy in keeping with our theological framework, traditions and relevant in a post-modern society.

³³ Obedience 81 was a seven day conference at which the Methodist people discerned God’s will for the MCSA in those turbulent times.

3.7. A way ahead

There were many suggestions made for consideration by the MCSA, most which are already known by bishops and those in the structures of the MCSA. Others are already incorporated into our disciplines, but not practised and need to be re-introduced.

Whilst many suggestions were of a practical nature, the dominant finding is that ministers wish the emphasis in the MCSA to be on developing relationships, communication, leadership, mentoring and accountability and not on authority, power and discipline. “The covenantal relationship, as is God’s covenant with humankind, must have an incarnational expression” (Respondent 35). The desire is for meaningful relationships, re-establishing trust as when there is a hiccup in a marriage. Let us learn to communicate and consult timeously. “The church must learn to consult and communicate without being arrogant. Ministers do have a say” (Respondent 16).

The desire is for leadership and people development through mentoring. Ministers wish to be formed as individuals, to grow and develop their individual gifts and talents. People development includes the MCSA and ministers learning how to be accountable and to be accounted for. “We need to instil accountability and responsibility - not more policy. Relationships are important. We have to change our mind set and be accountable to each other” (Respondent 35).

Ministers wish to have closer relationships with their bishop in order to foster trust and to experience being cared for. When bishops need to act, either in stationing or discipline situations, the plea is for more communication, consistency in decision making and turning less to commissions of enquiry and more to learning and discerning a way ahead. “Pastoral commissions need to be a learning not a disciplinary process. We need to learn how we got into that situation. Then we need to learn how, together, we can overcome this situation. ...We must discern more. Our methodology should be grace above law” (Respondent 34). Support groups or a Council of Elders (Respondent 8) within a district to whom ministers can turn and have someone to journey with them in their struggles or crises was suggested. However, ministers agreed that you can't legislate to heal broken relationships. Once the relationship breaks down and trust has been lost, re-establishing the relationship and healing cannot be a matter for legislation.

It has been argued that the impact of the covenantal relationship is most intensely felt by ministers regarding how the MCSA uses or misuses power in the stationing and disciplining

of ministers who feel aggrieved by our present processes. Ministers wish the MCSA to investigate a different model which will deal with those negative factors as well as incorporate changes to those commitments to pastorally care for the ministers. Some ministers are aware of how the covenant relationship is implemented in the British and American Connexions and believe that their constitutions are invaluable in reformulating our covenantal relationship.

In summary - To prepare for the next chapter which is to look at God's expectations of those who shepherd God's covenant people, the following deductions are made from the responses of ministers. Ministers have concerns about how they are being led by their shepherd, arising from not knowing the shepherd nor the voice of the shepherd; their lack of trust in the shepherd; questioning whether they are being led to pastures for their benefit or for the convenience of the shepherd; and that when they are moving along on a path, the shepherd suddenly takes them off in another direction. They have concerns about their sustenance as some of the feeding grounds are barren whilst in others the food is abundant. Some in the flock even get preferential treatment at the feeding places. They need a personal touch in significant times during the journey, which they are not experiencing. They feel insecure and unprotected. Those within the flock abuse each other and, yes, sheep do stray, but the discipline is harsh. However they want to be part of this flock and wish to be drawn closer to their shepherd and feel secure.

The questions "Who is the covenantal relationship serving? Who is the beneficiary" were asked earlier in paragraph 3.3.1 of this chapter. Whilst it may not be the intention of the MCSA, from the responses of ministers, the primary beneficiary is the MCSA and ministers do not experience the relationship as being covenantal nor does the church fulfil its commitment to care pastorally for them (Respondents 4 and 23). A possible way ahead is to be researched in the coming chapters, first looking at the Ezekiel model of shepherding God's covenant people and then proposing a new model for the MCSA.

Chapter 4

The prophet Ezekiel and the Shepherds of Israel

4.1. Introduction

How can the wisdom of Scripture assist in this research? In chapter 34, the prophet Ezekiel uses the shepherd and flock metaphor to present a model of God's expectations of how God's people should be cared for by those who are the shepherds of their flock. Central to the model is the covenant relationship between God and God's people and God's expectations of how the people should be cared and provided for. With the MCSA claiming to be in a covenantal relationship, the shepherd-sheep metaphor, as recorded in Ezekiel 34, provides a model which can be applied to the MCSA and ministers.

It is important to note that this chapter in the dissertation is not an exegesis of Ezekiel chapter 34, nor a historical-critical analysis of the text, but a content analysis of the chapter within the body of the book of Ezekiel as it is presently constituted in the Bible. Chapter 34 forms part of the last of three sections into which the book of Ezekiel can be divided, a section proclaiming salvation (Ezk 33-48) following the earlier sections on judgment (Ezk 1-24) and prophecies against foreign nations (Ezk 25-32). (le Roux 1987:176-177). Chapter 34 forms part of the section dealing with the salvation which God is to inaugurate, a chapter in which the prophet Ezekiel draws on the metaphor of the shepherd and the flock to critique how God expects those who are leaders of God's covenant flock to shepherd those entrusted to them in a covenant relationship (34:1-10). The prophet continues with the metaphor by contrasting the manner of how God will shepherd God's flock with how the shepherds of Israel performed that task (34:11-31). In verses 1-10 the shepherd metaphor applies to those who were shepherding God's flock with disastrous consequences, whilst in verses 11-31 the metaphor applies to God who is the shepherd bringing about restoration for God's covenant people. The shepherd-flock metaphor, as set before us in Ezekiel 34, will be used as the basis to evaluate the covenantal relationship between the MCSA and her ministers.

Metaphors are used extensively in Scripture to describe God and the acts of God, remembering, in the words of Brueggemann, "...no single metaphor can say all that Israel needs to say about God... the rich range of metaphors often stand in tension with each other,

so that one metaphor may say what is left unsaid by another, so that one may correct another, or so that one may deabsolutize another” (Brueggemann 2005:231-232). Alongside the metaphors of governance of God as judge, king, warrior and father, Brueggemann sets the metaphors of sustenance “...which represent Yahweh as one who nurtures, evokes, values, and enhances life. These images for Yahweh are much softer and, I believe, live in some tension with the metaphors of governance” (2005:250). One metaphor of sustenance described by Brueggemann is that of “Yahweh as Shepherd”. He describes how Ezekiel 34 expresses the manner in which Yahweh the shepherd will “...rescue the flock, which royal neglect has placed in great jeopardy. Yahweh will act as a proper and responsible shepherd in order to recover the flock” (2005:259). The shepherd metaphor in Ezekiel 34 will now be investigated in greater depth.

4.2. The context in which the prophet Ezekiel spoke

What is the context in which the people of Israel and Judah found themselves and into which the prophet Ezekiel spoke? Ezekiel lived in times of international upheaval and it is in “...this period of international turmoil and unrest, combined with the immorality and apostasy of Judah” that Ezekiel ministered (Gaebelin 1986:739). The great Assyrian and Egyptian empires were defeated by the rising Babylonian empire that pushed further south leading to a series of attacks on Judah and the deportation of people into exile in Babylon (2 Kings 24:1-2; 12-16). Among the mass deportation in 597 B C was a priest, named Ezekiel who in *circa* 593 BC received his call from God to become a prophet (Ezk 1:1-3) and continued in that role until 571 B C (le Roux 1987:190). His message was primarily to those in exile who “...maintained that Jerusalem would never fall and that they would soon be released to return to Jerusalem. It was exactly this presumption and false security that Ezekiel wished to break down by pointing to their sin, to the judgment of Yahweh and to the fall of Jerusalem” (1987:185).

Ezekiel wanted the people to understand that when Jerusalem fell and the people were deported that this was God’s action in response to the people and their leaders renegeing on their covenant with God. “Yahweh’s judgment was not something inexplicable, arbitrary, or unfair. Rather, it was the logical outcome of the covenant relationship in the light of Israel’s history. Sin *deserves* punishment; and Yahweh *will* punish the wicked” (Wright 2001:31).

Whilst the prophet held that all God's people were to blame for their predicament and all had forsaken their covenant with God, Ezekiel criticises the "...leaders of the people for the way they had utterly failed to provide the quality of integrity of leadership that the covenant relationship required" (Wright 2001:274). The leaders, the shepherds of Israel, acted selfishly, misusing their power and status, leaving the people feeling vulnerable and abused.

However, Ezekiel believed that God is sovereign and proclaimed that God would act to bring salvation, hope and restoration. God would ensure that there was restoration of God's covenant people. A new covenant relationship, based on the covenants of old and modelled on the roles of a shepherd, would be established by means of which God would proclaim "You will be my people and I will be your God" (Ezk 34:30). Wright (2006) asserts that "The whole section, Ezekiel 34-37, is then a coherent vision of a restored people of God living in covenant protection, covenant loyalty, covenant obedience, covenant unity and – above all – with the covenant dwelling place of God once again in their midst, in the language of Leviticus 26. And, most significant for our argument here, *this restoration of the presence of God in a cleansed Israel will have its affects [sic] on the nations*" (Wright 2006:338).

God's restoration process begins with the prophet using the well-known shepherd-flock metaphor to assess the actions, lifestyles and consequences of how the shepherds of Israel have shepherded God's flock (Ezk 34:1-10). The shepherd metaphor is then used to describe how God will bring life to the flock by God shepherding the flock and fulfilling those functions required of a shepherd (34:11-22). God will then inaugurate a new age of blessings and peace under a new Davidic leader in a new covenant relationship (34:23-31). Peterson (2012:264-266) reminds us that "The promise of a covenant of peace followed by the recognition formula (34:27, 30) highlights the shift from judgment to the restoration acts of Yahweh" (Peterson 2012:265).

As the Biblical prophets interpreted the circumstances which people were facing in the light of God's revelation and promises, I will apply a similar process to the covenantal relationship in the MCSA. The chapter will review the meaning Ezekiel ascribed to the metaphor 'the shepherds of Israel' in Ezekiel 34 and allow the metaphor to provide a model of how God expects the MCSA to shepherd those entrusted to them in a covenant relationship. In addition, the shepherd metaphor will be applied to the accountability of the flock to their shepherd. Ezekiel 34, therefore, provides a powerful text with which to learn from and evaluate the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

4.3. The shepherds of Israel and the shepherd metaphor

The people of Israel were familiar with shepherds tending a flock of animals. Many of these shepherds, however, were not the owners of the flock but hired by the owners to tend the flock and did so in terms of a contract drawn up between owner and shepherd. (Mein 2007:497-498). This is also the understanding which Jesus Christ used of himself in John chapter 10 stating, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep” (Jn 10:12). Shepherds were held to account by the owner for the fulfilling of their contract. Postgate (1975:1-21) explains that “...various possibilities led to variations in details of the arrangement, but the underlying principle was unchanged: the shepherd accepted personal liability for the flock, and was remunerated in proportion to the growth of the flock and the amount of its produce” (1975:2). Mein (2007:493-504) expands on the accountability of the shepherd, even having to account for animals that had died, stating, “...a hired shepherd took over management of a flock of mixed sheep and goats for a period of a year at a time. Contracts stipulated a minimum return to the owner in terms of both young animals and products such as wool and cheese. The shepherd was entitled to any surplus over and above the minimum, but had to make good any shortfall out of his own resources....The contracts made provision for the loss of a proportion of the herd each year, on condition that the shepherd provided the skin of the animal that died” (2007:497-498).

What were the duties and responsibilities of the pastoral shepherd? Gan (2010), Cacha (1997), Porter (2001), Mein (2007) and Resane (2014), describe the pastoral roles of a shepherd and combine these roles in various groupings. Gan describes the three primary pastoral roles of a shepherd as “...to lead”, “...feed or provide” and to “...protect the afflicted sheep” (2010:10-11). Shepherds need to lead the animals to water, food and secure locations and lead them away from threats, safeguarding their well-being. They were required to ensure that the flock is adequately nourished in order to remain healthy, care for the weak and search for the lost who go wandering off on their own in search of food. Sheep are defenceless animals and need protection from outside threats such as predation as well as internal threats of bullying and rivalry in the flock. Ageing, infirm and lactating animals require special attention.

When the shepherd was a faithful steward of the flock by leading, feeding, protecting and dealing with the relationships in the flock in a responsible manner, the sheep were healthy, secure, reproducing as they should and were not vulnerable to predation. And the shepherd

could account to the owner with confidence at having fulfilled his responsibilities as the hired shepherd and be rewarded accordingly. Both the owner and the shepherd benefited from good shepherding practices which also enhanced the status of the owner in the eyes of the community as a result of being a successful farmer (Porter 2001:54-60).

In addition to the pastoral responsibilities associated with being a shepherd, the metaphor of a shepherd was used in the Ancient Near East to portray the accountability of the relationship between a royal king and his subjects. Block (1998:279-285) reminds that the verb “to graze, to shepherd” often functions as a technical term meaning “to rule”. (Block 1998:281). According to Odell (2005:426-433):

In keeping with the shepherd metaphor, the ancient Near Eastern ideology of kingship stressed the nurturing and sustaining role of kings. They ruled with justice, provided for their people, and ensured abundance and prosperity. Other aspects of royal ideology indicate that kings performed these functions as servants of the gods, to whom they gave an accounting of the lands and people over which they exercised stewardship” (2005:426).

She later adds, “The shepherd metaphor was closely associated with the king’s responsibility for the welfare of his people” (2005:432).

When the prophet Ezekiel uses the shepherd-sheep metaphor and the terminology “shepherds of Israel” in chapter 34, it is necessary to understand the nuances of the passage and to draw on elements from both the pastoral and the royal kingship roles of a shepherd-king who is required to lead, feed and protect God’s flock. Allen (1990:155-165), in discussing Ezekiel 34, explains that “The term ‘shepherd’ is standard for a king throughout the ancient Near East. In this context it is combined with the use of the metaphor to portray the covenant between Yahweh and Israel (cf Pss 74:179:13; 80:2[1]; cf. the individualization in Ps 23). Accordingly the shepherds were employees of the divine shepherd and responsible to him” Allen 1990:161). The roles of pastoral shepherd and royal kingship, together with the accountability of the shepherd to the owner, are factors which will be considered when looking at the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

4.4. The use of the shepherd metaphor by the prophet Ezekiel

The shepherd metaphor is used by many writers in Scripture to describe the relationship between God and God's people with well-known passages being that of Psalm 23 and the words of Jesus Christ describing himself as "the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). However, it is the explicit use of the shepherd metaphor by the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34, specifically in verses 1-10, to which we will turn our attention. Ezekiel, as did the prophet Jeremiah, combines the pastoral and the kingship roles to indict the "shepherds of Israel", holding them accountable for their actions but also presenting God's model of shepherding the flock following the re-establishment of the covenant relationship. Brueggemann (2005) reminds us that "... a long tradition reckons human kings as shepherds of the flock – that is the community (cf. Isa 44:28; Ezek 37:24). The image evokes a wise, caring, attentive agent who watches over, guards, feeds, and protects a flock that is vulnerable, exposed, dependent, and in need of such help" (2005:259). Mein (2007:493-504) explains that, "It is the relationship between absentee owner/breeder and hired shepherds to which Ezekiel 34 alludes" and that, "We are dealing with a three-way relationship between sheep, owner and hired help" (2007:497, 500).

4.4.1 Who are the shepherds of Israel?

Ezekiel 34 is a complex chapter and the identity of the shepherd differs in verses 1-10 from verses 11-31. In Ezekiel 34:1-10, the prophet does not specify the identity of the "shepherds of Israel" whereas God is explicitly identified as the "shepherd" of God's people in verses 11-31.

Looking more specifically at the identity of the shepherds in verses 1-10, there are differing views as to their identity. Traditionally they are understood to represent Israel and Judah's kings (Mein 2007:494; Duguid 1994:40) whilst others believe they could include not only the kings but all leaders, civil and religious, whose actions impact on others. (Brownlee 1958:201). Odell (2005:423) believes that they represent the "foreign rulers" who reigned over Israel. Whilst accepting that scholars differ as to the identity of the shepherds, the shepherd metaphor is an appropriate model to evaluate everyone who has impacted the lives of God's covenant people. In keeping with Ezekiel's indictment of the prophets, leaders, priests and princes in Ezekiel 22, I believe that the prophet is concerned about the conduct of the leadership of those in the current context of Israel and Judah's history. My premise is that

the shepherds of Israel are for the prophet Ezekiel the civil and religious rulers who have ruled and were then ruling over God's people in Judah whilst being threatened, first by the Assyrian and then by the Babylonian kingdom. The shepherd metaphor, therefore, describes the expectations of the owner of the flock, God, as to how the civil and religious leadership of Israel and Judah are shepherding God's covenant flock, the people of Israel. The rulers, civil and religious, are acting on God's behalf, over God's people and are answerable to God.

In a similar way, using the shepherd metaphor, the shepherds are likened to the MCSA who are acting on God's behalf over the ministers with whom there is a covenantal relationship. Equally, the shepherd metaphor of how God shepherds God's flock (vv11-31) becomes applicable as to how the MCSA should shepherd their flock, the ministers. This will be discussed more fully in section 4.5.4.

4.4.2 Why are the shepherds being held accountable by God?

In terms of the shepherd and flock metaphor, the shepherds of Israel are held accountable in terms of the covenant relationship established between God and Israel. Ezekiel 34, which is styled on the blessings and curses associated with God's covenant with Israel as expressed in Leviticus 26, includes covenant concepts such as the expectation of obedience and faithfulness, God's commitment to people in spite of their waywardness, as well as the covenant formula, "Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign Lord. You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezk 34:30-31). As custodians of God's covenant made with Israel, God expects the shepherds of Israel to lead (shepherd) the flock in terms of their pastoral and royal-kingly roles.

An important aspect of the shepherd metaphor is the accountability of the shepherd to the owner regarding the well-being of the flock. Similarly, God is holding the shepherds of Israel accountable for their shepherding of God's flock as befitting their covenant role. (Dt 17:14–20). However, they have been weighed and found wanting. Wright (2001:273-276) describes their covenantal failure by declaring, "Ezekiel attacked the leaders of the people for the way they had utterly failed to provide the quality of integrity of leadership that the covenant relationship required" (2001:274). "The abused sheep are Yahweh's flock, not the rulers'. There was a delegated authority and they would answer to him for the manner in which they have exercised leadership" (Block 1998:284). The shepherds are, therefore, being held

accountable for the manner in which they have ruled God's people with whom God was in a covenant relationship.

Similarly, I believe that the MCSA is accountable for the manner in which they are applying the covenantal relationship in their shepherding of the ministers. The responsibility of the shepherds of Israel can be likened to the MCSA's responsibility to shepherd the ministers with whom they are in a covenantal relationship as shepherds answerable to God in Christ, the head of the universal Church. This accountability will be more fully explained in sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 of this chapter.

4.4.3 For what are the shepherds being held accountable?

For what are the shepherds being held accountable? The prophet Ezekiel draws on lessons from the contracts entered into between a hired shepherd and the owner of a flock to grasp the failure of the leadership of Israel over God's flock. In the light of Ancient Near East customs and contract requirements, the shepherds have been found wanting in their God-given shepherding tasks of leading, feeding and protecting God's flock. (Gan 2010:10-13; Mein 2007:499-501; Block 1998:283; Klein 1988:121-122). The shepherds have acted selfishly, exploiting the flock, abusing the sheep, stealing from their owner and are more concerned about their own status and well-being than the well-being of the flock. The sheep have been treated harshly, their health has suffered and they are scattered over the countryside with no attempt by the shepherd to search for the lost or weak animals which are vulnerable to predation. (Ezk 34:2-9).

Odell (2005:423-433) highlights the charges brought against the shepherds for the manner they have shepherded the flock stating:

Ezekiel exposes the hypocrisy inherent in the metaphor by dwelling on the manner in which the shepherds enrich themselves at the expense of the flock. Ezekiel asserts that the cause of the shepherd's failure is their determination to dominate with violence and harshness (v. 4), not to lead with care and concern. The quest for power drives the shepherds to destroy what has been entrusted to them. Associated with this will to dominate is the worrisome and ultimately self-defeating consumption of resources. If it is not the sheep that are being eaten, it is the pasture that is being trampled and the waters that are being fouled (2005:432-433).

From a covenantal perspective, the indictment of the shepherd's pastoral role is also God's indictment of the abuse of their covenantal role as the shepherds of God's flock. Mein (2007) articulates the indictment of God stating, "YHWH is presented as the owner of sheep, whose hired hands, the 'shepherds of Israel', have failed to perform their duties of care and protection" (2007:493). The behaviour of the shepherds is not what God expected when they entered into the covenant relationship.

Ministers have raised similar concerns about how they have been shepherded by the MCSA and the lack of accountability of both the church and ministers, contentions which have been identified in chapter 3.

4.5. What action does God take?

All God's actions are directed at the restoration of the flock, a task which Mein (2001:248-250) reminds us is "...totally the work of YHWH himself" (2001:250) and that "...the promised restoration, like the judgment, is a communal one" (2001:220). God who took action against the shepherds now acts for the sheep as their good shepherd. How does God act?

4.5.1 God acts to reclaim the flock and become their shepherd

As the rightful owner of the flock, God's first action is to reclaim the flock from the shepherds and to assume full responsibility for their restoration and future welfare by reintroducing the covenantal theocracy. (Ezk 34:10-11). "The sheep needed rescuing from their own shepherd! So God would act to do so, removing the tyranny and restoring his own divine kingship" (Wright 2001:276).

God indicts the shepherds for failing in their task and holds them accountable for their actions. However, as Block (1998:279-285) reminds us, "...the primary focus is not on the shepherds but on the flock. The leaders are introduced mainly because their actions have precipitated the crisis and created the need for divine intervention on behalf of the sheep" (1998:283). Though God's flock is in a perilous state, all is not lost. God acts by reclaiming the flock in order to shepherd them as a true shepherd should have done, a message of hope leading to the restoration of the flock. Klein (1988) confers stating, "This move of Yahweh

against the shepherds is balanced by Yahweh's move *for* the sheep as their good shepherd in verses 11-16" (Klein 1988:122).

4.5.2 God transforms the relationship between the shepherd and the flock.

Whilst God's first action is against the shepherds, the subsequent actions are all designed to benefit the sheep in order to restore the flock to their full health and potential. (Ezk 34:11-22). God claims them as "my sheep" (Ezk 34:11, 12, 15) and "my flock" (Ezk 34:17, 19, 22). "The possessive pronoun shows us that the bond that unites God to his people is not simply a bond of ownership but a deeper bond of love which God wanted to ratify in the covenant" (Cacha 1997:61).

It is significant that God, as their shepherd, does not discard the pre-requisite roles of a pastoral shepherd but adopts and transforms the pastoral requirements of leading, feeding and protecting the flock. By shepherding the flock in the required manner, God restores life, growth, security and health to the individual sheep and to the flock as a whole and in so doing transforms the relationship between shepherd and flock (Ezk 34: 11-16). Gan (2010:14-18) comments on the transformation that takes place stating:

In Ezekiel 34 those kings are judged who had failed in leading, protecting and feeding the flock. Now this responsibility reverts back to Yahweh in whom the two roles of god and shepherd are fused. Yahweh fulfils the role of a faithful shepherd in these three tasks... Thus, it depicts a picture of more than shepherd and sheep, but rather of a creator and creation, that which has been a binding relationship from the emergence of creation history (2010:15, 19).

The flock is restored to full health when shepherded as God intended. Similarly, the Methodist flock will be restored and refreshed by establishing a new relationship between the church and ministers with the MCSA shepherding the flock as God intended of a shepherd.

4.5.3 God deals with internal struggles threatening the welfare of the flock

The responsibility for the flock being scattered and vulnerable is not only that of the shepherds but also of the sheep. They too are held accountable by God. Competition and infighting between animals affects the well-being of the flock, weakening them and making them more susceptible to disease. However, the shepherds have not fulfilled their task of dealing with the internal threats to the welfare of the flock. The vulnerable have not been

protected from the destructive actions of the stronger (Ezk 34:17-22). The power struggles have impacted negatively on the food and water resources, affecting their health (Ezk 34:18-19). God, therefore, deals with the abuse of power and status by some within the flock as well as the shepherds for not controlling those responsible for the weaker being disadvantaged and feeling vulnerable.

God deals with the internal struggles threatening the welfare of the flock by assuming authority over the whole flock and limiting the powers of those misusing their position in the flock. “Yahweh’s action involves imposing restraints on the healthier members of the flock to prevent them from misusing their superior strength against the weaker sheep...establishing justice, removing the cause of the relational dysfunction, and restoring shalom” (Block 1998:292, 293). Porter (2001:80-83) determines that “If the shepherd stands over the flock, sometimes he must stand even against it” (2001:81). In addition to the pastoral responsibilities of the shepherd to lead, feed and protect the flock is added the responsibility of the shepherd to deal with the internal struggles and threats within the flock.

Similarly, a renewed covenantal relationship in the MCSA requires the incorporation of each of the pastoral responsibilities of the shepherd, including taking authority over the internal struggles within the flock.

4.5.4 God initiates a reign of peace by inaugurating the covenant of peace

God looks to the future and makes provision for the well-being of the flock through the appointment of God’s one chosen shepherd, the servant David, to tend the flock (Ezk 34:23-24) and to inaugurate the reign of peace through the establishment of the covenant of peace (Ezk 34:23-31).

God appoints one shepherd over the flock from the house of David with whom God would enjoy a close relationship and who would be accountable to God. (Ezk 34:23-24). Yahweh’s claim to the sheep is emphasised in v.24, “David will be the prince, but Yahweh will be their God” (Odell 2005:429). It is important to note that the future shepherd is not the owner of the flock but a servant of God, a “prince”, who is to “...tend them and be their shepherd” (Ezk 34:23). It is to this shepherd, and none other, that the flock is called to be obedient knowing that their shepherd is totally committed to their welfare and well-being.

God then sets in motion the envisaged outcomes for God’s flock by means of the new covenant of peace when the one shepherd of David shepherds the covenant people of God.

“In addition to repopulation, restored economic and social life, Ezekiel promises a renewed relationship with YHWH...expressed in the covenant formula ‘and they shall be my people and I will be their God’” (Mein 2001:221). God’s covenant people can look forward to restoration enjoying security, fruitfulness and the removal of oppression. It is to be noted that the shepherd’s responsibilities extend beyond that of oversight for the flock to a commitment to each individual’s needs. “The covenant relationship, while binding the people together in communal solidarity, brought a sense of God’s concern for each person” (Anderson 1988:440).

It is important to note, though, that the restoration of the flock in Ezekiel is not for the flock’s sake but for God’s sake in order to establish God’s kingdom. God’s covenant plan extends beyond the flock to all nations and people. The covenant is re-established as part of God’s mission for Israel. Wright (2006: 330-338) reminds us that, “Obedience to the covenant was not the condition of *salvation* but the condition of their *mission*. Only through covenant obedience and community holiness could they claim or fulfil their identity and role here offered to them. The mission fulfilment and engagement is inseparable from ethical obedience. That is why it is immediately followed by becoming a “holy nation” ” (2006:333).

Who is this shepherd, the servant David, who will lead, feed, protect and deal with the internal relationships within God’s flock in a manner that is God honouring and established on righteousness and justice for all? (Jr 23:1-6 and Ezk 34:17-29). Who is the royal king who combines the roles of God and shepherd?

John’s gospel makes it clear that God has appointed Jesus Christ to be the Good Shepherd and that he has assumed the pastoral and kingly responsibilities of the shepherd over God’s flock. (Jn 10:1-18). It is he who calls himself the “one shepherd” (Jn 10:16) and the “good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). All the pastoral responsibilities of a shepherd are exemplified in Jesus Christ including the acknowledgement that Jesus acts in obedience and subject to the will of his Father (Jn 10:18).

The shepherd metaphor is taken further in 1 Peter chapter 5 where Jesus is acknowledged as the “Chief Shepherd” of God’s flock. The writer reminds us that what we have come to know as the Christian Church has been brought about through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 5:1-4). Those who serve as elders/ministers/presbyters are required to “...be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...” following the example of Jesus

Christ so that “ when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Pt 5:4).

It is to the head of the Christian Church, the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ, that both the MCSA and the ministers are accountable: both having been called into being by the Good Shepherd; both fulfilling their ministry under the guidance of the Good Shepherd and both bound by their covenant relationship. The MCSA is required to be accountable to Jesus Christ for their shepherding of ministers with whom they are in a covenantal relationship. Similarly, the ministers who serve in the MCSA as ‘shepherds of His flock’ are accountable to Jesus Christ for their shepherding of Christ’s followers and their ordained colleagues with whom they are in the covenantal relationship (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:11, 13).

4.5.5 Helpful insights of the prophet Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel offers four helpful insights which will assist in this study and be applied in chapter 5, namely:

- The shepherding metaphor is to be interpreted in the light of the covenant relationship between God and God’s people.
- The shepherds are God’s stewards of the covenant flock and are accountable to God.
- The covenant relationship does not always function as God intends and needs to be re-established from time to time. God’s burning desire is for restoration when the covenant relationship breaks down.
- Creating a new relationship with the flock is essential in order that the shepherd can lead, feed, protect and deal with power relationships within the flock as is expected of a shepherd.

4.6. The Ezekiel shepherd model

What is the significance of Ezekiel 34 to this study of the covenantal relationship in the MCSA? In addition to the insights gained from the prophet Ezekiel's critique of the shepherds of Israel, the pastoral roles of shepherd need to be considered in more detail in order to discern a model which can be applied to the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

4.6.1. The pastoral roles of a shepherd

As portrayed in Ezekiel 34, the pastoral roles of a shepherd include:

4.6.1.1 Leading the flock

The shepherd takes charge of the life of the flock and the individual animals within that flock because sheep need to be under the meticulous control and guidance of the shepherd. In leading the flock, the shepherd determines the direction and pace at which the flock is to move, with the flock grouped together preventing predation and animals wandering away on their own. The shepherd's task is to lead the flock to "rest and refreshment" (Cacha 1997:45) and away from "distress or danger" (Gan 2010:16).

The shepherd must know the countryside, the needs of the flock and alternate pathways to a particular destination for food, water or a place to rest and ruminate. "Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves, they will follow the same trails until they become ruts; graze the same hills until they turn to desert wastes; pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites" (Keller 2007:83). The shepherd must prepare the way by "eradicating poisonous weeds" and "clear water-holes, springs and drinking places for his stock" (2007:127, 131).

In leading the flock shepherds need to be pro-active to changing seasons and weather conditions; their surroundings and the influence of drought or excessive heat. Porter (2001: 58-60) also draws attention to the impact of "...pregnancy, lambing and lactation" on the pace at which the flock could move. The shepherd "...had to be especially careful the flock was not overdriven (Gn 33.13-14) so as to tire pregnant ewes or lambs too small to keep up such a pace" (Porter 2001:59).

Sheep are prone to wander away from the flock whilst feeding, resulting in predation or getting into difficult situations from which they cannot free themselves. Shepherds, therefore,

need to search for those that are lost and rescue them, uniting them with the flock, risking their own life (Cacha 1997:54-55).

4.6.1.2 Feeding of and caring for the flock

Feeding and caring have to do with providing what nourishment is required for the “welfare of the flock” (Block1998:289). Feeding includes providing physical nourishment for the animals, creating an atmosphere conducive to their well-being as well as taking care of all the needs of the animals. Sheep require food and rest which influence their health, growth, strength and success in procreation. (Gan 2010:20). Caring extends to the grooming of the animals to “keep them clean and free of contamination” (Resane 2014:3). Even in drought or inclement weather, the animals need food, water and shelter. At particular times of the year the shepherd needs to pay special attention to the circumstances the flock is facing, for example, assisting with the delivery of lambs and dealing with the outbreak of nasal flies in the summertime which irritate the sheep, causing them to loose condition (Keller 2007:138).

Shepherds are expected to care for the flock by seeking the welfare of the weak, sick and crippled; to search for those animals that have strayed and the lost, and not to rule harshly. (Ezk 34:4). Caring creates an “atmosphere of tenderness and love” (Cacha 1997:58), providing tranquillity so that the flock can rest and ruminate. For a relationship to develop between shepherd and flock, the shepherd needs to have an intimate knowledge of each animal. “It is not a mere intellectual knowledge of the exterior traits but a knowledge which also means personal involvement and which enters into the practical day-to-day relationship between the shepherd and the sheep” (1997:61).

4.6.1.3 Protecting the flock

Sheep are defenceless animals and require protection from external dangers, injuries and threats such as wild animals and inclement weather. The shepherd has a guarding presence, watching over the flock whilst they are being led, busy grazing or at rest, “creating a sense of security in the flock” (Cacha 1997:48-49). Sheep “...have little or no means of self-defense [sic]. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to run” (Keller 2007:43). It is, therefore, the task of the shepherd to protect the animals from all external threats.

The shepherd must also protect the flock from internal threats of the bullying actions of others in the flock. A flock will develop a natural hierarchy and butting order. However, it is the task of the shepherd to ensure that the weaker animals or those lower in the butting order are protected from bullying (Block 1998:293) and that the stronger animals do not spoil the grazing and quality of water for the rest of the flock (Ez 34:18). The weak need to be protected from the powerful (Cacha 1997:57). Bullying and rivalries need to be dealt with and the shepherd needs to discipline misbehaviour. (Gan 2010:17). “For a flock to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations, and hunger. The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the sheepman himself who can provide release from these anxieties” (Keller 2007:42).

4.6.1.4 The important role of restoration

A common factor in the shepherd’s roles of leading, feeding and protecting the flock is that of restoration. Each animal is important to the shepherd and their welfare is his primary concern. His efforts at restoration will include restoring health to the sick; seeking those that have strayed or are lost and re-uniting them with the flock; re-uniting lambs that have become separated from their mothers with each other; introducing lambs to the flock; restoring relationships within the flock; and restoring his relationship with an animal when he has had to discipline an animal.

To summarise - the shepherd metaphor, combining the shepherd-king and pastoral roles, clarifies the expectations and role of the hired shepherd who is acting on behalf of the owner, caring for his flock. The shepherd is held accountable as to how he has led, fed and protected the flock from external and internal threats, taking note of the relationship that is established between shepherd and flock. The Ezekiel model calls for accountability but places the emphasis on restoration and the well-being of the flock. The desire of the owner is that the flock must be well managed, cared for and free of disease, reproduce successfully and provide a return for the owner. This metaphor will now be applied to the covenantal relationship in the MCSA.

4.6.2 Applying the shepherd model to the MCSA

The MCSA claims a place within the universal Church of Christ and authorises ministers with whom she has a covenantal relationship through ordination and acceptance into Full Connexion "...to act in its name and on its behalf in certain ways", subject to the doctrines, discipline and usages of the Church (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:20). "Christ's ministers in the Church are stewards in the household of God, and shepherds of His flock" (2014a:13). In ordaining ministers, the MCSA authorises these presbyters to act as shepherds of God's flock, holding them accountable for their ministry. By describing the relationship as covenantal, the MCSA is assuming both a shepherd-king and a pastoral role over the ministers. The MCSA is, therefore, accountable to God in Christ for the shepherding of the ministers with whom there is a covenantal relationship as their shepherd-king and pastor. In applying the shepherd model to the MCSA and by the church describing the relationship with ministers as covenantal, the role that the MCSA assumes changes to that of the hired shepherd, accountable to the owner of the flock, Jesus Christ, for her leadership of and relationship with the ministers. A new, a different, covenant relationship needs to be established based on God's covenants recorded in Scripture.

However, Block (1998:279-285) has reminded us in section 4.5.1 that "...the primary focus is not on the shepherds but on the flock" (1998:283). The focus in the MCSA must, therefore, be on how the shepherding model will bring life, restoration and well-being to the flock by implementing the model of leading, feeding, protecting and dealing with power relationships within a re-established covenant relationship.

The advantage of the new model is that with the MCSA and ministers being in a covenant and not covenantal relationship both will be held accountable to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, for their responsibilities in the relationship. The MCSA will be required to fulfil the responsibilities associated with being the shepherd of the ministers by leading, feeding and protecting them from internal and external threats as well as establishing a renewed relationship with the ministers. Ministers will be under the discipline of the church, subject to their leadership and accountable for their behaviour and actions. Accountability processes will limit the inappropriate use of the covenantal relationship empowering ministers not to feel insecure or aggrieved. The introduction of these elements will enable the Methodist Church to re-evaluate her present ecclesiology, theology of ministry and polity resulting in a more life-breathing relationship between the MCSA and her ministers and a more healthy flock through whom the mission of the Church of Christ will be fulfilled. If this is what God

could do for the covenant people, could the same not happen within the MCSA whose shepherd is our Lord Jesus Christ? The implications of adopting the Ezekiel shepherd model in a re-established covenant relationship will be explored in chapter 5.

4.7. Conclusion

What is helpful for this study is that whilst the prophet Ezekiel recognises that all is not well with the flock, all is not lost. God never gives up on those to whom God is committed through the covenant relationship. As their true shepherd God acts decisively to restore the health and well-being of the flock by transforming and legitimising the pastoral responsibilities of the shepherd to lead, feed, protect and to take authority over the relational dysfunction in the flock. God looks to the future with the appointment of the one chosen shepherd, Jesus Christ, as the Chief Shepherd over the flock and over all shepherds of the flock. According to what we understand in terms of a covenantal shepherd-flock model, it would be reasonable to believe that the MCSA can't claim to be in a covenantal relationship with ministers without accepting the responsibilities and accountability as recorded in the Old and New Testaments to manage the flock in a more life-giving way. The converse is also true – by accepting to be in a renewed covenantal relationship with the Church and their colleagues, ministers need to accept the authority of the MCSA and their accountability to their Lord, the Church and their colleagues in order to contribute to a more life-giving relationship. How this could be accomplished will be investigated in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

A Wesleyan theology of covenant in the MCSA

5.1. Introduction

This study set out to answer the research question: ‘How do we discern a model of the covenantal relationship that is theologically sound, restorative, life giving and in keeping with Methodist tradition?’ Methodist ministers are not employees but in the covenantal relationship which the MCSA describes in the *Book of Order* (2014a) as:

A minister who is so called has a covenantal relationship but not contractual relationship with the Church. The church provides ministers with the opportunity to practice their calling in or through this covenantal relationship. The Church recognises its pastoral responsibility to care for the welfare of its Ministers. Nevertheless, notwithstanding any provision contained in the Laws and Discipline or the decisions of Conference or of the Connexional Executive which seem to indicate the contrary, no legally enforceable contract shall exist at any time between the Church or any of its Circuits on the one hand and a Minister on the other hand, ...” (2014a:30).

Whilst the MCSA intends the relationship to be a covenant between the church and ministers, this is not necessarily the experience of ministers who believe that the covenantal relationship is an inappropriate use of covenant theology which leaves them feeling powerless and aggrieved.

Chapter 1 introduced the covenantal relationship in the context of Methodist theology and polity as well as the implications for ministers, their ministry and their families. This unique relationship, foundational for ordained ministers within the MCSA, has received attention from both the church and ministers in recent years. The chapter described the meaning of covenant theology and covenant relationships in Scripture and the MCSA and their influence in the adoption of the covenantal relationship as a description of the relationship of the MCSA with ministers. In order to establish the personal experiences of the covenantal relationship by ministers, interviews with a sample of forty two ministers (five percent of active ministers) were conducted. Believing that the wisdom of Scripture would assist in the research, the critique of the prophet Ezekiel of the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34 was

highlighted as a model for consideration by the MCSA of a re-established covenant relationship. Together Scripture, Methodist tradition and the experiences of ministers were applied to the hypothesis that when the covenantal relationship functions on the theological premise to lead, feed and protect the flock, as required in the Ezekiel model of Ezekiel 34, then the outcome would be an amended ecclesiology leading to theologically sound, life breathing relationships.

Chapter 2 described the covenantal relationship in the MCSA in more detail tracing the three influences of Scripture, Methodist tradition and challenges by ministers to their employment status leading to the adoption of the covenantal relationship terminology in 2001 and the introduction of the terminology into the *Yearbook* of 2009 (2009:86) and the *Book of Order* in 2014 (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:30).

The covenantal relationship is an extension of the ecclesiology of the MCSA which believes that Jesus Christ entrusts ministry and mission to every member of the body of Christ. However, God calls some believers through an inner conviction of the Holy Spirit, and whose calling is then tested and affirmed by the church, to be "...set apart for the ordained ministry of the Word and Sacraments and the pastoral oversight of the People of God" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:20).

As a consequence of being accepted into Full Connexion and ordained into the presbyterate, ministers enter into a covenantal and not a contractual relationship with the MCSA which provides an opportunity for ministers to fulfil their calling from God and to do so with the authority, care and protection of the Conference in return for ministers being subject to the discipline and authority of the Conference. Being a connexional church, the MCSA ordains presbyters into the itinerant ministry whose work is directly related to their office as a presbyter whereby they "...are given authority to care for the people of God, to teach and disciple them and to lead and equip them for mission and ministry" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:14).

However, on closer examination, a number of questions are raised regarding the covenantal relationship. The relevance of covenant theology in the covenantal relationship; the implications of the practice of Full Connexion and ordination; the theological premise on which the MCSA describes the relationship as a covenantal relationship; the lack of mutual responsibility and accountability; and that the covenantal relationship does not incorporate

many of the elements central to covenant theology in Scripture need to be considered in a meaningful covenant relationship.

From an ecclesiastical perspective, questions regarding with whom ministers are in the covenantal relationship; how they enter into the covenantal relationship; to whom are they accountable and how should ministers be held accountable are being asked. It is important to determine the function of and the relationship between Full Connexion and ordination in the covenantal relationship. On what basis does the MCSA motivate using the term ‘covenantal relationship’ – is it theological or did the MCSA find in the covenants of God with God’s people a type of covenant relationship which they adopted to describe the relationship with ministers? Whilst there are elements of Scripture and the Wesleyan tradition expressed in the covenantal relationship, this does not mean that the covenantal relationship is not a convenient instrument used by the MCSA when dealing with sensitive labour issues.

From a justice perspective questions are raised how the MCSA, whilst recognising its responsibility to care for the welfare of its ministers, only makes provisions for benefits to be received by ministers without being held accountable should they not receive their stipend or benefits. Ministers are stationed at the discretion of the Conference and the MCSA is not even required to provide a station for a minister and may regard that minister as having resigned should they not be appointed to a station for two consecutive years. In addition, ministers have no employment contract, are bound by the internal appeal and arbitration processes as set down in the *Book of Order* (2014a) and may not turn to structures outside of the church for relief regarding labour matters. It appears that all the power rests in the hands of the Conference and that ministers are accountable to the Conference, whilst Conference is not accountable to ministers. The relationship may be legal, but ministers are asking, “Is this practice just in the Christian Church in 2015?”

Chapter 3 dealt with the experiences of ministers. How do ministers experience the covenantal relationship? A qualitative methodology was used to research the understanding and experiences of a representative sample of 42 ordained ministers by means of personal interviews conducted in their own locality. The grounded theory methodology of analysis, as described by Babbie (2012:336), was applied to the data in order to determine the findings of the experiences of ministers.

The findings indicate that the covenantal relationship is not well received by ministers and is seen as serving the church and not the ministers. Ministers are negatively affected by the covenantal relationship when it comes to where they are stationed, their financial security when they do not receive their stipend or allowances and the misuse of power by the MCSA when dealing with labour and disciplinary matters. The covenantal relationship also impacts negatively on the families of ministers. Ministers confirmed that the terminology ‘covenantal relationship’ is a recent development and has only been incorporated into the language and discipline of the MCSA in the new millennium which, they believe, was introduced to deal with sensitive labour issues.

Most ministers experience the covenantal relationship as them neither being in a covenant nor in a relationship. Whilst they are accountable, the MCSA is not held accountable. They reject that the covenantal relationship can be likened to or founded on the covenants recorded in the Old or New Testaments and experience the covenantal relationship as the MCSA using biblical language to validate a labour practice. Their experience is that the covenantal relationship is a procedure by means of which the MCSA protects itself from litigation by ministers in courts of law or independent institutions outside of the structures of the church; it allows for labour practices which would not be legally permissible in a contractual relationship; it enables the MCSA to avoid the financial obligations to ministers who do not receive their stipends or allowances; and is a labour practice used by the MCSA to deal with unsuitable, under-performing or problematic ministers without going through formal dismissal procedures.

In addition to ministers believing that the MCSA needs to be held accountable for their actions and decisions, they equally believe that their colleagues need to be held accountable for their actions and for their performance as ministers. The present structures and processes are not holding ministers accountable and need to be revised.

Whilst the MCSA describes the relationship as being “in covenant”, what does it look like in practice? The answer appears to be that ministers are left feeling vulnerable and powerless. The overwhelming experience is that ministers have questions about the leadership they are receiving; the lack of nurture and protection by the church; feel disappointed that bishops are not able to give time to the pastoral care of their flock and that the misuse and abuse of power at all levels creates a feeling of vulnerability.

Because the covenantal relationship in its present form is not well received by the ministers of the MCSA, how is the relationship to be structured in the future? Overwhelmingly ministers want the covenantal relationship to be revised. A large number wish to move to a contractual relationship but would accept that the covenantal relationship be revised in order to include mutual accountability and mutual responsibilities from both the MCSA and ministers. Ministers are seeking a relationship which includes procedures to hold the MCSA accountable; measures for dialogue and consultation before the moving of a minister; an inclusive and fair process before ministers can be discontinued from the ministry; mechanisms to provide more security of tenure for ministers and their families and for ministers to be held more accountable for their actions and fulfilling their responsibilities.

Chapter 4 dealt with the critique of the prophet Ezekiel of the shepherds of Israel for the manner in which they have shepherded God's flock, God's covenant people, providing a model of a covenant relationship which can be applied to the covenantal relationship in the MCSA. I have argued that the shepherd metaphor, as used by the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 34:1-10, describes the expectations of the owner of the flock, God, as to how those in leadership over God's people are to tend God's covenant flock, the people of Israel. I have argued that whilst scholars differ as to the identity of the shepherd, the shepherd metaphor is an appropriate model to evaluate those leaders who have impacted the lives of God's covenant people. God requires the shepherd to lead, feed and protect the flock and deal with the power struggles within the flock as was expected of a hired shepherd, remembering that they are accountable to the owner for the manner in which they have fulfilled their responsibilities. The prophet's indictment of the failure of the shepherds of Israel to fulfil their pastoral responsibilities is God's indictment of their abuse of their covenantal role as the shepherds of God's flock.

However, all is not lost. God never gives up on those to whom God is committed through the covenant relationship. In Ezekiel 34:11-31, the prophet describes how God, the true shepherd of Israel and owner of the flock, acts decisively to restore the health and well-being of the flock by transforming and legitimising the pastoral responsibilities of the shepherd to lead, feed, protect and to take authority over the power struggles within the flock. God also looks to the future appointment of God's one chosen shepherd, the servant David, Jesus Christ, to be the "Good Shepherd" who will become the head of what we know as the Christian Church and to whom all shepherds are accountable. (Ezk 34:23-31 and John 10:1-18).

The Ezekiel shepherd metaphor and model provides a covenant model from Scripture for it is to the head of the Christian Church, Jesus Christ the “Good Shepherd, that both the MCSA and the ministers are accountable: both having been called into being by the Good Shepherd; both fulfilling their ministry under the guidance of the Good Shepherd and both bound by their covenant relationship. The MCSA is required to be accountable to Jesus Christ for their shepherding of ministers with whom they are in a covenantal relationship. Similarly, the ministers who serve in the MCSA as ‘shepherds of His flock’ are accountable to Jesus Christ for their shepherding of Christ’s followers and to their ordained colleagues with whom they are in the covenantal relationship (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:11, 13).

In addition, the Ezekiel shepherd model provides a covenant model of how the MCSA should shepherd the ministers whereby the MCSA can be held accountable as to whether the flock has been led, fed and protected as God intends as well as bringing about restoration to those who are lost, weak and intimidated in the flock. The new covenant relationship requires the MCSA to accept responsibility and accountability for their shepherding of the flock whilst the ministers need to accept the authority of their shepherd, and be accountable to the shepherd in order to contribute to a more life-giving relationship.

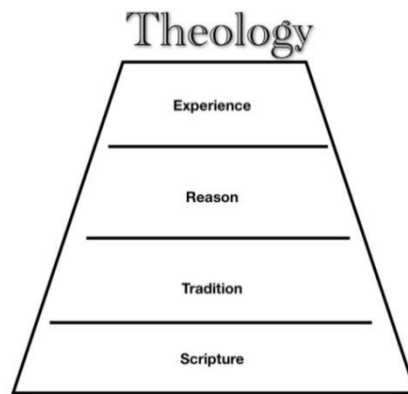
5.2. Conclusion and recommendation

It is my conclusion that the MCSA should move away from the existing covenantal relationship with the recommendation that the covenantal relationship be re-defined to a covenant relationship in keeping with Scripture and the practices of other Conferences in the Methodist tradition. A covenant relationship in terms of the Ezekiel shepherd model will enable the Methodist Church to re-define her present ecclesiology, theology of ministry and polity as set down in the *Book of Order*. This will result in a more restorative and life-giving model for the relationship between the Church and her ministers.

5.3. Support for the change to a covenant relationship using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Is there support in the theology and practices of the Methodist Church to move to a covenant relationship? Indeed there is with such a change being supported by applying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to the data at hand.

This research relates specifically to the Methodist Church for whom the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is the accepted methodology of theological reflection, as illustrated in the diagram below (Wesleyan Quadrilateral n.d):



The term “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” is not the description used by Mr Wesley of his theological method but it was introduced by Albert Outler. Outler (1985: 7-18) explains:

Wesley was clearly interested in coherent doctrinal norms but was equally clear in his aversion to having such norms defined too narrowly or in too judicial a form...His working concepts of doctrinal authority were carefully worked out; they were complex and dynamically balanced. His first appeal was to the Holy Bible...well aware that Scripture alone had rarely settled any controversial point of doctrine. Thus, though never as a substitute or corrective, he would appeal to “the primitive church” and to the Christian tradition at large as competent, complementary witnesses to “the meaning” of this Scripture or that.

But Scripture and tradition would not suffice without the good offices (positive and negative) of critical reason. Thus, he insisted on logical coherence and as an authorised reference in any contest between contrary propositions or arguments. And yet, this was never enough. It was, as he knew for himself, the vital Christian experience of the assurance of one’s sins forgiven, that clinched the matter (1985:8-9).

Oden and Longden (1991) comment on the theological method of Mr Wesley stating, “Thus we see in Wesley a distinctive theological *method*, with Scripture as its pre-eminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture” (Oden & Longden 1991:25). Maddox (1994), however, warns that for Mr Wesley experience “...was only to confirm what Scripture proclaimed” (Maddox 1994:45). Thorsen (2006:7-27) describes the relationship of the components saying, “The Quadrilateral sees not just dependence but interdependence among Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. There always exists an interdependence or coinherence, using a Trinitarian analogy, between the various religious authorities” (2006:25). The United Methodist Church incorporates the methodology of the quadrilateral as a source and criteria for their theological processes stating, “John Wesley believed that “the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason” (United Methodist Church 2012:80).

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral methodology will now be applied to support the proposed change from a covenantal to a covenant relationship.

5.3.1 Support from Scripture

Scripture reveals what it means to be in a covenant relationship. One of the recurring themes of Scripture is that, out of God’s love for humankind, God enters into a covenant with people and invites them to respond in love and obedience. Foster (2010:205–208) describes the characteristics of a covenant as “...a (1) chosen (2) relationship of (3) mutual obligation, (4) guaranteed by oath sanctions” where “...the obligations were not necessarily equal but that both parties bound themselves to do something for the other, to treat one another in certain ways” (2010:205). Attwell (2007b:1-5) reminds us that in the covenants recorded in the Old and New Testaments, “The Covenant is initiated, sustained and renewed by a dominant party. The purpose of the dominant party is to give life, to sustain it and renew it. And that the submissive party obeys the dominant party and finds life in that obedience” (2007b:3). As Linington (2003:58-72) reminds us, “Time and again, the prophets announce the judgement of God on the recalcitrant nation, but even in the severest of these, the ultimate purpose of God is the restoration of the relationship between Himself and His people” (Linington 2003:59).

Some of the characteristics of the covenants recorded in Scripture are included in the covenantal relationship of the MCSA. For example, whilst it is the minister who chooses to be in the covenantal relationship and commits to be obedient to the MCSA, the MCSA's response is to protect, nurture and care for the ministers within that covenant relationship as is expressed in Exodus 19, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6).

However, certain features which are essential to covenant relationships in Scripture, for example mutual accountability (Gen 17:4-10; Ex 19:4-6) and the restorative, life-breathing acts of the dominant party in the relationship are missing in the covenantal relationship of the MCSA. The words of Ezekiel are relevant to this requirement, "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not the shepherds take care of the flock? ... but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally" (Ezk 34:2-4).

Bringing together those elements which are already present in the covenantal relationship and incorporating the additional elements from biblical covenants will provide the foundation onto which the shepherd model from Ezekiel 34 will be built to establish a new covenant relationship.

5.3.2 Support from Methodist tradition

The change to a covenant relationship is supported by various traditions within the Methodist movement, including the influences of the thinking and theology of John Wesley as set out in section 2.1.2 of chapter 2, namely the influence of Mr Wesley's covenant theology; the accountability to the Conference whose decisions and powers are absolute; the acceptance of preachers into Full Connexion with the Conference; the spiritual and material care of preachers; and the influence of Connexionalism. How the conferences outside of Southern Africa have incorporated those traditions into their present constitutions are informative and provide additional information that supports the proposed change to a covenant relationship from a covenantal relation. What we can learn from the Methodist Church in Britain and America will now be examined.

5.3.2.1 The nature of a covenant relationship

The Conferences of the Methodist Church in Britain and the United Methodist Church in America incorporate the covenant relationship into their constitutions, sometimes in agreement with the Southern African Conference but also differing in important aspects. Both Conferences use the word ‘covenant’ in describing the relationship between the Conference and the minister. The British Conference speaks of a ‘covenant relationship’ (Methodist Church 2013:530) whilst the American Conference speaks of being ‘in covenant’ (United Methodist Church 2012:218). These conferences support the use of the word ‘covenant’ in its Scriptural meaning and not ‘covenantal’ as a type of covenant presently adopted by the MCSA.

Being a covenant relationship, both Conferences define the mutual accountability and responsibility of each party, represented in the constitution of the British Conference (Methodist Church 2013:530-531) stating, “By receiving persons into Full Connexion as Methodist presbyters the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry” (2013:530).

Mutual accountability of both the Conference and ministers is provided for in Methodist tradition and needs to be incorporated into the constitutions of the MCSA. Moving to a covenant relationship, the MCSA will define more clearly the nature of the accountability and responsibilities of each party in the relationship. Being a covenant relationship will ensure that the interests of both parties are served as well as that both parties are accountable in the relationship.

5.3.2.2 Implications of being accepted into Full Connexion

Both the British and the American Conferences emphasise that entry into the covenant relationship is by means of being received into Full Connexion of the Order of Presbyters of the Conference and then ordained by the Conference. The Methodist Church in Britain states, “By receiving persons into Full Connexion as Methodist presbyters the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them...” (Methodist Church 2013:530), with the United Methodist Church stating, “Elders in full connection with the annual conference by virtue of their election and ordination are bound in a special covenant with all the ordained elders of

their annual conference. In the keeping of this covenant they perform the ministerial duties and maintain the ministerial standards established by those in the covenant” (United Methodist Church 2012:256). For these connexions, being received into Full Connexion incorporates ministers into the Order of Presbyters whilst ordination grants authority for them to function as a minister in the Church of God. “By their authority given in the ordination, they are authorised to preach and teach the Word of God, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the Church for service in mission and ministry” (2012:256).

However, whilst both conferences highlight that being in Full Connexion is with the Conference through the Order of Presbyters, they place a greater emphasis than the MCSA on being in connexion with and accountable to their ordained colleagues in the Order of Presbyters. “An order is a covenant community within the church to mutually support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church” (United Methodist Church 2012:221).

There are three implications arising from the understanding of being received into Full Connexion from these Conferences which should be noted by the MCSA. Firstly, they distinguish between being received into Full Connexion and ordination. Being received into Full Connexion incorporates ministers into the Order of Presbyters whilst ordination grants authority for them to function as a minister in the Church of God. Each practice fulfils a specific role and together enable ministry to take place. Whilst differentiating and defining the purpose of entry into Full Connexion and ordination, they, together, enable purposeful ministry to take place with the authority of the Church of Christ and with accountability to those in the Order.

Secondly, there is a greater emphasis on ministers being accountable to each other. Ministers are supported and held accountable by their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters and they, in turn, support and hold them accountable. “Ordained persons exercise their ministry in covenant with all Christians, especially with those whom they lead and serve in ministry. They also live in covenant of mutual care and accountability with all those who share their ordination, especially in the United Methodist Church, with the ordained who are members of the same conference and part of the same Order” (United Methodist Church 2012:218). The British Conference requires that presbyters are accountable to and for each other stating, “Presbyters and presbyteral probationers and deacons and diaconal probationers shall meet regularly as separate orders of ministry and where appropriate together, to confer together,

encourage and watch over one another in love in respect of the exercise of their presbyteral or diaconal ministry” (Methodist Church 2013:568).

Thirdly, ministers are accountable to each other in the Presbyteral Session of the Synod. “The primary constitutional forum in which presbyters account for their ministry and are accounted for by the Church is the Presbyteral Session of the Synod. The Presbyteral Session of the Conference is the primary constitutional forum in which presbyters corporately exercise their ministry of pastoral responsibility for the Church” (Methodist Church 2013:530).

Being in Full Connexion with colleagues and, therefore, accountable to them in a Ministerial Session of Synod and Conference have a dominant place in the theology and constitutions of the conferences outside of Southern Africa. In contrast, the MCSA has not sufficiently distinguished between the two practices of ordination and Full Connexion, contributing to the removal of the MCSA’s emphasis on the fellowship, accountability and oversight of members of the presbyterate over one another from a Ministerial Session of Synod and Conference to a general Synod and Conference. Adopting a covenant relationship in the MCSA will clarify the procedures and practices whereby ministers will have a greater responsibility of being accountable to each other and for each other.

5.3.2.3 The support and maintenance of ministers

The Conferences in Britain and America set down their obligations and commitments towards the support and care of ministers. The commitment of the United Methodist Church is expressed in the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* stating, “Assumption of the obligations of the itineracy, required to be made at the time of admission into the traveling connection, puts upon the Church the counter obligation of providing support for the itinerant ministry of the Church” (United Methodist Church 2012:427). In addition, the United Methodist Church states that, “The Church shall provide, and the ordained minister is entitled to receive, not less than the equitable compensation established by the annual conference for clergy members according to provisions of ¶ 625.3.³⁴... If it becomes necessary to modify a pastor’s compensation, it shall occur at the end of the conference appointment year” (2012:271, 428). Similar commitments are made by the British

³⁴ ¶ 625.3 “The commission shall carefully study the needs for additional support within the conference and the sources of income and shall recommend annually to the conference for its action a schedule of minimum base compensation for all serving full-time as pastors to local charges and for ordained ministers serving other types of appointments” (2012:429).

Conference declaring, “Circuit ministers, other ministers in the active work and probationers appointed to stations within the control of the Church shall ... receive stipends at not less than the appropriate rate on the scale of minimum stipends from time to time prescribed by the Conference” (Methodist Church 2013:600).

Ministers in these conferences are assured of receiving their monthly stipends and allowances for each year of their appointment, unlike the Conference of the MCSA which is not accountable for stipends and allowances not received by ministers. Moving to a covenant relationship will give ministers financial security and security of tenure in a circuit as ministers will receive their stipend and allowances, even when stationed in presently non-viable circuits.

5.3.2.4 In dealing with under-performance and unsuitability of ministers

Whilst not binding in South Africa or on the MCSA, for reference purposes, the Conferences of Britain and America have clearly set down procedures to evaluate the performance and suitability of a minister. In addition to the conferences placing an emphasis on the continuing professional development and training of presbyters, ministers are held accountable for their effectiveness by their colleagues through the annual review of each minister by their colleagues. The Methodist Church in Britain requires that “Every such person shall engage in ministerial development review, a process which enables each such presbyter or deacon to reflect, with input from others, on how his or her ministry is being experienced and fulfilled both in relation to the Church as a whole and within the particular context in which his or her ministry is being exercised” (Methodist Church 2013:569). The United Methodist Church has a process of evaluation stating that “There are professional responsibilities (§ 340³⁵) that elders are expected to fulfil and that represent a fundamental part of their accountability and a primary basis of their continued eligibility for annual appointment” (United Methodist Church 2012:258). In terms of those evaluations, ministers are then held accountable for “Evidence of continuing effectiveness reflected in annual evaluations by the pastor-parish relations committee and by the district superintendent or a comparable authority” (2012:258).

³⁵ § 340 “The responsibilities of elders are derived from the authority given in ordination. Elders have a fourfold ministry of Word, Sacraments, Order, and Service and thus serve in the local church and in extension ministries in witness and service of Christ’s love and justice. Elders are authorised to preach and teach the Word, to provide pastoral care and counsel, to administer the sacraments, and to order the life of the church for service in mission and ministry as pastors, superintendents, and bishops” (2012:267).

When a minister's "...professional effectiveness or vocational competence" is in question, procedures are in place for a "corrective plan of action" to be initiated by the bishop, failing which the "...conference relations committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry shall conduct a fair process hearing as set forth in ¶ 362.2 in any administrative location process. The committee shall report the results of the hearing to the full Board of Ordained Ministry for their action" (2012:301). Similar procedures are in place for the discontinuance of a probationer minister (2012:245).

The procedures of the United Methodist Church ensure that under-performance and unsuitability of ministers are dealt with justly and transparently and that the stationing of ministers is not used as a method of dismissing a minister without following a participatory review process.

It is presently very difficult in the MCSA to dismiss a minister for under-performance or unsuitability once a candidate for the ministry has been accepted as a probationer minister. Whilst the term 'probationer minister' is used to describe a minister during his/her formation years, action is frequently taken against the church when such persons are found not to be suitable for the ordained ministry.

A similar problem exists regarding the suitability of those serving as ordained ministers in the MCSA. Whilst the requirement that "For accountability purposes, every Minister's work shall be reviewed bi-annually through an interview process (Review of Ministry)" is recorded in the *Book of Order* (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:42) and is encouraged by some bishops, this regulation is either being resisted, conducted on an informal basis or not at all leaving the MCSA powerless to deal with the under-performance and unsuitability of ministers. The provisions of the 1992 *Laws and Discipline* (Eighth Edition) to assess whether "...a minister is left by Conference without an appointment to any Circuit or Connexional office on grounds of unsuitability, lack of efficiency, or lack of general acceptance among the Circuits" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1992:43) needs to be re-introduced in an expanded format into the *Book of Order* as this provision was excluded from subsequent editions. The re-introduction of this provision into the *Book of Order* will support the concept of being in a covenant relationship resulting in ministers not feeling disempowered and being acted on unjustly by the MCSA for whom not stationing ministers is the manner of handling under-performance or unsuitability.

5.3.2.5 A fuller understanding of the Covenant Service

The Covenant Service has greatly influenced the manner in which the MCSA interprets the covenantal relationship in the light of the covenant commitment made, “I am no longer mine but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things” (Methodist Church 1999:288) with the emphasis on our response in obedience to serve God wherever that may be and whatever the cost. The insight provided by Attwell in December 2014, recorded in section 2.8 of chapter 2, that “...obedience is less and less a glad response to the love of God in Christ and increasingly mere self abnegation” (Attwell 2014:2) is an important warning in understanding covenant theology. Mr Wesley intended that the Covenant Service emphasise God’s covenant promise that “He will fulfil in and through us all that He declared in Jesus Christ, who is the Author and Perfecter [sic] of our faith. That His promise still stands we are sure, for we have known His goodness and proved His grace in our lives day by day” (Methodist Church 1936:123). The response of obedience to God in the Covenant Service is founded on and in response to the love and commitment of God to us in Jesus Christ. God’s love and grace enable the people to respond in thankfulness, “I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; ...” (1936:132).

In moving from a covenantal to a covenant relationship, the MCSA will need to incorporate, the element of God’s covenant commitment and promise of life to God’s people into the covenant relationship. Only then will ministers respond in thankfulness and not out of duty or coercion by the MCSA. This change in emphasis will deal with the critique of CB Firth who, in the journal *Theology* (1961:245-246), critiqued the theology of the Covenant Service stating, “It tends to make the climax of the service, i.e. the making of the so-called covenant, an act of the human individual by himself. He makes it and God is asked to ratify it” (1961:245). In a similar way, Firth’s critique reminds the MCSA of the need to move away from the covenantal relationship in which the church ratifies the covenant made by the ministers to a covenant relationship founded on grace, love and a life-giving relationship.

5.3.3 Support from reason

“Wesley characteristically restricted the role of reason in theology to organising and drawing inferences from revelation” (Maddox 1994:41). What can the MCSA infer from other sources to support the change to a covenant relationship?

5.3.3.1 Implications from Courts of Law

There are four implications arising from courts of law which are important for a revised covenant relationship in the MCSA. Firstly, in section 2.7.3.1 of chapter 2 the findings of courts of law in South Africa determining that ministers of the MCSA are bound by the constitutional provisions of the Conference and are not in a contractual relationship are recorded. These findings are supported by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in the judgment of *The President of the Methodist Conference v Preston, 2013* (UKSC, 29 2013). The court upheld the legality of the covenant relationship confirming that “...the rights and duties of ministers arise, as it seems to me, entirely from their status in the constitution of the Church and not from any contract” (2013:Paragraph 20). In reality, many ministers in the MCSA are of the belief that a covenant relationship is not a legal ‘employment’ relationship and are unaware of the findings of the courts of Law both in and outside of South Africa.

Secondly, this misbelief leads to the misunderstanding of many ministers in the MCSA that not being an employee exonerates them from paying income tax on their income, a practice which can lead to tax evasion on gifts received. In support of the requirements of the Revenue Services in South Africa requiring ministers to pay tax on their income, ministers in both Britain and America are required to register with the Revenue Services for tax purposes. “The Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) and the courts have determined that United Methodist clergy at the local church are to be classified as employees for income tax purposes” (United Methodist Church. Legal Manual. n.d:21).

Thirdly, the judgment in *The President of the Methodist Conference v Preston, 2013* (UKSC, 29 2013) case in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom draws the attention of the Methodist Church in Britain to an implication regarding the stationing of a minister. Lady Hale found that “Stationing is a crucial part of the relationship between the Church and those in active work” (2013:Paragraph 41). Consequently, “...a distinction has to be drawn between being a minister – being in full connexion with the Methodist Church - and having a particular 'station' or 'appointment' within it” (2013:Paragraph 46). Her conclusion is that

whilst “Admission to full connexion brings with it a life-long commitment to the Church and its ministry...The assignment is to a particular post, with a particular set of duties and expectations, a particular manse and a stipend which depends (at the very least) on the level of responsibility entailed, and for a defined period of time. In any other context, that would involve a contract of employment in that post...But I do not think that a prior commitment to go where you are sent negates a mutual contractual relationship when you are sent and agree to go to a particular place” (2013:Paragraphs 46-48).

The implication of Lady Hale’s finding is that the Methodist Church in Great Britain needs to differentiate between entering into the covenant relationship, which is not contractual and commits the minister to go where they are sent, and the stationing of a minister in a particular appointment which may need to be contractual. Lady Hale found that the covenant relationship does not preclude contractual provisions relating to a particular appointment.

Fourthly, in the CCMA ruling of *Wentzel v The Methodist Church of South Africa* (2011:GAJB 16127-10), after analysing the evidence presented as to the status of a minister’s employment, the Commissioner turned to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and case law to interpret the covenantal relationship in terms of the protection of persons against unfair labour practices. The Commissioner ruled that:

...courts focused on the existence of an employment relationship rather than the legality of the relationship between the parties. The Courts have acknowledged that they have an equitable discretion to relax the so called *par delictum* [sic] operation rule, if it was necessary to prevent an injustice or to satisfy the requirements of public policy. Furthermore Section 23(1) of the Constitution states that every one has the right to fair labour practices. This has been interpreted by the Courts to extent [sic] to sex workers. I see no reason why Section 23(1) should not include Ministers within its ambit. Consequently, I find the Applicant [Wentzel] to be an employee of the Respondent [Methodist Church of Southern Africa] (2011 Paragraph 4.3).

The Commissioner’s ruling that Mr Wentzel should be regarded as an employee in terms of the modern approach to employment relationships is significant for the MCSA to consider from a theological and justice perspective. Whilst the covenantal relationship may be legal, is it just and is it helpful for the mission and witness of the Christian Church?

What does this mean for ministers and the MCSA? The findings of courts of law regarding ministers’ employment status and tax requirements should be communicated more fully to the

ministers of the MCSA in order that they are better informed regarding the legal and church polity implications for themselves and the MCSA. The finding of Lady Hale is important for the MCSA to provide security of tenure and the well-being of the ministers and their families in every appointment and that of the Commissioner of the CCMA for the MCSA to re-assess the Christian witness and justice in the present relationship.

5.3.3.2 Is the use of the word ‘covenant’ helpful?

What is the way ahead for the MCSA – to continue with the covenantal relationship, move to a contractual engagement or to move to a revised covenant relationship? Whilst a covenant relationship is the proposed way ahead, the questions asked by a respondent, “Is the covenant relationship the right way to describe the relationship? Can the problem be the language we use?” (Respondent 13) need to be considered. We need to ask if there is another word that is more applicable than the word ‘covenant’ to describe the relationship. Unfortunately, I don’t believe that there is another description which is true to Scripture, Methodist tradition, will describe the complexity of the relationship and be acceptable to ministers. The MCSA must, however, pay closer attention to describing this relationship more fully and clearly in our constitutions in order to gain the understanding and support of ministers.

5.3.4 Support from experience

The genius of Mr Wesley including experience in his theological method, was to allow theology to move from being a “...theoretical faith to an existential one so as to insist on “heart religion” in place of nominal Christian orthodoxy” (Outler 1985:10). For Mr Wesley the truths of scripture needed to be lived out, earthed in the life of the believer, and not merely a doctrine to be believed.

The experiences of ministers were described in chapter 3 indicating that the covenantal relationship was not life-breathing. Chapter 3, section 3.7, summarises their experience using the shepherd/flock analogy:

Ministers have concerns about how they are being led by their shepherd, the MCSA, arising from not knowing the shepherd nor the voice of the shepherd; their lack of trust in the shepherd; questioning whether they are being led to pastures for their benefit or for the convenience of the shepherd; and that when they are moving along on a path, the

shepherd suddenly takes them off on another. They have concerns about their sustenance as some of the feeding grounds are barren whilst in others the food is abundant. Some in the flock even get preferential treatment at the feeding places. They need a personal touch in significant times during the journey, which they are not experiencing. They feel insecure and unprotected. Those within the flock abuse each other and, yes, sheep do stray, but the discipline is harsh. However they want to part of this flock and wish to drawn closer to their shepherd and feel secure.

When applying the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to the proposed change to a covenant relationship from a covenantal relationship, the covenant relationship is consistent with Scripture, is embedded in Methodist tradition, is logical and reasonable and become a life-giving experience for ministers as they respond in grace and thankfulness to serve their God who has called them into ministry. When the Ezekiel shepherd model with the emphasis on leading, feeding, protecting and dealing with the power struggles within the flock is incorporated into a revised covenant relationship by the MCSA, the consequence will be a well led, healthier, secure and cared for flock.

5.4. Implications for the ecclesiology, doctrines and church polity for the MCSA

If the Ezekiel shepherding model was to be accepted, what will this mean for the ecclesiology, doctrine of ordination, ministry and church polity of the MCSA?

The proposed covenant relationship will not mean a change to the ecclesiology of the MCSA but will require amendments to the doctrines of ministry and the relationship between being in Full Connexion and ordination as well as the MCSA's polity as set down in the *Yearbooks* and in the *Book of Order*.

5.4.1 The doctrine of ministry

The doctrine of ministry as understood by the MCSA is set down in the *Yearbook* of 2002 specifying that ministry in the Christian Church, and the MCSA, is a continuation of the ministry begun by Jesus Christ; that all Christ followers are called to ministry and service (Priesthood of all Believers) whilst acknowledging that God calls some to be set apart to be ordained to the ministry of Word, Sacraments and pastoral oversight of the people of God. "Ordination is the act by which the Church authorises Christians to act in its name and on its

behalf in certain ways” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:13). Those ministers wishing to be ordained are required to be accountable to the authority, discipline and practices of the MCSA in return for the opportunity to minister under the protection and care of the Conference. Ministers are received into Full Connexion with the Conference, are then ordained to the office and work of a minister within the Church of Christ and have entered into a covenantal relationship with the MCSA.

These emphases in the doctrine of ministry will not be amended in moving to a covenant relationship. But, with the MCSA and ministers being in a covenant relationship where they will be accountable to each other, the doctrine of ministry needs to reflect the changed relationship between the MCSA and ministers. The revised doctrine needs to incorporate the accountability of the Conference to ministers and not only the accountability of ministers to the Conference. The MCSA will no longer be providing an opportunity for ministers to serve God but will now become the shepherd being accountable for how they lead, feed and protect their flock. The MCSA will also be required to fulfil their dominant role required in covenant theology from Scripture ensuring the “...creation, recreation, sustenance, restoration and reconciliation of its ministers” (Attwell 2007b:5) but to do so not “...with violence and harshness” (Ezk 34:4) but “...to lead with care and nurturing” (Odell 2005:432). As was stated during an interview, “The covenantal relationship, as is God’s covenant with humankind, must have an incarnational expression” (Respondent 35).

5.4.2 The relationship between ordination and Full Connexion

The distinction between reception into Full Connexion and ordination as well as the role of each practice needs to be amended and incorporated into the *Book of Order*. There needs to be a clearer separation in the understanding and application of each practice. The role and significance of each practice needs to be set down in the *Book of Order*.

What is the role of ordination? Ordination has to do with the authority granted to a presbyter for ministry in the Church of God by which ministers are authorised to act on behalf of the Church of Christ. As discussed in section 5.3.2.2 of this chapter, Full Connexion has to do with the relationship established between the minister and colleagues in the Order of Presbyters of the MCSA. It is as a result of being in Full Connexion, not of ordination, that ministers are in connexion with and accountable to each other and for each other. The place for that accountability to take place is, firstly, in and through the Review of Ministry and,

secondly, in answering the questions in the annual Ministerial Session of Synod regarding the moral and religious character of ministers; their doctrinal beliefs; their observance and enforcement of our discipline and regarding their competence for the work of ministry (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:188). Whilst there will be no changes required to the doctrine of ordination, the relationship between Full Connexion and ordination will need to be revised.

5.4.3 Implications for the MCSA, ministers and church polity

There are implications for the MCSA, ministers and the polity of the church reflected in the *Book of Order*.

5.4.3.1 Implications for the MCSA

The implication for the MCSA is that the doctrine of ministry will need to be revised by means of constitutional amendments to the *Book of Order*. Amendments will relate to the new emphasis on being received into Full Connexion and the re-introduction of the Ministerial Session of Synod as well as other amendments arising from the implications for the MCSA and for ministers.

The amendments must reflect that, in the covenant relationship, the MCSA will be accountable for providing what is required for ministers to fulfil their ministry wherever they are stationed. This would include ministers receiving their stipend, travelling and other allowances agreed to by the Conference. Ministers will, therefore, be ensured of receiving those benefits for the year of appointment until their appointment or re-appointment at the following Conference. Conference must, therefore, make provision for this amendment as well as the provision that, should the appointment of that minister be financially unsustainable from a connexional perspective, the Conference may move that minister outside of the invitation period.

The Review of Ministry process becomes important in the life of the individual minister's development and assessment and is to be the basis on which a minister is not stationed on account of non-effectiveness, unsuitability or under-performance. Ministers need to participate in that assessment process and know that it is fair and just. Therefore, the Review of Ministry form needs to be standardised and updated setting down the purpose of the

interview as well as the processes before, during and subsequent to the interview which are to be amended in the *Book of Order*.

In order to fulfil their caring, pastoring role over ministers, Conference should regulate that every district bring together a support team who can care for the welfare of ministers and their families who are hurting, facing distress, dealing with crises or needing support.

5.4.3.2 Implications for the ministers

The implications for ministers include that ministers will become more accountable to those in the Order of Presbyters; be more accountable to the annual Ministerial Session of Synod; play a greater role in and place more emphasis on the Review of Ministry and, as well, have a different relationship with the MCSA. As more importance will be attached to the Review of Ministry for professional and personal development as well as assessing the effectiveness of their ministry, ministers need to be aware of the implications of not participating in this process with the requirements and sanctions being specified in the *Book of Order*. Ministers have to accept that their accountability to their colleagues and the Ministerial Session of Synod will be the primary basis of their continued eligibility to be stationed in an appointment.

Following the Ministers' Indabas held during 2011, the Conference recommended that, "To enhance clergy morality, the existing Code of Conduct, alongside a yet to be developed Code of Ethics, be revisited and used as a tool to hold ministers accountable" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2012:18). These Codes are not being applied when they should be serving a useful and practical purpose in holding ministers accountable.

With ministers being assured of receiving their approved stipend and allowances, their families will have financial security and security of tenure, even when stationed in presently non-viable circuits. However, Conference will have more control over the strategic stationing of ministers for more effective mission and outreach. The stationing of ministers must be based on missional requirements and not only on those circuits which can afford a minister.

5.4.3.3 Implications for the polity of the MCSA

There are implications for the polity of the MCSA as the change may lead to both entering into a covenant relationship as well as the introduction of contracts. All candidates are required to sign the Application Form (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2015), often without sufficient insight and information, which is an acceptance of their relationship with the MCSA and cannot be revoked. By signing the Application Form, ministers have, in effect, entered into a contract with the MCSA. The Application Form, therefore, needs to be revised to serve the purpose of an application form and not *de facto* entering into a contract. Once a candidate has been accepted by the Conference, only then should a fixed term contract be entered into and be binding up to ordination. Matters specific to their training, suitability for ministry and advancement in probation are to be included in that contract.

The relationship changes at acceptance into Full Connexion and ordination and requires a different contract to be entered into between the MCSA and ministers, with different stipulations and controls. The covenant will relate to the relationship between the MCSA and ministers whilst contracts will relate to the accountability of ministers to the MCSA and for the MCSA to provide for the agreed support in order that effective ministry can take place in every circuit. This would mean that an annual contract will be drawn up between the MCSA, through the circuits, with each minister. Whilst ministers will be stationed in terms of an invitation to a circuit or placed by the Conference, the Conference needs to confirm the appointment of each minister on an annual basis.

Will contracts detract from or negate the covenant relationship? I do not believe so as God's call, ordination, the authority of Conference, accountability of ministers to the Conference and to each other and the stationing of ministers by Conference are all incorporated into the covenant relationship. Contracts will provide structure to surround and support the relationship.

5.5 Actions needed to bring the covenant relationship into effect

What would need to happen to bring the covenant relationship into effect in the MCSA? There would need to be constitutional amendments, agreed to at the Conference of the MCSA, to the *Book of Order*. Any amendments to the ecclesiology, doctrine of ministry and polity of the MCSA would need to be discussed and accepted by the Conference after passing through the required courts of the church ensuring that the recommendations are in keeping

with Scripture, the ecclesiology and the traditions of the Methodist Church. The recommendations will also be made available to the General Secretary of the MCSA, the Human Resources Unit and the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit for their consideration.

Is it unusual for such changes in policy and ecclesiology to happen in the life of the Methodist Church? No it is not as indicated in the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (2012) describing the ‘Nature of our Theological Task’ as being critical and constructive:

It is *critical* in that we test various expressions of faith by asking: Are they true? Appropriate? Clear? Cogent? Credible? Are they based on love? Do they provide the church and its members with a witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage and that is authentic and convincing in the light of human experience and the present state of human knowledge?

Our theological task is *constructive* in that every generation must appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom, justice, moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns. Our summons is to understand and receive the gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times (2012:79-80).

In a similar way, the MCSA is required to revisit the covenantal relationship critically and constructively including drawing on the constitutions of the Methodist Connexions in Britain and America with the proposals and recommendations to the Conference of the MCSA being more clearly defined in the following sections. The recommendations to the Conference, therefore, include the following:

5.5.1 Amend the doctrine of ministry

It is proposed that the doctrine of ministry be amended to reflect the change in relationship between the MCSA and the ministers. No longer will the MCSA be providing an opportunity for ministers to serve God subject to the authority, discipline and practices of the MCSA but will be entering into a relationship with responsibilities and accountability from both partners. Ministers will no longer be regarded as volunteers involved in ministry but as partners in mission extending the Kingdom of God. In terms of covenant theology, the

MCSA will also be required to fulfil its dominant role required in a covenant theology from Scripture "...to give life, to sustain it and renew it" (Attwell 2007b:3).

In terms of the Ezekiel shepherding model, the role of the MCSA is likened to the shepherds of Israel who shepherded God's covenant people on God's behalf, being accountable for their actions and the fulfilling of their responsibilities.

5.5.2 Convert the covenantal relationship to a covenant relationship

It is proposed that the relationship between the MCSA and ministers no longer be termed a 'covenantal relationship' but converts to a 'covenant relationship' in keeping with those recorded in Scripture reflecting the mutual accountability and the restorative, life-breathing acts of the dominant party in the relationship. Wording, similar to that adopted by the British Conference (Methodist Church 2013:530) but adapted to the Southern African context, would be appropriate stating: By receiving persons into Full Connexion, the Conference enters into a covenant relationship with them in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their appointment to a circuit or Connexional post and the provision of the support and maintenance required for their ministry.

A critical element in converting to a covenant relationship is the emphasis on the establishment of relationships and the nurturing of those relationships from the time a person applies to enter the ministry to his/her burial.

The Ezekiel shepherding model, as described in section 4.6 of chapter 4, provides the elements which would assist in formulating a covenant relationship in keeping with scripture and the nurturing of relationships. Whilst the ministers would be subject to the authority of the MCSA and accountable to the MCSA for their ministry, as the shepherd of the covenant flock, the MCSA would be required to lead, feed and protect the flock on God's behalf and would be held accountable for its actions. As the covenant shepherd, the MCSA will provide leadership that is experienced by the ministers as serving the interests of the flock and their well-being, bringing life, vitality and security. The shepherd model will provide the care, nurture and nourishment of each member of the flock according to his/her needs and circumstances. Ministers will be protected from the misuse of power by those in authority, both clergy and lay, as well from rivalry and bullying from within the flock.

5.5.3 Entry into the covenant relationship is by reception into Full Connexion

It is proposed that entry into the covenant relationship is by means of being received into Full Connexion by the Conference into the Order of Presbyters on the recommendation of the Ministerial Sessions of Synod and Conference. On being received into Full Connexion into the Order of Presbyters, ministers are ordained granting them the authority to function as a minister in the Church of Christ. Ordination has to do with authority to perform the duties and responsibilities of a minister within the Order, whilst being received into Full Connexion has to do with the covenant relationships established by means of acceptance into the Order of Presbyters.

Probationer ministers, therefore, have not entered into the covenant relationship but are accepted into their formation period in terms of a fixed term contract between the MCSA and the probationer. (To be discussed further in section 5.6.5 of this chapter).

5.5.4 Mutual accountability of both partners

By entering into Full Connexion and ordination, the MCSA and ministers enter into the covenant relationship which implies accountability from both partners in the relationship. The new emphasis on a covenant relationship with mutual accountability will require that the terms of the covenant relationship be set down clearly and be agreed to by both the MCSA and the ministers. This may seem contractual but will in fact support the covenant entered into, as for example in the legal procedures before and following a marriage.

Being received into Full Connexion and entering into the covenant relationship, ministers are in covenant both with their fellow ministers in the Order of Presbyters and the Conference. Presbyters admitted into Full Connexion accept the authority of Conference, are accountable to Conference for the conduct of their ministry, are subject to the discipline of the Church as set down in the *Book of Order* and offer themselves to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, as the Conference determines. However, ministers are also in Full Connexion with their fellow presbyters and are bound in covenant with their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters by which ministers are mutually accountable to and for each other, accepting to subject themselves to the process of clergy discipline and accountability. Ministers are supported and held accountable by their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters and they, in turn, support and hold them accountable.

Furthermore, the MCSA is committed to provide a station for each minister with whom they are in covenant and shall provide, and the ordained minister is entitled to receive, no less than the minimum stipend and travelling allowances established by the annual Conference as well as other benefits and support for the itinerant ministry of the church (United Methodist Church 2012:271). The obligation of a minister to be accountable to the MCSA for where they are stationed "...puts upon the Church the counter obligation of providing support for the itinerant ministry of the Church" (United Methodist Church 2012:427). This measure will ensure that the mission of the church is the primary focus of the stationing of ministers as well as providing security of tenure to the minister and their family, even in presently non-viable circuits which the church regards as strategically important from a mission perspective. If ministers are required to minister and live in a professional manner and be accountable for their effectiveness and suitability, the MCSA needs to deal with them as one would a professional in another profession.

5.5.5 Ministers are to be appointed or re-appointed annually

It is proposed that, whilst invitations to minister in a circuit may be for up to a five year period, the Conference annually appoint or confirm the re-appointment of each minister to their station which may be amended by the Conference, with consultation, at the end of the Conference appointment year. Ministers will, however, only be appointed or re-appointed on a satisfactory assessment of fulfilling their responsibilities and being fruitful in ministry. This measure will ensure that the responsibilities and accountability of both parties are accounted for and that ministers are assured of receiving minimum benefits for the year of appointment in keeping with the mission of the MCSA.

5.5.6 Ministers to be accountable through the Ministerial Session of Synod

It is proposed that ministers are accountable to and for each other through the Ministerial Session of Synod and Conference. The British Conference (Methodist Church 2013:530) expresses this accountability and it is proposed that the adapted wording be adopted by the MCSA stating: The primary constitutional forum in which presbyters account for their ministry and are accounted for by the Church is the Ministerial Session of the Synod. The Ministerial Session of the Conference is the primary constitutional forum in which presbyters corporately exercise their ministry of pastoral responsibility for the Church. It is, therefore,

proposed that when the Order of Presbyters meets, their purpose is to consult, encourage and watch over one another in love and respect. The purpose and consequences of the questions which are presently asked at the annual Synod regarding the moral and religious character of the ministers; their doctrinal beliefs; their observance and enforcement of our discipline and regarding their competence for the work of ministry relating to the beliefs and competence of ministers need to be revisited (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:188).

Ministers must accept responsibility and become more accountable for their own conduct and that of their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters in the annual Ministerial Session of Synod. As Wright (2006) reminds us in his discussion on chapters 34-37 of the prophet Ezekiel, “Obedience to the covenant was not the condition of *salvation* but the condition of their *mission*. Only through covenant obedience and community holiness could they claim or fulfil their identity and role here offered to them. The mission fulfilment and engagement is inseparable from ethical obedience. That is why it is immediately followed by becoming a “holy nation”” (Wright 2006:333).

5.5.7 The Review of Ministry to be formally adopted and observed

Whilst provision is presently made for the Review of Ministry process in the constitution of the MCSA, it is proposed that these provisions need to be more formally adopted and practised as an essential part of a minister’s personal, professional and effectiveness appraisal. Every minister shall be required to participate in an annual Review of Ministry process during which he/she shall “reflect, with input from others, on how his or her ministry is being experienced and fulfilled both in relation to the Church as a whole and within the particular context in which his or her ministry is being exercised” in the words of the British Conference (Methodist Church 2013:569).

Accountability and restoration are central to the Ezekiel shepherd model. The Review of Ministry provides for such accountability and makes provision for the restoration of those who are failing, ailing or are wandering from the pathway.

5.5.8 Review the processes for the discontinuance of ministers

It is also proposed that the Review of Ministry process be the method for dealing with the discontinuance of unsuitable or inefficient ordained ministers. This instrument will provide a

fair process of assessment and appraisal and must replace the practice of deemed to have resigned or of unsuitable ministers being placed at the foot of stations. Appropriate procedures need to be set in place to deal with a minister's effectiveness, processes which are inclusive, which allow for consultation and appeals and will, therefore be accepted as just and fair. The provisions of the 1992 *Laws and Discipline* (Eighth Edition) to assess whether "...a minister is left by Conference without an appointment to any Circuit or Connexional office on grounds of unsuitability, lack of efficiency, or lack of general acceptance among the Circuits" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1992:43) need to be amended and re-introduced into the *Book of Order*.

5.5.9 Review the processes for the disciplining of ministers

It is proposed that the disciplining of ministers be the responsibility of the Ministerial Session of Synod which makes its recommendations to the Ministerial Session Conference for final adjudication. Ministers are to be held accountable for their actions by their colleagues in the Order of Presbyters. As ministers are concerned about the misuse of the disciplinary processes by those in leadership, such processes should be instituted only after corrective measures have proved to be unsuccessful and must be transparent and just with avenues of appeal available to the minister.

Similarly, the MCSA must be held accountable for their actions in the disciplinary processes with adequate and equal opportunities for appeal available to the ministers. Ministers desire consistency in the disciplining of ministers with the MCSA not resorting to moving or not stationing of a minister as a perceived means of discipline. Being a covenant, it is proposed that no party shall be able to turn to processes not available to the other party. If the MCSA turns to courts of law to uphold their rights in a matter when challenged, then ministers need to be afforded the same rights.

5.5.10 The continuing education of ministers to be strengthened

Whilst the MCSA provides for the continuing education of ordained ministers, it is proposed that the continuing education be better co-ordinated and become a formal requirement of post ordination training of each district. However, ministers must also take responsibility for and be accountable to their colleagues through the Review of Ministry for their spiritual well-being and "growth in professional competence and effectiveness through continuing

education and formation” in the words of the American Conference (United Methodist Church 2012:258). The MCSA could consider introducing a programme similar to that of other professional bodies requiring ministers to accumulate Continuing Professional Development points as part of their continuing education and formation.

5.5.11 Changes are to be applicable to the states incorporated into the MCSA

As the MCSA is a trans-border church, the proposed amendments to be considered by the Conference must be applicable and acceptable to our neighbouring states who are incorporated into the MCSA Connexion.

5.6. Practical considerations

As the covenant relationship will be different from the present covenantal relationship and both the MCSA and ministers need to understand and accept the changes, matters for consideration by the MCSA to assist in this transition could include the following:

5.6.1 Refer the doctrine of the covenant relationship to DEWCOM

Refer the concept of moving from a covenantal to a covenant relationship to DEWCOM for their consideration and appraisal from a theological, justice and missional perspective. Particular attention should be paid to the proposed changes to the theology of probation as it relates to entering into a fixed term contract up until being received into Full Connexion and ordination after which ministers would enter into the covenant relationship.

5.6.2 Develop a statement on the meaning of covenant for the MCSA

In keeping with the practice of the MCSA declaring their understanding of doctrinal matters, as for example the statement on ‘A theology of Ministry for the MCSA’ (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2002:8-21), DEWCOM should be approached to develop a statement on the meaning and role of covenant theology in the life and practices of the MCSA with particular reference to the doctrine of ministry and the covenant relationship with ministers.

5.6.3 Decentralise authority

In order for the MCSA to lead, care, feed and protect those in ministry in a more personal and accountable manner and for ministers to be held accountable for their ministry, it will be necessary for the MCSA to revisit the decentralisation of authority by the creation of smaller districts resulting in more personal oversight and involvement by those in leadership.

5.6.4 Fully inform ministers regarding the covenant relationship

The MCSA should communicate with and inform ministers more fully regarding the legal and polity implications of the covenant relationship. Ministers are ignorant of the implications of being in a covenant relationship, resulting in them making uninformed statements which are not helpful and could even, mistakenly, lead to actions which could affect them adversely. The Human Resources Unit needs to publish a comprehensive statement which will contribute to a better understanding of the covenant relationship with ministers.

5.6.5 Define the nature of the contracts with ministers

The relationship of a minister to the Conference would have different forms during the lifetime of a minister and require a contract at candidature, on being received into Full Connexion and with an annual contract on a minister's appointment or re-appointment to a station or Connexional post. The MCSA will, therefore, need to clearly define the nature of the relationship from when a person applies to enter the ministry, during their probation and following their ordination. The implications for the relationship entered into between the MCSA and the candidate by signing the Application Form, even before they are accepted into the ministry, must be explained to the prospective candidate as well as indicating what process the candidate should follow should they wish to receive further information. Similar explanations need to be given for each phase of a minister's journey in the MCSA.

Candidates for the ministry are already required to complete an Application Form which is binding on them for the duration of their ministry. This means that there is already an element of contractual obligations from the candidate. With the primary emphasis on formation prior to ordination, the present 'contractual relationship' needs to be extended entering into a formalised fixed term contractual relationship. Included in that contract is the provision that

the minister accepts that Conference has the authority to terminate a probationer minister's relationship with the church should that person not meet the required outcomes within a stipulated period of time and/or if such a person is regarded as unsuitable for the ministry.

On being received into Full Connexion by the Conference, ministers then, contractually, enter into the covenant relationship with the Conference stating that they are held accountable by the MCSA in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the MCSA in respect of their appointment to a circuit or office. Conference will enter into an annual contract with ministers on their appointment or re-appointment to a station or Connexional post.

Is it not risky that these contracts be tested in a court of law and involve the MCSA in litigation? Yes it might be so, but such challenges would show that the processes are just and open to scrutiny.

5.6.6 Update the Application Form for candidates for the ministry

The wording of the Application Form for entry into the ministry needs to be amended from "I understand that my relationship with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a covenantal rather than a contractual relationship" (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit 2015:1) to reflect that the relationship during their probation will be a fixed term contract, renewed annually, which will become a covenant relationship on being accepted into Full Connexion and ordination.

5.6.7 Update the Review of Ministry Form and procedures

Whilst the MCSA includes the provision of an annual Review of Ministry (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2014a:42), EMMU should be approached to revise the Review of Ministry instrument (Education for Ministry and Mission Unit n.d.), initially devised in the 1990s, which shall become the standard document for the reviewing process of ministers in the MCSA. The revised document should clearly describe the procedures for implementation and the reporting of findings in order to ensure meaningful participation and transparent implementation.

5.6.8 Changes to the support and caring of ministers

As requested by the ministers in the interviews, it is proposed that the MCSA give attention to strengthening the support available to ministers and their families in times of stress, turmoil and ill health. Their request is that bishops assume more of the shepherding role over their ministers in keeping with the recommendations of the Conference of 2011, following the Ministers' Indabas, that "Bishops be freed from their administrative tasks in order to meaningfully and effectively exercise their oversight and pastoral responsibilities" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2012:18). There will need to be a re-defining of the role of bishops as well as a more pastoral relationship between bishops and the ministers and their families. The ministers also propose that districts have a support team of competent suitable persons to whom ministers may turn for support, guidance and, where applicable, to heal past pain and bruising.

Whilst ministers are appreciative of the medical assistance provided, their appeal is for Conference to re-appraise the benefits available for support services, such as psychological support, which they experience as inadequate.

Another practical way in which the MCSA could care for their ministers is in preparing ministers for retirement by providing a seminar to assist those persons make the emotional, financial and professional transition in becoming a supernumerary minister. Just as the MCSA prepares ministers for their journey into the ordained ministry, so they could assist at the culmination of that journey. In the August 2015 edition of *The New Dimension*, a retired minister, the Reverend Baumeister, challenges the MCSA and ministers with the words, "Retirement – have a plan", and continues stating, "As far as I know, no one has yet thought to prepare ministers for retirement, and this includes ministers themselves nearing retirement. All our energies are poured into ministry, so hardly a thought goes towards preparing for the inevitable retirement age of 65" (Baumeister:2015:9). The MCSA could be instrumental in assisting ministers to superannuate.

5.7. Conclusion

This study set out to evaluate the covenantal relationship within the ecclesiology of the MCSA to determine its theological basis, its formulation in the formal documentation of the MCSA and how the relationship is experienced by and impacts on the ministry of those serving God within its structures. Ezekiel 34 and the constitutions of other connexions of the Methodist Church provided a Scriptural backdrop against which to apply the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in order to evaluate and propose a new model of the covenant relationship to be considered by the Conference of the MCSA. The new model is consistent with Scripture and Methodist tradition, is tested by reason and incorporates the experiences of ministers.

As with all research, these findings and proposals need to be challenged and tested, acknowledging that the research will, and must, lead to further questioning which is beyond the scope of this study. The financial implications of the mutual accountability; the implications should there be a surplus of ministers for stationing in the MCSA; the implications of bishops and the MCSA being held accountable for leading, feeding and protecting the flock and whether the Ezekiel shepherd model could be extended to the relationship between the minister and the circuit/society to which they are appointed are some of the matters which need to be considered for further investigation.

It is my hope that this research will assist the MCSA to enter into relationships with ministers that will be life-breathing for both partners in order that the MCSA may fulfil its mission as stated in the *Yearbook* of 2015, namely, “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2015:2).

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Mehana, V., 2014. e-mail, 10 April 2014, HR@methchurch.org.za.

Morgan, C., 2015. e-mail, 30 March 2015, gensec@mco.org.za.

Interviews

Information relating to the interviews conducted:

Respondent	1	on	13 November 2014	at	10:00
Respondent	2	on	20 December 2014	at	09:00
Respondent	3	on	30 December 2014	at	16:30
Respondent	4	on	13 January 2015	at	11:00
Respondent	5	on	13 January 2015	at	14:00
Respondent	6	on	22 January 2015	at	10:30
Respondent	7	on	22 January 2015	at	10:30
Respondent	8	on	22 January 2015	at	10:30
Respondent	9	on	22 January 2015	at	10:30
Respondent	10	on	22 January 2015	at	14:00
Respondent	11	on	2 February 2015	at	10:00
Respondent	12	on	2 February 2015	at	10:00
Respondent	13	on	2 February 2015	at	14:00
Respondent	14	on	3 February 2015	at	09:30
Respondent	15	on	3 February 2015	at	12:30
Respondent	16	on	4 February 2015	at	09:30
Respondent	17	on	4 February 2015	at	11:15
Respondent	18	on	5 February 2015	at	12:00
Respondent	19	on	6 February 2015	at	09:30
Respondent	20	on	6 February 2015	at	11:30
Respondent	21	on	9 February 2015	at	09:30
Respondent	22	on	9 February 2015	at	11:30
Respondent	23	on	10 February 2015	at	09:00

Respondent	24	on	10 February 2015	at	12:00
Respondent	25	on	12 February 2015	at	09:00
Respondent	26	on	12 February 2015	at	14:30
Respondent	27	on	13 February 2015	at	09:00
Respondent	28	on	16 February 2015	at	09:30
Respondent	29	on	16 February 2015	at	15:00
Respondent	30	on	17 February 2015	at	08:30
Respondent	31	on	17 February 2015	at	15:00
Respondent	32	on	17 February 2015	at	15:00
Respondent	33	on	18 February 2015	at	10:00
Respondent	34	on	18 February 2015	at	12:30
Respondent	35	on	18 February 2015	at	15:00
Respondent	36	on	19 February 2015	at	12:00
Respondent	37	on	23 February 2015	at	16:30
Respondent	38	on	23 February 2015	at	17:30
Respondent	39	on	23 February 2015	at	19:00
Respondent	40	on	24 February 2015	at	16:00
Respondent	41	on	24 February 2015	at	17:00
Respondent	42	on	25 February 2015	at	17:00

(Additional information, such as the names, localities and transcripts of the interviews of the respondents, has not been included in order to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents. This information is, however, in my possession).

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 11 615 1616
Fax: +27 11 615 1511

The Methodist Connexional Office
Bruma Office Park
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Avenue
Bruma 2192
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2046

13 August 2014

**THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRETORIA**

LETTER OF CONSENT: REV D M WILLIAMS (STUDENT NO. 2160978)

The Reverend Donald Murrell Williams is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and is registered to conduct research into *The covenant relationship between the MCSA and her ministers: a systematic theological study* with your University.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa grants permission for Mr Williams to conduct the research as contained in his research proposal of 2014 with the Rev Dr W Bentley as the supervisor and Professor C Landman as the co-supervisor.

This research will include the examination of the formal documentation of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa regarding the covenant relationship and to interview ministers of the denomination regarding their experiences of the relationship during their ministry.

Permission is also granted that the findings of the interviews may be included in the dissertation on condition of anonymity of the participants.

Yours faithfully

**VUYANI G NYOBOLE
GENERAL SECRETARY**

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations
Presiding Bishop: Rev Ziphozihle Siwa
Email: presbish@methchurch.org.za

General Secretary: Rev Vuyani Nyobole
Email: gensec@methchurch.org.za

Appendix B: Topics for Discussion and Sample Questions

Our discussion will focus on three areas relating to the covenantal relationship: Your understanding of the nature of the covenantal relationship, your experiences of the relationship during your ministry and your suggestions regarding any changes that you think should be considered by Conference. Below are a few sample questions that may assist our discussions:

Your understanding of the covenant relationship

- 1.1 Are you aware that you are in a covenantal and not an employee relationship?
- 1.2 What is your understanding of the covenantal relationship with the church? What is the difference between a covenantal relationship and an employment relationship?
- 1.3 Why do you think that the church insists on a covenantal relationship?

Your experiences during your ministry

- 2.1 What are your experiences regarding the covenantal relationship during your ministry? Has it been a help or a hindrance during your ministry?
- 2.2 Has the covenant relationship impacted on your marriage partner and family?
- 2.3 Would you prefer a contractual relationship with the church?
- 2.4 Should we be concerned that the church is in such a powerful position in the relationship?
- 2.5 Are you satisfied with the church's commitment to care for your welfare in terms of the covenantal relationship?
- 2.6 Are the present policies conducive to restore broken relations or to deal with the hurt of ministers?

The way ahead

- 3.1 Is the covenantal relationship an appropriate policy for the Christian Church in 2015?
- 3.2 What suggestions do you have to be considered by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa?

Appendix C: Biographic Details

First names and Surname: _____

By which name do you wish to be addressed? _____

Gender: _____ Age: _____

Population group: _____ Ethnic background: _____

Circuit No: _____ Year of Ordination: _____

Are you in a rural or an urban ministry? _____

Contact details:

Home telephone: _____ Work telephone: _____

Cellular: _____ Fax number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Postal address: _____

Note: Your gender, age, population group and ethnicity are requested to ensure that the sample of ministers being interviewed is as inclusive as possible.

Do you receive additional allowances above the minimum stipend? _____

Has there been a time when you did not receive your stipend or allowances? _____

Has your name ever been placed at 'the foot of stations'? _____

If you are a supernumerary, what year did you become a supernumerary? _____

If you have resigned from the ministry, when was that? _____

Please return to Don Williams at donwill@telkomsa.net or fax to 013 755 4142.

Appendix D: Informed consent

I, the undersigned, hereby give consent that **Donald Murrell Williams**, a student at the University of South Africa, may use the information that I supplied to him in an interview for his Masters of Theology dissertation. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the covenantal relationship between the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and her ministers and that I will be one of approximately 40 people being interviewed for this research. I declare the following:

Statement	Agree	Not agree
1. I have been informed by him of the objectives of the intended research		
2. He has supplied to me his name, address and contact details as well as those of his research supervisor		
3. I was informed why I was selected as a participant in the research project		
4. I give this consent willingly, under no coercion and without incentives.		
5. I received satisfactory answers to any questions about the research		
6. I was informed of the estimated time that the interview would take		
7. I retain the right to refrain from answering any question and to withdraw at any point in time should I feel uncomfortable during the interview		
8. I agree that the interview may be recorded by means of an electronic device and that notes will be taken during the interview		
9. I agree that he may use the data from the interview in his dissertation and in any subsequent publications that may flow from it		
10. I require that the findings of the interviews will be made available to me, in electronic format, for my information and approval before being incorporated into the final analysis of the research project		
11. I require that my anonymity be ensured in his dissertation and that my confidentiality as a participant will remain secure		
12. I accept that he will store the record of my interview(s) safely and will destroy them no later than two years after his dissertation is accepted		
13. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without needing to give reasons		

Full Names _____ Date _____

Signature of participant _____

Signature of researcher _____

Contact details of Prof Wessel Bentley (supervisor): bentlw1@unisa.ac.za and Prof Christina Landman (co-supervisor): landmc@unisa.ac.za