INVITING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO RE(-)MEMBER THEIR IDENTITY AS COMMUNITY-OF-FRIENDS

by

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NOVEMBER 2006
I declare that *Inviting faith communities to re(-)member their identity as community-of-friends* 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.

......................................................... .........................................................
Signature  Date
M S Grobbelaar
INVITING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO RE(-)MEMBER THEIR IDENTITY AS COMMUNITY-OF-FRIENDS

Summary

This thesis is about a pastoral theology of participation, guided by the process of participatory action research. It explores through the lived experience of the participants practical ways of doing friendship.

On this research journey, I explore the discourse of individualism and how it blinds us to our connectedness as creations in the image of God. Without denying the benefits scientific development have to offer, I argue for a more richly textured individualism, inviting concern for the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others as part of our ethical ways of being. The Fourth Century description of a Christian as ‘friend of God’ was the inspiration for the metaphor of friendship as a powerful counterweight against the isolating forces of a culture where the distorting ideology of consumerism and individualism are prevailing. I argue for the re-membering of this metaphor for God as friend, and the church as community-of-friends.

Through the telling of tales of living friendship, interwoven with and giving life to the philosophy of friendship, I build further on the metaphor for the church as community-of-friends. I propose a Friendship Position Map and the metaphor of a circle of concern, arguing that although it comes more natural to us to love those close to us, and reach out to them in friendship, in an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, we are to follow Jesus’ example and show hospitality towards all others, including strangers and enemies.

Where many authors write about the importance of community, this thesis is about how to create the nourishing community we long for. It explores practical ways in which communities can overcome obstacles in their way to connect to each other through ethical ways of loving and doing friendship. It offers some ideas about learning to be friends in the inner circles of the circle of concern with those close to us, in order to do friendship in the outer circles.
I explore the role of the church and faith communities as habitat for the nurturing and/or cultivating of living friendships, in inviting faith communities to live as community-of-friends; friends of God and of one another.

KEY TERMS
Faith community; re-membering; friendship; community-of-friends; theology of friendship; healing communities; friendship facilitation; ethical ways of caring; narratives of woundedness.
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CHAPTER 1
A RESEARCH JOURNEY TOWARDS PARTICIPATING
COMMUNITIES OF FAITH AS COMMUNITIES-OF-FRIENDS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As a pastoral therapist, working at Coram Deo, a pastoral centre of a Dutch Reformed Church, I have the privilege to share life experiences of many people. I also have the privilege to, in many ways, be shaped by the stories and life experiences of the women and men who come to see me. As a pastoral therapist using narrative practices, I often am confronted with the question of how to help people to deal with the injustices of life and of how to rediscover their inner reserves and forgotten strengths by joining them on their journeys as they edge towards recovery (White & Epston 1990:15). Until one specific day, when Linda entered my office, I actually believed that I was privileged to be part of a faith community, believing that I could invite our community of faith to join in on journeys I and the people who came to see me undertook together. That day, my eyes were opened for the pain and isolation of wounded members of our congregation. I had no choice but to embark on a journey in search of answers for what went wrong in my community of faith, and how I can turn this journey into an invitation for faith communities as communities of friends of God, to care for their wounded.

1.2 THE INSPIRATION TO THE STUDY

One Sunday morning in church, during the sermon, my thoughts wondered, and my attention was caught by the congregation’s credo displayed on the wall of the church building. It reads: “We are a network of loving relationships inspiring people to follow Jesus”. As I was reading this, I remembered the recent conversation I had with Linda. She came to see me the previous week, and I still could almost feel her pain and isolation as she shared her story with me. I was struck by the contradiction between the words displayed on the wall, and the words of Linda echoing in my mind. The words she used to tell me how she searched on the Internet for prayer groups to help carry her on her journey with her son who was trapped in a relationship with heroin. She said: “I knew that only God could ensure that Joshua would make it in the rehabilitation centre. I decided to ask everybody to pray for my child – that is
everybody except those close to us. I really did not have the confidence! I searched the Internet, and discovered a prayer group. I contacted literary thousands of Christians, asking them to pray for Joshua and for me and my family”. I knew of the prayer chain our congregation had, and wondered why she did not contact them. With shame, I listened to her answer: “How can I ask them to pray for me and my family, when I know how they despise my son and judge my family?” In cyberspace, through the Internet, in countries all over the world, she found a community of care who prayed with her and strengthened her, carrying her through her days of worry and pain.

The sermon completely forgotten, I was intrigued by this situation. I believe that the words written on the wall were composed in sincere honesty and with the best of intentions. But why did it not resonate with the experience of members of the congregation? Were there any of the members who could testify to the truth of the words written on the wall? I started to think about other stories of pain and isolation I heard frequently, and doubted that it was only the family of Linda experiencing the isolation and judgement instead of the warmth and support of a community of care.

During the following days, weeks and months, I kept my ears to the ground, and my nose in books, trying to find answers to these questions. Whenever the opportunity presented itself during conversations, I raised the subject. The result was that I discovered some stories that resonate with the experiences of Linda. I also discovered stories of caring and support within our faith community. In the literature, I found ideas that explained some of the stories I was wondering about; but I also came across ideas that were more confusing. I soon realised that this journey I was already immersed into would not be a bed of roses. However, I was intrigued and determined not to go back to the way I used to be.

In the following paragraphs, I will share some of the ideas I came across. These ideas became the building blocks for the research journey I was about to undertake.

1.2.1 Social group evolution

According to Wilson (2002:9), Darwin was proposing that the ingredients of natural selection could exist at the level of social groups. Groups can thus evolve into
adaptive units in just the same way that individuals do. According to evolution theory, a species only survives as long as there is sufficient variability among its members to withstand the changing environmental pressures that constitute the process of natural selection. The cultivation of diversity is thus essential, not only for the growth of society, but even for its survival (Mathers 2000:153). Therefore, some features of religious groups are a product of within group selection, benefiting some individuals at the expense of others within the same religious groups.

Through ages, religious systems have arisen in profusion, competing against each other and against non-religious organisations. Although the differences among religions are culturally based, that does not prevent religious groups from succeeding or failing on the basis of their properties and for these properties to be transmitted with modifications to descendant groups. The moral virtues are practised among members of a “tribe” and are directed against other “tribes”. Religions are “well known for their in-group morality and out-group hostility” (Wilson 2002:10).

To distinguish between members of the same species and those of other kinds had survival value among other species, resulting in the distinction between “us”, who conform to our pattern, and “them”, who do not (Mathers 2000:153). We can also learn the winds of our own culture when encountering another. Seeing how “they” think and act makes us conscious of how “we” think and act (Myers 2000:164).

Explaining why religious groups fare as well as they do, Wilson (2002:175) refers to a psychological fundamental of religious groups: the elimination of the self, the denial of individuality, having no meaning or existence, save as part of something greater and other than the self. Multilevel selection theory allows us to explain this as one of the important proximate mechanisms that evolved to enable groups to function adaptively. A group of people who abandon self-will and work tirelessly for a greater goodwill fare very well as a group, much better than if they all pursue their private utilities, as long as the greater good corresponds to the welfare of the group.

But why, then, does my congregation include some of its members, and exclude others? Could it have something to do with the survival of the group? Does caring for a family struggling with drug abuse constitute a threat to the survival of the group, but
Is this what Wilson (2002:176) refers to when he says: “Religion is selflessness with strings attached”? Could it be that morality is one of the strings attached?

Wilson (2002:223) defines morality as “conformity to the rules of right conduct”. The behaviours that count as right conduct are not genetically determined, but depend on open-ended psychological and social processes. The open-ended nature of right conduct means that phenotypic variation will exist between groups, even as it is reduced within groups by pressures of conformity. By its very nature, morality shifts the balance between levels of selection in favour of group selection (Wilson 2002:224).

I was still not satisfied. It was as if I was building a puzzle, and most of the pieces were not available. When I read the story of Jonah and the worm, it was as if I found another piece.

1.2.2 Jonah and the worm – a call to compassion

Jonah was summoned by God to leave the comfort and security of his homeland to serve as a prophetic presence in the city of Nineveh, the capital of the “evil empire” of Assyria. Jonah tried to escape from this assignment, but eventually, after some adventures, he obeyed and the Ninevites began to repent – the whole city began to heed Jonah’s message. However, according to Stone (1996:x), Jonah was not pleased, as it was his opinion that the people of Nineveh deserved to be punished. Although Jonah was a persuasive evangelist with effective preaching and revival skills, he “felt nothing for the people themselves”. In the end Jonah showed compassion for the plant in which shade he found comfort, but he did not want God to have compassion on Nineveh, a city in which there were more than 120 000 people!

Jonah, it seems, “had a bad case of misplaced compassion…. [He] was a superb evangelist, but not a very compassionate one!” (Stone 1996:x).

Again, the experience of Linda and her family resonated with these ideas. Could it be that our congregation was so engulfed into ideas of individualism and capitalism, or
engaged in a struggle for survival, that the compassion of God was sidelined to the periphery of our imaginations?

1.2.3 Individualism and community

For the purpose of this introduction, I relate some information on individualism from the book "The American Paradox: Spiritual hunger in an age of plenty" (Myers 2000). As this is one of the dominant themes of the thesis, I will return to this topic in the following Chapters.

The term individualism was already used in 1831 by the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville when he travelled America by steamer, stage coach and horseback to analyse the then young democracy. He described individualism as

\[\text{[a] calm and considered feeling that disposes each citizen to isolate himself (sic) from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself …. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody.}\]

Myers (2000:162)

Although individualism supports democracy by stimulating initiative, creativity, and equal rights for individuals, it can become egoism. As Tocqueville foresaw then that each individual “withdrawn into himself (sic), is almost unaware of the fate of the rest” (Myers 2000:163), he warned that eventually tasks once carried out by families, churches and communal organisations would be taken over by government. According to Kornfeld (1998:5) in the time of the “Scientific Era” religious practice was moved to the periphery of ordinary life. Pattison (1977:11) also points out that since the industrial revolution and the rise of the secular state, many functions of the church were taken over by other agencies. As a result, the church lost its identity and its distinctive function. According to Kornfeld (1998:5), educated people in the West thought that God had gone away from the world He created. They believed that “the orderly universe was like a complex, well-oiled machine that ran perfectly by itself according to immutable laws. The machine no longer needed God’s supervision”.

Myers (2000:173-177) points out six factors that contribute to a more individualistic culture.
i) In an individualistic culture, people belong to many groups, and do not feel extremely bound by any of them. They choose these groups from a buffet of possibilities, and stay or leave as meets their needs.

ii) Social and demographical mobility enhances individualism. Group loyalties weaken when one can easily move into new groups. Rugged individualists – those most willing to leave their people and place – are the most likely pioneers. Could that be why America, Australia and (white) South Africa count under the most individualistic societies?

iii) Urban settings, which offer the widest cultural buffet, nurture more individualism than rural settings. As human cultures have moved from hunting-gathering to agriculture to industrialisation-urbanisation, individualism has replaced communalism.

iv) Another ingredient of the individualism recipe is afﬂuence. More afﬂuent people can afford among others television, which not only provides a model for individualism, it also isolates people. Afﬂuence also makes people more self-sufﬁcient, better able to live alone or to acquire needed goods and services without community support.

v) Common predicaments bind people together, as social barriers drop when people help one another cope with a shared threat. Having a common enemy unifies a group. When made keenly aware of who “they” are, we also become keenly conscious of who “we” are. When resources are scarce or many hands are needed to make light the work, like harvesting the crops, collectivism is more likely to flourish. However, afﬂuent, self-sufﬁcient people have formed values less focused on mutual survival.

vi) Individualism rise as economies become more market oriented. By “placing self-interest ahead of moral obligation, and by being endlessly innovative through the replacement of one technology by another, it destroys the bonds built up over the centuries within human communities and leaves them with nothing but naked self-interest as a source of social cohesion” (Jane Fukuyama quoted by Myers 2000:175).
Sociologist Daniel Bell says that capitalism is “a tornado that enriches our lives yet also promotes a consumer culture … and provides media models that undermine Mom, Dad, church, and community” (Myers 2000:177).

In our competitive, individualistic culture, we enjoy great personal freedom; we take pride in our achievements; we enjoy privacy; we feel free to move about; we choose our lifestyles; we have an experimental spirit; we prize innovation and creativity; we seek and declare truth, relatively unhindered by authorities. However, growing individualism is accompanied by more frequent loneliness, homicide, theft, eating disorders, and stress-related diseases such as heart attacks. When individuals pursue their own ends and all goes well, it can be rewarding. However, when things go wrong, there is less social support (Myers 2000:178).

On one side of the societal balance is the valuing of self-fulfilment – that is insistence on our rights, cherishing personal freedom, pursuit of passion and pleasure. On the other side hangs our valuing of commitment – our sense of responsibility, our regarding permanence as a virtue, our believing that love is not just a feeling but a binding obligation. Does Myers offer another piece of my puzzle when he says that “the balance has shifted toward prizing fulfilment over commitment, rights over responsibilities, wants over oughts” (Myers 2000:182)?

**1.2.4 Narratives of woundedness**

When I read about chaos illness narratives, where a person’s suffering is “too great for a self to be told” (Frank 1995:115), I found another piece of the puzzle. Although Frank’s ideas in “The wounded storyteller” (Frank 1995) were inspired by illness, he also refers to the experiences of Holocaust survivors. These ideas also resonate with my experiences of ableism (Grobbelaar 2000:27), as well as the experiences of families like those of Linda. These ideas echo in many stories people tell of their journeys through the difficulties of their lives. I therefore argue that when Frank refers to ‘illness’, it can also be interpreted as ‘woundedness’.

Frank describes three types of narratives of woundedness: The restitution, the chaos and the quest narrative. In Chapter 7 I discuss these narratives of woundedness in
more detail. For the purpose of this introduction, I give a concise summary of Frank's ideas in the following paragraphs.

i) In the restitution narrative, anyone who is sick wants to be healthy again, as this is considered as the “normal” condition that people ought to be restored into.

ii) Chaos is the opposite of restitution: its plot imagines life never getting better. Therefore, as chaos narratives negate the expectation of restitution, they are experienced as threatening and provoke anxiety. Although the consequent personal and cultural dislike for chaos narratives take the form of “simply being unable to hear the story” (Frank 1995:100), people living chaos stories ask recognition for the chaos of their stories. Until the chaos narrative can be honoured, the world in all its possibilities is being denied. To deny the chaos story is to deny the person telling the story, and people who are being denied, cannot be cared for (Frank 1995:109).

To me, the story Linda told me, resonated with these ideas. Was this what was happening to Linda and her family? Could these ideas cast some light on what was happening in a community of faith that isolate and reject their wounded rather than care for them? Are we so caught up in the chaos of our own lives, that we have no energy left to become involved in the woundedness and chaos of others? Does that mean that real friendship would mean resisting our inclination to involve ourselves only with those whose lives are running smoothly, rather than to reach out to those caught up in chaos narratives, to those who pose a threat to our tendency to be in control?

iii) The quest narrative meets suffering head on. It accepts woundedness and seeks to use it. Something is to be gained through the experience. The quest narrative affords the wounded person a voice as the teller of his/her own story. In the quest narrative the teller does have a story to tell. Quest stories tell of searching for alternative ways of being wounded.

Pondering on these ideas, I wondered how communities of faith will be different if they could witness their members’ stories of chaos and woundedness with love and care.
1.2.5  The story of Linda and her family

Linda came to see me out of concern for another family she knew who was living a chaos story. Sometime during the conversation, she told me about the journey she and her family unwillingly had to embark on.

Linda is married to Daniel, the father of her youngest son, Danie. She also has two older sons, Christopher (the eldest) and Joshua. Their father died when Joshua was 2 years old. Joshua was from early childhood a difficult “problem child”. Yet, he still attended church and ‘koffie kroeg’, a youth club which was very popular among the high school children at that time, even though he had to hide when other parents dropped their children off, for no one wanted their children to mix with him.

Linda remembers: “Slowly but surely Joshua distanced himself from church and became involved with drugs. This had devastating effects on our family, of which isolation was the cruellest - isolation from the rest of our family, the individual, extended family and rejection from the community. Joshua’s own brothers hated him. Their friends weren’t allowed to come over, he stole from them and all available money was spent on Joshua’s psychological treatments and rehabilitation (approximately R250 000). Our marriage also suffered, due to our different opinions on dealing with Joshua’s problem behaviour.”

Linda and her husband found resolution in a care group they joined, where they found a new meaning for the word ‘church’ – although Joshua and his problems were never mentioned. Joshua was admitted to Noupoort Christian Care Centre for 18 months, and Linda, along with thousands of other Christians she found on the Internet, prayed for his healing. In order to prevent yet another relapse, they linked with ‘Oosterlig’ (our congregation) and Coram Deo, the pastoral centre, who found a group of young people to help Joshua adjust back into ‘normal society’. Even though the group disintegrated after a while, the care Joshua experienced resulted in his active involvement in the community today. Joshua’s brothers “forgave him and although the sword of relapse still hangs over his head, he grows stronger every day”.

This story of Linda and her family touched me deeply. I am experiencing shame for being part of a faith community who failed this family in their darkest hour. I am propelled to take up my prophetic responsibility to introduce change in the community.

1.2.6 The “community braai” of isolation

The following story comes from a Master of Theology dissertation of a colleague, Sue Skidmore.

While Jeanine was struggling through a very “messy” divorce, she recounted her experience of exclusion and invisibility of her situation in the church and her community of believers:

Last night I went to a church function with some people that I know – a bring and braai. I was so fed up because no one seemed to realise that it was almost impossible for me to keep my eye on the children (they were 4 years and 1 year at the time) and to cook my own meat as well. I was so busy with the children that when I came back to the braai someone had taken my meat. No one offered to help me either cook or watch the children. In the end I just collected the children and went home.

Skidmore (2002:2)

This story touched me deeply. I could almost feel the pain and frustration of Jeanine on her way home. Her experience made me also realise that it was not only in my congregation that individual behaviours and responses toward wounded persons contradict the Christian message of inclusive love (Stone 1996:133).

1.2.7 Fellow travellers in the forest

Dr. Francois Fourie, one of the pastors in our congregation, established a ministry where he cares for members of the congregation through hiking trips. Brenda, whose husband died three months earlier, was invited by him to join on one of these trips. Although Brenda had never hiked before, she seized the opportunity and even bought a new outfit. However, after their first valley (a steep descend, and then an equally steep ascend) Brenda realised that she wasn’t fit to continue. A few of the “regulars” volunteered to stay behind with her, and they sat on the rocks enjoying the view and chatting the time away. After six hours they learned that the rest of the group was delayed by a Blesbuck caught in a trap, and still had a long way to go.
However, they witnessed the most glorious sunset. After the sun had set, the temperature dropped and a wind came up. They went to a nearby plantation for shelter and shared the rest of their food and the one space blanket they had between the six of them. Brenda was sad with longing, but took part in the light conversation. She also shared the difficult times of her husband’s illness (cancer) and the loneliness after his death. When darkness fell, the four women lay down on the leaves close to one another and listened to the men telling hilarious stories of previous hiking trips, until the rest of the group returned after eight that night.

What struck me of this story, was not only the willingness of a few people to put their own interests aside in order to care for a wounded person in their midst, but also the fun they had while doing so. I was wondering how Brenda experienced the support and closeness of this group of people she did not know beforehand. Did she experience her fellow travellers as a “safe place”? As a community of care? Did it change her in any way? What did their involvement in creating this community of care for the wounded person in their midst, do for the rest of the group? Did it change them in any way? If so, in what way?

1.2.8 Companions in hope

Among the most significant recent developments in the theory and practise of pastoral care has been the recognition that pastoral care is not just the work of the clergy. All kinds of people are implicitly or explicitly involved in this activity (Pattison 1994:173). According to Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:1) opportunities abound for caring in the fabric of everyday life, where in everyday moments a form of caring can occur that helps alleviate suffering of another person which has the potential for the transformation of that person as he or she gains new insights about life or chooses to think and act in new ways.

Therefore, according to Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:2), as families become smaller, cities and businesses become larger, schools begin numbering their students and the demand for job mobility increases, our “support systems shrink” (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:2). When we feel the stress of modern existence and the pain of troubled personal relations, like Linda and her family experienced, we often look in vain for that special someone who will care. There seems to be an increasing trend to use
hotlines, psychotherapists, counsellors and psychopharmacologic drugs instead of first turning to family and friends for assistance. Yet, according to Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:3), often colleagues, family or friends could have provided the necessary help. With them, I am convinced that ordinary people need to be considered as a critical component to the healing team of caring professionals, including clergy, therapists and doctors. This is not to say that these caring people would take the place of the professionals. I believe that I found another missing piece to my puzzle: Here were distinguished academics who shared my idea that there is an “army of caregivers” (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:4) out there who can be invited to facilitate spiritual growth on a broad level, people who can be companions in hope for the wounded amongst them.

These ideas resonate, according to Wadell (2002:10), with Thomas Aquinas who envisioned charity not only as a singular virtue an individual possesses, but also a communal way of life.

1.2.9 The church as a community of friends of God

Augustine, the classic theologian from the fourth century, discovered that intimacy with God cannot be separated from intimacy with others. An essential idea for Augustine’s theory of Christian friendship, is that Christians should love God in their friends if they are to love their friends properly (White 1992:201). For Augustine, “Friend of God” was a “normal” description for a Christian. Conversion meant turning from friendship with the world and “mortals things” to friendship with God (Carmichael 2004:62). According to Wadell (2002:78), Augustine meant that becoming intimate in love with God did not mean turning away from others but turning towards them with a new understanding of what love, friendship and intimacy mean.

These ideas intrigued me, especially Wadell’s (2002:17) argument for the church as a community of friends of God. According to him

Christian liturgy and worship should form the church into a community of friends of God. Such a hopeful and magnanimous way of understanding our lives is also ineluctable risky because to live in friendship with God is to will what God wills, to seek what God seeks, and through a lifetime of faithful, committed love, to become one with a God who has a dream for the world we often strangely fear, a dream Christians call the reign of God. Ultimately, the goal of Christian worship is to create and sustain a community of friends of God who precisely
because they are friends of God commit themselves to embodying and proclaiming and practicing the ways God’s reign in the world. Such a life is not without risk … but it is the vocation of the friends of God, a vocation into which we are initiated as we learn and practice the ways of Jesus, the perfect embodiment and examplar of friendship with God. [Wadell’s emphasis]

For Wadell (2002:10), friendship with God is not a solitary enterprise but something “the baptized are to pursue together”. We join the community of the friends of God through baptism, and we nurture and sustain this life through the prayer and practices of the church.

Wadell (2002:12) proposes that friendship with God should illuminate and guide our friendships with others, about “befriending the misfits and strangers who come our way”. What happened in our faith communities that made us forgot about being friends of God and of one another? How will it be if we could re-member our identity as community-of-friends? Would Linda and her family have experienced loneliness and isolation the way they did? In Chapter 3 I will return to this most intriguing metaphor for the faith community as a community of friends of God.

1.2.10 Re-membering

Michael White (1997:22) took up Barbara Meyerhoff’s notion of membered lives, reviewing some of the conventions of an individualistic culture that can be dismembering of persons’ lives. According to White, the “image of membered lives brings into play the metaphor of a ‘club’”. This metaphor opens up options for the exploration of how a person’s club of life is membered – all the people whom we are associated with in the course of our daily lives, could be considered members of our club of life. Some of these members are consciously invited into our lives, others we have little choice over including. Re-membering conversations are about people deliberately choosing who they like to have more present as the members of their club of life. This metaphor suggests unique possibilities for action in the form of re-membering practices, which inform a special type of recollection. Meyerhoff (1982:111) uses the term re-membering for the “reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one’s life story, one’s own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story. Re-membering, then, is a purposive, significant unification, quite different from the passive, continuous fragmentary flickerings of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of
consciousness …. A life is given a shape that extends back in the past and forward into the future”.

According to Morgan (2000:77), when faced with a problem, we often experience isolation and disconnection from important relationships. The problem succeeds in minimising or making invisible certain partnerships or histories in our lives. Remembering conversations are then intended to redress this and powerfully incorporate and elevate significant peoples’ contribution in our lives. Through remembering conversations, a historical alternative account of the person’s identity can be generated and the significant memberships of a person’s life can be privileged and explored (Morgan 2000:79). In this way persons “can have more to say about whose voices are to be recognised on matters of their identity” (White 1997:23). For Freedman and Combs (2000) these people can form a “nurturing team” for the person who experiences problems.

Weingarten (2003:196) uses the myth of Osiris, Set, and Isis to illustrate the concept of re-membering. In the myth, Osiris is chopped into many pieces by his brother and scattered over the world. Isis travels the world to collect his pieces and to re-member him. For Weingarten (2003:196), remembering restores possibilities. As we go through our lives, we sometimes become separated from vital aspects of ourselves. Our reactions to life circumstances, troubling interactions, oppressive conditions, negative relationships can produce disconnectedness from our feelings, beliefs, values, and commitments. This then can disconnect us from others and our communities. When our community witness the pain in our hearts, drawing disparate peoples into a more intimate awareness of each other, we are remembered. Parts of ourselves that have been scattered, shattered, or forgotten are brought back together (Weingarten 2003:196). If someone remembers qualities or aspects of our life experience that we have put aside, but which have bearing on our current circumstances, that remembering will produce a greater sense of wholeness. And when we feel more whole, we have options for action that we did not have before (Weingarten 2003:197).

What happened to Maggie illustrates my interpretation of the concept of remembering and the impact it can have on our lives:
During the 36 years of their marriage, Maggie always knew something was “wrong”, but could never pinpoint this uneasiness about her relationship with her husband. She knew she felt “claustrophobic”. Maggie’s husband is “from the old school”, meaning that he adhered to patriarchal values. Because Maggie was raised in the discourse of patriarchy (that a wife should be obedient to her husband - her mother taught her that “a wife should keep the crown on her husband’s head”), she put in every effort to make the marriage work.

However, when they attended a seminar about the five love languages, Maggie realised what was wrong in her relationship. Her love language was to be touched and comforted and cuddled, but that was not something her husband was prepared to do – even though he knew how desperately she needed him “to touch me in a kind way”. On the other hand, his love language was about the small things she always did for him. When she realised that she always made the effort to do for him the small things he needed to feel loved but never even tried to meet her halfway (on the rare occasion that I demanded more attention, he ignored me for weeks!), she found a name for her uneasiness: she was emotionally abused by her husband. When she rebelled against this abuse, her husband decided that “he had to fix me”, and insisted on marriage counselling – with a male counsellor of his choice!

Maggie remembers their sessions: “During the first session, he [the counsellor] listened quite politely to what I had to say. At the beginning of the second session, he needed my name for the medical aid form. Proudly I announced: ‘Gertruida Magdalena – my grandmother’s names. She was a woman made of steel and I am proud to be named after her’. I will never forget the look on the faces of the two men – they were ready to book me in at Denmar [a psychiatric hospital]! Just imagine: this obedient voiceless woman, a woman made of steel! However, except that this highlighted in my mind my complete voicelessness – after this no one asked for my opinion on anything again during the sessions - I thought nothing of the incident until I related the story one day in class [a pastoral therapy training session at Coram Deo] and you [researcher] asked me about the meaning I attribute to a woman made of steel. When I told the class about my grandmother, how she kept her family together by sewing after her husband died when my mother was 4 years old, I realised the
significance of my heritage. Being a woman made of steel is part of my identity ever since. I am not feeling voiceless any more – I am a woman made of steel."

In the context of this research, I wonder whether in the same way problems can blind us to capacities we have, the discourse of individualism, among others, blinded our faith communities to the richness of our faith tradition as friends of God and of one another. I wonder how our communities of faith can collect the pieces and re-member this part of our faith history, inviting it back into our ways of being church, so that we think of ourselves once again as community-of-friends. Germano (1998:57-58) relates how the centrifugal flow of Tibetan identity into contemporary Chinese urban culture was reversed by Khenpo Jikphun when he established a visceral link to Tibet’s glorious past and brought discrete products of that link into the present. Germano (1998:54) argues that these parallels have resulted in “intersections of memories” among Tibetans.

Meyerhoff (1982:109) argues that “remembering the past fully and well retains it. Life experiences are not swept away as if they had never been. They are rewoven into the present”. Wyschogrod (1998:3) argues that “linguistic appropriation of that which was, need not disappear but is to be transformed”. According to Wyschogrod (1998:174), events that have gone by are “imprinted on a surface or stored in a repository in the form of words and images that can be accessed over and over again, re-membered”. For her, to re-member is to bring back, to re-present, what was previously encoded. It is like a “storehouse into which one can reach to fetch up some particular of the past” (Wyschogrod 1998:174). She warns, however, that the “gap that opens between first and later occasions creates an unsurpassable difference” (Wyschogrod 1998:175), because what is re-membered is embedded in “ethical contexts that impact upon the dilemmas of the present” (Wyschogrod 1998:183).

I wonder how it will be if our faith communities could reach into the storehouse of memories of our identity as friends of God, and reweave that identity into our present dilemmas. Would we be able to re-member our identity as community-of-friends, embracing our wounded in inclusive, loving and caring relationships?
1.2.11 Missing pieces

The metaphor I used for the dilemma I was struggling with, the puzzle with the missing pieces, reminded me of Brueggemann's (1993:20) idea of “the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations”. I was wondering if, by undertaking a journey with wounded persons and persons caring for wounded persons, we would be able to find some of the missing pieces and that over time, these pieces could perhaps be “stitched together into a sensible collage”.

1.3 MY COMMITMENT TO THIS STUDY

That Sunday morning in church, when my thoughts wondered and all these stories and questions entered my mind, was to me a “moment of insertion”. According to Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:17) the moment of insertion locates our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities. Like Miller-McLemore (1999:92) I am dedicated to a pastoral method that makes the immediate human experience of suffering and compassionate response to it primary. Or as bell hooks (1994:74) puts it, I wanted to “create theory from the location of pain and struggle”.

I believed that this was not only a moment where pastoral care was needed because of human pain and bereavement, of human woundedness. My community of faith was struggling to be faithful to its prophetic task. I believe that compassionate ministry of participation is not only suffering with others, it is also and always a response to that suffering. Community with fellow sufferers is never Christian community if it does not imply a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo, accompanied by a dissatisfaction and intense commitment to transform situations of despair, hopelessness, and indignity (Stone 1996:63). Like Jonah, I had to leave the security and comfort of my conversations with individuals and families, and serve a prophetic presence in my community, in such a way that we will not be able to go back to the “way things used to be” (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:6).

I sincerely believe that in order to be relevant, theological reflection should find its point of departure in the existing praxis, in its efforts towards improving concrete
conditions in the society and the church. Brueggemann (1978:13) refers to a “prophetic ministry” which is “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us”. I agree with Pattison and Woodward (2000:37) who argue that if the process of pastoral theological activity and reflection makes no difference to what people do, or how they see the world, it becomes a limited, abstract and disconnected intellectual quest.

I also believe that God is fundamentally compassionate. On the one hand there is a distinct and significant link between God’s compassion, and on the other there is the kind of ministry to which God calls us as human beings (Stone 1996:xii). Jesus did not merely talk, but also intervened in the field of sickness and injustice – in other words, where woundedness occurred. He was not “only preacher and advisor. He is at the same time healer and helper” (Küng 1977:237) [Küng’s emphasis], because for God, it is always about “man’s well-being” (Küng 1977:251).

Added the voice of Stone (1996:xiii) who argues that “[u]ntil and unless Christians begin the critical task of structuring their faith in terms of a concrete practise of ministry on a daily basis, we can only expect the world’s problems to grow ever more intractable, while Christianity sinks deeper into irrelevance”. I believed that I had no choice but to commit myself to respond to the suffering of others, to participate in caring for the wounded with the compassion of a compassionate God. I also realised that I did not enter this process as the one with the knowledge and the ideas of how to do it. I entered this research journey with the expectation to be changed and transformed together with the participants, my fellow travellers on our research journey.

1.4 RESEARCH CURIOSITY

Inspired by the conversations I had with people living chaos stories, people who experienced the blessing of caring and of being taken care of, and the stories I read, I started asking the following questions:

- How do chaos stories shape the experiences and lives of wounded persons?
- How does a culture of individualism and consumerism shape communities and their responses to the woundedness of their fellow members?
What does a radically inclusive community, a community-of-friends of God, and of each other, look like?

How do we create a community that practises authentic participatory, inclusive, loving, caring relationships?

If my community of faith could learn to re-member their identity as community-of-friends, would the lives of people like Linda and her family be any different? If the community took their friendship with God seriously, will they also befriend the “misfits and strangers”? In other words, the wounded in our midst?

Following these curiosities, I identified and formulated my core research question as:

“How can a faith community co-create authentic participatory, inclusive, loving, caring relationships, to become a community-of-friends of God and of each other where practices of mutual care are both implicit and explicit?”

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In this study, I wanted to journey with persons who were sidelined and isolated from their communities of faith as a result of their woundedness. I wanted to invite the participants to a “face-to-face encounter, confrontation, and messiness, and a willingness to participate proactively” in a project that changed the lives of all the participants (Miller-McLemore 1999:92). I visualised ministry to wounded persons “through longer lenses, which bring into focus the impact of society, culture, and nature upon the caretaking enterprise” (Graham 1992:29).

Firstly, I was committed to create a social space where people who were sidelined and isolated from their communities because of their woundedness could tell their stories – whether it was stories of chaos, or quest stories, telling of their search for alternative ways of living their journey through their woundedness. Together we had to “negotiate what is a good life for all the participants” (Kotzé 2002:21). Through our journey together, in collaboration with the participants in the study, I wanted to explore ways in which faith communities could be invited to participate in inclusive and caring practices, becoming friends of God.
Secondly, I wanted to create a context where people who did participate in care and experienced the blessing of taking care or being taken care of, could tell their stories and share their experiences. My hope was that through the telling and re-telling (White 2003) of these stories, others could be inspired to participate in caring practices.

Thirdly, in collaboration with the participants in the study, I wanted to explore ways in which they would prefer their faith communities to befriend them, and care for and with them. From their local knowledges point of view, I wanted to explore ways in which faith communities could be invited to participate in caring practices.

1.6 RESEARCH PARADIGM

My preferred way of doing research included a participatory and inclusive inquiry into the lives of wounded persons and persons caring with wounded persons. I wanted a research paradigm through which, in collaboration with the participants, we could generate transformational knowledge, introduce new knowledges from experience, suggest new ways of seeing and possibilities for acting and being, in the framework of a theological approach that allowed for the lived experiences of wounded persons to form the basis of my theological reflections. Such an approach presented itself in the form of participatory action research where the primary purpose for human inquiry is the “flourishing of life, the life of human persons, of human communities” and not so much to “search for truth but to heal” (Reason and Bradbury 2001b:10) [Reason and Bradbury’s emphasis].

In the next Chapter I will discuss the research paradigm, or “discursive positioning” (Davies & Harré 1990), that formed the broad context for this thesis.

1.7 CHAPTERS OUTLINE

In Chapter 2, when discussing the discursive positioning that formed the broad context for this study, I indicate how a pastoral theology of participation guided by the process of participatory action research, attempted to respond to the human suffering in a way that could introduce change and enhancement in the lives of the participants
on our journey to invite faith communities to re-member their identity as community-of-friends.

In Chapter three, I explore how the discourse of individualism, seduces us into believing that our only interest is about the preservation of the self, blinding us to our dependence on others. Without denying the benefits scientific development has to offer, I argue for a more richly textured individualism, for an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, inviting concern for the consequences of my actions on the well-being of others as part of my ways of being. In this context, I argue that the metaphor of friendship can provide more hopeful ways of living, as a powerful counterweight against the isolating forces of a culture where the distorting ideology of consumerism and individualism are prevailing.

In Chapter four I offer a philosophy of friendship from classical philosophers up to feminist writers of the 20th Century, exploring the spirituality of Fourth Century Christians for whom ‘friend of God’ was the normal description. I argue for the re-membering of this metaphor for God as friend, and the church as a community-of-friends of God.

Chapter 5 is about tales of living friendship, where the lived experiences of participants, where friendship made a difference to them in their woundedness, are interwoven with and giving life to theoretical ideas on friendship, building further on re-membering the metaphor for the church as community-of-friends. I propose the Friendship Position Map and the metaphor of a circle of concern, arguing that although it is easier and more comfortable to love those close to us and reach out to them in friendship in an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, we are to follow the example of Jesus and show hospitality towards all others, including strangers and enemies.

Chapter 6 explores reasons why, although we are made in the image of God, we often find it so difficult to reach out to those in the outer circles of the circle of concern – to the strangers and enemies and the wounded - in loving support. The chapter starts with a letter to a congregation born out of woundedness in the absence of friendship, and proceeds with a journey from hostility to hospitality, where I explore a
few obstacles in the journey towards embracing our identity as community-of-friends, participating in caring practices. The chapter ends with a story of hope, where caring and support were offered to a family of strangers.

Chapter 7 is about the spirituality of hospitality, where I argue for the building of healing communities. I explore the importance of our stories and how the community, as community-of-friends, can witness the chaos of the wounded among us with compassion. Doing so, we can help build healing communities. However, because of the obstacles discussed in Chapter 6, we have to collect the pieces of our identity as community-of-friends in order to remember it; we have to learn how to be friends, in the inner circles of the circle of concern, with those close to us.

Therefore, Chapter 8 proceeds with ideas about the role of the church in the creation of a habitat for the nurturing and/or cultivating of living friendships in the community of faith, referring to the ways faith traditions can be employed in inviting faith communities to participate in caring practices, living out a spirituality of friendship as community-of-friends; friends of God and of one another.

In Chapter 9 I reflect on the research journey and the way the participants and I were changed through our participation in the research journey, as well as the theoretical story that also became part of me and my therapist self. I also reflect on the implications for practical theology and the training of clergy and therapists. Reflecting on the research methodology that informed this research journey, I also point out other routes we had to pass, expressing the hope that other researchers will follow these branches in future research journeys.
CHAPTER 2
DISCURSIVE POSITIONING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will introduce the discursive positioning that formed the broad context for this study. I will outline how a pastoral theology of participation was informed by ideas on participatory ethics, a feminist theology of praxis, and an understanding of pastoral care. I will then explore ethical and accountable ways of coming to know through the process of participatory action research in the framework of a pastoral theology of participation.

At the centre of a participatory worldview is a participatory understanding of the underlying nature of the cosmos we inhabit and co-create. Action research is a “living process” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:11), and its primary function is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in everyday conduct of their lives. On the other hand, contemporary pastoral theological knowledge arises from people’s experience of living and their dialogue with experience. It cannot be produced apart from action. It is knowledge that makes a difference, changing and transforming people and situations even as it is itself transformed and changing. The pastoral theological process is an enjoyable, illuminating and often demanding conversation which draws participants onwards and outwards without prescribing exactly where they should end up or what they should do (Pattison & Woodward 2000b:37).

2.2 PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION

As I explained previously, I am committed to a pastoral theology of participation, where the lived experiences of wounded persons form the basis of my theological reflections. I intended to blend intellectual inquiry with a commitment to minister to suffering persons, while simultaneously addressing unjust practices in my community. I am committed to take up my prophetic task and participate in a process of pastoral theological activity that will make a difference in what people do and how they see the world.
I prefer to think of my own theological reflections as a “lake where experiences and theories mingle and are creatively transformed” (Pattison & Woodward 2000b:36). In the next paragraphs, I will embark on a journey to explore the experiences, theories and voices that fed into the lake where they were mingled and transformed to form my perspective on a pastoral theology of participation.

2.2.1 Participatory ethics

When post-modern thinking is applied to discourses of faith and religion, no-one has privileged knowledge based on external religious or scientific sources that may claim that this is “the way and the truth” (Kotzè 2002:15). For Kotzè (2002:18) it is about being participatory rather than prescriptive. It is not about taking the voice of the wounded “into account”; it is about “ethics located in discourse and praxis with” (Kotzè 2002:18) [Kotzé’s emphasis] the wounded. Participation of all “is a primary commitment if in any way we aspire to being ethical” (Kotzé 2002:18).

Those who have a voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge/power to ensure participation with the wounded, to listen to them, but not to decide for them, and to engage in participatory solidarity with them.

However, Guijt and Shah (1998:7) warn that the widespread use of “participatory research” that has attracted growing attention and enthusiasm since the late 1960s, has become a fashion, the “aerosol word” of the 1970s because of the “hopeful way” it is used. It is often been used in a normative sense, whereby anything participatory is assumed to be synonymous with “good” and “empowering” (Guijt & Shah 1998:9). While participatory approaches may “provide more accurate information than surveys, they are not foolproof” (Murthy 1998:91).

For me, in order to avoid the pitfalls of participatory practices, and to stay within the ethical framework of participatory practices, the question, “‘Who benefits’, becomes a central and guiding challenge” (Kotzé 2002:18). By being aware of the effects of a certain action, practices from which only I, the researcher, benefit, excluding the participants, could be uncovered.
2.2.2 Feminist theology of praxis

Although it was not my intention for the purpose of this study to focus on political issues concerning discrimination on the grounds of race, sex and class that was a reality within Christian history, the feminist/womanist perspective of practical theology influenced my way of thinking and reflecting. I do believe that the struggles and hopes of marginalised and oppressed persons resonate with the struggles and hopes of what I call wounded persons.

I understand the primary goals of feminism as “inclusiveness and interconnectedness” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:23), and that of feminist theology as “directing women’s and men’s potential away from conforming to a system, … away from surviving a system towards living a faith” (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:32). Feminist theology takes as its starting point the experience of women and men and their interaction with each other and with society, as a source from which to do theology (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:33-35). I also understand a feminist theology of praxis as “critical, committed, constructive, collaborative, and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories and experiences of women/marginalised and oppressed people” (Ackermann 1996:34). The womanist writer, Watkins Ali (1999:63), also calls for a pastoral framework that is free of paternalism and the imposition of dominant culture perspectives (like the individualistic ideas in my community of faith), and that is immediate and prophetic in its praxis.

The value and place of historically and contextually rooted stories in a feminist theology of praxis, is for Ackermann (1996:33) an accepted place of departure for “doing theology” which is concerned with human suffering and emancipation. For Ackermann (1996:33) knowledge linked with action and passion becomes a focus for theological theoretical reflection and liberating praxis. The spirituality of risk, courage and hope is “at the heart of the human struggle for the mending of creation” (Ackermann 1996:33). Ackermann (1996:34) pleads for “active involvement” rather than “detached explanation”.

2.2.3 Ordinary theology

According to Hunt (1991:60) theologising is the organic and communal process of sharing insights, stories, and reflections on questions of ultimate meaning and value. The answers that a community gives to such questions are then evaluated in light of the tradition, weighed with respect to the culture in which they are set, and "pondered in relation to the ineffable mystery they call the divine". Only then can tentative and always changeable, faithful, and serious answers be shared. But according to her, such methods have been disparaged as "untheological" so that certain value-laden presuppositions will always emerge as normative. Masked as academic excellence or scholarly rigor, their efforts still have "status-quo-preserving results" (Hunt 1991:62).

Astley (2002:47) agrees when he argues that there is much in "ordinary belief" that is "worthy of theological attention". Astley (2002:49) distinguishes between "popular religion" (the religion "of the people") and religion that is more elitist in a variety of senses, as having a "more literate, verbal, and conceptually sophisticated approach", whose level of "theological sophistication" distinguishes them from the "rudimentary level of understanding of the great majority of adherents". Clapp (1996:191) adds that universities grant religious studies doctorates and tenure only to those who learn not to take a religion on the terms of those who seriously try to live it, but to recast it in supposedly more fundamental social, psychological or economic terms. Professionalised, the "modern world system" cannot register the wisdom "inherent in any indigenous culture".

Cobb (1993:11) also argues that in "an age of professionalism" we became dependant on others even with respect to things we could do for ourselves. Although this tendency is inescapable and desirable, Cobb (1993:12) points out that the problem arises during the Nineteenth Century when "professional theology" began to grow separate from the life of lay people, with the result that many of us have stopped taking responsibility for our own theology. Theology has come to mean something done only by professionals. Theology has been "professionalized, and when any activity is professionalized, those who are not professionals are intimidated by the expertise of those who are. We expect them to take care of things, and we not even ask for an explanation".
With Astley (2002:52), Clapp (1996:191), Cobb (1993) and Hunt (1991), I prefer to take seriously a theology that is grounded in the challenges and fulfilsments of ordinary life and its ordinary religious concerns, rather than in the controversies of the academy. I do believe that the ultimate object of theology, God, and its proximate object, faith, are not necessarily better known by the “experts” than by those “who do their theology outside academia” (Astley 2002:52). I also believe that theology does not necessarily have to be “so very sophisticated” in order to communicate religious truth (Astley 2002:130).

Although I am not suggesting that elitism is never justified, I believe with Astley (2002:49) that the danger comes when it blinds us to the value that is also to be found in “what is without a special status; so that we do not see the worth of the everyday, the usual, the ordinary” [Astley’s emphasis]. However, this is not to say that all ordinary theology is “thoroughly spiritual or experiential”, and every example of academic theology is “irredeemably impersonal or theoretical” (Astley 2002:86). I believe that the difference between these two types of theology is a difference of degree in participation and power-sharing when determining what counts as “good” or “bad”, rather than a difference of kind. Therefore, while arguing for a pastoral theology of participation, I do believe that I have to listen to both the voices of ordinary people, doing ordinary theology, and the voices of the professionals and academia.

2.2.4 Understanding pastoral care

Over the centuries, the church’s commitment to pastoral care has taken on many forms and has drawn on many different wisdoms. However, since the 1950’s pastoral care has been able to draw on the insights of such disciplines as psychology, sociology, psychiatry and social work. Although this has provided a rich addition to the wisdom of earlier ages, it brought along the temptation for pastoral care to define itself primarily in terms of these humanistic disciplines. In the process other dimensions of its heritage were neglected, and it even lost sight of its ancient rootage in the church’s faith (Griffin 1995:i). According to Forrester and Kee (1994:x), pastoral care has had difficulty in relating to serious theology or developing a critical self-understanding. Theron (1996:11) points out that the emphasis in pastoral counselling tends to be too much on problem solving and success, that the nurturing and
sustaining of the community of faith has been neglected. There has been a shift in emphasis from the corporate to the individual. He also is concerned that too much emphasis was placed on the structure of the interview, the correct response and the setting. As the role of the clergy became increasingly professionalised, the faith community and the importance of mutual care have been underplayed.

However, in recent years it has been accepted that the clergy are not the only people who have been called to God’s service (Pattison 1994:73). In their definition of pastoral care Capps and Fowler (2001:1) address both these concerns when they define pastoral care as follows: “Pastoral care in congregations is a ministry of the church that challenges pastors and church members alike to reach out beyond themselves and respond to those who suffer”.

Gerkin (1979:12) includes the theological basis in pastoral care, but emphasises the role of the professional when he understands pastoral care ministry as:

> growing fundamentally out of the ability to understand what is going on in a given human situation with the greatest breadth and richness of perception possible and the accompanying ability to relate these perceptions to a coherent and comprehensive theological framework.

Also in his definition of pastoral care as “that relationship to the other person which seeks to open both pastor and parishioner to glimpses, signals, signs of God’s presence, to engender the quality of expectancy of God’s disclosure” (Gerkin 1979:37), he does not refer to the role of the community of faith and the importance of mutual care.

For Griffin (1995:44) a good deal of pastoral care consists of listening to people tell their own stories. The pastor’s task can be seen as one of helping people understand their story in a new perspective and helping them to locate it within the much larger story of God’s dealing with humankind.

Goodliff (1998:10) defines pastoral care as

> the healing, sustaining, guiding, personal/societal formation and reconciling of persons and their relationships to family and community by representative Christian persons (ordained or lay), and by their faith communities, who ground their care in the theological perspective of that faith tradition and who personally remain faithful to that faith through spiritual authenticity.
Although he includes relationships to family and community when referring to persons seeking help, and he also includes ordained as well as lay care givers, Goodliff creates the impression that a pastoral caregiver can help only those who adhere to the same belief system as him/herself.

For Pattison (1988:13) pastoral care is “that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God”. Although he emphasises the contribution of lay people to the activity of pastoral care, he also underscores the importance of the mutual care of a caring community in caring for wounded persons. The definition found in the Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling in North America (Pattison 1988:195) describes pastoral care as follows:

Pastoral care is considered to be any form of personal ministry to individuals and to family and community relationships by representative religious persons (ordained or lay) and by their communities of faith, who understand and guide their caring efforts out of a theological perspective rooted in the tradition of faith.

Although this definition includes the community of faith, it also leaves the impression that only persons of the same faith tradition can care pastorally with others. I therefore believe that the definition of pastoral care Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:4) offer, is the most comprehensive. For them, the focus in pastoral care or counselling is to help people better understand their relationships with themselves and the world, with an eye to the influence that God is having in their lives. They contend that in addition to seeking to understand appropriate theory and skills, the pastoral counsellor should take into account such elements as:

i) seeking spiritual equanimity or standing with persons as they face the mystery of pain;

ii) seeing growth as taking place in a community of faith as well as helping the community to grow;

iii) uncovering the healing presence of God;

iv) having a sincere appreciation of grace that engenders hope and helps us to accept our limits;

v) seeking justice that is grounded in God’s will for humanity.

Therefore, in the context of this thesis, I argue for a perspective on pastoral care that
embraces some of the insights of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, psychiatry and social work, without only emphasising problem solving and success;

- does not neglect the nurturing and sustaining power of the community of faith as a community of the friends of God;

- sees pastoral care as a challenge to both "professionals" and church members to respond to those who suffer;

- uncovers the healing presence of God;

- seeks justice grounded in God’s will for humanity: the well-being of humankind.

However, pastoral workers need to do their work within a theological framework and method that has real significance. According to Pattison (1988:223), this will help them to understand where they are religiously (in what way they relate to traditional beliefs and practices), professionally (what kind of knowledge-base do pastoral workers use, in what way is it to be used) and personally (what kind of self-knowledge and understanding is operative in a worker's life). Pattison (1988:223) contends that the main underpinning knowledge, understanding and method which inform and give distinctive identity to the skills and competencies of Christian ministry, are nothing other than pastoral theology.

In the following paragraphs I will argue for a pastoral theology as framework for doing pastoral care in the context of a faith community as the friends of God.

2.2.5 Pastoral theology

In literature, considerable disagreement about appropriate terminology exists. Pastoral theology and practical theology are sometimes written about as if they are completely different things; at other times, as if they are exactly the same (Pattison & Woodward 2000a:1). For Graham (2000:114), practical theology denotes the generic activities of Christian ministry, and pastoral theology the more interpersonal levels of care. According to Heitink (1993:6) practical theology as a theory of action is “the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society”. Practical theology originated in an educational responsibility, where students could not only learn of theological insights, but also the
practice of preaching, teaching and the pastorate. Practical theology studies how the processes of mediation of the Christian tradition through various channels take place, and how these structures can be adapted so that there can be a real transmission of the Christian tradition. However, this mediation can never be detached from the context in which it takes place. Therefore, the “exercise of practical theology does not have the church, but rather society, as its horizon” (Heitink 1993:9). It also engages not only the “how” of preaching, but also the “what”, the content of what is preached. The praxis of theological insight is about “kerkelijk functioneren en het pastoral optreden” (Heitink 1977:19). Dreyer (1998:1) agrees when he contends that the scope of the “new” practical theology is “lived religion inside and outside the church”.

According to Graham (1992:20) pastoral theology is the branch of theology that develops theoretical understandings of and practical guidelines for the ministry of care. For Heitink (1993:310) pastoral theology is an “important branch” of practical theology. Pastoral action in the frame of “Praxis Gottes”, is mainly interaction between “de tekst van de bijbel” and “de mens als tekst” (Heitink 1977:20). Pastoral theology is theological reflection and theological insight and pastoral action, an ongoing interaction between theory and practice. Pastoral theology therefore is an integral part of theology in the broadest sense, and in particular of practical theology. Pattison and Woodward (2000a:2) agree with this view of practical theology. According to them, it is a term that emerged in the German Protestant tradition as part of the academic theological curriculum in the late eighteenth century. Although pastoral care was seen as one important area of concern in practical theology, its concerns extended beyond this to specialist interest in worship, preaching, Christian education, and church government.

For Pattison and Woodward (2000a:1) pastoral theology is an older term than practical theology, and goes back far into the history of the Christian community. Pastoral theology is related to the need to guide, to heal, to reconcile, and to sustain the community. A pastor is literally a shepherd who looks after a flock. Pastoral theology might be seen in broad terms as the theological reflection and underpinning that guided pastoral care directed towards ensuring the individual and corporate wellbeing, and flourishing of the Christian “flock” (Pattison & Woodward 2000a:2).
Ultimately, both terms are concerned with how theological activity can inform and be informed by practical action in the interests of making an appropriate, effective Christian response in the world we live in. However, I prefer to use pastoral theology for the purpose of this study, because, like Pattison (1988:217), I think of pastoral theology not as “the art of teaching clergy how to baptise babies, but as the place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experience, questions and actions to engage in a transforming dialogue which has substantial practical implications. As such, it is relevant to many people inside and outside the churches”. For me, pastoral theology also connotes the caring practices of pastoral care as opposed to practical theology that denotes more the generic activities of Christian ministry.

In the next paragraph I will describe a perspective on pastoral theology as I understand it in the context of this thesis:

Broadly spoken, pastoral theology is “a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experience, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue which is mutually enriching, intellectually critical and practically transforming” (Pattison 2000:227). Pastoral theologies arise in the sphere of practical reasoning, but engage more of the person than the faculty of reason. It attempts to strategically relate specific acts of pastoral caretaking to selected aspects of the religious heritage in which the caretaking occurs and to relevant secular theories about the nature and care of persons (Graham 1992:20). It helps people to distinguish how they should act and be. The kind of knowledge that is required is transformational knowledge. The process of undertaking pastoral theology transforms people, their views of the world and their actions, producing new ways of seeing and possibilities for acting. Pastoral theology stands for a complex view of reality, which incorporates meanings, images, metaphors, stories and feelings as well as thoughts and actions. This is a kind of practical wisdom, which is more valuable and more elusive than guiding plans. If they are to be useful and authentic, pastoral theologies will emerge out of particular experiences and situations. For pastoral theology to be a creative, related activity there must be the possibility of developing new insights and directions (Pattison & Woodward 2000b:37-42) through ongoing research.
In the following paragraphs I will reflect on a research paradigm which I believe will allow for a contribution to pastoral theology to emerge from particular experiences and situations, in the development of new insights and directions.

2.2.6 Qualitative research paradigm

The metaphors and worldview that emerged from the rise of Western science demand that we believe in the possibility of separating fact from value, mind from body, mind from emotion, and self from other (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:4). According to Dreyer (1998:3) the traditional or positivist view of science, with objectivity as one of the key notions that guaranteed the scientific status of knowledge, implies that the researcher adopts the role of a “detached observer”. With this emphasis on scientific, methodological and quantitative rationality, Western thought began to “liquidate” (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:4) other ways of knowing, as intuition, imagination, feelings, spiritual knowing, knowing through connecting, participation and identification. These ways of knowing came to be regarded as unreliable, biased and subjective, suitable for our intimate, personal lives, but not for claiming knowledge about the world.

Action research that is a collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry has been established since the 1920s and 1930s as an appropriate research paradigm for educational, professional, managerial and organisational development. Since then, it also has been the focus of many books since the 1980s (Zuber-Skerrit 1996:3). However, qualitative researchers are still called “journalists, or soft scientists” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:4) and their work is termed unscientific, or only exploratory, or entirely personal and full of bias. Some academic disciplines still wonder “how this action research animal can be understood as science” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:1), and critics still ask whether it is “really research” (McTaggart 1997:7). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) these academic and disciplinary resistances reflect an uneasy awareness that the traditions of qualitative research commit the researcher to a “critique of the positivist project”. The positivist sciences (for example physics, chemistry, economics, psychology) are often seen as the “crowning achievements of Western civilisation”, and in their practices it is assumed that “truth” can transcend opinion and personal bias. According to Dreyer (1998:4) scientific knowledge was
considered superior to all other forms of knowledge such as traditional and local knowledge, which was seen as “mere opinion”. The opposition from qualitative researchers to positive science is thus seen as an attack on reason and truth. However, according to Heshusius and Ballard (1996b:4) post-modern deconstructionist thought points to the impossibility of describing reality through a transparent language, a reality that was supposedly “out there”, separate from us. They contend that an objective reality does not exist because there is no extra-linguistic referent, and therefore, language being a symbolic system, there is nothing beyond this symbolic system to which a text can refer. Therefore, there can never be an authentic statement from one person to another about anything in any objective sense. Reality is seen as “text, endlessly interpretable – and therefore deconstructable – through language, never ‘true’ in itself. Language is seen as a system of power relations rather than a transparent medium. Textuality becomes the primary ‘reality’ of life, of the world, and of subjects (that is, of socially constructed realities): Reality itself has become a text and cannot be more than a text” (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:9). We have to accept that our perceptions, ideas and experiences are shaped by our own mental processes, and that they are “not carbon copies of an external objective reality standing outside our personal experience” (Griffith & Griffith 1990:13).

I am not denying the importance of reason and rationality – they are of course indispensable. My problem with forms of scientific rationality and reason is that they look for evidence “exclusively in material reality and in abstraction” (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:5), denying other forms of knowing, with the idea that reliable knowledge could only be obtained through externalising modes of knowing, through distancing, quantification, atomisation, manipulation and experimentation, conducted only by a detached observer purported to shield us from “knowing of the third kind” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:9). Such knowing is “not a thing, to be discovered or created and stored up in journals, but rather arises in the process of living, in the voices of ordinary people in conversation” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:9). In the process of my research, I came upon researched data and philosophies about friendship in literature, about what friendship is and theories of philosophers about different kinds of friendship. But it was only when I shared in the stories of living friendship, and through the voices of ordinary people in conversation, that the
theories of the researchers and philosophers became alive and gained in meaning. McTaggart (1997:7) adds that the literature on these ways of coming to know show that it “produces new insights and understandings that meet defensible standards for knowledge claims”. I do believe that through the stories of living friendship as shared in the following chapters, new insights and understandings were produced.

I therefore preferred not to work in a positivist worldview, where I would have had to “break the world down into discrete bits for study” (Ballard 1996a:30) or focus on “dispassionate” modes of inquiry (Anglin 1996:99), or “pretend that I could separate who I am from what I do” (Ballard 1996a:30). I believe that ideas and practices about practical theology and therapy have traditionally been constructed “by professionals and not by the people who become subjects to those knowledges” (Gaddis 2004:38). I preferred to seek involvement with others as “a participant learner, open to a range of interpretations, constructions, and reconstructions” (Ballard 1996a:30). I committed myself to research that constructed “knowledge according to the stories that [participants] have to tell” (Gaddis 2004:38). Like Ballard (1996b:106), I believe that research as stories can be part of the “complex web of experiences that will help us to understand and value our differences, our common humanity, and our interdependencies”. I wanted to consciously and openly include myself as researcher in my work and to “research [myself] as creator and constructor of research (Ballard 1996b:103). In the past, we have exposed the data and interpretations of our research to scrutiny. We have critiqued the research method as if that were the foundation of the work. It is now time to look at “the ghost in these research machines” (Ballard 1996b:103), that is, at ourselves. For me, this meant focusing on research as an essentially human activity and therefore embedded in personal, social, cultural, political, historical, spiritual, and gendered bodies and contexts. I had to ask myself: What did I not have seen or sensed or said? What different interpretations might emerge from the emotions and realities of others? Such complexity, the acknowledgement of contradictions, and of somatic experiences, made my research an “exciting and humanizing enterprise” (Ballard 1996b:103). I realised that the theories and philosophies about friendship, the prescriptions and romanticised versions of what friendship should look like, would not allow for the complexities of doing friendship in real life. I therefore rely on the stories and experiences the participants brought to the research journey, and allow their
interpretations of the meaning of their stories, to fill the gaps in my own interpretations.

However, I was aware of the risks involved in “weaving too close a fabric of meaning and in creating a smoothly flowing and persuasive narrative, such that the process of seeking the truth is overwhelmed and lost in the onwards flow of plot and character” (Roberts 2000:11). I realised that just as there are no theory-free facts, so there are no innocent meanings, and stories can “dissimulate as well as illuminate” (Roberts 2000:11). The clarity and simplicity of understanding that we long for can be an obstacle, if such clarity is forged at the expense of denying appropriate complexity.

According to Tootell (2004:59), another difficulty lies in finding the right balance between including the self of the principal researcher and the voice of the participants or co-researchers. Qualitative, participatory research practices imply a subjective, two-way process, affecting all participants. One possible danger is that the research can become overly centred on me as the principal researcher to the detriment of the participants. I was very conscious of the fact that the act of writing gave me, as the principal researcher, enormous influence over the construction and content of the text. McTaggart (1997:6) also warns against “mere involvement” where people often are involved in research, but are not participants who have real ownership. I had to be careful not to create the risk of co-option and exploitation of the participants in the realisation of my plans.

I do believe, however, that Bird’s insistence “never to assume, but to negotiate meaning” (Bird 2005), Hare-Mustin’s (1994:33) suggestion on self-reflexivity, together with the ethical and accountable ways of coming to know I committed myself to in this study as described in paragraph 1.6.2 provided a safeguard against these possibilities of misinterpretations. I therefore invited the participants to add their voices in the text, reviewing my interpretation of what they said.

In summary, I have so far established that my preferred way of doing research, was a participatory, collaborative, emancipatory, inclusive inquiry into the lives of wounded persons and persons caring with wounded persons, with the purpose of generating transformational knowledge, formulating new knowledges from experience,
producing new ways of seeing and possibilities for acting and being. I was determined to find a research approach that was consistent with these values. Such an approach presented itself in the form of participatory action research where the primary purpose for human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to heal, and above all to heal the alienation, the split that characterises modern society (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:10).

In the next paragraph, I will give a concise description of what I believe participatory action research is. In the following section, I will weave these ideas into ideas of participatory ethics, pastoral theology, and a feminist theology of praxis to formulate my inquiry into a pastoral theology of participation through participatory action research.

### 2.2.7 Participatory action research

Reason and Bradbury (2001b:1) provides a working definition “to be expanded on” for participatory action research as a “democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview….It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities”.

Dialogue occupies a central position in participatory action research as inquiry in pursuing the objectives of participatory action research, and the knowledge associated with them, by making it possible for the participants to “create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together” (Park 2001:81).

A primary purpose of participatory action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives, contributing to the increased well-being of human persons and communities. It is about “creating new forms of understanding, since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2). Participatory action research is only possible with, for and by persons and
communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense making that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2). It is about the “conscientious objectification of concrete experience and change” (McTaggart 1997:7).

In a creation-centred spirituality the experience of wonder, awe and beauty is the basis of our experience of our participation in the cosmos. So, according to Reason and Bradbury (2001b:11), a participatory worldview locates the practical response to human problems in its necessary wider, spiritual context. And grounded in a participatory worldview the practical and theoretical outcomes of the research process are grounded in the perspective and interests of those immediately concerned, and not filtered through an outside researcher’s preconceptions and interests (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:4).

2.3 A PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Ideas of participatory ethics, pastoral theology, feminist theology of praxis and that of participatory action research were mingled and transformed in my “lake of theological reflection”. As the water in a lake cannot be compartmentalised, the ideas that surfaced refused to allow me to fit them into categories. Bound by the limitations of the process to convey information and ideas from one person to another, I attempted to formulate my ideas in an orderly way, using categories. However, the ideas kept flowing from one category to another! However, in the following paragraphs, I outline my perspectives on a pastoral theology of participation through practices of participatory action research.

2.3.1 Critical and committed

Religion has often tried to provide the comforts of certainty, to assert propositions and to claim knowledge. Decisions were based on doctrinal and dogmatic truths. Those people directly affected by these decisions were seldom invited to participate (Kotzé 2002:12). However, Jesus’ example and the via negativa tradition in Christian theology suggests that there is a very important place of asking and living with
questions. Interrogating and challenging contemporary action and thought, open up “new ways of seeing and different ways of acting” (Pattison & Woodward 2000:47).

However, Hall (2001:178) warns that our work as researchers has also inadvertently reinforced already existing patterns of social inequality. Therefore, our efforts to engage in the demands of healing “requires a critical edge while at the same time allow for creativity, flexibility and intentiveness” (Ackermann 1996:43). Such a critical awareness asked in this research for a critical consciousness of my own history, tradition, and their connections with the marginalisation of wounded persons, with an emancipatory intent. Furthermore, I had to keep in mind that the steps I intended to take to ameliorate the misery of existence could only be partial, provisional and tentative, and therefore they continuously demanded sustained critical reflection (Ackermann 1996:43).

2.3.2 Post-modern and post-structuralist

Post-modern thought, according to Anderson (1997:35), often linked to post-structuralism, represents a broad challenge to and a cultural shift “away from fixed metanarratives, privileged discourses, and universal truths; away from language as representational; and away from the scientific criterion of knowledge as objective and fixed” (Anderson 1997:36). For Denzin and Lincoln (1994:15) post-modernism is a contemporary sensibility that privileges no single authority, method or paradigm. Post-modernism rejects the foundational dualism of modernism, an “outer real world and an inner mental world” (Anderson 1997:36). Post-modernism views knowledge as socially constructed, and knowledge and the knower as interdependent. We cannot have direct knowledge of the world; we can only know it through our experiences. We continually “interpret our experiences and interpret our interpretations. And as a result, knowledge is evolving and continually broadening” (Anderson 1997:36).

According to post-structuralist thought, language is an unstable system of referents, thus it is impossible ever to capture completely the meaning of an action (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:15). A pastoral theology of participation is therefore based on the assumption that there are no “core” meanings or deep structures to life experiences that are singularly, absolutely or universally true, but there are always multiple
meanings to life experiences. Multiple meanings are generated by various interacting meaning systems; for example, the meanings that our families, our communities and our cultures attribute to being a woman or being a man, a wounded person or a friend (Doehring 1999:101). A post-structuralist approach allows us to consider several contextual factors at the same time (for example, a person’s age, gender, ethnicity or class).

Post-structuralist thought is also pragmatic in the sense that whatever meanings emerge from my reflections on wounded people, these meanings shaped my ministry to them (Doehring 1999:102).

However, dispensing with the notion of truth does not imply that “nothing exists”, or that “everything goes”. According to Anderson (1997:37) post-modernism promotes social criticism; from a post-modern perspective everything is open to challenge, including post-modernism. In the following paragraphs, I unpack a few characteristics of the post-modern discourse in the context of this thesis.

2.3.2.1 Contextual and rooted in the living experiences of human beings

Since theologies reflect the needs and interests of particular communities, it is important to ensure that the appropriate people are involved in formulating theologies and that theologies are communally-owned, and not the product of an elite minority group (Pattison 2000:247). In the context of this thesis, my inquiry into participation in caring practices with wounded people was to involve ideas generated by wounded people in the community, and not to reflect the ideas of an elite minority group like the church council.

Therefore, for a pastoral theology to be relevant, it requires to be rooted in the lived experiences of human beings – the wounded persons in my community as well as the experiences of those who are involved in caring activities. According to Doehring (1999:97-105), a pastoral theology of participation should be contextual. In other words, the particularities of our life experiences should form the basis of our theological reflections. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:33) refer to the “all-embracing vision of participation by everybody”. Watkins Ali (1999:63) also suggests a new
method for pastoral theology that focuses on experience indigenous to a particular cultural context. What will be considered as inclusive caring practices in my community, which is a white, middle class suburban community, will not necessarily work in a rural area.

2.3.2.2 Pastoral theology as “bearer of discourse”

Discourse theory holds that language is not an inert representation or reflection of what is “out there”. Language is not the label given to pre-existing human experiences or perceptions. Rather, language constitutes things. Language creates: “It is not as though we have meanings, or experiences, which we then proceed to cloak with words; we can only have the meanings and experiences in the first place because we have a language to have it in” (Eagleton quoted by Dunlop 1999:134).

However, language is enmeshed with other entities such as social structures, institutions, truth claims, “scientific” knowledge, power dynamics, the body and the psyche. Therefore, discourse is never simply language; it is always linked with concrete, social, cultural, historical realities, including psyches and bodies (Dunlop 1999:134-135). The beliefs, ideas and practices of the culture in which we live, or “taken for granted realities and practices” (White 1991:27), play a major part in the meanings we make of our lives. A person’s identity is viewed within the politics and power plays of a culturally manufactured and constituted self according to these taken for granted assumptions. Madigan (1996:50) refers to community discourses as “the rules we formulate by which we decide what is normal and what is not”. These discourses can become so internalised that people can exclude others with different ideas without realising it (Gerkin 1991:73). Discourses are invisible. Going along with it is like riding a bike with the wind: As it carries us along, we hardly notice it is there. When we try riding against it we feel its force (Myers 2000:164).

These ideas are important for the purpose of this study, because, like Dunlop (1999:135), I believe that an important way to understand pastoral praxis is the “activity of bearing discourse”. To explain this idea, I refer to an idea of Hare-Mustin (1994:19), that the therapy room is a mirrored room that can reflect back only the discourses brought to it by the family and therapist. She suggests that therapists, and I take the freedom to add pastoral theologians, need to develop a reflexive awareness if muted discourses are to enter the mirrored room. If I talk about
friendship, and a metaphor for God as friend, for instance, I know precisely what I mean, because I know the “rules” of friendship, and what I will expect from the other person in a friendship relationship according to my cultural background, and how I know the rules of friendship. For another person this can be an unacceptable metaphor, because the concept of friendship might mean something quite different, something unsuitable to her/his expectation of her/his relationship with God.

Discourse theory offers a way to say that something more is going on than a neutral representation of things in the use of pastoral language. Pastors, and I, the researcher, are participating in the creative, constructive capacities of language in our role as bearers of discourse. We are also challenged to view the field of pastoral theology as “discourse, as connected to institutional forms and movements of power that may or may not enhance human flourishing” (Dunlop 1999:135). If I do not take into account that the way I think about God is socially constructed, and I take it as a universal truth, I can confuse the person who I am talking to, who has a different construction of who God is. If we are aware of the power of context to shape meaning, and if we are in the habit of asking how discourse functions, we are able to deconstruct the discourses that shape our realities of the world we are living in.

2.3.2.3 Deconstruction of discourses

Deconstruction lays bare our illusions of any kind of certainty and holds that we must be suspicious of all overarching theories and paradigms. The post-modern perspective asks us to ‘deconstruct’ and ‘transgress’ beyond our taken-for-granted assumptions, strategies and habits (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:6). Wolfreys (1998:23) also cautions that “[w]hatever seems obvious, whatever appears a ‘natural’ or ‘common-sensical’, relies often on an immense body of knowledge and ways of thinking”. Therefore, the dominant notion of a text has to be extended and expanded, because a text is always a “differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces” (Wolfreys 1998:18).

For Jennings and Graham (1996:179) there is considerable satisfaction in the opportunity to examine the gaps, silences, conflicts and contradictions in the understanding of taken-for-granted “truths” or answers which may provide a “space” for much needed change.
Although it is not the purpose of this study to perform a “discourse analysis” (Jennings & Graham 1996:171), I believe that it is my responsibility as researcher to render transparent discourses and taken for granted assumptions, and the effect these have on the participants’ lives and relationships. For example, I am interested in ways that the discourse of individualism, seducing us to assume that “personal problems are best handled alone” (Collins 1988:50) affects my community and the participation of the community in caring practices and therapy.

As Jennings and Graham (1996:172) warn, I also have to be mindful that I myself am likely to be engaging in some form of discourse. If the participatory action research process itself is constituted through its own discourse, then the participants to the study themselves are also constituted. The “boundaries” for the research question are also constituted through discourse. As Hare-Mustin warns, conversations “can be oppressive, not so much by what it includes as by what it excludes”. This raises the interesting question of “what is the effect of constructing the research question in a particular way?” “What are the limits within the constructed discourse?” As I use categories that are familiar within this discourse, other possibilities are “silenced” (Jennings & Graham 1996:173).

Like Bird (2004:6), I believe that “relational language making” provides us with a language structure that allows the meaning attributed to words to be “negotiated rather than assumed”. In this meaning negotiation, we are directed towards the search for consensual and contextual meaning rather than believing in or searching for the “true” meaning of a word or phrase, or meaning assumed through discourse. This resonates with the ideas of Hare-Mustin (1994:33) that we should develop self-reflexivity that means “trying to provide a special vision that can challenge the assumptions of dominant discourses rather than merely going along with them”. It also means that I, the researcher, should acknowledge my own influence and authority by questioning my own views and questioning why those are the questions I am asking. A post-modern orientation reminds us that “all realities are constructions, and some are more influential than others. By opening up the possibility of alternatives, a post-modern view moves beyond existing practices to their transformation” (Hare-Mustin 1994:33).
Therefore, in this study, I attempted to keep asking questions not only to myself, but also to the participants and others as well, to keep negotiating meaning, in order to invite faith communities to develop new insights and directions towards participation in caring with the wounded in our communities of faith – towards becoming a community of friends of God. I was committed to ethical ways of coming to know.

2.3.3 Ethical ways of knowing

Heshusius (1994:15-16) describes a participatory mode of consciousness, as the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known. It requires an attitude of profound openness and receptivity, where we free ourselves from the categories imposed on us by the notions of objectivity and subjectivity. According to Kotzé (2002:6), within such a participatory consciousness, knowledge itself is quite different from knowledge discovered as the product of applying our theories to uncover an understanding of what “is”.

Therefore, by researching with people, research becomes a “participating, ethicising adventure” (Kotzé 2002:28). As guests in the lives of the participants in the research, “we do have ideas and concerns, but these can only be raised in our capacity as guests and not as powerful proprietors checking on ‘our property’” (Kotzé 2002:28). Participatory action research therefore leads not only towards new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge. In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is “a verb rather than a noun” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2).

Theories that contribute to human emancipation, to the flourishing of community, which help us reflect on our place within the ecology of the planet and contemplate our spiritual purposes, can lead us to different ways of being together, as well as providing important guidance and inspiration for practise. We may say that “the view from below is a critical safeguard in doing theology” (Stone 1996:18).

As I was committed to ethical ways of coming to know, one of the challenges I faced during the research, was the way I was to use – or misuse – the power awarded to me as researcher.
2.3.4 Deconstructing power

According to the French philosopher Foucault (1980:119), power exists throughout all social relationships, and is therefore unavoidable. It needs to be considered as a “productive network which runs through the whole social body” (Foucault 1980:119). Therefore, all religious activity involves the use of power. The force of power does not lie in the ideas people have about it, but it shows itself “in the day-to-day social practices, in the construction of subjectivities, and in the forms of knowledge that come to be possible” (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:44). Power “produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault 1977:194).

Foucault looked at power in its reproductive potential, as well as its negative potential. Positive and negative forms of power can be equally oppressive, in the sense that power may create subjectivities of, for example, the “normal” person as opposed to a “wounded” person. This definition of personhood can be as oppressive as any formal social restrictions or controls (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:43).

Stone (1996:108-109) warns that the church may become deluded as to its own use of power, regarding itself as somehow operating on a level that is a step removed from “the dirty world of power”. Therefore, the church must develop a critical stance toward the ways in which power is exercised in community. Stone (1996:119) argues for a relational power: the power to influence persuasively through the forces of love, example, compassion, dialogue and participation. In the context of the metaphor for God as friend, I would like to add the force of friendship.

Turning the relationship between “researchers and subjects inside out by promoting the approach of co-researchers in an effort to share or flatten power” (Maguire 2001:65) is at the heart of participatory action research. In this metaphor, the relationship between me and the participants grew into relationships of friendship, where power was defaced by reconceptualising it as a network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:72). The participants enjoyed the freedom to participate effectively in shaping the boundaries
that define for them the field of what was possible. Agency in the process of knowledge production, or co-production with others, did broaden these boundaries.

The post-modern perspective points to the researcher’s complicity in the constitution of their subjects of study and the interested nature of knowledge-making (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:6). It also emphasises the intimate relationship between knowledge and power, how knowledge-making, supported by various cultural and political forms, creates a reality which favours those who hold power. As action researcher, I agree that objective knowledge is impossible, since as researcher, I am part of the world I study. Knowledge-making cannot be neutral and disinterested, but is a political process in the service of particular purposes (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:6).

As I understand participatory action research, it is about closing the gap between the “uppers” (or the haves) who occupy positions of dominance, and “lowers” (the have nots) who reside in positions of subordination or weakness (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:73) - in this case, the wounded members of the faith community. The role of participatory action research is to empower people through the construction of their own knowledge, in a process of action and reflection. In the context of this thesis, it is about listening to the voices of woundedness, learning from the wounded what caring practices would heal their wounds. By “listening and learning, ‘uppers’ shed the mantle of dominance …. [they] ‘hand over the stick’, sit down, listen, and themselves learn” (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:73).

2.3.5 Accountable ways of coming to know

A participatory worldview places human persons and communities “as part of their world – both human and more-than-human – embodied in their world, co-creating their world” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:7). A participatory perspective asks us to be both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research. To reflect on ourselves implies to reflect on the way power operates in our research and in the production of knowledges (Kotzé 2002:26).
If knowledge is socially constructed, that is, based upon the ways in which people put together understandings of themselves, God, and the world, then knowledge is very much shaped by who we are. Given that, meaning that what we see depends upon where we are standing, then we need to name not only what we see; we also need to name where we are standing (Doehring 1999:103). Therefore, to be accountable, a pastoral theology of participation should be explicit about the sources and norms that shape its identity. Such sources and norms become the basis for how I, the researcher, identify myself. For example, my religious faith, tradition and community; my theological perspective; my understanding of human beings shape my identity and therefore my point of departure in this study. I have to provide sufficient information on my personal engagement for the reader to be able to make a judgement concerning authenticity, ownership and personal integrity (Tootell 2004:51). Being accountable also means that I acknowledge my context and the power afforded by my position. It emphasises both the situatedness of knowledge and the interrelatedness of the knower and what is known (Graham 1996:162).

According to Ackermann (1996:45) accountability also implies an acute awareness of injustice. It requires a hearing of and identifying with the voices from the outer circles and a resolve to live in such a way that the common good is advanced. Accountability to a community is a means of expressing faith in the role of theology to contribute to the way people live their lives. It also means acknowledging the contributions of communities in the shaping of theology itself. Accountability is, however, not limited to a faithful agency for the community from which one comes. Accountability is “ultimately tested in the reality of the well-being of all” (Ackermann 1996:45).

2.3.6 Telling tales

A feminist perspective invites us to consider whether an emphasis on action without a balancing consideration of ways of being is rather too heroic. In a feminist perspective, participatory action research fundamentally is “about the right to speak …. To listen to people is to empower them” (Maguire 2001:62).

Stories are an indispensable part of what it means to be human. Stories create order and meaning out of the scattered fragments of human existence. They provide
spaces in which to remember our past and rehearse our future. Stories are “agents of transformation” (Lynch & Willows 2000:181).

Participatory research emphasises the importance of listening to and for different versions and voices. “‘Truths’ become products of a process in which people come together to share experiences through a dynamic process of action, reflection and collective investigation. At the same time, they remain firmly rooted in participants’ own conceptual worlds and in the interactions between them” (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:74).

Therefore, listening to the stories of the participants was a significant part of my research journey with the participants. I was acutely aware of my responsibility while listening to the stories told, as I realised that the “narrating of any story is powerfully shaped by the listener’s response” (White 1997:6). On my research journey with the participants, I therefore intended to create a safe place where individuals could tell their stories, creating a platform to have their voices heard.

Because this research journey will take place in the context of the church, a community of faith, I will explore in the following paragraphs what the church and the faith community are.

2.4 UNDERSTANDING FAITH COMMUNITIES AND THE CHURCH

Clarifying what the term “faith community” means to me, I found a description of the term in bits and pieces, sometimes at the most unexpected places. The RICSA report (1999:18) offers a definition of faith communities as “communities defined by loyalty to a particular faith tradition”. However, with the authors of this report, I asked: What is a faith community? What are its boundaries? How much can it be identified with the actions and interests of its constituents? In her description of participatory action research, McTaggart (1997:1) refers to “church” as connoting to “community, solidarity, and commitment”, “engagement with social life” as well as “ethics, morality, values”. In the following paragraphs, I will look into these ideas of what the church and the faith community are.
2.4.1 Ecclesiology: The theology of the church

According to Doherty (2003:7), community is what the word “church” really means. The word used by early Christians such as Paul that we translate as “church”, is the word *ekklesia*. Roughly translated, *ekklēsia* means “the gathering of those who believe in Christ, in community” (Doherty 2003:7). According to Doherty (2003:7), other words that describe the church are *koinonia* and fellowship. According to Ladd (1974:536), the background of the word *ekklēsia* is the Old Testament use of *ekklēsia* of Israel as the people of God. Implicit in the word is the claim that the church stands in direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God.

*Ekklēsia* can designate a meeting of Christians for worship. This does not mean in a building called church; it is “the assembling of the saints for worship” (Ladd 1974:537). As such, *ekklēsia* can designate the believers who gather in a particular home as a house-church; it can designate the totality of believers living in one place; or it can designate the universal or catholic church.

According to Ladd (1974:537), *ekklēsia* is suggestive of Paul’s concept of the church. For Paul, the local congregation is the church; the totality of all believers is the church. Therefore, the church is not conceived of numerically but organically. The church universal is not thought of as the totality of all the local churches; rather, “each community, however small, represents the total community, the Church” (Schmidt 1976:506). The local church is not part of the church, but is the church in its local expression. This means that the whole power of Christ is available to every local congregation, that each congregation functions in its community as the universal church functions in the world as a whole, and that the local congregation is no isolated group but stands in solidarity with the church as a whole. Most Christians “believe in the ultimate community of believers in Christ across space and time” (Doherty 2003:9).

For Guder (1999:27), faith communities are “communities of disciples” or “a missionary community that will continue to incarnate the gospel” (Guder 1999:29). Collins (1988:50) refers to a community of faith as a “local body of believers” who should exist “to care for the needy, to welcome strangers, to do good to all people, to heal the broken hearted, to forgive the repentant, to comfort the sorrowing, to hold up
the weak” (Collins 1988:52). According to Clapp (1996:194), Christian community are
groups of persons dedicated to one another for the purpose of serving the Kingdom
of God initiated in Jesus.

According to Couture (1996:102), the congregation is “a community of friends who
delight in one another, who help one another, and who hold one another
accountable”.

For Bosch (1991:371), the church can be described as the mystery of God’s
presence in the world, in the nature of a sacrament, sign, and instrument of
community with God and unity among people. The church is not presenting itself
imperiously and proudly, but humbly; it does not define itself in “legal categories or as
elite of exalted souls, but as a servant community”. Bosch (1991:372) argues that
since “God is a missionary God, God’s people are a missionary people”, and “without
mission, the church cannot be called catholic”. This does not mean, however, that the
church is always and everywhere overtly involved in missionary projects. Bosch
(1991:373) suggests the distinction between the church’s missionary dimension and
its missionary intention.

The missionary dimension of a local church’s life manifests itself, among other ways,
when it is “truly a worshipping community; it is able to welcome outsiders and make
them feel at home; it is a church in which the pastor does not have the monopoly and
the members are not merely objects of pastoral care; its members are equipped for
their calling in society; it is structurally pliable and innovative; and it does not defend
the privileges of a select group” (Bosch 1991:373).

The missionary intention “evokes intentional, that is direct involvement in society; it
actually moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missionary points of
concentration such as evangelism and work for justice and peace” (Bosch 1991:373)
[Bosch’s emphasis].

When I argue for faith communities – for the church – to reach out towards the
wounded among us in a spirituality of friendship, it is with both these concepts in
mind. I believe that in a spirituality of friendship we, as the ultimate community of
believers, will welcome outsiders and make them feel at home; we will work towards healing communities where members are equipped to take up their calling in society. We will, however, also become involved in society, reaching out beyond the “walls” of our church community.

In the following paragraphs I explore inclusive communities of faith as communities-of-friends.

2.4.2 Inclusive, caring communities of faith

While I was pondering these ideas and the term “community, I was watching the television broadcast of the Comrades Marathon of 2005. It was about 10-12 minutes before the cut-off time for the silver medals, when my attention was caught by a little drama unfolding on the screen. A woman of about 40, clearly at the end of her resources, whose legs refused to carry her one more step, was supported by a few of her fellow runners. These men, at times there were two, sometimes four and sometimes three, acted in spite of their own ideals and dreams. By assisting this woman (I assume that they did not know her – at least the last person who joined the group carrying her towards the finishing line appeared to be a casual bystander) they put their own personal goals regarding their finishing times, as well as their chances of finishing in time for a silver medal in jeopardy. While I was touched by this display of compassion among strangers, I suddenly realised what the term “community” means for me personally – something of it was encapsulated in this display of caring for a fellow human being regardless of the consequences it holds for the caregiver.

But what then about faith communities? As the stories related in paragraph 1.2 illustrate, this kind of display of “community” is not always in evidence in our faith communities. And I do not know whether the helpers of the woman competing in the Comrades Marathon are part of a faith community or not. However, I sincerely believe that the experience of Christian community, of a local body of believers, should provide a creative and liberating channel between the suffering of the world, on the one hand, and on the other hand our helpless individual responses to that suffering (Stone 1996:158). It should always be a “demonstrated message” (Guder 1999:39). For Guder (1999:39) the “heart of the matter” is that Jesus forms “this community to carry out its witness as the continuing and expanding embodying of
God’s love for the world”. Guder (1999:43) translates 1 Cor. 16:13 as though Paul were saying to us: “Live out your faith as a community in such a way that the world you are sent to can see in your life together the transforming power of God’s love”.

Therefore, in the context of this thesis, I believe that the experiences of the participants to this research, as a community of friends of God, could become a demonstrated message through which others could learn creative ways to participate in caring practices. In other words, I wanted us (the participants and me) to do theology.

2.4.3 Inviting the faith community to participate in caring practices as community-of-friends

Through a more open and democratic process, new categories of knowledge, based on local realities, are framed and given voice. Gaventa and Cornwall (2001:75) argue that participatory research implies the necessity for further investigation of reality in order to change it, not simply to reflect the reality of the moment. For me, the aim of this research is not only to tell stories of caring practices, but also to find ways to invite the faith community to participate in caring practices as a community of the friends of God. Participatory research must also encourage mobilisation and action over time in a way that reinforces the alternative forms and categories of knowledge that might not have been produced. The emphasis of the process is not knowledge for knowledge sake, but knowledge which will lead to improvement, usually, for the action researcher, taken to mean in terms of organisational improvement or for the solution of practical problems (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:75). By involving people in gathering information, knowledge production itself can become a form of mobilisation; new solutions or actions are identified, tested and then tried again. Thus, in action research, knowledge must be “embedded in cycles of action-reflection – action over time” (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:76). The nature of action can then be deepened, moving from practical problem-solving to more fundamental social transformation. The ultimate goal of research in this perspective is not simply to communicate new voices or categories, but the “transformation of social reality and improvement in the lives of people involved” (Selener quoted by Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:75). By inviting the faith community to participate in caring practices as a
community of friends of God, I believe that the community could be moved into social transformation over time, improving the lives of the persons who make up the community of faith.

By using what we evaluate to be the best current methods, we can build bridges capable of bearing the weight of twenty-first century traffic that moves both across disciplines and between theory and practice. Through ongoing conversations about methodology, and by relating cross-disciplinary perspectives to practise, the discipline of pastoral theology can be guided into new directions (Doehring 1999:99).

I sincerely believe that through a pastoral theology of participation, guided by the practices of participatory action research, we (I together with the participants in the study) would find the strength of authentic Christian community, to “mend our social nest” (Couture 1996:103) and to find ways to invite faith communities to participate in caring practices; to care for their wounded, and to live in friendship with God in authentic ways.

I believe that participatory action research, as described in the paragraphs above, cannot be pre-programmed and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods. Therefore, I describe my intentions in the research process as a research journey with several destinations, fully aware that the journey might take detours or change its route completely.

2.5 THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

In the next section, I will focus on an outline and a brief overview of the steps or destinations on the research journey (Reinharz 1992:211) I undertook with willing participants to find ways in which we could invite faith communities to engage in caring practices and to learn to live in friendship with God and with one another.

2.5.1 Destination one: inviting participants or co-researchers

Since my eyes opened up for the pain and isolation of the wounded persons who came to see me, my ways of being with them were transformed, and my focus in therapy changed. Apart from therapeutic conversations, where applicable, we (I and
my conversational partners) also tried to find creative ways in which the community could be invited to share in their life experiences. I invited these wounded persons to join me on this research journey, to share their experiences with the readers of this thesis. I also invited the members of the community who shared in the experiences of these wounded persons, to join me on this research journey, sharing their experiences of participating in caring practices.

As a result of Linda’s first visit to me, we started a care group for the parents/families of young persons who were caught in a relationship with substances. I also invited the members of this group to join me on this research journey.

I therefore did not advertise to invite people to participate in the study; I begged these persons, who believed that they have contributed to finding creative ways in which the community could be invited to care for their wounded, to invite me into their lives to participate with them in their quest for what they see as important (Kotzé 2002:28).

I also invited voices from literature to join me and the participants on our research journey. These included the voices of philosophers, other researchers, as well as many authors who generously shared their knowledges, insights and wisdom in various written forms. Voices of my colleagues, friends, promoters, and many conversational partners also made a huge contribution to the knowledges and insights that guided the research journey.

The course of the journey was determined by the specific needs and situations of the various participants. Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways the process of enquiry is as important as specific outcomes. Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2). Each journey will bring with it options for entering new territories of thought and practise (White 1997:24). Therefore, ideas on how to invite the faith community to participate in caring practices, evolved from the participants’ ideas on how they would like to be cared for by their faith communities, as well as creative ideas offered by persons who were involved in caring practices. These included making use of the sermons on Sundays, to sensitise the congregation towards the pain and suffering of
others in their midst and to provide information on what the wounded would expect from them. The whole range of the traditions of faith was available to be engaged creatively to invite the faith community to care for and with their wounded, as they live their lives as a community of friends of God and of one another.

The course of the journey was also influenced by the knowledges offered by many authors through literature. When the work done by Carmichael (2004) on friendship as the interpretation of Christian love joined the participants and me on our journey, we had no choice but to make a slight change of course, and invite more authors who wrote on the same theme to join us on our journey.

2.5.2 Destination two: negotiating the journey

Once a conversational partner agreed to participate in the study, I discussed the project in detail with him/her, informing them about my inspiration to the study and my preliminary aims for the project. I invited them to co-construct our journey together. I explained to them that although I was engaging in this research project in order to obtain an academic degree, I would like all the participants to benefit from their participation. For me, it was not only about producing academic theories based on or about action, or producing theoretical or empirical knowledge that can be applied on action. Through this research project, I wanted to “liberate the human body, mind and spirit in search for a better, freer world” (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2).

Following an approach of participatory action research, I continuously negotiated the goals and aims of the study with the participants. Therefore, I had to realise that the end result could not be fixed, and that my initial intentions only served as a guideline by which the study would be conducted. I also realised that this could likewise change. When the direction of my enquiries changed as a result of the insights of other researchers, through the literature I read, I negotiated the new direction with the participants.

Although the research agenda could not be determined beforehand, I proposed the following points of discussion during the interviews for a starting point for discussions with the participants:
• The individual’s own experience;
• The reaction of the community of faith;
• The reaction of extended family, close friends and relatives;
• Reflecting on their experiences – what they have learnt through the experience;
• Participants were encouraged to journalise their experiences – their stories, as well as their experiences during the research project;
• Reflecting on their experiences in reaction to their faith communities, and how they would have preferred their faith communities to care for them, as well as ideas on how to achieve this;
• Creating ideas on what action can be taken because of the ideas that were co-created on the research journey;
• Deconstructing discourses.

2.5.3 Destination three: creating a safe place where tales can be told

During interviews, it was my intention to create a safe place where individuals could tell their stories, creating a platform to have their voices heard. I wanted to create an audience for participants where they could develop their own self-knowledge, practise more validating stories about self, and incorporated preferred narratives into their lived experience (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart 1995:335). Like Dixon (1999:232), I unpacked the research metaphor and approach issues in such a way that all participants would benefit from the conversations and would be able to make significant contributions towards the process. These contributions included both the participants’ local knowledges and the knowledge that were co-constructed by researcher and participants.

Participatory research emphasises the importance of listening to and for different versions and voices. “‘Truths’ become products of a process in which people come together to share experiences through a dynamic process of action, reflection and collective investigation. At the same time, they remain firmly rooted in participants’ own conceptual worlds and in the interactions between them” (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:74).
I was also aware of my responsibility while listening to the stories told, as I realised that the “narrating of any story is powerfully shaped by the listener’s response” (White 1997:6). It is like “weaving threads of understanding – listening, responding, all the while attuned to participate in a way that would heal and not hurt” (Kotzé 2002:4).

2.5.4 Destination four: reflective summary of discussions

Following conversations with the participants, I made a reflective summary of the conversation where applicable. With each participant or group of participants, I negotiated how to make the summary available to them, and how they would like to deal with the summary. I invited each individual participant to design his/her role in the construction of the research process, and to have the casting vote as to what should be included in the research report. Some of the participants preferred to write their contribution in their own words. Others preferred oral conversations, where we explored their journeys in a series of conversations.

2.5.5 Destination five: inviting faith communities to participate in caring practices as a community of the friends of God

Pastoral theologies emerge out of human encounters and institutions – from “real conversations with actual human beings” (Pattison & Woodward 2000:48). They are best and most useful constructed within communities. And it is in communities and between communities that these theologies will best be criticised, modified, and expanded. Theology is a local language or at least a locally nuanced language. Many of the praxis-based theologies which emerged in recent years emphasise the importance of groups of ordinary Christians (and others) working together to produce new languages, insights and methods so that theology is relevant to particular situations and bears the stamp of “communal authenticity” (Pattison & Woodward 2000:48).

Since I believe that theologies should reflect the needs and interests of particular communities, it is important to ensure that the appropriate people are involved in formulating theologies (Pattison & Woodward 2000:48). Therefore, the participants
were involved in any strategy planned to invite the faith community into practices of care and participation. I also believe that theologies should be communally owned, neither the product nor property of an elite minority group. The rediscovery of the central place of the whole community in the production of relevant theologies is one of the great resources for undertaking the pastoral theological process today (Pattison & Woodward 2000:49). During the research, I took great care to involve the participants. While planning a sermon as part of this project, the pastor performing the sermon was invited to several of the meetings of the support group for the parents of young people who suffered from addiction to drugs. The participants were also invited to reflect on my interpretation of their stories, adding their own voices to the text.

With this research project, I intended to co-create with the participants, practices of participation in a caring community of faith as friends of God. During the research process, the researcher and participants developed concrete ideas of how we could participate in mending our social nest (Couture 1996:103).

Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2), in many ways the process of enquiry is as important as specific outcomes. Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process. I therefore hope that the process will not end when this research journey reached its last destination.

2.5.6 Destination six: reporting the research

As theologians generally have an unfortunate habit of writing and speaking in a kind of private language which is only understood by a very limited number of people, and because I believe that a main aim of pastoral theologies is to make a difference in the contemporary world, it was important to me to write about the research journey in words and concepts that ordinary people will understand so that these concepts/stories will be of some use as transformative knowledge (Pattison & Woodward 2000:50). I also wanted to avoid a “distorted technical picture of scientific research as a logical, linear process – which is far from the continually changing actual research process with its surprises, design changes, and reformulations” (Tootell 2004:57).
I therefore write about my research journey in an “experience-near” (Tootell 2004:57) style, giving a “two-way account” (Tootell 2004:57) of the journey the participants and I undertook, acknowledging the contribution of the participants in the development of knowledges described. A two-way account of the research journey challenges the traditional power relations inherent in most research discourse, as it foregrounds the interpretations of co-researchers. In order to clarify, refine and re-story my own way of thinking about the research journey, I invited Linda to add her own voice to the text while editing and proof-reading.

I therefore co-constructed the report with the participants. The emphasis was on leaving the ownership of the research with the participants. Where possible, I used the participants’ own words. Each of the participants also had, from the early stages, the opportunity to review the drafts of the report, and comment on its authenticity. They also had the opportunity to dictate the language used in the report to describe their contributions. Each participant was requested to sign a consent form for the release of the information.

2.5.7 Destination seven: reflecting on the research journey

Right from the start of this research journey I was confronted with ideas about what I call “the ethics of care”. In a country where millions of people suffer from poverty, the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, who still suffer from the trauma brought upon them by apartheid practices, or who suffer from the trauma brought upon them by violent crime, I chose to focus on the wounded in a privileged, white, middle class community. I had to define what the wounded meant to me. And I found through my lived experience, that to me, the wounded means anyone who suffers; anyone who is sidelined to the margins of their community due to their woundedness. As a pastoral counsellor I learned to understand the “radical nature of Jesus’ ministry as that of creating new community for all persons, regardless of their personal histories and current problems” (Buford 1996:286). I learned that woundedness does not ask questions about race, class, gender, or anything else. I learned that I had to respond to the pain and suffering and isolation of wounded persons who shared their stories with me, with the compassion of a compassionate God.
When I was campaigning to raise funds for a young person to be instituted for rehabilitation for the umpteenth time, I was confronted with the question: Why do you spend so much time, effort and emotional energy on this young person, who had all the privileges and opportunities others were denied, who had chosen to throw away all his chances? What about all the millions of children in townships who simply do not have the opportunities, and who will grab any opportunity that comes their way with both hands? I could only answer: Because I have to respond to the pain and suffering of this mother and her family, who hopes with all her heart that this will be the last time! Because this is the pain and suffering I am inserted into, and it is to this pain and suffering that I have to respond.

I also have learned the freedom that lies behind the answer: “I don’t know. And I don’t have to know all the answers”.

In chapter 9 I will reflect on the research journey, and how I was changed by the intersection of the stories the participants brought to the research journey, the theoretical story, as well as my own story.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Through my work as pastoral therapist at a pastoral care centre, I learned that Christian community can provide a creative and liberating channel between the suffering of our communities and our helpless individual responses to that suffering. In Christian community, the sights and sounds of suffering do not dissipate behind cold stained glass nor do they translate into resignation, paralysis, or panic as so often happens in the case of each of us as individuals. In Christian community, “we find strength for compassion. We discover that through the bond of the Spirit, we can do far more together than any of us or all of us can do individually. In Christian community, we discover hope” (Stone 1996:158). At the pastoral centre where I work, I found hope, through the Christian community together with the community of care. And I sincerely hope that through this research journey, through the telling of stories and experiences of wounded persons, that once “we recount our stories in community, and analyse and reflect together on their meaning, they acquire the power to move us forward” (Ackermann 1996:48).
I reflect in the next chapter on ideas of individualism, its effects on our communities and the way we participate in community life. In order to understand these effects, I look at the face of individualism, its components and how we came to be recruited into this belief system. I also explore a theology of Ubuntu, as example of more collective ways of living. Arguing for an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, I explore the fundamental relationality of human existence, by reflecting on ideas on the *imago Dei* and how this impact on our participation in the well-being of others. I argue for a more richly textured individualism, inviting concern for the consequences of my actions on the well-being of others to become part of my ways of being. In this context, I argue that the metaphor of friendship can provide more hopeful ways of living and a powerful counterweight against the isolating forces of the individualistic belief system.
CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE OVERVIEW: A JOURNEY FROM INDIVIDUALISM TOWARDS PARTICIPATING FAITH COMMUNITIES

Modern industrial society often strikes me as being like a huge self-propelled machine. Instead of human beings in charge, each individual is a tiny, insignificant component with no choice but to move when the machine moves.

Gyatso (1999:9)

By the eighteenth century educated people in the West thought that God, too, had gone away from the world he created. Sharing the view of science, they believed that the orderly universe was like a complex, well-oiled machine that ran perfectly by itself according to immutable laws. The machine no longer needed God’s supervision.

Kornfeld (1998:5)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will attempt to uncover how some interpretations of the ideas of individualism and materialism seduced us to believe that we actually can “make it on our own” without God or our fellow human beings. I will discuss ideas on how we seek our own fulfilment rather than depending on others. Even the church fell into this trap, so that Jesus became more the icon of good people instead of the friend of sinners. However, in the Bible through the example Jesus set for us there is much evidence that creation is an integrated system, and that everything is in relation to everything else. We were created to the image of God, and therefore if God enters into a relationship with humankind, so do humankind!

The implications for a pastoral theology of participation is that we can no longer allow clouded interpretations of the ideology of individualism to blind us to our interdependency with our fellow human beings, and our responsibility towards the wounded among us. We have to ask ourselves how we are going to question religious dogmas, influenced by ideas of individualism, and invite “the language of the common good” (Wadell 2002:44) into our lives, embracing the relationality of our human existence.

I am well aware of the effects of the discourse of “rugged individualism” (Combs & Freedman 1999; Myers 2000:161) in my community, and am interested in what ways the “very loud, consistent, and powerful” message coming from the discourse of
competitive individualism, attributed to the pain and isolation of wounded persons and families in our midst. This chapter will therefore be a journey towards an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care. On this journey, I will explore the discourse of individualism, what it looks like and the effect it has on communities. I will then search for a counterbalance of these effects, exploring other ways of being in the world. The relationality of human existence will then be explored, and I will lastly argue for an ethical spirituality, where the concern for the well-being of others form the basis of our ethical reflections.

In the next paragraphs I will, through the lenses of theologians, philosophers and other authors, explore the face of individualism: what it is, where it comes from, and its consequences.

3.2 THE FACE OF RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM

To find a comprehensive definition of individualism seems to be an evasive task. For Fowler (1988:74) the essence of individualism is “when emphasis is placed on the welfare of the individual, with the accompanying assumption that the free play of individual self-interest would bring about the welfare of all”. The only interest the individual has is for the preservation of the self, with no emphasis on the individual’s responsibility for the common good. Oden (1995:28) contends that autonomous individualism makes “an idol of the detached individual as self-sufficient, sovereign self …. The lonely self is cut off from community”. According to him, modern living is so organised that it demands the least possible direct dependence on others. With these developments, there has risen a sense that my future is not dependent on my neighbour, but rather on my job, or, at most, my employer. This encourages us to believe that “because others are not important for my happiness their happiness is not important to me” (Gyatso 1999:8-9). Added to this argument, is the liberal emphasis upon the rights people demand, which encourages people “to ask for assistance, but not to offer it” (Goodliff 1998:107).

Although individualism is firmly rooted in democracy, the “consensus orientation of which presupposes individual independence as influenced by coercive strategies” (Schilderman 2002:212), politics is not the only source that has encouraged individualism. In modern society individualism is also a “dominant characteristic in the
religious realm and some of its roots actually have a long religious history” (Schilderman 2002:213). There are also economic and technical developments, as well as developments in various art forms, informing the discourse of individualism.

Therefore, in order to understand the discourse of individualism and how it informs us how to be in the world and how to relate to ourselves and to others, I will explore in the following paragraphs components and characteristics of individualism, its consequences on the social domains of our existence and some ways in which we are recruited into this belief system.

3.2.1 Individualism through forms of art

Through development in art forms, like literature, the visual arts, or the music industry, modern cultures nurture individualism.

In literature, for example, this is being achieved by the heroes authors create: from Iliad and Odyssey to The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes celebrated self-reliant individuals who act heroically or seek their own fulfilment rather than depending on others and following their expectations. Myers (2000:163) refers to Howard Roark, hero of Ayn Rand’s novel The Fountainhead, who succeeds in breaking free of his society’s mediocrity, thanks to his individual talents and motivation. Roark, the epitome of the autonomous individual, declares: “I do not recognize anyone’s right to one minute of my life … I am a man who does not exist for others” (Myers 2000:164). And Sweet (1999a:293) refers to Oscar Wilde’s aphorism that “self-love is the beginning of a life-long romance”.

Art is also roped into promoting the notion of individualism. Graham (1992:14-15) refers to Albrecht Dürer’s painting The Knight, Death and the Devil, in which the Knight is the central figure, and the world is seen as a dangerous place that must be overcome personally with God’s help. In contrast to his animals, which are more attuned to the rhythms of the universe, the Knight seems unaware of and unaffected by them. He is clearly in the world, but neither of, nor for it. The world is merely a means to an end, and he transcends its powers and dynamics on the way to the fulfilment of his personal destiny. Dürer depicts the world as alien, threatening,
external and incidental to the Knight’s goals. He is on his way to a better place, confident of his powers to get himself there.

Sweet (1999b:292) also refers to Frank Sinatra’s ballad *My Way* as a national anthem! Even our humour is being employed in this quest to trick us into believing the ideology of individualism, as displayed in the bumper sticker: *I couldn’t have done it without me*. So is the movie industry, like the movie “Playing God” released in 1997 (Sweet 1999a:288).

These artists find their inspiration to a certain extent from the philosophers ‘produced’ by the temporary culture. How was Ayn Rand, Albrecht Dürer or Frank Sinatra influenced by Nietzsche’s declaration that “[m]ankind must work continually at the production of individual great men” (Detwiler 1990:99)? In his work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche (quoted by Detwiler 1990:101) argues that “the well-being of the majority and the well-being of the few are opposite viewpoints of value”, saying that society should be dedicated to the promotion of the highest type rather than the universal good or the common good. He had the “superman” at heart, not “the neighbor, not the poorest, not the most ailing” (Detwiler 1990:102). Was the character of Howard Roark and the Knight inspired by Nietzsche’s (quoted by Detwiler 1990:105) suggestion that “anyone is a slave who does not have two-thirds of his (sic) day to himself”?

### 3.2.2 Materialism

One of the major contributing factors to the discourse of individualism is materialism. Graham (1992:59) uses the term to designate a number of perspectives that define reality in terms of material forces contending for power and influence. According to him, modern science and technology, and the economic philosophies of capitalism and Marxism, are the dominant cultural expressions of materialism. They have each resulted in major social and cultural revolutions. They have increased longevity and eased the burdens of life for some, and added burdens for others as well. They have eventuated in exploitation, especially when tied to industrial and technological advance (Graham 1992:60). In this regard, Goodliff (1998:102) refers to “the language of the market” that reduces co-operation between individuals, creates administrative and bureaucratic barriers, sets a price on ideas, destroys a sense of
community and fragments a sense of corporate belonging. Society becomes a collection of marketing categories, and “real people are reduced to minute selling units for the convenience of the market”. According to him, one no longer inhabits a society in common with other individuals, but we live in a world of niches, where each one is separated from, wholly indifferent to and even hostile to the values, wishes and interests in other niches. The overriding question is not what you believe, who you are or how you live, but what you can be persuaded to buy. For Schilderman (2002:213), evolving markets have turned individuals into “self-conscious loci of commercial choice, agents for contracts and patients for liability”.

This “aggressively materialistic” culture urges us to believe that “we need things more than we need people” (Wadell 2002:47). It also tells us that we are liberated through what we own, not through intimate relationships, and that our identity is measured through our possessions, not by the richness of our lives.

### 3.2.3 Technology and science

A major reason for modern society’s devotion to material progress is the very success of science and technology, because of the immediate satisfaction they promise. Sweet (1999b:294) refers to “technicism”, which he describes as “the ideology of technology”. It is the notion that science can solve any and all problems, even the ones that it creates itself. According to Sweet (1999b:294) the ideology of technicism was in some ways invented by René Descartes, who argued that “nature is a machine, as easy to understand as clocks and automata, when one but investigates it carefully enough”. McLaren (1998:194) adds that “as we view the universe as a great machine, who else would God become but the Great Modern Machine Operator”? And according to Doherty (2003:79-80), after Sir Isaac Newton proposed the law of gravity, the universe was seen as governed by unseen forces. People started to believe that God had abandoned the world to run on its own. One of the effects of this technicism was that people wanted to be scientific, objective, reasonable, and rational – all they wanted was “just the facts” (McLaren 1998:194). According to McLaren (1998:193) our culture spent five hundred years pursuing the dream of mechanisation, and largely succeeded, so that human beings “generally feel like little machines in bigger machines”. What we also succeeded in, was to believe that we could be sovereign, unbiased, autonomous, knowing subjects, who
reduced the Bible to “nothing but myths” on the one hand, and “nothing but propositions, principles, abstractions, doctrines” on the other hand (McLaren 1998:194). Although that era produced a shower of facts, it excluded the “looms of imagination and faith needed to weave those facts into wisdom” (McLaren 1998:195). And with McLaren (1998:195) I ask: “[W]hat happens when what people really want and need is not just Bible knowledge, but biblical spirituality”?

3.2.4 Religious individualism

Like other social domains, religion cannot escape the consequences of individualism. Schilderman (2002:213) offers a definition of religious individualism as “the view that the individual believer does not need intermediaries, that he (sic) has the primary responsibility for his own spiritual destiny, that he has the right and the duty to come to his own relationship with his God in his own way and by his own effort”. Hopper (2003:30) argues that the origins of individualism can be traced to the Reformation and the emergence of Protestantism, which with its emphasis upon the importance of liberty and conscience, came to challenge ritual and established authority. McLaren (1998:195) agrees when he argues that “in the world of the personal computer and personal identification number, Christianity was reduced to being a story about how to get a personal Saviour – how to get my personal soul into heaven rather than hell”.

According to Schilderman (2002:213), some of the roots of individualism have a long religious history. He suggests five characteristics of religious individualism:

- Human dignity: Ever since its conception Christianity has advocated human dignity by acknowledging the supreme worth of the individual under the sovereign will of God;
- Autonomy: Stressed by the Reformation’s tendency to consider the solitary individual as being ultimately responsible to God alone, autonomy is a second characteristic of religious individualism;
- The notion to privacy: This has ancient roots in the notion of an intimate self, the soul: the religiously enshrined locus of personal identity set apart from the public realm. Privacy has been emphasised by the spiritual and mystical traditions of Christianity, which contributed to the notion that any access to God springs from the intimacy of the self;
Self-development: The Renaissance and Romantic traditions stressed self-development that referred to the need to cultivate the self and thus presupposed ultimate self-regulatory values within the person;

Abstract individuality: It presents individuals as independent of social context, and society merely as a set of arrangements that correspond with personal requirements.

McLaren (1998:196) uses the metaphor of the “virus of individualism” as an “autoimmune disease of the body of Christ” which caused parts of the body not to recognise they were organically united to other parts. Instead of celebrating their connectedness, parts competed with, fought, rejected and feared one another. He points out that “in modernity it was me and Jesus, me and my Bible, me and my spiritual growth, me and my salvation. Even where the church came in, it was still all about me - getting my needs met, getting my soul fed, acquiring the religious goods and services needed for me and my happiness and my success”. According to Peterson (2005:232), the “do-it-yourself, self-help” culture of North America has so thoroughly permeated our imaginations that “we do not give much sustained attention to the biggest thing of all, resurrection”, because it is “not something we can use or manipulate or control or improve on …. Resurrection is not available for our use; it is exclusively God’s operation”.

However, McLaren (1998:196) argues for an understanding of the gospel that is bigger than the salvation of my individual soul – an approach to the church experience in which “we” does not exist for “me”.

Religious individualism not only affects our relationships with our fellow Christians and the community at large, it also affects our views on the psychotherapeutic models we base pastoral care and counselling on.

3.2.5 Pastoral care and individualism

Even the field of pastoral care and counselling and the psychotherapeutic models upon which it was based, took an increasing turn toward individual fulfilment (Graham 1992:12). When Myers (2000:168) describe the individualism of psychotherapists, he refers to their assumption that problems reside inside the
client’s own skin, and that therapy should aim to “liberate people from social straightjackets”, put them “in touch with themselves”, and increase their self-acceptance and self-fulfilment. According to Graham (1992:18) this unrestrained philosophy of expressive individualism undergirding the human service industry erodes the theoretical and functional level considerations of an organic connection between personal well-being and public order. The concomitant largely individualistic approach to pastoral care and counselling tends to minimise the connective relationships between persons and their world. In addition, it tends to devalue the impact of family, society, and culture upon individuals, leading persons to believe that they can ultimately be fulfilled apart from a meaningful connection to their multiple environments (Graham 1992:70). According to Brueggemann (1995:151) it is a special temptation of modern persons to believe that our life springs from us, that we generate our own power and vitality, that within us can be found the sources of wholeness and well-being. Against the “pervasive biblical insistence that human life is in relation to Another, tempting ideologies around us assert that life is grounded in self …. The self is where the issues of life and health may be ‘solved’” (Brueggemann 1995:152). According to Sweet (1999b:293) Jungian psychology is especially adept at facilitating the view of oneself as a god. Graham (1992:71) refers to Niebuhr, who believed that while nature and culture were necessary for individuality to be possible, the individual was ultimately morally superior to, and finally found fulfilment apart from his or her relationship to the environment. Graham (1992:71) identifies three notions central to a theological and psychological interpretation informing contemporary pastoral care and counselling:

i) The individual and the social order are in essential conflict, with the social order having ultimately a negative impact upon individual welfare;

ii) The self is essentially separative rather than connective. While society, culture, nature, and history may be a primary condition for individuals to come into being, their fulfilment and destiny ultimately results from autonomous rather than interconnected functioning;

iii) The individual is ultimately self-interested rather than altruistic.

Another implication of the language of individualism is that the emphasis on pastoral counselling tends to be too much on problem solving and success (Theron 1996:11). Enslaved to this language of individualism and consumerism, we do not see our
“profound and unavoidable connections to others” (Clapp 1992:32). However, the gospel opens up other possibilities: it disposes me to see my connections to others, to see individual Christians as members of a community.

In summary, Brueggemann (1995:152) contends that it is clear that “much of the psychology used in pastoral care has not been grounded in this other One”. He argues that it is likely that the consciousness of the Enlightenment has been decisive for our abandonment of God-talk in pastoral care. Modernity’s concern with freedom and negative notion towards authority have “created a situation in which ‘coming of age’ has meant getting free from God and making it ‘on our own’. The quest for modernity has been to become a self who is the ultimate unit of meaning” (Brueggemann 1995:152). For Goodliff (1998:105) the problem with this kind of self-reliance is that it “can easily absorb the space that is meant to be filled with reliance upon others in a network of shared obligations and rights”.

### 3.2.6 Consumerism

Clapp (1992:29) suggests the metaphor of the character “Winnie-the-Pooh” for the way the church is more and more thinking about God and discipleship: Winnie-the-Pooh cannot imagine bees possessing an existence and purpose apart from his own use and interest – he is “quint-essential consumer, entirely practical and entirely self-centred”. The Pooh has a range of other possibilities blocked from his vision – he is a bear of very little vision. And according to Clapp (1992:29) American Christians are limiting themselves to a kind of “Pooh-speak” for talking about God and discipleship, forgetting the language and grammar of the gospel. Our only language becomes the language of pragmatic individualism and grammar of consumerism. Clapp (1992:29) compares the church to a “spiritual supermarket”, when the church shamelessly is promising health and wealth. We choose churches on the basis of whether or not they meet my needs. Clapp (1992:30) warns that we seem increasingly blind to the limits imposed on us by consumeristic language, when he points out that “finding a church is something entirely different as buying a new car!” McLaren (1998:197-198) agrees when he argues that in its Protestant, free-church forms, the church disappeared as an institution and reappeared as an enterprise: a purveyor of religious goods and services.
In the context of a pastoral theology of participation, these characteristics of individualism pose “a real threat to the unity of the Body of Christ by espousing independence rather than interdependence” (Theron 1996:5).

3.2.7 The quest for self-fulfilment: me, myself and I

Jordaan (2005) points out another consequence of the loud voice of rugged individualism: the notion towards self-fulfilment. He argues that the contemporary “happiness cult” does not distinguish between an “enjoyable” and a “meaningful” life. In the happiness cult, life is about me and my fulfilment – or as Swanepoel (2005) puts it “me, myself and I”. A relationship only works as long as it makes one feel good and ends when one does not receive enough in return any more. Even as we attend church sermons, we want every sermon to be a “self-hug” (Sweet 1999b:290). We go to worship mostly to feel good about ourselves – we want every worship experience to “pump us up and make us happy” (Sweet 1999b:290).

The problem is that those of us who believe that life is a “duty to be happy” (Jordaan 2005), experience failure when we do not succeed in finding that happiness. A meaningful life, however, is more about a journey to understand that life is a gift to share with others. In a meaningful life, the most caring way of living with yourself, is to be caring with other people – to see through their eyes, hear what they hear and feel what they feel (Jordaan 2005). For Peterson (2005:239), resurrection is not a private experience. It does not make us self-sufficient or autonomous. It “takes place in a company of friends”. However, blinded by the discourse of individualism, these knowledges are not available to many of us, resulting in loneliness and isolation.

3.2.8 Isolation

According to Wadell (2002:44) the “irony of individualism is that while it promised happiness and success, it dead-ends in a very lonely, empty life”. Myers (2000:163) warns that although individualism supports democracy by stimulating initiative, creativity, and equal rights for individuals, it can become egoism, when the individual withdraw from community life, unaware of the fate of the rest. According to him, in the discourse of individualism, people define personality, achievement, and the purpose
of human life “in ways that leave the individual suspended in glorious, but terrifying isolation”.

Gyatso (1999:8) also adds his voice by using the example of farmers who used to call in their friends and extended family to help with the harvest; now they telephone a contractor. For Graham (1992:72) the result of this individual egoism is “moral impoverishment, empty relationships, and an empty self, unconnected to time, place, and others”. Lukes (1973:99) refers to “ethical individualism” taking the form of “ethical egoism” according to which the sole moral object of the individual's action is their own benefit. One of the versions of this self-interest ethics, maintained that one should seek to secure one’s own good, not that of society as a whole or other individuals. A most serious consequence is the undermining of any positive basis for fashioning a consensual public morality and coherent social order.

According to Clapp (1992:32) the insidiousness of the language of individualism is that it “confuses the kingdom with the kingdom’s benefits. It mistakes certain effects of the gospel for the gospel itself”. He argues for a sharper and reinvigorated sense of how the people of God are called to be “multi-lingual”. Although we need the language of pragmatic individualism, as it is the language of our society and we cannot make it go away, it should stay our “second language”. But our primary language, our first tongue in every time and place, must be the language of the gospel.

In the following paragraphs, I will explore the theology of Ubuntu as an example of other ways of being in the world than the voices of individualism, voices contradicting those of individualism, in order to find a multi-lingual voice.

### 3.3 THE THEOLOGY OF UBUNTU

In collectivist cultures, social networks provide one’s bearings and help define who one is (Myers 2000:168), as in the African concept of Ubuntu, where human community is vital for the individual’s acquisition of personhood; in the discourse of individualism, the individual alone defines self-existence; the individual is “nothing [and] will not be anything until later, and then he (sic) will be what he makes himself” (Sartre quoted by Battle 2000:180).
Ubuntu is “a form of relational spirituality that connotes the basic connectedness of all human beings” (Battle 2000:178). According to Desmond Tutu (quoted by Battle1997:41-42), people are made for togetherness and fellowship. For Tutu, identity and relationship goes hand in hand. An obsession with individualism and self-achievement runs counter to Jesus' invitation to discipleship. The discourse of Ubuntu begins with community and moves to individuality, whereas the discourse of individualism moves from individuality to community. In the discourse of individualism ‘community’ connotes a “‘mere collection of self-interested persons, each with private sets of preferences’, but all of whom get together nonetheless because they realise that in association they can accomplish things they are not able to accomplish otherwise” (Battle 2000:179). By this definition, community is basically an aggregation, a sum of individuals.

In the Ubuntu theology the aphorism “I am because we are” (Battle 2000:179) does not include an additive ‘we’, but a thoroughly fused collective ‘we’. A person is not basically an independent, solitary entity. A person “is human precisely in being enveloped in the community of other human beings, in being caught up in the bundle of life. To be … is to participate” (Krog 1998:143). In this concept, if one person is not treated properly, no one is treated properly. The connectedness of a community is such that the devaluation and dehumanisation of one is devaluation and dehumanisation of all. To illustrate this concept, Sweet (1999a:190) uses a Jewish parable: Some people were sitting in a boat. When one of them took a drill and started drilling beneath himself, his companions asked what he was doing. When he replied that it was none of their business as he was only drilling beneath himself, they answered: “But the water will rise and flood the ship upon all of us”. He concludes the parable by remarking: “We are all in the same boat, linked in ways we cannot yet even conceive” (Sweet 1999a:190).

However, being properly related in Ubuntu theology does not denigrate individuality. According to Carr (1989:61), as well as Tutu (Battle 2000:179), no real individual human being can be absolutely self-sufficient. Such a person would be subhuman. But we belong in a “network of delicate relationships of interdependence. It is marvellous to know that one who has been nurtured in a loving, affirming, accepting
family tends to be loving, affirming and accepting of others in his or her turn. We do need other people and they help to form us in a profound way" (Battle 2000:179). *Ubuntu* is the continuous co-operation amongst various cultures to establish joint diversity and to create unity (Roets 2005:2). It is in this light of *Ubuntu* that Roets (2005:2) pleads that we have the responsibility to support each other, to create trust amongst one another, to stand together without sacrificing our diversity.

It is in the spirit of *Ubuntu* that I agree with Graham (1992:19) when he proposes that we understand care as a subjective and strategic participation in the dynamics within persons and between persons and their world; that we understand the nature of the human personality in contextual rather than individualistic terms. In the context of a pastoral theology of participation, change is then extended to include modifying or enhancing the environment as well as tending to the motivational energies and adaptive capacities of the individual seeking assistance.

However, Gyatso (1999:14) warns that we must be careful not to idealize “old ways of life”. The “high level of cooperation we find in undeveloped rural communities” may be based more on necessity than on goodwill. People recognise it as an alternative to greater hardship. And the contentment we perceive may actually have more to do with ignorance. The fact is that the achievements of science and technology clearly reflect our desire to attain a better and more comfortable existence. Doherty (2003:7) also points out that individualism “is not all bad”: among others, according to him, it has protected us from putting our trust in one leader or having all the answers to the questions of life. I would like to add to this argument, that technology and science even produced some tools which we can apply in caring for one another, like the use of cell-phone technology to convey messages of care and support, or to call for assistance when needed. Unfortunately, it has also closed us to relating with others as members of a community (Doherty 2003:7). And it is also true that certain “traditional, rural communities do enjoy greater harmony and tranquillity” (Gyatso 1999:14).

I therefore agree with McLaren (1998:195) when he argues that modernity and individualism produced “a shower of facts, but excluded the looms of imagination and faith needed to weave those facts into wisdom”. I also agree with McLaren
(1998:195) when he argues that what we really want and need is “not just Bible knowledge, but biblical spirituality”.

The challenge we face is therefore to find some means of enjoying the same degree of harmony and tranquillity as those communities embracing a more communal lifestyle, while benefiting fully from the material developments of the more individualistic cultures (Gyatso 1999:15). I believe that the challenge is to find the balance between enjoying the benefits of communal life without sacrificing the benefits material development offers – to find ways to counter the “fragmentation of family life and of the breakdown of community life” (Lyall 2001:122). I believe that the challenge lies in Jesus’ promise that our love for one another, our visible demonstration of living community, will prove both our legitimacy and his, in a community-starved post-modern culture where “the pendulum has swung to extreme individualism, isolation, and loneliness” (McLaren 1998:184). In the following paragraphs, I will therefore argue for a more richly textured individualism in my quest for a multi-lingual language.

3.4 A RICHLY TEXTURED INDIVIDUALISM

Schilderman (2002:214) points out that authors tend to contrast individualism with social engagement, and that the growing emphasis on the individual comes to be understood as egocentrism that will ultimately lead to social anomy, while others disagree with this view, and call for a more balanced view of individualism. He refers to Taylor, who argues that individualism is “one of the malaises of our time, since it dissociates a personal achievement orientation from the moral horizons that have always constituted identity” (Schilderman 2002:214). However, according to Schilderman, Taylor recognises the dialogical conception of identity, which acknowledges that our ties with others constitute us – in taking others’ desires into account we are “not victims of our own arbitrary desires” (Schilderman 2002:214). We interact with others on the basis of fairness and love.

Although Graham (1992:72) contends that individualism, “ultimately works against a rich individuality”, he also agrees that, by contrast, a “richly textured individuality emerges in the interplay between persons and their context in the mutual creation, reflection, and transcendence of one by the other”. Brueggemann (1995:151) uses
the metaphor of the covenant when he refers to our relatedness, saying that human persons have fundamentally to do with God. Covenant is the “deep and pervasive affirmation that our lives in all aspects depend upon our relatedness to this other One, who retains initiative in our lives (sovereignty) and who wills more good for us than we do for ourselves (Graciousness”). Kornfeld (1998:6) adds her voice in this argument, referring to Buber who contends that we can live together in time and space because of our relationship to God who is at our Centre. Through this relationship, community is formed. Because of our relationship to God at the Centre, we are connected to each other. However, it is not the community members’ connection to each other that comes first, but the quality of relation with the Centre. Through our relationship to God, we are “connected to each other, and … we need community that supports us as we dwell in time and space” (Kornfeld 1998:6).

In summary, I believe that we should not underestimate the effects of the loud and clear voice of radical individualism in our communities of faith. However, the prevalence of anxiety, stress, confusion, uncertainty and depression among those whose basic needs have been met is a clear indication that material gain alone will not bring happiness (Myers 2000:xx). However, I also believe that we cannot escape it – it is the culture we are living in as Clapp (1992:32) points out. It is therefore my quest to find a multi-lingual language, a balance between radical individualism, and a more communal attitude in a richly textured individualism. Although I agree with Carr (1989:61) when he declares: “There is no self-sufficient individual life”, I take sides with Goodliff (1998:110) when he warns that the significance of the individual should never be lost; it is only relativised by the place of the community of believers. With Gyatso (1999:24) I argue for a “radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self. It is a call to turn toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct which recognizes others’ interests alongside our own”. Or, in the words of Sweet (1999a:288), the “self must be dethroned”.

I therefore argue for a radical movement towards an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care. It is my opinion that the post-modern religious context provides such a context in which the Christian narrative may enter into constructive encounter with contemporary individualistic society. However, before I discuss the meaning of
the terms “spirituality” and “ethics” in my argument towards an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care as I understand them in a post religious context, I will embark on a journey to rediscover our spirituality in the fundamental relationality of our human existence.

3.5 THE FUNDAMENTAL RELATIONALITY OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

From an echo-systemic point of view as proposed by Kotzè (1992), creation is an integrated system. Everything is in relation to everything else out of the primary relationship to God, who created everything. Therefore, the entire life of human beings is moulded in their relationship to God (Heyns 1978:125; Kornfeld 1998:6; Kotzè 1992:226;). According to Dames (2005:36), the Christian community used the prayer “our Father in heaven” through the ages as a model, norm and criterion. The very beginning of the prayer, with the reference to “our” has social implications: Every time we pray “our Father” we are reminded of our joint connectedness with Christians around the world, as well as our responsibility towards all the peoples – Christians as well as non-Christians. According to Burger (2005:154), the most significant impact of the gospel is not found in what happens to persons, but what happens among persons. And for Minear (1960:156) it was recognised throughout the New Testament that every “obligation towards the Messiah was immediately transferable into attitudes and actions toward one’s fellow men”. Just as there is “no use of saint in the singular, so too is there no private or individualistic ethic in the New Testament. Every demand for holiness was a demand placed upon all the saints by him who, in sanctifying them, created a single community with a single mission and gave to that community gifts designed to build up ‘the common good’” (Minear 1960:139). To be a saint was to become a participant in this common good.

Heyns (1978:125) also argues that God enters into relationship with human beings and simultaneously gives them responsibility and accountability. To be human is to be responsible to God and for His creation, in all of its aspects. This does not mean that God gave humanity power over the earth, but according to Swinton (2000b:45), humanity has been given the vocation of caring for the earth. Heyns (1978:125) uses the metaphor of ambassador: For God, we as humans are the ambassadors of God on earth. What this means, is “to care for one another, for God and for His creation,
and to live one’s life in relationships which manifest care and responsibility, is to participate authentically in the actualisation of the imago Dei” (Swinton 2000b:45).

My journey towards the fundamental relationality of human existence firstly brought me to the concept of the *imago Dei* – through our relationship to God, we are connected to each other (Kornfeld 1998:6).

### 3.5.1 Imago Dei

The concept of *imago Dei* (the image of God) has fundamentally to do with human life in relationship with God and with one another (Swinton 2000b:27). My dialogue with my fellow human beings, with nature, with everything God created, is only possible because God put me in that relationship (Kotzè 1992:227). The mandate to increase the love of God, self and the neighbour, and to promote justice and responsible ecology has consequences for the world as well as for persons. Understanding the interlocking relationship between our brokenness and the brokenness of the world we inhabit help us come together to make and create beauty in the midst of, and in place of, brokenness (Graham 1992:16).

Heyns (1978:127) contends that if to be human means to be someone, in particular someone who is God’s representative on earth, then to be human means fundamentally to live in relationship with others. Who I am is not independent from the relationships I have with my fellow human beings. According to Moltmann (1997:79) God’s image is not to be found in every individual soul, elevated above the body. It is “men and women in their wholeness, in their natural community with one another, who are God’s image”. König (1990:26) adds that a person can only reflect the *imago Dei* in community with others. And according to Southard (1989:46), to be identified with the image of God is to initiate and maintain his work in the world; that is to have the mission of acting for God. It is not only the “direct experience of the self (if there is such thing) which is the place where we encounter the living God; it is rather the social experience of the ‘Thou’ and the responding ‘I’” (Moltmann 1997:79).

My relationship with God therefore is determinative of my behaviour, and includes my every action. This means fundamentally that in this triadic view, I am permanently in relationship and dialogue with creation, and cannot choose not to be in relationship.
The only choice I have is the way in which I enter into this relationship and dialogue. According to Peterson (2005:225), “[p]articipation is in our genes”. Swinton (2000b:28) contends that in this perspective, the image of God is understood as pertaining to a particular type of relationship that marks humanity out from the rest of creation.

However, according to Swinton (2000b:29), God not only enters into relationship with humanity, he also gives them responsibility for what he has created. His interpretation of Gen I:28 indicates God’s desire to relate with humanity in a way which is both personal and meaningful. For Heyns (1978:131) our lives with our fellow humans should mirror our lives with God. What God is for me, I have to be for others. As God’s representative on earth, as his ambassador, my actions towards others should reflect God’s concern for them. Wadell (2002:78) refers to Augustine, who discovered that we cannot separate intimacy with God from intimacy with others because “an incarnational God - God who took flesh and walked the earth with us in Jesus – works through the love, goodness, and care of others to let us know we are loved and cared for by him”. According to König (1990:41), this means that the way we behave towards others, should resemble God’s ways. And therefore, if God enters into relationship with humans, this is what we humans are to do.

3.5.2 The image of God as reflected in a community of persons

We find God entering into a deeply personal relationship with human beings, a relationship which is marked by freedom, reciprocity and an attitude that seeks out and sustains the personhood of the other. This was not without risk for God, as Swinton (2000b:29) points out:

> It also reveals something of the vulnerability of God in the sense that in opening Himself up to relationship with Humanity, and by giving them vital responsibilities for His creation, He also runs the possibility of personal rejection and the abuse of His creation by humanity .... From this we can see that one aspect of humanity’s being in the *imago Dei* has to do with God’s relationship with them and their ability to respond to Him, that is, the image of God in humanity has a *vertical* dimension .... If this is so, then the *imago Dei* might best be understood as a reflection of God’s essential relational character and intentions. It is something inherent within human nature that motivates them to be *with* and *for* God and *with* and *for* others in the same way as scripture reveals God as being *with* and *for* humanity.

Swinton (2000b:29-30)
For Goodliff (1998:110) the *Imago Dei* lies in the fundamental characteristic of the God revealed in Christ as Father, Son and Spirit, relationship in unity or Persons in relationship. According to Doherty (2003:72) the Trinity is the God of community. Johnson (1993:207) contends that “divine trinity must be seen to consist not in the identity of an absolute subject but in the living *koinonia*, the community, among three distinct persons”. Because God is Trinity, three distinct Persons in one, God is community. And it is “the God who is already a community of Persons and who elects to create a universe crowned … by humankind, who images himself in man and woman” (Goodliff 1998:110).

Human relationality that authentically images God therefore has vertical as well as horizontal aspects. Tutu (quoted by Battle 2000:178) agrees that people are made for togetherness and fellowship. He tells this lovely story from the Bible:

Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden and everything is hunky-dory in the garden. Everything is very nice, they are all very friendly with each other. Did I say, everybody was happy? No, actually Adam was not entirely happy and God is solicitous for Adam and He looks on and says, “No, it is not good for man to be alone.” So God says, “Adam, how about choosing a partner?” So God makes the animals pass one by one in front of Adam. And God says to Adam, “What about this one?” Adam says, “Not in your life.” “What about this one?” “No.” God says, “Ah, I got it.” So God puts Adam to sleep and out of his rib he produces this delectable creature Eve and when Adam wakes, he says “wow, this is just what the doctor ordered.”

Desmond Tutu (quoted by Battle 2000:178)

That is to say, you and I are made for interdependency. Adam finds his fulfilment as human being when he enters into personal relationship with God and immerses himself in his relationship with Eve. Together, they find “personal, corporate and spiritual” (Swinton 2000b:30) fulfilment. God, who is “differentiated in himself and is at one with himself, then finds his correspondence in a community of human beings, female and male, who unite with one another and are one” (Moltmann quoted by Swinton 2000b:30). Human existence is therefore seen to be co-existence. Also for O’Neill (1993:140), the image of God is “reflected in a community of persons”. Human relationships are diverse and creative, and not simply confined to the intimacy of the marital bond. As I have argued in the paragraphs above, the original intention of God for humanity is that they are designed to be in relationship with God and with one another. Relationship with God and relationship with one another are fundamental to what it means to be a human being made in the image of God who is love and who
longs to relate with His creation (Heyns 1978:131; König 1990:43; Swinton 2000b:31). According to Swinton (2000b:31), Jesus sums this understanding of the *imago Dei* up when in Mark 12:33 he proclaims that the primary relational task of all human beings is to love God and to love others as much as they love themselves. In order for persons to live out their lives faithfully in the image of God, it is necessary for them to acknowledge the three-dimensional relational nature of their existence and realise their relationships with God, with one another and with themselves.

### 3.5.3 Koinonia

According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, *koinonia* means “to share with someone in something” (Hauck 1976:804), or “to give someone a share in something” (Hauck 1976:808). Paul uses *koinonia* for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings, and for the mutual fellowship of believers. According to 1 Corinthians 1:9, Christians are called to fellowship (participation) with the Son. They are lifted up to be his fellows. They entered into a spiritual communion with the risen Lord (Hauck 1976:804). Fellowship with Christ necessarily leads to fellowship with Christians, to the mutual fellowship of members of the community (Hauck 1976:807), and the idea of “having a share” often pass over into that of “giving a share”. It does not refer to the mere bond of friendship (as understood as affection between like-minded persons), but includes spiritual union in the same faith. Shared feeling moves over into the sharing of active assistance. *Koinonia* is rather an abstract and spiritual term for the fellowship of brotherly concord established and expressed in the life of the community (Hauck: 1976:809).

For Bosch (1991:374) *koinonia* is the concrete Christian community in its everyday life, and Ladd (1974:543) describes fellowship or *koinonia* as something more than human fellowship or the pleasure people of like mind find in each other's presence. It is more than a fellowship in a common religion. It is an eschatological creation of the Holy Spirit. This relationship exists between people because they share a common relationship to Christ. A bond exists between all who are in Christ that is unique and transcends all other human relationships.
According to Swinton (2000b:43), the character of the relationships which God establishes with humanity and which humanity is called upon to reflect, are marked by such attributes as passion, sacrifice, commitment and the need to respect the individuality of the other, whilst at the same time joining with them in solidarity and community.

3.5.4 Shalomic community

Graham (1992:263) offers a description of Shalom as the “religious reality from the biblical and theological heritage which joins love and justice for the sake of greater community and harmony”. To explain the concept of Shalom, Kotzé (1992:227) proposes the metaphor of the driver of a motorcar. How I drive my car does not only refer to my relation towards the car and the road, but also to my relationship with other motorists as well as the passengers in my car. If I drive with caution and responsibility, it fundamentally is an indication of the way I tend to the creation of God. It says for example that I treat creation with respect, and that I do not view myself as so powerful that I can do as I please. This also indicates towards my relationship to other humans; that I allow them space to share in what creation has to offer. It also says something about God; that I receive creation with consideration and respect from His hand, and live in it with joy. It also says that I acknowledge and love my fellow creatures as creation of God.

Therefore, I am always in relationship and dialogue, without the choice to enter into or exit relationship and dialogue. I only have a choice regarding the way in which I participate in relationship and dialogue. Graham (1992:49) refers to the “kinship” of all things. According to him, persons and their world are in mutual interaction, for better and for worse. It is not a matter of choice, it “is the way things are …. [W]e have no choice about whether or not to relate interdependently; we only have relative choice about how we will relate to our world” (Graham 1992:49).

God creates with Shalom in mind, He cares for creation with Shalom in mind, and He recreates creation with Shalom in mind. According to Kotzé (1992:233), the concept of love is synonymous to that of Shalom. Love is central in the Bible, as well as a condition for dialogue and relationship. In the context of creation as an eco-system, human beings participate continuously in the making of history. On the one hand,
human beings are not above creation, but they are part of what happens. On the other hand, they are, as participants, influential to creation. Graham (1992:52) joins in this argument saying that individual subjects have creative agency that to a large, but not exclusive measure, determines how the environment will be appropriated and how it and the individual will be shaped. Human beings therefore neither finally transcend their communities, nor are controlled by them. They exist by the establishment of “relative independence” in community. The more the person interacts with others in community, the more individual the person becomes. The more individual the person becomes, the greater one’s participation in community. Persons and contexts create, reflect, and transcend one another.

If the only choice we have in our participation in creation is the way we participate, we have to take responsibility for the way we choose to participate.

3.5.5 Mutual responsibility of all participants in our dialogue with creation

For Graham (1992:203), the purpose of the covenant is to regulate relationships and to bring about Shalom by delineating the mutual responsibilities of all participants. Therefore, humans have to take responsibility for their participation in this dialogue.

Regarding the responsibility of humans in the ongoing dialogue between the triad (God, nature and human beings) Kotzé (1992:237-247) discerns individual, collective and corporative responsibility.

3.5.5.1 Individual responsibility

Each individual person takes responsibility for his/her dialogic participation. The choices I make are my own and I have to take responsibility for them. I cannot blame anyone else. Redemption through Christ cannot be received on ground of collective or corporate participation; it asks for a personal, individual faith commitment. The gospel therefore has a strong individual notion.
3.5.5.2 Collective responsibility

Collective responsibility means “that all members of an identifiable grouping are answerable, liable, and/or praiseworthy or blameworthy for events, persons, or conditions connected with the group as an entity” (Weber quoted by Kotzé 1992:239). The whole of Israel were banned in exile as a collective unit and not only the unfaithful individuals. However, collective responsibility does not exclude individual responsibility. It is rather the collectivism of individual responsibility. It represents the total of the individuals in a specific collectivity.

3.5.5.3 Corporate responsibility

Corporate responsibility is about the relationship between all the individual parts in a whole, as well as between individual parts and the whole. It supposes a definite organic connectedness, in which each individual part is assigned a specific place and function within the whole. The relationship between Adam and humankind can be viewed as a corporate relationship. The covenant is also corporate: God included all of humankind in His covenant with Abraham. The redeeming death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of all believers can also be explained in this way: “Just as many men were made sinners as the result of the disobedience of one man, in the same way many will be put right as a result of the obedience of one man” (Rom 5:19).

Individual, collective and corporate responsibility is in an inclusive, reciprocal relationship. Individual and collective responsibility relate to one another in the same way as singular and plural. Individual responsibility is about an individual taking responsibility for his/her own dialogic participation. Collective responsibility is about collective responsibility of a group of individuals for the participation of the group. In this collectivity, each individual participant has a responsibility, which imply together with the responsibility of the rest of the group, the collective responsibility of the whole group. Among the group and the individual part exists solidarity in order for the individual participants together to take collectively responsibility for the participation of the group. Each individual participant has to take responsibility for his/her participation, but also has to take responsibility for the context that his/her participation creates for the participation of the other participants.
For Robinson (2001:91), participation means involvement in the process. It is not simple democratisation, but rather the taking of responsibility, the ownership of ideas and openness to others. Without this, the “ethical response does not come to life”. Therefore, in terms of community, each person is responsible for the whole community. However, responsibility and accountability go hand in hand.

3.5.6 Accountability of participants in our dialogue with creation

According to Kotzé (1992:246), accountability always starts at the individual; that is at myself. If someone else has to account for her/his actions, my participation in the process of accountability starts with the question: What did I do to contribute to his/her actions? In this sense, accountability always starts with self-reflection, even if it is about the actions of another. The metaphor of the speck and the log (Mathew 7:1 – 6) where Jesus calls us first to pay attention to the log in our own eyes before looking for the speck in our brother’s eye indicates this self-reflection. Corporate responsibility means that the log should be found in one’s own eyes, before one tries to find the speck in another’s eye. In terms of corporate responsibility, it is not in the first place about the indication of who is responsible, but about the quest for personal accountability in a specific situation. Ethically speaking, the first question should be: How did my own participation provoke or contribute to the actions of someone else? The husband of a woman trapped in an unfortunate, toxic relationship with alcohol, can ask himself this question: “How did my continuation of my own drinking pattern after she returned home from rehabilitation, contribute to her relapse two years later?” I, as a member of her community of friends and family, should ask myself the question: “How did my participation in festivities, like birthday celebrations, where the use of alcohol is an accepted custom, contribute to her relapse?” When something happens like the new-born baby deserted by her own mother and hidden in a ditch, and then raped by someone and thrown back into the ditch (Beeld 18 January 2006), I believe the whole society should ask themselves: “Do we care enough? Do we provide sufficiently for the poorest of the poor? Do we provide enough care facilities for unwedded mothers and unwelcome babies?” Each individual can ask him/herself: “Do I give enough to welfare organizations?”

If my participation, the way I choose to participate in creation, contribute to the actions and choices of someone else, then ethics is about the way I choose to
participate and the effect of my choices on others. In my argument for an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, I will explore in the following paragraphs the concept of morality, spirituality and ethics in a post-modern religious context.

3.6 INDIVIDUALISM, RELIGION AND ETHICS IN A POST-MODERN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

In the past, religion and ethics were closely intertwined. The “moral source was considered to be God or some inner notion of the good” (Schilderman 2002:214). In the medieval period, God was central to people’s view of the world (Goodliff 1998:28). However, the Enlightenment gave birth to another radically transformed paradigm of human society and a new understanding of what it is to be human: a confident belief in the ability of humanity to progress towards an utopia of rational, humanistic and autonomous harmony – we expect to “derive well-being from a favoured disclosure of our original self” (Schilderman 2002:214). Gone were the preoccupations with the supernatural, ecclesiastical authority, and the transcendent power of God. In its place was a preoccupation with this world, which involves a belief in the secular rather than the sacred, the power of the individual’s mind and rationality to institute change and progress, the fruits of scientific and technological endeavour and the triumph of a rational humanity that has been liberated from superstition and is now directed towards the future (Goodliff 1998:28-29). According to McLaren (1998:194), in modernity nobody wanted to be spiritual; people wanted to be scientific, objective, reasonable, or rational – but not spiritual. Modern humanity was “self-confident and self-governing, homo autonomus” (Goodliff 1998:29) [Goodliff’s emphasis], and religious practice was moved to the periphery of ordinary life (Kornfeld 1998:5). This notion was enforced by Nietzsche’s declaration that “God is dead” (Detwiler 1990:68), and emphasised the declination of the influence of religion. According to Detwiler (1990:68), there was a mounting confusion with respect to the problem of how best we are to conduct ourselves in life. Many people, believing that “science has ‘disproven’ religion, make the further assumption that because there appears to be no final evidence for any spiritual authority, morality itself must be a matter of individual preference” (Gyatso 1999:11). Like Gyatso it is not my intention to criticise scientific endeavour. Like him, my concern is rather that we apt to overlook the limitations of science. Although we are impressed by the
achievements of modern science neither science nor the law can help us forecast the likely consequences of our actions, and neither can tell us how we ought to act in an ethical sense (Gyatso 1999:13).

By reducing life to an attempt to control natural and economic forces, there has been little cultural basis for constructing a meaningful belief in God and for developing positive views of a just social order and responsible stewardship of the natural environment (Graham 1992:60). Our notion to be impressed by results encourages us to suppose that the keys to happiness are material well-being on the one hand and the power conferred by knowledge on the other (Gyatso 1999:11). Gyatso warns that the danger of knowledge is that it is less obvious that it cannot provide the happiness we strive for. And it can cause us to loose touch with the wider reality of human experience and in particular, to overlook our dependence on others. As Peterson (2005:226) puts it: “I am not myself by myself. Community, not the highly vaunted individualism of our culture, is the setting in which Christ is at play”. In contrast to a “happiness cult”, Goodliff (1998:102) emphasises the importance of “conviviality” as a social value. According to him, unless social activity, some new urban development or a social project increased human interaction, personal exchange, or conviviality, it was “useless”. In the context of a pastoral theology of participation, I believe that conviviality might be replaced with fellowship, koinonia, or “we might simply call it friendship”¹ (Goodliff 1998:103).

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how I understand morality, spirituality, and ethics in a post-modern religious context.

3.6.1 Morality

Maturana (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:207) refers to “moralists” who “stand for adherence to rules” which they consider as the “external reference lending authority” to their statements and ideas; they lack awareness of their own responsibility; they do not see their fellow human beings because they are “completely occupied by the upholding of rules and imperatives”; and they know with certainty “what has to be

¹ What I mean by friendship, will be explained in more detail in chapter 4. It is about more than the popular view of friendship with a few close friends; it is more about a spiritual friendship, including strangers and enemies, to the example of Jesus’ friendship with ‘sinners’.
done and how everybody else has to behave”. Küng (1977:241) also warns that for many doing God’s will has become a “pious formula”, identifying it with the law, the dogma of our religious context. It may also be used as a “shelter in which to hide from God’s will” (Küng 1977:242). Religious teachings and dogma provide security, because we know exactly what we have to keep to: just this, no less but nothing more. One has to do only what is commanded. And what is not forbidden, is permitted. People in their relations to other human beings prefer to keep to a law, rather than make a personal decision (Küng 1977:243). For Gyatso (1999:28) it would also give ground for arguing that we are responsible only to the letter of those laws, rather than for our actions!

However, such a formulaic approach could never hope to capture the richness and diversity of human experience. As Schilderman (2002:215) points out, in a post-modern context, religious faith can no longer be defined mainly as imitation, in the sense of following rules, methods and precepts for imagination. And from a social constructionist point of view, we construct our own identities - we create instead of merely imitate. What is decisive is “not the ideal of expertise in following blueprints, but the ideal of appropriating uniqueness” (Schilderman 2002:215). And according to Schilderman (2002:215) the assertiveness of an “I” who appropriates is not necessarily inimical to the efforts of others or the orientation to the common good. Therefore, in the post-modern context, spirituality, as apposed to morality, is concerned with qualities of the human spirit such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of harmony - those qualities that bring happiness to both self and others (Gyatso 1999:23).

### 3.6.2 Ethical spirituality

For McLaren (1998:194), to be spiritual in a post-modern context means “that I believe there is something more, something beyond the reductionist ‘objective data’ of modernity”.

The unifying characteristic of the qualities Gyatso describes as spiritual, characteristics such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance and a sense of responsibility, may be said to be some level of concern for others’ well-being. Each of
the qualities mentioned implies an implicit concern for others’ well-being (Gyatso 1999:23).

Therefore, people acting ethically perceive others, consider them important, and see them. According to Maturana (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:208), the “possibility of ethics and of being touched arises only when the other human being is seen as a legitimate other, and when the possible consequences of one’s actions for that other’s well-being are reflected”.

I agree therefore with Sweet (1999b:296) when he argues that the search for self-fulfilment can ethically only be met in the context of belonging and contributing to a community where the common good takes precedence over the self. Goodliff (1998:105) sheds some more light when he argues that it is not self-fulfilment that is wrong, but its pursuit with little or no concern for the consequences to others. For him, our freedoms, our self-fulfilment, are always relative in a just society. Like Kotzé (1992), he uses the example of a driver of a motorcar to explain: when my self-fulfilment, expressed in the adrenalin buzz of driving at very high speed, results in the loss of freedom to be self-fulfilled by the driver with whom I collide and who becomes disabled as a result, that fulfilment should be condemned. Therefore, in my quest towards an ethical spirituality of participation of mutual care, I explore in the following paragraph eschatological ethics in the context of our concern for the well-being of others.

3.6.3 The kingdom of God and the well-being of all as eschatological ethics

When discussing eschatology, I choose not the more traditional and orthodox “other-worldly and future” (Braaten 1974:116) interpretation which permits no real connection between eschatology and ethics, or as Muirhead (1906:7) describes it: “the Kingdom is a hope of the future rather than a possession of the present …. [Jesus] brought it near, and considered its arrival imminent; still to the last it was something to come”. I choose the “this-worldly and present” (Braaten 1974:116) interpretation whose eschatology is radically realised in the moment of ethical decision. I agree with Heyns (1978:391) when he argues that it is not only about what
will come at the end of times. It is about the vertical dimension of “truths and values”. It is about our immediate relationship with God which should be resembled in everything we do.

According to Küng (1977:241) Jesus came to defend God’s cause and to bring the message of the coming of God’s Kingdom, and that His will will be done. Referring to Mathew 6:10, “May your Kingdom come, May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”, Campolo (2003:43) contends that God wants this Kingdom “to become established on earth, now!”. For him, God’s Kingdom is a new society that Jesus wants to create in this world – within human history – right now! It is not an “otherworldly, pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die religion that promises us mansions in the next world if only we endure the oppressions, inequities, and injustices of the present socio-economic order” (Campolo 2003:43).

For Goodliff (1998:111), the Church has as its end the Kingdom of God, brought about “not by ecclesiastical act, but by God’s act in Christ, and points to that end by being the new community of saved and redeemed men and women”. According to him, the overriding call is to reject self-interest and love one another, looking not only to our own interests, but also the interests of others. Küng (1977:252) adds his voice, arguing that our friendliness for others is based on God’s friendship for us. That is why “the universal and final criterion must be: God wills man’s well-being”. According to Küng (1977:253), we cannot take God and his will seriously without at the same time taking seriously the well-being of our fellow human beings.

3.6.3.1 Ethics as concern for the well-being of others

To love my neighbour as myself means, according to Gyatso (1999:34), that I try to be “of the greatest service to others that I can be”. We have no means of discriminating between right and wrong if we do not take into account others’ feelings, others’ suffering. One of the things that determines whether an act is ethical or not, is its effect on others’ experience. An act that harms or does violence to this is potentially an unethical act (Gyatso 1999:29; Kotzé 2002:11). Braaten (1974:116) also argues that the right thing to do is always to seek the good of our neighbour, which is to act in such a way as to open them to their greater fulfilment. Goodliff (1998:109) argues that the world we want to inhabit is one where all the benefits of
community – neighbourliness, care for the needy, sustaining stable family relationships, and so forth – are won without the costs of coercion, authoritarian attitudes, shame and humiliation of the deviant and intolerance of the “other”. In other words, we have to love them as we love ourselves.

3.6.3.2 Love and ethics

According to Küng (1977:254), through the ages the word “love” has been “misused by Christians and non-Christians and cheapened by the pious and impious”. For Jesus, where love is concerned, actions speak louder than words. It is “not talk, but action, which makes clear the nature of love” (Küng 1977:255). Heyns (1978:132) contends that because I know that God loves me – not for what I am worth, but for who I am – I also love others for whom they are. Love exists from the full abundance received from God, and wants to share this abundance with others. For Küng, love is essentially love of both God and human beings. Jesus came “to fulfill the law by making God’s will prevail, and God’s will aims at man’s well-being. That is why he can say that all the commandments are summed up in this dual commandment of love …. and combines love of God and love of man in an indissoluble unity …. love thus becomes the criterion of piety and of a person’s whole conduct” (Küng 1977:255).

However, Jesus is not interested in universal, theoretical or poetical love, but he wants practical, and therefore concrete love. Küng (1977:256) warns against universal humanity, because the more distant our fellow men, the easier it is to profess our love in words. Humanism costs so much less, the more it is directed to all mankind and the less it is open to the approach of the individual person with his/her needs. It is easier to plead for peace in the Far East than for peace in one’s own family or in one’s own sphere of influence” (Küng 1977:256). Would it have been easier for the husband of the woman with the drinking problem to pray for peace in the Far East, than to change his own drinking pattern as an act of solidarity to accommodate his wife’s problems? Stone (1996:107) links this argument to our preoccupation with materialism, when he says: “A single act of creative solidarity with victims is worth a thousand dollars flown in from the outside”. Does this mean that the act of solidarity of the husband to abandon all drinking in the presence of his wife – or
better, stop using alcohol himself altogether – would mean much more to his wife than all the money spent on rehabilitation programmes?

When asked how much love shall I give my neighbour, Jesus answered: “as yourself”. For Küng (1977:257) it means the orientation of ourselves towards others: an alertness, an openness, a receptivity for our fellow human beings.

However, as Wadell (2002:44) points out, we live in a society that teaches us to put ourselves and our needs before the needs and well-being of others. This culture gives unqualified public approval to the drive of individual success, individual affluence and individual profit, and other people are “more likely to be seen as rivals and competitors than friends” (Wadell 2002:44).

I understood something of the application of these ideas on ethics as concern for the well-being of others discussed in the preceding paragraphs in the context of a pastoral theology of participation, when a woman came to see me. She was involved in a relationship with a married man whose wife was institutionalised due to an illness that resulted in physical disability. When things in her life started to “go wrong”, like serious deterioration of her relationship with her daughter, problems at work and financial difficulties, she wondered whether all these troubles were punishment for the sin of her extra-marital affair. In our conversation, instead of only referring back to moral guidelines and ideas from the Bible and the ten commandments, we explored the effects of her actions on all the people who were being affected by this relationship, by pondering on two questions: “What is the effect of this relationship on everybody involved: herself, the man, his wife, her children, his children, her extended family, his extended family, their friends?” and “Who benefits from this relationship?”. While discussing these two questions, we also explored the values she chose to live by, and how she could reconcile these effects on her fellow human beings with her values. Shortly after my conversation with her, the man was diagnosed with cancer and had to undergo surgery. Guided by the questions we discussed, she made decisions regarding her actions: because she cared, she supported him while he was in hospital; at first, discreetly, so as not to upset his family, especially his mother and children. As the relationship between her and his family developed, they became more open about the true nature of their relationship.
And in the end she was accepted by his mother and children, and they actually became quite good friends.

In the light of the above narrative, I pose the following questions:

- How was the woman discussed above, influenced by the powerful cultural ideology of individualism?
- Did she view the wife and children of the man she wanted, as competitors to her own personal fulfilment?
- What difference would it have made if she considered them to be her neighbours, whom she had to love as much as she loved herself?
- Is the emptiness and sorrow she experienced, something like what Wadell (2002:44) suggests when he contends that the irony of individualism is that while it promises happiness and success, it dead-ends in a very lonely, empty life?
- What does it say of the man’s mother and children that they granted their son and father the care and support they knew his woman friend provided, instead of condemning the relationship? Did they care about his well-being?

If I argue that an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, is about the reflection upon the consequences of my actions in terms of the well-being of others, of my neighbour, I have to explore who the other might be.

3.7 WHO IS THE OTHER?

In a world where people succeed by trampling others, the identity of “my neighbour” becomes very unclear and contested. Is “my neighbour” anyone who is oppressed regardless of his/her skin colour, religious or geographical background? Is “my neighbour” someone who speaks and dresses like I do? Is it someone who has helped me before? Is it someone who tends to agree with me? Or is it absolutely anyone I happen to cross paths with? (Tshehla 2004:153). The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) starts with a question to Jesus: “Who is my neighbour?” or: “Who around me needs to be shown kindness?” (Tshehla 2004:152) and ends with Jesus turning the same question around by asking: “Who have been a neighbour to the man attacked by the robbers?”
I believe that the first question in the paragraph above asks for a norm, criterion or standard to determine who the neighbour is. The neighbour is reduced to a “subject of pity” (Groenewald 1973:150) and not necessarily a person in need of care in any particular situation. According to the question Jesus asked, however, there is no justification for such a standard. The neighbour is the subject, the votary of the compassion. The neighbour is therefore a person who places him/herself in the circumstances of his/her fellow human beings and to become like him/her, and therefore saves him/her from distress and loneliness (Groenewald 1973:150). The concept of neighbour cannot be ascribed to selected persons and not to others; it is determined by specific situations in which one finds oneself unexpectedly. According to Groenewald (1973:150) a person is not a neighbour, he/she becomes a neighbour. And according to Tshehla (2004:153) I am to my neighbour my neighbour’s neighbour. In other words, if I confer neighbourhood on someone, I am by the same token conferring neighbourhood on myself – “I am in your eyes what I make you out to be in mine” (Tshehla 2004:153).

By turning the question in the parable around, Jesus demonstrated that life is not ‘a codified system of do’s and don’ts” (Müller 1987:133), but about a practised faith, a faith that works through love, that meets the other half-way (Müller 1987:133). Such love is “reckless” (Müller 1987:133): it leaves the false security of the law and the codified system. The true believer knows that he/she is called to action. God’s commandment to love can only be fulfilled in a challenge, in the freedom of a concrete decision and of creative love (Müller 1987:133). For Tshehla (2004:153) the crux of Jesus’ answer to the lawyer is that if “I see everyone as my neighbour, and I obey the law’s junction to love her/him as I love myself, and everyone regards me as their neighbour in response to my neighbourly actions, then how shall I not inherit a long and fulfilled life?”

According to this exemplary narrative Jesus told, my neighbour is not merely someone who is close to me from the very beginning: a member of my family, my circle of friends, my class, my party, my people. My neighbour can also be a stranger, a complete stranger, anyone who turns up. My neighbour is “anyone who needs me here and now” (Küng 1977:258) [Küng’s emphasis]. And as God does not make any distinction between friend and foe, my neighbour also includes my enemies: “God’s
love of enemies is itself therefore the reason for man’s love of enemies” (Küng 1977:260) [Küng’s emphasis]. My neighbour has no lesser claim to God’s love than I do. On the contrary, s/he has as much a claim to my love as I have to myself (Tshehla 2004:153).

This parable also warns against the dangerous cleft between liturgy and life. It is precisely the religious “professional” who knows all the “prescriptions” who terribly fail to bridge the gap to his/her wounded neighbour (Müller 1987:133).

In conclusion, I argue that an ethical spirituality of participation is “about relieving those who are suffering; it is about finding the discomfort of others … to be quite uncomfortable” (Tshehla 2004:154). It is about acknowledging our fundamental relatedness to each other, and it is about being concerned about the well-being of others alongside my own well-being.

3.8 TAKING SIDES FOR COMPASSIONATE PARTICIPATION IN FRIENDSHIP

From Christ’s birth in a cowshed to his execution, naked and suffering, on a cross, Jesus is portrayed in the gospels as one who took sides with the outcast (Stone 1996:105) - the wounded. To love one’s neighbour as one’s self is “to approximate true communion in this life – and humanness is a communal affair” (Tshehla 2004:155).

In the context of my quest to find a multi-lingual language, a powerful counterbalance for the individualistic forces of our faith communities, resulting in pain and isolation of the wounded among us, I believe that what we really need for an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, is a vulnerable and listening presence, a holistic spirituality, a faithful and credible theology, a wild imagination, and a radical spirituality of fierce tenderness! The metaphor of friendship can provide such a counterbalance, the multi-lingual language.

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2 In Landman’s (2005) quest for “spiritual correctness” (as in political correctness), she came upon the words “fierce tenderness” (Hunt 1991:29) to describe the radical spirituality of participation faith communities needed to journey with wounded persons towards healing.
I have to agree with Goodliff (1998:103) when he argues that the breakdown in community has profound consequences for pastoral care, since the good ordering and compassionate functioning of a society is dependant upon there being a community which works. According to him, the context for pastoral care is the community, whether the Christian community of the Church, or the wider community of the neighbourhood, city or nation. Like him, I am not an advocate for the "lone-ranger style" of pastoral care, where it is utterly individualistic, but locate one of the most important pastoral tasks where the individual is in relationship to others. Like him, I believe that if a community is really working well and is stable and healthy, many of the tasks of pastoral care will take care of themselves, will be accomplished through the commerce of family and neighbourhood life, and will not necessarily require the intervention of “specialised pastoral carers” (Goodliff 1998:103). I agree with Goodliff (1998:113) when he says: “Communities where friendships flourish are pastoral communities, caring for one another because of the bonds of friendship that are forged”. I do believe that the metaphor of friendship can provide more hopeful ways of living, a powerful counterweight against the isolating forces of a culture where “the distorting ideology of consumerism, individualism and violence” (Wadell 2002:74) are prevailing.

In the following chapters I journey with the participants to this study in search of an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, and the metaphor of friendship. In the next chapter I argue for the re-membering of a metaphor for God as friend as opposed to metaphors of distance and power, followed by an argument for faith communities as communities of the friends of God. In the chapters following these me and my fellow travellers on this research journey, explore ways in which the faith traditions of our congregation can be exerted to invite our faith community to become friends and involve themselves in practices of friendship and mutual care.

This is not an attempt to a “how-to” manual, or “five easy steps”, but a reflection on the experiences of community and friendship of a few men and women I had the privilege to witness, combined with the insights and wisdom of many authors who generously shared their insights with me, their ‘thirsty’ reader.
CHAPTER 4


“A friend”, says the Wise Man, “is the medicine of life”. Excellent, indeed, is that saying. For medicine is not more powerful or more efficacious for our wounds in all our temporal needs than the possession of a friend who meets every misfortune joyfully. So, as the apostle says, shoulder to shoulder, they bear one another’s burdens …. Friendship, therefore, heightens the joy of prosperity and mitigates the sorrows of adversity by dividing and sharing them. Hence, the best medicine in life is a friend.

Aelred of Rievaulx (Translated by Pennington 2001:63)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Friendship is one topic that recently received a good deal of philosophical attention. It will not serve the purpose of this thesis to go into depth into these “investigations” (Friedman 1993:187). I will therefore, as a way of introduction to my quest towards a spirituality of friendship and arguing for the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as the community of the friends of God, give a brief overview on some of the themes on friendship in the literature. My intention is by no means to suggest that this will be a comprehensive overview on the topic of friendship. My aim is to provide a composite picture of how we may conceive and exercise “Christian love as the love of friendship” (Carmichael 2004:5), by reflecting on writings on friendship chiefly from the Western Christian tradition pointing out that in the fourth century the “normal” description for Christians were “friends of God”. During the Middle Ages and towards the Enlightenment period, this description became reserved for a privileged few, until the 20th Century, when mostly feminist writers began to look for metaphors for God that were more gender sensitive and less authoritative. In an attempt to make the theoretical reflections more practical, I will reflect on the ideas presented by philosophers and theologians through the experiences of a participant in this study, Linda and her family (related in Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2.5). I also invited Linda to reflect on these ideas in her own words. The following chapter (five), will be about doing friendship, where I will then weave stories of living friendship, practised in the lives of a few people, with the philosophy and theory of friendship.
These theoretical reflections, together with the experiences of the participants, were like streams flowing into a lake of knowledge as described in Chapter 1. A primary stream flowing into the lake was the book authored by Liz Carmichael (2004) *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, which gives a comprehensive account of Christian love in terms of the love of friendship. Newly researched from primary sources, Carmichael examines friendship from the classical tradition, up to the feminist insights in the 20th Century. Because the aim of this thesis is on how to do friendship in the context of participating communities as friends of God, I look through the lens of Carmichael towards a theoretical report on the philosophy of friendship. Other streams of knowledge on friendship followed, so that in the end, all these knowledges mingled and changed. What I found a challenge, was to separate all the different voices into themes, in order to relate them in this report in such a way that it will make sense. Like the water in a lake, the ideas and knowledges kept overflowing, refusing to be compartmentalised. In an attempt to create some sort of order, I used italics for the voices of the participants to the study.

I will begin this overview with a reflection on a philosophy of Christian friendship from the period Before Christ up to the 21st Century, mainly through the lens of Carmichael (2004), but also including contributions by other authors.

### 4.2 A PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP

As Carmichael (2004:3) remarks, there was the overarching influence of the classical friendship-tradition of Greece and Rome, which in its final Ciceronian form reserves true friendship for a tiny minority of educated and virtuous males who enjoyed and depended on each other’s character. Unlike the universal love commanded by Christ, such friendship selects with great care whom it will love and is partial, exclusive and contingent on worthiness, unlike the universal love commanded by Christ. However, classical friendship was sufficiently broad so that New Testament writers drew on its language, and the great theologians of the Fourth Century, who were still steeped in their traditions, integrated them into their understandings of love in Christ. Long afterwards, the Twelfth Century Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx made a Christian version of Cicero’s book on friendship; and Aristotle’s philosophy of friendship was essential for Thomas Aquinas who made friendship with God the basis for all our understanding of
love, both for God and neighbour. More recently, “friendship has come to the fore as a key paradigm of community and renewed human society” (Carmichael 2004:4).

In the next paragraphs I will give an overview of the philosophy of friendship in different periods in time, starting with the period Before Christ.

4.2.1 A philosophy of friendship BC

In the following paragraphs I will discuss shortly the philosophy of friendship in four centuries before the birth of Christ, starting with the philosopher Plato. Because according to these philosophers true friendship was reserved for a tiny minority of educated and virtuous males (Carmichael 2004:3), and they seldom included females in their reflections, I use the male pronoun.

4.2.1.1 Plato

At 427–327 BC, Plato defined friendship as a state of *philia* in which men converse with one another and are friends of the gods (Carmichael 2004:13). He praised the sober male friendship, and set friendship in the context of Eros, which he defined as love for a particular human being (homoerotic attraction) (Carmichael 2004:12).

4.2.1.2 Socrates

As early as 469-399 BC Socrates defines love as “to desire happiness for the beloved” (Carmichael 2004:11). For him, there is no better “possession” than a good and sincere friend (Carmichael 2004:12). A friend is also the most useful possession. For Socrates, some “elements in man's nature make for friendship: men need one another, feel pity, work together for their common good and conscious of this they are grateful to one another” (White 1992:21).

4.2.1.3 Aristotle

For Aristotle (384 – 322 BC), it is impossible to be a friend outside a mutual friendship (Carmichael 2004:11). Aristotle has no doubts that “friendship is essential to the good life” (Gilbert 1991:68). *Philia* (friendship) is fundamental to life, since no one would choose a life without friends. The wealthy need friends on whom to
practise beneficence, and the less fortunate depend on friends to “guide the young and assist the old” (Carmichael 2004:15). Friendship exists where each wishes well to the other for their own sake, is willing to act on that goodwill, and is aware of the goodwill of the other (Carmichael 2004:16). According to Swinton (2000b:80), for Aristotle friendship was a deep and committed relationship of which the primary objective was the interconnectivity and mutual obligation experienced by its participants. For Swinton, this description resonates with the interconnectivity of nature, desire and purpose which characterises the Divine life, and which is also a mark of authentic human existence in the *imago Dei*.

Aristotle described three kinds of friendship: the good, the pleasant and the useful.

The first kind of friendship described by Aristotle, friendship of virtue and character (Wadell 2002:99), is grounded in what the person essentially is, but only to the extent that they instantiate excellence, not simply because they are a fellow human being (Carmichael 2004:17). The “proper considerations” when choosing a friend are “whether I esteem a possible friend and that requires me to reflect upon his [sic] character” (Gilbert 1991:72). In choosing our friends, we do not consider only what would satisfy us or them, but also what “justifies our liking” (Gilbert 1991:73). For Aristotle (Gilbert 1991:74), the value of friendship depends upon the achievement of choosing one’s friends well, because “one has chosen for what is really good in them. One has responded to their qualities aright”. Such friendships are rare, because “good men are few and far between” and because these friendships need time to mature (White 1992:26).

The second kind of friendship described by Aristotle, friendships for advantage or pleasure, are imperfect in that the partners love each other, not for themselves, but for virtue of some good which they get from each other due to some incidental quality attaching to the beloved (Carmichael 2004:17). These friends enjoy spending time together.

In the third kind of friendship described by Aristotle, friendship of usefulness or advantage (Wadell 2002:99), or utility friends (Carmichael 2004:18), includes business partners, and may not find each other pleasant. Such friendships are
formed for “mutual benefit” and Aristotle regards them as “inferior” friendships (Gilbert 1991:70). They do not necessarily spend time together.

In these latter two forms of friendship described by Aristotle, the friend is not loved for “being what he is in himself but as the source, perhaps of some pleasure, perhaps of some advantage” (Gilbert 1991:71). According to Aristotle, we do not choose friends for pleasure or advantage; we rather choose whom to treat as friends. Aristotle makes much of the way these friendships end: “'[S]ometimes when the lad’s beauty wanes the friendship wanes also’ or ‘[T]hey part as soon as the profit goes’” (Gilbert 1991:71).

According to Aristotle, actions are necessary in friendship; benevolent feelings are not sufficient and faith must be accompanied by works. A friend must continually prove his affection by actions. Living together is therefore important, for communal life allows one greater opportunity to behave actively as a friend (White 1992:26).

For Aristotle, friendly relations with one’s neighbour, and the measures by which friendships are defined, seem to have proceeded from a person’s relationship with himself. A good person who wishes well to his higher, intellectual self and enjoy his own company, will treat a friend in the same way, for a friend is another self. He (Aristotle) explains that “all friendly feelings towards others are an extension of the friendly feelings a person has for himself” (White 1992:28). Therefore, the capacity for friendship depends on “right self-love, which is free of selfishness” (Carmichael 2004:21-22); a self-love which “does not prevent a man giving his life for his friend” (White 1992:28).

Like the other philosophers of his time, Aristotle does not mention friendship between men and women apart from marriage, or friendship between women (Carmichael 2004:20). However, he lays more emphasis on the significance of friendship for the truly moral life (White 1992:25). According to Woggon (2003:261), Aristotle’s notion towards “partiality and exclusivity has heavily influenced our Western understanding of friendship".
4.2.1.4  Cicero

Cicero, at 106–43 BC defines friendship as “a relationship based on agreement about all human and divine matters, together with good-will and affection” (White 1992:32). Another idea of Cicero, which is often referred to by later writers, is that there is nothing more pleasant in life than to have a friend with whom one may talk as if with oneself (White 1992:32). For him, a natural bond unites the human race. It is more strongly felt towards those closer to us, and friendship is a concentrated form of *societas* in which love (*caritas*) is joined only between two or a few, and which requires goodwill (*benevolentia*) over and above closeness or relatedness. According to Cicero, true friendship originates from nature rather than from need, from an inclination of souls joined in a feeling of love rather than from “calculation of gain” (Carmichael 2004:27). Cicero was the first to recognise reciprocal friendship in the wider sense, embracing “the many and not just the few” (Carmichael 2004:28). However, he also warns that this state of virtue is not “sufficient in itself, but must activate itself in practical love” (Carmichael 2004:28). The full joy of friendship can only be experienced when we seek it in and for itself, not for any ulterior motive. For Cicero, *agape* is sacrificial giving – the love of true friends. It is the “interpretation of Christian love as friendship” (Carmichael 2004:36). He dismisses the suggestion that friendship is simply the mutual return of services, because for him, it reduces friendship to a “matter of accounting” (Carmichael 2004:90).

4.2.2  A philosophy of friendship from the birth of Christ towards the Middle Ages

Although early Christianity inherited the strongly familial terminology of Scripture, the language of friendship also makes appearances. Early writers use friendship language infrequently, but with ease. When Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire in the late Fourth Century, it was natural to the classically educated theologians to blend their theology with the cream of their classical learning, and they were steeped in the traditions of friendship (Carmichael 2004:41). In the following paragraphs I will discuss the ideas of these theologians, up to the Middle Ages.
4.2.2.1 Philo of Alexandria

According to Carmichael (2004:41), it was Philo of Alexandria (20BC-AD50) who shifted the philosophical ground of true friendship from human virtue to “shared faith in God”. For him, friendship between Christians is grounded in common commitment to Christ, a paradigm shift that widens the community of friendship from the select few to the entire committed church, including women. Friends share everything because of the fellowship (koinonia) of the Spirit and the agape (Christian love) that unites them.

4.2.2.2 Ambrose

According to Carmichael (2004:46), Ambrose (339-397) also did his part by promoting friendship as an integral part of the lifestyle of a Christian minister. According to White (1992:122), Ambrose proposed that for human friendship to be genuine, it must be modelled on Christ’s treatment of his disciples as his friends.

4.2.2.3 Augustine

However, according to Carmichael (2004:55), Augustine (354–430) did more than any other Western writer to establish the primacy of love in Christian ethical and theological discourse. Wadell (2002:78) adds that Augustine, who learned from the many wrong turns of his life, that the answer to his heart’s longings was to be found not in wealth, not in pleasures, and not even in knowledge, but in a deep, abiding intimacy with God. Augustine also discovered that we cannot separate intimacy with God from intimacy with others. An essential idea for Augustine’s theory of Christian friendship, is that Christians should love God in their friends if they are to love their friends properly (White 1992:201).

Augustine criticises Cicero’s definition of friendship as “agreement in all things human and divine”, together with goodwill and affection. For him, agreement in falsehood cannot be friendship (Carmichael 2004:58). His vision of true friendship ideally embraces all those redeemed in Christ. For him, the “law” that we should carry one another’s burdens, and love one another, means friendship (Carmichael 2004:59).
I agree with Augustine’s argument, because I believe that if we can only be friends with those we are in agreement in all things human and divine, this kind of love, to carry one another’s burdens, would not be possible. I wonder if this was what happened to the neighbours of Linda and her family? Because the neighbours did not agree with the lifestyle of one of the members of Linda’s family, they also withheld their goodwill and affection? I cannot help but wonder how this family’s experience would have differed, were their community more like the one Augustine describes “That we should not judge, but seek the good in each person and know that everyone has something to offer that we lack”.

Linda said:
To me, Aristotle (‘for a friend is another self’) and Augustine (‘we cannot separate intimacy with God from intimacy with others’) sum up the essence of friendship. Friendship should be an extension of the self into the most intimate ‘living world’ of another human being, irrespective of their circumstances.

Augustine emphasises increasingly that the divine gift of caritas is the foundation and essence of Christian friendship. True friendship is impossible unless you bond together those who cleave to one another by the love which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He interprets Rom 5:5 that grace, not nature, creates friendship. For him, there is no difference between loving a friend or a neighbour. According to him, our neighbour is every human being. Therefore, I believe that where there is goodwill there is friendship. For the family of Linda, there was no goodwill, and therefore, no friendship.

In principle, according to Augustine, all others are to be loved equally although “in the lottery of earthly life we can only help those who happen to come within reach” (Carmichael 2004:60). Augustine touches here on an issue that I call “circle of concern”. For Linda and her family, it was not expected from everyone in the community to reach out to this family – not everyone knew about them and their troubles. And not everyone was equipped to help them. But as I understand what Augustine is saying, those members who did know them, and knew of them, had the responsibility to love them. In Chapter 5 I discuss this aspect in more detail.
Linda reflects:

The Bible uses the physical human body to describe the functions and structure of God’s church in this world (Eph 4:16), with God as the head. If the Church was living out their calling, various parts of the ‘body’ should have realised that my family was experiencing problems. We, the de Waal family, were members of a specific congregation and were regular church-goers. The Church did know about our problem, but had chosen not to reach out to us, isolating us. A possibility is that the message from the ‘injured hand’ to the rest of the body was not ‘transmitted’ correctly. It might be a good idea to investigate the improvement of the interaction/communication between the ‘injured limb’ and the rest of the body through the use of friendship/structures, etc.

Christian friendship to all can be lived inwardly in prayer: but its outward expression has then to be worked out on personal, social and political levels (Carmichael 2004:61). Augustine never believed that all who called themselves Christians had chosen friendship. (Did Augustine know a family like Linda’s?)

For Augustine, “Friend of God” was a “normal” description for a Christian. Conversion meant turning from friendship with the devil or “mortal things”, or even from courtly status as “friend of the Emperor”, to friendship with God (Carmichael 2004:62). I would have liked to ask Augustine whether this argument endorse exclusivity. Does this mean that, because through some of the choices he made, it seemed as if the son in Linda’s family turned his back to the church, the Christian community had the right to withdraw their friendship also from the family? However, according to Waddell (2002:78), Augustine meant that becoming intimate in love with God did not mean turning away from others but turning toward them with a new understanding of what love, friendship and intimacy mean. Does Waddell then mean that Linda’s community was to turn towards them, showing them what love, friendship and intimacy meant? If that had happened, how would their experience have been different?

Linda’s voice:

If the above did happen, I can imagine that the time period of isolation would have decreased substantially. God says: “There is wisdom in the council of many”. Some
of the mistakes we as parents made along the way, could have been prevented if impartial Christians were there to advise and care for us.

For Augustine, *Eros* is the longing for truth and beauty which draws souls upwards (Carmichael 2004:63). Love for God is primary, and love for our neighbour is in line with that love (Carmichael 2004:64). In Augustine’s thought, human love came to be more highly valued and more closely linked to human’s love for God rather than being in conflict with it. Augustine attaches a positive meaning to the idea of self-love; he contends that self-love is directed primarily to love of God (White 1992:200). According to Augustine, four things are to be loved: God, self, neighbour, and our own body (Carmichael 2004:117). According to White (1992:201), Augustine argues that we love God for our own sake, and ourselves and our neighbours for His sake. Does he mean that Linda’s neighbours were to love them for God’s sake? How would the life of this family have been different if their neighbours loved them for God’s sake? Would they have been granted the wisdom of the council of many? According to White, (1992:198) Augustine draws a distinction between what is to be used and what is to be enjoyed, and says that some things fall into both categories.

According to White (1992:204), Augustine adds an eschatological perspective to friendship, as he believed that only in heaven can human relationships be perfect. For Augustine (White 1992:206), not only do Christians have the hope of perfect relationships in the life to come but they can even regard the formation of friendships in this life, imperfect and uncertain though they be, as a foreshadowing of the true unity and intimacy to come. However, in order to be eternal, friendships must be extended as far as possible throughout mankind already in this life. Although he recognises that the extension of friendship will necessarily be limited, he insists that the attempt must be made (White 1992:207). He believed that by loving another human being, Christians can bring their fellow beings to a knowledge and love of God so that the human becomes transformed and they find themselves bound by a common love of God, which makes their relationship a true friendship as much as it can be like in this life. The neighbour then “becomes a brother, a friend in Christ” (White 1992:207). This is how Christian friendship, regarded as part of the theological context, can be extended and maintained, not in spite of the commandment to love your neighbour, but rather because of it. Augustine argues for
“a network of Christian friendships including as many people as possible” (White 1992:207).

I believe it is true that not everybody in their community could be expected to reach out in friendship to the family of Linda. It is also true that not everybody turned them a cold shoulder – there was among others the pastoral therapist who went out of her way to care and make up for the lack of caring from their community. And not everybody they knew abandoned them. It is only that most of their community turned away from them when they needed support and love, depriving them of the knowledge and love of God they were supposed to experience through the body of Christ, the church. And by neglecting this command, the neighbours of this wounded family missed the opportunity to bring their fellow beings to a knowledge and love of God so that this wounded family could have become transformed and found themselves bound by a common love of God.

Linda reflects on their experience during that time:

What I believe our neighbours should have done, was to be a living example to Joshua that God’s love is unconditional, and to carry the hope embedded in a loving God to the rest of our family; hope to be founded in the prayers of our community; hope through witnesses who cared enough to share their stories of chaos with us, who went through the same kind of chaos, but who was redeemed; hope because God’s love was channelled through them to us. We would have been much more aware of the love of God, could we have experienced that love through the caring actions of the body of Christ. We needed their encouragement on our journey of struggle and pain. We did not need to be transformed – we were already children of God. All we needed, was to experience God’s love in tangible form, through the actions of our community of faith. Joshua, of course, needed much more!

When Carmichael (2004:55) argues that Augustine’s writings were in practise a source for the friendship tradition, although his doctrine of love is not wholly hospitable to friendship, I wonder whether she refers to his notion towards exclusiveness?
4.2.2.4 Aelred of Rievaulx

Centuries after Augustine, the Twelfth Century Cistercian Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) contends that community, or *koinonia*, is the true human state (Carmichael 2004:72). Salvation restores our likeness to God (Carmichael 2004:75). We love friends “in God” and enemies “because of God” (Carmichael 2004:76). He divided humanity in six kinds, to whom all *caritas* (love) must be shown: Relatives, special friends, those bound to us by obligations of duty, fellow Christians, those outside the church (Gentiles, Jews, heretics, and schismatics), and enemies.

To love the latter two groups is to taste the fruition of the love of neighbour, for when we love our enemies we “are made sons of God” (Carmichael 2004:77). He adopted Cicero’s definition of friendship: Friendship is mutual harmony in affairs human and divine, coupled with benevolence and *caritas*, where *caritas* signifies a feeling or inclination, and *benevolentia* means acting on it (Carmichael 2004:81). According to Pennington (2001:39), Aelred argues that for our joy, we need “these two: God and neighbour, although not in the same way”. For Aelred, together we will be capable of enjoying God to a greater extent than each one of us could singly. In the light of Linda’s reflection above, I believe that she agrees with Aelred that, although she found her strength in her belief in God, through *koinonia* with her neighbours and the Christian community, she would have been able to enjoy God and experiencing His love in a more tangible way.

Aelred discerns between friendship and *caritas*: the law of *caritas* compels us to embrace with love both our friends and enemies, while friends are those bound to us by reciprocal trust, in “whom we have no fear of confiding” (Carmichael 2004:82). Is this what happened with Linda and her family? Was it *caritas* that lacked in the idea of friendship of their community?

Like Aristotle, Aelred identifies three kinds of friendship, although not in the same category:

i) **Carnal friendship** originates in a mutual love for immorality. What attracts people to one another is a sense of one another’s weaknesses and the belief that not only have they found a partner who will not challenge them to change, but that they can also pursue what is evil with this person and
remain undisturbed (Wadell 2002:101). Carnal friendship is centred in shared weakness and corrupting behaviour. The harvest of these “twisted” relationships is not human flourishing but decline, as friends involve one another in crime. These relationships actually cannot be called friendship, because true friendship always makes us better and not worse. And in a relationship where the aim is not to help us achieve what is best, but to make us comfortable with all that is corrupting, there is no benevolence; and benevolence is an essential mark of true friendship (Carmichael 2004:82; Pennington 2001:60; Wadell 2002:101-102). I cannot help but wonder: Was this the kind of friendship the son of Linda engaged in when he uses substances like heroin? What was the role of the absence of “true” friendship according to Aelred, in the allurement of these carnal friendships? How would the lives of this family be different if the community reached out to this son “with benevolence”? (In chapters 7 and 8 I return to this discussion, illustrating through tales of living friendship, how to do friendship and reach out towards those trapped in carnal friendships.)

ii) **Worldly relationship** is typical of the “fair-weather friend” (Carmichael 2004:83) that “will not abide in your day of trouble” (Pennington 2001:60). They are born from a desire for temporal advantage or possessions, and are full of deceit and intrigue. These relationships nurture in us “the wrong kinds of ambitions” (Wadell 2002:103). These are the relationships we seek because we can gain something from them. According to Aelred (quoted by Pennington 2001:60), “take away his hope of profit and immediately he will cease to be a friend”. They are alliances we form because they are essentially self-serving. They are not like true friendship where the focus is on the needs and well-being of the other. They are seldom long-lasting. These are calculating, devious relationships that have the appearance of friendship because each friend will be a “master at flattering the other” (Wadell 2002:104), but beneath the flattering lies little affection or genuine regard. People primed for worldly friendships form them fast and end them quickly. They move from person to person, skilled as they are at discerning who will serve them best. With an eye always on the future, they seldom notice the harm they have done and the hurt they
have left behind. We see worldly friendships “in our churches, when leaders who ought to be concerned about service, become more interested in power, titles and ecclesiastical rank” (Wadell 2002:104). This description by Aelred resonates with ideas on impediments to the value of friendship in community life, which I discuss in Chapter 6. The predominant culture of individualism seems to be one of the biggest culprits. Was the culture we now know as individualism already alive and well in the time of Aelred? And how was the community Linda and her family lived in blinded by this dominant discourse of individualism?

iii) **Spiritual friendship** is similarity in life, morals and interests among the good, a true consensus in things human and divine with goodwill and *caritas*, where *caritas* is an orientation of the will and love towards God so that ill vice is excluded, and goodwill is a “loving feeling sweetly aroused interiorly” (Carmichael 2004:83). Every friendship is formed around shared goods that identify the friendship and help the friends understand the life and purpose of the friendship. In spiritual friendship, the principal good is a mutual love for Christ and a mutual desire to grow together in Christ. Through their friendship they want to help one another to live a godly and holy life. They want “each other to become resplendent in goodness” (Wadell 2002:108). Does Aelred mean then that what it is about, is that spiritual friends have the well-being of others at heart? Again, I cannot help but wonder: In what ways would the lives of Linda and her family be different, should their community have offered them this kind of friendship, wanting to grow together in Christ, wanting them to become splendid in goodness? Having their well-being at heart?

According to Wadell (2002:108), Aelred proposes that Christ is a partner to every spiritual friendship, and the friends understand themselves to be living together in Christ. This is why he suggests that spiritual friendship is a *discipleship life*, a way in which people who are committed to growing in Christ help one another imitate Christ and grow in gospel virtues. For Aelred, spiritual friendships represent the highest possibility for any friendship because through them we “practise our baptisms” by growing in Christ together. I would like to ask Aelred whether he means that
friendship with persons other than Christians is not friendship? Is he also promoting an exclusivist stance toward friendship, as though it is only meant for the already “good” and “baptized”? What then about people like Linda and her family? Although they were part of the congregation, and their children were baptised, they were treated like outcasts?

Aelred provides the answer to my question when he argues that friendship is humankind’s intended, natural human condition; but at the Fall caritas (seeks enjoyment of God for His own sake, and of self and neighbour for the sake of God (Burnaby (1991:130) cooled and cupiditas (enjoyment of self, neighbour and material goods without reference to God) crept in, elevating private above common good (Carmichael 2004:84). By abusing free choice, the first man diverted his love of God, and blinded by his own self-centeredness, he directed his love to “what was inferior” (Pennington 2001:21). The image of God became “disfigured in us without becoming wholly destroyed. Consequently we have memory, but it is subject to forgetfulness; understanding, but is open to error; and love, but it is prone to self-centeredness” (Pennington 2001:21). I believe that this argument explains why people with no ill intentions, caused so much pain to the family of Linda. However, according to Aelred, “in this trinity within the rational soul there still persist an imprint, however faint, of the blessed Trinity” (Pennington 2001:21), and through Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and us, the “Victim on the cross”, our “memory is restored by the word of sacred scripture, understanding by the mystery of faith, and love by the daily increase of charity” (Pennington 2001:22). It is as though Aelred could read my thoughts. For me, this argument restores my hope for my community of faith. In Chapter 7 I will return to this argument when I argue for healing communities.

According to Aelred, Paul’s pastoral love (2 Corinthians 11:28) has the shape of friendship. However, he warns that “[n]othing less than the life of the body should be denied to a friend. We may die for them, but we may not put our soul in danger: we may not sin, not even for a friend” (Carmichael 2004:91). Does this mean that “caring can be dangerous”? Should we place restrictions on how far we can go to help someone in need? Do parents have the right not to allow their children to attend the youth club when a young person involved in drug abuse attends in an attempt to protect them from evil influence – from carnal friendships? In Chapter 7 I return to
this argument when I argue for awareness to the need of our neighbours, but that we also be aware of our own limitations and safety.

Linda disagrees:

*I believe that this is what the gospel is about: that we will teach our children to love others with the unconditional love of God! We have to trust God for protection - for both the sinners and the saints. You are trying to justify exactly those practices that need to be changed. Any excuse will do when we do not want to do what God commands us to.*

According to Aelred, the formation of a friendship passes through four stages or steps:

- choice;
- testing: we tend not to think about it in a formal manner, but in reality life continually “tests” friendship for faithfulness, motivation, discernment and patience (Carmichael 2004:93);
- admission;
- the greatest agreement in things divine and human, with a certain caritas and goodwill.

Friendship, for Aelred, is founded on love. In order to love another as oneself it is first necessary to love oneself, “allowing nothing which is unbecoming and refusing nothing which is profitable” (Carmichael 2004:95).

Aelred’s optimism is grounded in theological hope. To him the image of God in us has not been entirely expunged and can in Christ be fully restored. Reason guides us to show caritas to all, and even if friendship in its full reciprocal sense is currently restricted to those whom we trust and to whom we feel attracted, in a world where renewal is possible, caritas must always in essence be potential friendship. The realisation of that friendship goes hand in hand with the restoration of God’s image in us: “Friendship is not, then, exclusive, but is limited by our present condition” (Carmichael 2004:97). Like Augustine, Aelred restores my hope for my community of faith in this theological hope, where we do not wait for one day in heaven, but focus
on the needs and well-being of our neighbours here and now. In Chapter 5 I return to the issue of theological hope embedded in friendship as a value for community life.

For Aelred, Martha sets an example in loving Christ now through service to those in need (Carmichael 2004:97). For him, *caritas* is the broken and open arc of love with which we must reach out to all, including those who cannot presently be invested with our full trust and confidence, whether the immature, or enemies, or former friends. It is already friendship-love in the sense of the steady practice of the willed and rational element of friendship. The source of this love is not in our will alone, but the “love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit”, conforming us to God’s image, and expressed through God’s love and delight in His creation. Hence saints may, even in this present life, be able to find all humanity attractive (Carmichael 2004:97-98). I believe that it is through this kind of love that we reach out to strangers and even our enemies. This is the kind of love that could have made a difference in the lives of Linda and her family. In Chapter 5 I discuss love in more detail.

4.2.2.5 Thomas Aquinas

According to Carmichael (2004:101), where Aelred was the practical theologian of friendship, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was its greatest theoretician, placing it at the heart of all Christian thought and life. According to Aquinas (Swinton 2000b:80), God’s *agape* love that He offers to all human beings, is in essence a form of friendship, and Christian love, or *caritas*, is defined “fully and in every respect as friendship” (Carmichael 2004:105). Aquinas proposes seven definitions of caritas:

i) it makes us desire to see and enjoy God;

ii) *agape* is the same as *amor*;

iii) since it wills good, it is *benevolentia*;

iv) it causes unity;

v) it must be shown in action, hence it is well-doing;

vi) it is peace because it creates unity of spirit; and

vii) it is friendship.

As friendship, *caritas* demands that we share, and do good (Carmichael 2004:108). The way I understand what Aquinas means, is that we as the faith community were supposed to share and do good to the wounded family of Linda – we were supposed
to have had their well-being at heart. If we were true to this calling, they would have experienced friendship, and not loneliness and isolation the way they did.

According to Carmichael (2004:117), Aquinas applies Augustine’s four things to be loved as well as Aristotelian metaphysics to suggest that God is loved with caritas, as the “principle” from which flows the “communication” of divine life. We ourselves are direct participants in that communication, in which our bodies too participate by “a kind of overflow”. We love ourselves as “one with us” in this joyful communion, and our neighbour as associated with us in it. The following are the objects of caritas as friendship-love, according to Aquinas:

i) Friendship with God: Loving God “with our whole heart” (Deut 6.5) means loving everything that pertains to God, with our whole self and without limit. According to Carmichael (2004:117), Aquinas’s metaphysics describes rather well how our love for God takes us beyond cupidity into the wider vista of love, into wonder and praise. Friendship can be a sheer rejoicing in another what goodness it may bring. Friendship with God is experienced and developed through life and activity in conformity of God’s will, and prayer and the sacraments lie at the heart of this relationship. He understood prayer as “conversation” with God, the Eucharist as the effective sign and means of union, the sign of supreme caritas which lifts our hope. We look forward to life in the bodily presence of Christ “because it is the special feature of friendship to live together with friends …. Yet meanwhile in our pilgrimage He does not deprive us of His bodily presence; but unites us with Himself in this sacrament” (Carmichael 2004:118). Aquinas touches here on a dominant theme of this thesis. When I argue for the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God, I also argue for the practice of friendship and the role the church can play in creating a habitat where friendship can flourish and grow, and where the community of friends of God can experience the love of God through the actions of their friends in community. Linda agrees when she asks: “Wouldn’t it have been wonderful if the Eucharist could have been served to our family in our darkest hour? Wouldn’t it have strengthened us? Wouldn’t it have reminded us of the greatness and goodness of God?”
ii) Friendship for our self and our body: Loving self above neighbour means we may not, even when attempting to free a neighbour from sin, commit any sin that prevents our own participation in the beatitude. Neighbour-love does however take precedence over love for our own body – which stands lower than both our soul and neighbour in the hierarchy of love. Although our bodies are to be used in God’s service, we “can and should risk physical, but never spiritual, injury for a friend” (Carmichael 2004:119). For Aquinas, the motivation of moral action is not the good of any individual in isolation, but the common good of all humanity (Carmichael 2004:120). Aquinas’ ideas resonate with those of Aelred, and the ideas on the well-being of all I discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

iii) Friendship for our neighbour: If existence itself is a good thing, and to love anything is to will good to that thing, then obviously God loves everything that exists. Friendship with God introduces us into God’s universal friendship, in which we are commanded to love every person as our neighbour. For Aristotle, perfect friendship with many was impossible. For Aquinas, the caritas with which we love God and our neighbour is the most perfect friendship, in which we love God for his own sake and all things because of him and to the degree that they are ordered to him (Carmichael 2004:121). The more perfect our love for God, the more we are moved to love and beneficence of all, whether those close to us, or strangers and enemies (Carmichael 2004:123). This argument of Aquinas forms the cornerstone of my argument towards the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God. I will therefore revisit these arguments in paragraphs to come, like a golden thread woven through the thesis.

In respect of benevolence, Aquinas contends that we show equal caritas towards all in that we wish everyone the good of eternal happiness; but in respect of beneficence and depth of affection we are unable to love all equally. Rightly ordered love is felt more intensely in proportion to the nearness of the beloved, to ourselves but above all to God (Carmichael 2004:124). To love God brings the enjoyment of God, the
most excellent reward. But love of neighbour for God’s sake is more perfect, including both God and our neighbour in one act of love. The commandment we have from Him is this: Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also (Carmichael 2004:125). Like Augustine, Aquinas touches on the topic that I call “circle of concern”. I will return to these ideas in Chapter 5.

4.2.2.6 The Friends of God

During the late Thirteenth Century, after Aquinas and towards the Middle Ages, according to Carmichael (2004:129), a movement of popular piety whose adherents thought of themselves as “friends of God” spread “through the towns and villages of the Rhineland, from the Low Countries up to Switzerland”. Several women’s communities formed within it and affiliated with the Dominican Order. A relationship formed between these loose, mainly lay networks, and Dominican preachers. The movement was mystical, encouraging a virtuous lifestyle and aiming at profound inner detachment from the world and union with God in silent contemplative prayer. I cannot help but wonder if this was the first signs of the script on the wall for the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God, reserving the “title” of being a friend of God for a privileged few.

4.2.3 A philosophy of friendship from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century

According to Carmichael (2004:127), after Aquinas, the theological virtues of faith, hope and love were effectively banished into the specialised realm of mystical theology, where ‘friendship with God’ was associated with the heights of contemplative life. The term “trickled down” into more popular literature as a “synonym for piety and inward devotion” – another script on the wall?

4.2.3.1 Individual inward devotion

During the Middle Ages the hugely influential *Imitatio Christi (imitation of Christ)* was continuously translated and read throughout Western Christendom. It teaches a very individual inward devotion, a help and comfort and a way of holiness, but one that falls significantly short of friendship with God as envisioned by Aquinas with its
positive outwards extension in friendship for all whom God has made (Carmichael 2004:130).

Linda reflects:
*If we could strive towards the “prescriptions” of the “Imitation of God”, we would have known what the will of God for us and for our community is. I wonder whether this is not part of our problem? We do not seclude ourselves enough to listen to the voice of God. We need to hear the heartbeat of God! The quality of our friendships depends on our relationships. When our relationship with God is not extremely intimate, we never will be able to love as we are supposed to!*

Well into the Twentieth Century friendships among laity were encouraged, but nuns were warned against “particular friendships”, assuming them to be immature emotional crushes that undermine obedience, cause jealousies and intrigues and distract from prayer” (Carmichael 2004:135). When Glisky (1997:153-171) highlighted “rule provisions that discourages friendships” prior to Vatican II, she referred to the emphasis on the individual member’s solitary pursuit of sanctification; the stripping away of personal freedom and possessions, personal tastes and characteristics; the sisters were to leave personal choices to their superiors, so that the local bishop and male director controlled friendly exchange among the sisters; personal friendships were seen as a threat to the Gospel call to universal love and the desire to be faithful to the vow of chastity; regulations restricted communication among sisters, with students, medical professionals, etc., and the monitoring of the behaviour of the sisters. Therefore, the potential for developing friendships between mature, self-possessed persons was threatened when sisters viewed themselves as dependents, as children, and as subjects, loosing their ability to form relationships of deep mutuality characterising friendships (Glisky 1997:160). According to Carmichael (2004:127), regulations and advice like these, devoid of all positive encouragement to integrate true friendship with personal growth and holiness, continued to be the norm for both men and women in religious communities.

Apart from these negative effects on the vision of friendship with God with its outwards extension in friendship for all whom God has made, this form of “abstract Christian cosmology” (Ullmann 1966:101), this ideology characterised by the
dominance of the concept to which everything else, including manifestations of humanity, had to be subordinated, initiated revolution as the only remedy. Therefore, individualism arose in opposition to the dominant order of feudalism (Chaikin 1981:29).

4.2.3.2 The spirit of humanism and renaissance: The birth of individualism

According to Ullmann (1966:104), the Thirteenth Century has been called the “century of naturalism, the century in which the natural elements began to assume importance for their own sake”. The visual arts were filled with the spirit of humanism and renaissance. The hitherto stereotyped form gave way to individualistic and natural portrayal, concrete image and a human personality in all its individuality. For the first time, according to Gurevich (1995:159), “we encounter real individuals in the art of medieval Germany”. Throughout Western Europe, vernacular prose and poetry was about the emergence of the theme of the individual citizen in society. Ullmann (1966:107) refers to one product (book) that contrasts the two main ways of life: the ascetic, contemplative life, with the active life of a citizen. Although the author does not evaluate the two ways of life, he considers that man may legitimately and freely choose the one or the other, “either that of a recluse or that of the citizen”. According to Ullmann (1966:108), no longer did “theology and its servant, philosophy, constitute the only worthwhile intellectual pursuit, and no longer was the educated man (sic) identical with a cleric”. The earlier tone of resignation and flight from the world into eternity was replaced by “optimism and the appeal to man’s own capacities to bring his life on earth to full fruition” (Ullmann 1966:109).

Gurevich (1995:175) refers to Berthold of Regensburg who, through a series of sermons concerning the five talents, puts forward a new concept of the human individual in the guise of traditional exegesis of the Holy Scriptures, where through this “new reading of a passage from the Gospels, there erupts the idea of the human individual until then absent from such commentaries”. In his sermons, the person, service or office, lifetime and property are all brought together as an indivisible whole. All these things “should be used for the benefit of the individual” (Gurevich 1995:173). In Berthold’s mind, according to Gurevich (1995:173), wealth was so
closely linked with the person and its preordained vocation that the concept of “love for thy neighbour” assumed far less significance that it had done hitherto.

Also during the Thirteenth Century, the natural sciences emerged where all that mattered were the minute observation of individual phenomena in the natural world (Ullmann 1966:112). In a “radical departure from theological thinking” (Ullmann 1966:115) the task of natural science was not simply to describe and accept things, but to inquire into the causes. According to Ullmann (1966:116), the “man of nature, the individual in his natural state, was alleged to have been done away with, to have been wiped out by his baptism. But now this eliminated man of nature was revived, resuscitated and resurrected, was awakened from the slumber of centuries”. Ullmann (1966:129) describes the core of this new doctrine: “[N]atural man himself, having been reborn and reinstated, had emerged as an independent, autonomous unit within the framework of the natural order”. Social life once more had become man’s own creation, and “the citizens were in no need of any agencies outside themselves” (Ullmann 1966:140).

One of the consequences of this “rebirth of man”, was the increased emphasis which the individual received in the religious sphere. The objective and institutionalised form of the faith was to make room for a subjective and personal approach to divinity – the internalisation of faith (Ullmann 1966:143).

During the Sixteenth Century, with its emphasis on the importance of liberty of conscience, ritual and established authority came to challenge (Hopper 2003:30). The Protestant Reformation, where Martin Luther asserted sovereignty of the individual conscience and the right of the individual to commune directly with God (Kingdom 1992:8), paved the way for “religious individualism” which Lukes (1973:94) describes as the view that the individual believer does not need “intermediaries”, that he has the primary responsibility for his own spiritual destiny, that he has the right and the duty to come to his relationship with his God in his own way and by his own effort. According to Lukes (1973:95) this tended to make the individual increasingly egocentric.
Added to this, the Eighteenth Century Enlightenment advanced the compelling and intoxicating idea that human reason could release for mankind a pattern of unending improvement in science and politics (Kingdom 1992:8). Of the many characteristics of the Enlightenment, Hindmarsh (2002:67) focused on its individualism. According to him, its “rationalism led Enlightenment philosophy to enthrone the individual as the centre and creator of meaning, truth, and even reality”. During this period, the new style of evangelical homiletics also provoked “this sense that religion had to do in a new way with one’s own individual life” (Hindmarsh 2002:69). According to Doherty (2003:79), the Enlightenment taught the power of humanity and the human mind. While the thought of early Christian theology might have been “I think, therefore God is”, the philosopher Rene Descartes said during the Enlightenment “I think, therefore I am” (Doherty 2003:79).

Then, during the nineteenth century, after a long period of individualistic “defence morality” (Häring quoted by Carmichael 2004:127) that viewed the world with wariness as likely to lead people into sin, Vatican II opened the way to a “covenant morality” that saw the church as “a sacrament of creative liberty and fidelity”, a “fellowship in the Holy Spirit” (Carmichael 2004:127). Such a church has a mission of love in the world. This climate of thinking, congenial to, and even already imbued with, an understanding of Christian love as friendship, came to characterise the wider ecumenical scene in the latter part of the twentieth century.

4.2.3.3 Kierkegaard

The Danish philosophical theologian, Kierkegaard (1813-1855), declared that love of neighbour is not contingent on feeling but commanded as absolute duty. He launched a vigorous polemic against the superficial Christianity, as he saw it, of the Danish Lutheran church: its collusion with selfish, sentimental human love while ignoring Christ's call to a new, radically self-denying, divine love. For him the message of the New Testament is love of neighbour which is sober, spiritual, self-renouncing, universal, and eternal and constitutes “the moral task which in turn is the origin of all tasks” (Carmichael 2004:157). Every person is our neighbour, equal before God, to be loved unconditionally and exactly as they are. I find it interesting that Kierkegaard, characterised as standing “at an extreme point, both in the development of Christianity and in the development of individualism” (Lukes
1973:98), is also the one “celebrating reciprocity” (Carmichael 2004:158). This confirms to me the possibility of a richly textured individualism I argued for in Chapter 3.

4.2.3.4 Charles de Foucauld

At the dawn of the Twentieth Century, the Christian hermit Charles de Foucauld envisioned an apostolate of friendship: “If it is true that Jesus is our friend and he asks us to love others as he himself loves us, are we not obliged to love others in such a manner that we may become also in truth their friend?” (Carmichael 2004:162). When a faith community embraces their identity as friends of Jesus and of each other, will it still happen that the wounded among them will be isolated and be left to their own fate?

4.2.3.5 Karl Barth

Later in the Twentieth Century, Karl Barth contended that analogical and pedagogical relationship exists between “natural friendship” and “supernatural neighbour-love” (Carmichael 2004:159). The command to love our neighbour comes to us as persons already capable of free relationship to the other through natural friendship; hence the friend is a model of the neighbour. I wonder whether the situation of Linda and her family called for supernatural neighbour-love? These ideas also touch on what I call “circle of concern”, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2.3.6 Emil Brunner

According to Emil Brunner (1937:517), in reformed thought, the moral life was divided into compartments concerned with the family, work, state and church. Brunner assigns friendship to the recreational realm, the “community of play, and all free social life”. For Brunner, real community, or *agape*, is foreshadowed in friendship and in the capacity for friendship. The fact that human beings naturally form friendships indicates that they are destined for community. But friendship is not itself such community, because friendship is not obligatory, but out of choice. Friendship begins with pleasure in the individuality of the other person. However, in spite of the fact that the basis of friendship is delight in our friend, it also contains an ethical motive. Mere delight in the figure, the face, the wit, the peculiarities of the other person is not
friendship. Friendship arises where the pleasure we feel is caused not by “something in him” but by “himself”, and where the attraction is mutual. According to Brunner (1937:517), “the more that friendship is concerned with the whole personality, the more it becomes a bridge leading to the ethical realm. It is the aesthetic aspect of ethics, ethics as a natural fact, as something given .... Friendship is only genuine where it is deliberately regarded not only as a gift but as an obligation”. For Brunner (1937:518) from the point of faith, friendship is a natural fact which can only become ethical through the love of our neighbour. Real community, Agape, is foreshadowed in friendship and the capacity for friendship. However, because friendship does not say: “I love you because you are there”, but it merely says: “I love you because you are like this”, friendship is not unconditional, but conditional, exclusive and not universal. Although this exclusiveness and these limitations seem incompatible with the commandment of love, for Brunner this exclusiveness is no more incompatible with the commandment of love than the exclusiveness of married love, as the “Creator grants us beauty alongside of duty” (Brunner 1937:518). From the point of view of faith, friendship starts from the standpoint of real human refreshment, and here lies the right to friendship and its exclusiveness. However, at the same time, here lies the possibility of its corruption, when it degenerates into sheer self-pleasing and possessiveness. Friendship is human and therefore, although it is God’s refreshing gift to us, it will always retain an element of selfishness. Brunner (1937:518) contends that “friendship, too, needs to be reborn, and this new birth, even in the highest instance, will be only the beginning of a new life which is never perfect”.

4.2.3.7 Bonhoeffer and Moltmann

According to Carmichael (2004:161), a way of thinking about love that places relationality of friendship at its heart gathered pace through the later years of the Twentieth Century, as Bonhoeffer pointed towards the ethical significance of friendship, and for Moltmann friendship, to become integral to ethical existence (Carmichael 2004:161). According to Moltmann-Wendel (2000:17), Moltmann was one of the first to take up the concept of friendship from the tradition in order to use it to illuminate both interpersonal relationships and relationships between God and human beings. Starting from the friendship which Jesus practised in eating meals with tax collectors and sinners, Moltmann also sees the deeper side of Jesus’
relationship with people. As prophet of the Kingdom of God for the poor, Jesus becomes the friend of sinners and toll collectors; as High Priest he sacrifices himself for the life and salvation of others and completes his life by dying for his friends; as exalted Lord he liberates people from slavery and makes them friends of God. Therefore, Moltmann insisted that a “hierarchical official church should reflect again on the fact that it was once the community of friends and sinners” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:18).

However, in order not to misunderstand friendship in exclusivist terms and to miss the significance of friendship in the New Testament, Moltmann proposes “open friendship” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:18), a community which does not live in the inner circle of believers and pious but in open concern and public respect for others. Such open friendship should then prepare the ground for a more friendly world. He invites us to know Christ as “Friend” and to live out Christ’s love as “open friendship” (Carmichael 2004:178). These arguments also fit into the scheme of “circle of concern”, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2.3.8 Burnaby

Although Burnaby is concerned that we can reduce friendship with God to a “kitsch piety” (Carmichael 2004:165) [Carmichael’s emphasis], he formulates his own account of Christian love: “God has made men apt to find their completion in communion, because such communion is a likeness of the mutual love in which and through which Three Persons are one God, and therefore love can have no other purpose, as it can have no other source, but the mutual ‘inherence’ of persons, life in one another” (Burnaby 1991:306). Divine love is the offer of relationship: “The love which endures, which offers itself to the unloving, is always the servant of its own high purpose – not to rest till the sundered fellowship is restored, till rejection is changed to response” (Burnaby 1991:307). Does this kind of love resonate with Aelred’s caritas? Is this what was missing in the community of Linda and her family? Could this be the link between Barth’s natural friendship and supernatural neighbour-love? I will return to this discussion in Chapter 5.
4.2.3.9 Simone Weil

For the French philosophical writer Simone Weil, all our loves, whether of neighbour, the beauty of the world, religious practices, or friends, are an implicit love for God (Carmichael 2004:169). God’s love, with which we love our neighbour, has the quality of “creative attention”. She believes that love of neighbour is identical to justice (Carmichael 2004:169). Thinking back to the experience of Linda and her family, I tend to agree with Weil. In the absence of love for a neighbour, I believe that injustice was done to this family.

For Weil, friendship derives from our preferring someone because we seek some good in them or need them, whereas charity is available for all the afflicted (Carmichael 2004:170). As I understand it, for Weil friendship is what Barth calls natural friendship, and what she calls charity, Barth refers to as supernatural neighbour-love. I return to this topic in chapter 5, exploring what it is that turn natural friendship into supernatural neighbour-love.

4.2.3.10 John Swinton

According to the practical theologian John Swinton, friendship is just as vital a source of healing and support as any professional help (Carmichael 2004:196). For Swinton (2000b:80), the relationship of friendship is intricately bound up with the nature of discipleship and the character of authentic human relationships with God and between human beings. In Scripture, we find examples in John 15:15 where Jesus described his disciples not as servants, but as friends; in John 15:13 where Jesus offers to lay down his life for his ‘friends’; and in John 15:20 Jesus used the same words to describe the love of the Father for the Son, strongly suggesting that friendship is an appropriate term not only to express the intimate and committed nature of discipleship, but also for accurately describing the relationship between human beings and God. As friends of God, human beings are called upon to image the friendship of God in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions.

The model of friendship revealed through the life of Jesus signifies responsibility, solidarity and commitment, which were earlier shown to typify true care, supplemented and deepened by the theme of sacrifice. It was also a call to take
chances and to sacrifice oneself for one’s friends. By offering the gift of friendship to his followers, Jesus entered into a deeply intimate, yet totally open and inclusive relationship of loving commitment and solidarity with his friends. For Jesus in his earthly ministry, friendship was understood as a public, open and committed relationship marked by solidarity and sacrifice, and which sought to care for every aspect of the friend (Swinton 2000b:81). If Swinton is right, and we are called upon to image the friendship of God, why did Linda and her family not experience loving commitment and solidarity? Was the community blinded or seduced by the very loud voice of individualism, as discussed in Chapter 3? In chapter 6 I also discuss obstacles on our journey towards caring practices.

4.2.3.11 Burger

According to Burger (2005:158), the church does not say enough about friendship. We think it is too common place to give attention. But, according to him, friendship has much to offer in terms of koinonia. It offers the benefit of not being forced as in familial relationships, or structured as in organised small groups. He adds that only those friendships where friends can talk freely about their faith and problems, will offer this form of koinonia.

4.2.3.12 Derrida

For the French philosopher Derrida (1997:8), friendship comprised of loving; it is a way of loving. It is “the act of loving, before being the state of being loved”. He refers to the “act of the activity of friendship”, in this “intention of loving”.

According to Derrida (1997:8), the word philia refers to being loved, on the side of the beloved, and it says nothing of friendship itself. Someone “must love in order to know what loving means; then, and only then, can one know what being loved means”. For Derrida, friendship is about “being friend”. His definition of friendship is “to love before being loved”. The emphasis is on the action of love. It is “possible to be loved without knowing it, but it is impossible to love without knowing it” (Derrida 1997:9). There is an irreversible order: “One must start with the friend-who-loves, not with the friend-who-is-loved, if one is to think friendship” (Derrida:1997:9).
According to Derrida (1997:20), engagement in friendship takes time. He suggests that one should not prefer things to friends, and that one also should prefer certain friends. He contends that one “must not have too many friends, for there is not enough time to put them to the test by living with each one” (Derrida 1997:20).

Derrida suggests that one should not “choose a friend like a garment”. When a “sensible man” has to choose between two garments, and if one has used the worse garment for a long time and not the better, the better is to be chosen”. However, where friends are concerned, he suggests: “[A] friend is not to be had without trial nor in a single day, but there is need of time and so ‘the bushel of salt’ has become proverbial” (Derrida 1997:20).

Derrida (1997:21) argues that a friend must not only be good in himself, in a simple or absolute manner, he must be good for you, in relation to you who are his friend. When the friend is useful to his friend even if he is not absolutely virtuous or good, it is not possible to love while one is, at the same time, the friend of numerous others. However, although it is possible to love more than one person, not too much so, according to Derrida (1997:21). He contends that “[i]f we say that to love is an act, it is not possible to be in act effectively actively, presently at the heart of numerous …. A finite being could not possibly be present in act at too great a number”.

In my discussion on the ‘circle of concern’, I will return to these arguments of Derrida. For the purpose of this argument towards the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as the community of friends of God, it will suffice to say that he touches on another important value for friendship, which is that action is required to make friendship work. In Chapter 5 I will discuss this topic in more depth.

Derrida agrees with Aristotle that primary friendship is founded on virtue, and only primary friendship demands an equality of virtue between friends, in what “assigns them reciprocally to one another” (Derrida 1997:23).

According to Derrida (1997:24), although we say a friend is another self who must have the feeling of his own existence, it is not always egoism. We are not speaking of narcissism as it is commonly understood. An “arch-friendship would inscribe itself on
the surface of the testament’s seal. It would call for the last word of the last will and testament”. Derrida touches in his argument on the issue of self-love, as did Aristotle and Augustine. In Chapter 5 I return to this topic.

4.2.3.13 In conclusion: A definition of friendship

In the light of the preceding paragraphs, I find the definition of friendship offered by Southard (1989:xxii) to summarise of all the different models of friendship offered by philosophers and theologians, in the light of the metaphor of the church as the community of friends of God. I will therefore apply this definition in my argument for the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God.

Southard’s (1989:xxii) definition of friendship:

The demonstration of love in a privileged, equalitarian relationship between disciples. It is privileged because of shared knowledge that may be very intimate. It is equalitarian because friends have the capacity to give and receive love in a nondefensive way. They appreciate the truth that is shared …. Godly power will be evident [in friendship] in two ways: first, in the grace and forgiveness with which the quality of friendship is maintained despite disruptive and destructive forces; second, in the expansion of friendship towards strangers. It is self-giving to people who from a human point of view don’t really deserve our loving attention. (Thus we move in Christian love from the initial restrictiveness of friendship toward universal benevolence.)

According to Southard (1989:xxii), friendship is also not only a sign that self-deception is being overcome, but it contains the “indispensable ingredients” of empathy, congruence, and positive regard that are antidotes for secrecy and deceit. For Southard, friendship is also the triumph of trust and specific self-giving over former trends toward divisiveness and competition. He further stresses that friendship, as modelled by Jesus, is mutually fulfilling, but it includes self-giving that may end in self-sacrifice. According to Southard (1989:xxii), this is the “persuasive context for counsel that embraces the wisdom of God. One person is consistently willing to accept another with trust and respect if both of them can come to see ultimately reality in the same way – that God has created us to receive strength when we admit our weakness and are willing to love others as we learn to love ourselves”. He never thought of “literally walking as a friend with a comparative stranger through a valley of death. But that would be the authentication of wisdom for those who are transformed into friends of God” (Southard 1989:xxiii).
This concludes my overview and reflection on the philosophy of Christian friendship. In the next paragraphs, I continue my argument for the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God, by looking into some ideas suggested in feminist thought towards a metaphor for God as friend instead of the metaphor for God as father or mother.

4.2.4 Feminist thought and a metaphor of God as friend as opposed to the metaphor of God as father

By now, we have a well established view that friendship is not just easy empathy between the like-minded, but a love that thrives on differences and extends to strangers (Carmichael 2004:184).

4.2.4.1 McFague

For McFague, within an “egalitarian” and “immanent” friendship God’s authority becomes that of “the companion whom we wish to please and who attracts our cooperation”, which may be more powerful for us than “the model of God as father or king who commands us to be obedient children or servants” (Carmichael 2004:184). For Carmichael (2004:184), the church becomes “a community of friends united by a common vision of fulfilment for all”. The “model of God as friend says that we are not our own, but also that we are not on our own: as friends of the Friend of the world, we do not belong to ourselves nor are we left to ourselves” (McFague 1987:179).

4.2.4.2 Dunfee

Dunfee (1989:xiii) argues that “Jesus’ intent is in fact to call people to be a community of friends who are not to be slaves to one another but who are freed to respond to one another’s needs ‘in their own voices’”. The truly liberating and empowering relationship is found in being ‘with’ rather than just ‘for’ others (Dunfee 1989:138). Friendship is that, which liberates those whom it serves and empowers them to become free and autonomous agents, speaking with their own voices (Carmichael 2004:187).
4.2.4.3 Hunt

For Hunt (1991:2) friendship is “a useful paradigm of right relation for the whole of creation ... the model of healthy relating and the goal of human community”. According to Hunt (1991:22), friendship is about attention. For her, attention to friends is at the same time, interesting and frightening: we want it, but we are afraid of what it will reveal. She calls friendship “fierce” because of the intensity of attention. It can be hard “to be known so well, to be understood and transparent to friends who pay attention”. However, we all “crave the tenderness that only those we love can offer”. For Hunt, tenderness does not affect the ferocity, but it is the quality of care and nurture that only friends share. She admits that caregivers can be tender in touch, but contends that only friends are tender in feeling. She prefers, however, to refer to “fierce tenderness” which is “fierce” in the quality of its attention to persons, “tender” with a friend’s “quality of care and nurture” (Hunt 1991:22).

According to Hunt (1991:23) friendship is a cross-cultural, cross-generational, interdisciplinary experience that can be plumbed fruitfully in many corners. It is an existential stance, embodied in political, embracing relationships to the divine, others and the earth; it emerges from women’s experience but is meant for all (Carmichael 2004:188). In it people “intend one another’s well-being and ... that their love relationship is part of a justice-seeking community” (Hunt 1991:29).

For Hunt (1991:20) justice involves making friends, lots of friends, many kinds of friends. Friendship in this sense is not a “cheap effort to buy freedom with flattery or treachery, pretending to be friends for personal gain when in fact some structures and conditions make friendship impossible”. Justice is the fundamental relational goal that issues from communities of accountability where change takes place. Justice is the reason for personal nurture. Justice-seeking friends “empower one another to keep making change when the work is hard. In fact, the job is so massive that we need all the friends we have, of whatever gender or nationality, to get it done” (Hunt 1991:20). Hunt (1991:85) argues that justice is a hallmark of women’s friendship. Glimpses of justice inspire action to assure more justice.

For Hunt (1991:166) imagining the divine as a friend is “quite easy and rather pleasing” (Hunt 1991:166). More than parent, spirit, and force, friend has the
advantage of being widely available as a positive relationship, as one that is personal without being intrusive, powerful without being mystical. It is not perfect, but it works quite well in the absence of much competition. The friendly companion divinity is a powerful possibility, as she marches steadfastly “alongside” her friends (Hunt 1991:167). She suggests another dimension of the metaphor as friend when she contends that “perhaps the most suggestive image for the divine that emerges out of women’s friendship is not one divinity but many. Just as friends do not exist in the singular, neither is it feasible to imagine that something as complex and comprehensive as divinity could be singular either. There may be even a hint of this insight in the Christian Trinitarian theologies …. Thinking of the divine as one friend reinforces a relationless content and minimizes the extent to which the divine, for all of its glory, is still more available through human imaginings”.

“Friends” is also a useful term in the language of prayer and worship. Friends speak to friends in terms of endearment; friends turn to each other in moments of need. Friends expect comfort and appreciate stimulation. Friends convey a sense of trust and disappointment, or serendipity and betrayal. It is not just a happy word, but one that puts people in touch with personal and collective histories, both their positive and negative points (Hunt 1991:168-169).

It combines love that unites and generates; awareness of our embodiment; power to choose; and spirituality defined as “the religious impulse toward meaning and value expressed concretely in making choices about the quality of life for oneself and for one’s community” (Hunt 1991:105). With Hunt (1991:9), I urge that a pastoral theology of participation should enable a political vision of fierce tenderness in action. I do believe that what Linda and her family needed, was fierce tenderness and if they experienced fierce tenderness from their community of faith, their suffering could have been cushioned and softened.

4.2.4.4 Moltmann-Wendel

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:5) welcomes feminist insight as “an important step forward from old patterns" but does not want to make women’s experience of friendship a new “absolute”. For her, God as friend is a “healing image for our day. Anyone who is tired of the discussion about using the metaphors of father or mother for God, who
misses a personal element in the images drawn from nature and the figure of Wisdom, can rediscover in friendship with God something of the breadth, closeness, goodness and companionship which people today so urgently need” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:5). Kotzé (2006) points out as an additional ‘benefit’ of seeing God as friend, it rises above the gender issue. No more arguments about whether God is male or female!

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:37) suggests that Jesus is the friend who gives himself, not as sacrifice for sin but in conscious self-surrender for friends, that is, for the community he “joyfully but scandalously” (Carmichael 2004:191) formed at his table. That behaviour led to his death. So “he did not die for our sins but for those men and women who had been his friends, for friendship as a passionate human relationship and liberation” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:37). For me, this idea that Jesus died for us, his friends, add to the hope that this metaphor carries. Consequently, we should see in terms of sickness to be healed and separation to be reconciled, which is how the gospel predominantly portrays it. The Eucharist is then above all a celebration of Christ’s friendship, of his healing and liberating activity through a life of “total loving self-surrender to the Father and us” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:46). In a faith community that embraces values like these, a faith community that celebrate Christ’s friendship and his healing activities each time we celebrate the Eucharist, would we still find families who suffer isolation and rejection in the face of difficulties, like Linda and her family? In Chapter 8 I return to this argument, reflecting on the healing power of our faith traditions.

According to Moltmann-Wendel (2000:12), the term friend became an important designation of relationships in early Christianity, which is not based on any ties of blood or affinity. It indicates a community which represents a new society, a fellowship which not only integrates the outcasts but makes them the centre of the new society. She reminds us that “in the Bible the original basic opposite to friend is not enemy, but stranger” (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:13). I do believe that although Linda and her family were not regarded as enemies to their neighbours, but as strangers, they still did not experience the fellowship to which we are called, according to Moltmann-Wendel. In Chapter 7 I discuss the concept of strangers and
a spirituality of hospitality, which is what I believe Moltmann-Wendel means with this argument.

4.2.4.5 Johnson

Johnson (1993:217) contends that Jesus, divine friendship incarnate, welcomes all in open hospitality and calls us friends. God as creative Mother loves the universe and each individual “with a friendship brimming with desire for the well-being of the whole of her creation”. God’s friendship engages us in partnership to renew the earth and establish justice, creating in us an attitude of profound friendship toward all others, even those not unlike ourselves. In Chapter 7 I will build further on these ideas of a spirituality of hospitality and healing communities.

4.2.4.6 In conclusion: a call for love

With tenderness we associate closeness, warmth, snuggling up; Eros makes most people think of sexuality. In the last thirty years tenderness and Eros infiltrate what we commonly call “love”. They refer back to primal states of love and criticise an apparently whole Christian world and a complacent, stable church, in which a hierarchy has repressed the initial equality in Christianity. However, terms like tenderness and Eros have found a place in our terminology. They are attempts at friendly contacts in the face of growing indifference, which opened up a new culture of relationship, and which were related to both the private and public spheres (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:85). For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:86) they are “the stormy first steps on the way to a culture of friendship”.

In feminist thought, Eros becomes the revolutionary banner in a world in which women now seize the power to define Eros and liberate it from its narrow sexual connotations so that it becomes a primal power of passionate self-knowledge, relationship to others and the world (Carmichael 2004:192). For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:95-96) both tenderness and Eros are “spontaneous, irrational attacks by love on a world in which love is dead”. She suggests that an Eros that puts us passionately and positively in touch with the world and others, delighting in them, is not opposed to but contained in New Testament Agape. Tenderness and Eros are possibilities of approaching oneself, others and the world afresh. It is a way in which
we are hurt, but it is also a way against hardening and being torn apart and an attempt at healing and friendship (Moltmann-Wendel 2000:102). Friendship so understood can embrace God, others, my body, and the Earth (Carmichael 2004:193). I believe that this kind of love can build bridges between a selfish kind of friendship, and a friendship that embraces strangers and enemies as well. I do believe that where this kind of love and friendship thrive in communities, we will have what I call healing communities. (In Chapter 5 I return to the issue of love and self-love, and Chapter 7 is about healing communities.)

4.3 JESUS AS FRIEND OF SINNERS

The pastoral theologian Frank Woggon (2003:261) argues for a “different language” (Woggon 2003) to portray the images of friendship found in “the Jesus story of the compassion of God”. According to him, in contrast to an Aristotelian concept of friendship, Jesus lived radical and open friendships with those who were different. Woggon (2003:261) contends that while the theology of the Church chose metaphors from the realm of an authoritarian society (like King of Kings, Lord of Lords, priest, prophet, and Messiah), Jesus was famous – or infamous – among his contemporaries as “friend of sinners”. The stories that he told about the dominion of God were taken to a large extent from the lives of ordinary people. The contemptuous name “friend of sinners” given to Jesus by his antagonists, reveals a deep truth about Jesus’ life and mission. Jesus made it very clear that there is no relationship with God without relationships with others. When he calls his disciples his friends, he calls them to join this mission of open friendship. It is no longer the dependent, obedient relationship of servants to their master, or of immature children to their heavenly father. Rather, it is the liberating fellowship of the friends of God, who are called to share what they experience; that is who empower others to live their lives as fully as possible in relation to God, just as Jesus empowered them. Such friendship “does not exercise dominance nor uses coercive power, but rather offers cooperative care, mutuality, and nurture to enhance the dignity of the other and to establish community”. Jesus’ friendships were personal, as opposed to instrumental; and they were aimed at regaining the dignity and personhood of those whom society and the religious law had rejected and depersonalised. They revealed something of the nature of God. As pastoral therapist, working in the frame of a pastoral theology of participation, I believe that my reflections should be grounded in
experience and aimed at transforming practice. The example of Jesus, as portrayed here by Woggon, provides for me that framework. I therefore argue that a metaphor for God as friend and the church as a community of friends of God, will provide a rich context for the invitation to the faith community to care with their wounded; to become a healing community; a community-of-friends.

Arguing for the metaphor of God as friend, I would like to add some ideas voiced by a group of pastoral counsellors at the centre where I work. For them, honesty is something that will come with more ease in a friendship relationship, than an authoritarian one. In an authoritarian relationship, the text is in a way prescribed: “God, please forgive me my sin”. In a friendship relationship, we can feel more free to amplify, and while “discussing” what I have done with my “friend”, telling him/her why it hurt or why I think it was wrong, I will learn more about myself, gain more insight into what have happened, making my confession of sin much more authentic and honest. In this way, I will not only “confess”, but also the healing process will be set in motion.

This group of men and women believe that this kind of “open conversation” will come more readily with a “friend” than an authoritarian figure like a father or king or even priest. And perhaps forgiveness will be accepted more readily from a friend than from a far-away, authoritarian God.

This concludes my argument for the re-membering of the metaphor for the church as a community of friends of God, as apposed to seeing God as the father of His earthen family. In the next paragraph I will refer to voices opposing the metaphor for God as friend.

4.4 CONSIDERING VOICES OPPOSING A METAPHOR OF GOD AS FRIEND

Although for me personally the metaphor of God as friend is more appealing than the metaphor of God as father or any other authoritarian figure, and many persons with whom I shared these ideas share this sentiment, there are those who feel more comfortable with the known and therefore more comfortable ways of referring to God.
Because I would like to present a balanced view on the subject, I will reflect on some ideas of critique to this way of thinking about God.

Moltmann-Wendel (2000:5-6) offers some ideas of critique to the metaphor of God as friend as opposed to the metaphor of God as father:

- Those who have been brought up on traditional theology for whom the distance between God and human beings remains the one, steadfast and compelling topic of theology, ask whether the notion of friendship sufficiently enables us to perceive and reconcile the different dimensions of God and human beings and the abyss between them, and not to overlook this.

- Others have problems about how God can be understood as friend in view of the disasters which are constantly visited upon the world. For them, God shares the responsibility for causing all the evils in this world.

- There are those who experience friendship in such a private and intimate way that they find it almost impossible to see social and religious models in it.

However, for Moltmann-Wendel (2000:6) “God the friend” is an old biblical designation of God which keeps cropping up among Christians, but it no longer has a home in our theological thought-patterns and in our hierarchical bureaucratic churches. These are stamped by the distance between God and human beings. In feminist theology too, God the friend tends more to arouse the suspicion that here there is a transfer of male individualism.

For Moltmann-Wendel (2000:6) however, God as friend is an image which regularly appears in the context of the search in which many people are engaged, for God as an “ally” who will support them in their problems. It is an “image of the God-for-us and the God-with-us, the companion who can also become a sisterly companion, who helps us to cope with life in its complexity”. She advises those who have difficulties with such an image to take a look at the basic pattern of their own friendships. In friendship there is intimacy, trust, and closeness. These are the basic presuppositions. A friend can also stand up for me, can make amends and can also be better than me. And like Job, I can also argue with my friends. But in friendship, there is also detachment, respect for the otherness of the other, the mystery of his or her strangeness. It is also possible to become alienated from one another, and for a
friendship to dissolve. Friendship can come to an end, yet time and again begin anew. A friendship can rest a while and then be revived. Moltmann-Wendel (2000:6) believes that “we can rediscover all our experiences with friendship, including Eros and disillusionment, anger and reconciliation, strangeness and intimacy, in our experience with God, even if God as friend remains a mere metaphor, an attempt to say something about God”.

Burnaby (1991:311) warns that while friendship with God has at times been guarded exclusively for saints, the more modern danger is that we reduce it to the casual and comfortable level. If ‘friendship with God’ proposes God as a cosy and tolerant companion, one among many whom we might care to collect as a friend, a congenial item to add when constructing a “designer spirituality” for ourselves, we engage in a “kitsch piety” (Carmichael 2004:165) [Carmichael’s emphasis]. If God, even as a friend, is not awesome and challenging, we are not truly encountering God. According to Burnaby (1991:311), we can “only speak of friendship with God without danger, if we remember at every moment its unlikeness as well as its likeness to all human friendship”. McFague (1987:83-87) also asks whether the authority of God is preserved in such an image of friendship. She shows however, that, in contrast to paternal authority, in a metaphor of friendship a freely developing authority, including love and criticism, can unfold which is based on reciprocity and can produce new aspects of relationship. For her, God is part of us, as we share in the life of our friends.

Wadell (2002:10) is concerned that a metaphor of the church as a community of the friends of God risks an elitism that should never characterise the church. He asks, for instance, if Christians are the friends of God, what does it say about everybody else? I would like to add whether this stance would exclude friendship with anybody who is not a Christian? Or live a lifestyle that appears not to be based on Christian values, like the son in the family of Linda?

Another concern Wadell voices, is that “to speak of the church as the community of friends of God risks the awful temptation of thinking the church must already be perfect and complete, and anyone with an eye half open knows that is hardly true” (Wadell 2002:10).
However, he finds this metaphor not only promising, but also a fittingly challenging way to think about the church. For him, to speak of friendship with God can sound “so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God”. As Kotzé (2006) suggests, I also agree with Wadell that the metaphor of friend can be more inviting to snuggle up against God for a child who experienced abuse, an elderly person with dementia, or a person dying with Aids, than a more authoritarian way of thinking about God. However, for Wadell (2002:10) there is also no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, as friends have expectations of each other, and because friends “are said to be committed to the same things”. With this in mind, the metaphor is not so comforting, because it suggests that any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. According to Wadell (2002:10), there may be “grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost”.

I sincerely do believe that, although no metaphor can ever fully reveal all there is to know about God, and remains only an attempt to say something about God, in the light of the arguments submitted in the previous paragraphs, the metaphor of God as friend and the church as the community of friends of God, can provide a new and fresh perspective on the church and what being a Christian is about.

I do not argue for the resurrection or resuscitation of the Fourth Century spirituality; it is not about a wheel that must come to a full circle. For one thing, I would not argue that friendship be reserved for a privileged few educated males, excluding women and persons from all layers of society. I argue for a re-membering, a collecting of the pieces of our collective history as friends of God and of our identity as being made in the image of God, who is a relational Being; that part that were clouded by the voices of independent, autonomous units during the Middle Ages, towards the Eighteenth Century and continuing until today.

I would like to believe we can take the best of what the scientific era has to offer without giving up our identity as relational beings. I believe that in a world in which love appears to be dead, a metaphor of the church as a community of friends of God
can point towards healing and friendship against hardening and being torn apart. Although we still are imperfect, I do believe that in a community that perceive themselves as the friends of God, suggesting that any friend of God is challenged to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, the possibility for wounded families like those of Linda to be cast out to the periphery of the community, left on their own to find their own ways to cope in the midst of their difficulties, will surely be diminished.

### 4.5 CONCLUSION

In the light of the arguments in Chapter 3, and those presented in the above paragraphs, I ask, with Wadell (2002:87): Shouldn’t our churches be communities where people see and experience a unity among persons that does not deny their differences or erase their distinctiveness, but work to overcome all that divides them? Why does a family have to suffer isolation and rejection in the face of their woundedness, when one of its members made choices that were not in line with what the community considers “right”? If Augustine was correct, the church should be a “community of peace” not because everyone always agrees with everyone else, but because in Christ and in the life they share together they know an intimacy and unity much deeper and far more resilient than whatever can possibly divide them (Wadell 2002:88).

Although Augustine desperately wanted the church to be the place for us to live together in unity and peace in contrast to the dark forces of division and conflict we so often experience outside the church, one of the most “glaring scandals” of our church today is that “people do not find community among persons there, much less the peace of Christ” (Wadell 2002:89).

I agree with Wadell (2002:90) that Augustine’s reflections on what the church should be, are relevant to Christians no matter where or when we live. With him, I believe that the church should be a community where people gather to love, praise and glorify God through love, friendship and service to one another. Each congregation should be a community where people strive “to live in a spirit of unanimity” so they “may have one soul and one heart among them” (Augustine quoted by Wadell 2002:90). With Wadell (2002:90) I plead for Augustine’s conviction to be ours: If there
is to be any true and lasting peace in the world, it can only come from the peace of
Christ. That peace has to be “palpable”, it has to be “visible and believable”, and “it is
the role of the church to make it so” (Wadell 2002:90).

The next chapter is about doing friendship. I will further build on the metaphor of a
church as a community-of-friends, by relating tales of “living friendship” (Carmichael
2004:196), and weaving them through the theory of Christian love and friendship.
Stories will have more to say than merely philosophising about friendship, because
stories serve as “vehicles to carry people’s dilemmas and ethical choices”, including
the effects of those dilemmas and choices on other people (Kotzé 2002:21).
However, the challenge will be not to use these stories in a moralising or prescriptive
way, but in such a way that it will reflect the struggles of people searching for and
choosing a way through real-life challenges and dilemmas, not necessarily finding
“the way” (Kotzé 2002:20). The stories I will use are part of everyday life. I did not
have to create them – they already exist and circulate in everyday life and social
interaction.
CHAPTER 5

AN ETHICAL SPIRITUALITY OF PARTICIPATION AND MUTUAL CARE: DOING FRIENDSHIP

But, for me, the focal question is one that encompasses the experience of community, the value of relationship, the possibility for forgiveness, the reality of love, and the need to be connected to others. For me the focal question is one having to do with rootedness – a ground of authentic care into which the roots of our individual lives can sink for nourishment. The question is, will we grab hold of life? Will we choose a people; will we reach to the center of their lives where a meaning can be shared, and will we plant ourselves there?

Lore-Kelly (1983:103)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4, we humans are living, breathing images of a Trinitarian God whose very life is the fullness and perfection of intimacy. Born from this love, I believe that we are called to mirror in our lives together the intimacy, friendship, and community we see perfectly displayed in God.

The task of reflecting upon friendship seemed simple enough when I started out with my quest towards a spirituality of friendship, since we all know about the topic of friendship. However, in an age of “functional relationships and competitive interests, friendship might be like a rare and beautiful flower, which is seldom seen or picked” (Woggon 2003:257). Perhaps that is why philosophers view friendship among the most cherished of human goods and at the same time, has become “curiously marginal in modern times, especially in the contemporary world” (Woggon 2003:257). I also believe that it could be easier to contemplate a philosophical stance, the dogma concerning friendship and what it should be, than reflecting on how to do friendship in real life. It seems to me much more comfortable to theologise and philosophise about what friendship is. I believe the challenge is to reflect on doing friendship without being prescriptive, moralising or romanticising.

Therefore, in my reflections upon doing friendship, I am aware of the risk of becoming moralising and romantic or prescriptive. However, it is my intention to engage in an exercise of a pastoral theology of participation, my reflections grounded in experience and aimed at transforming practice as explained in Chapter 2. My journey will be marked by listening and responding to the wisdom and authority of my
faith tradition, the stories of the participants to this research, the knowledge and insights of many authors who shared their wisdom generously, and my interpretation of what I experienced and learned and read, coloured by my own personal story. Although my reflections are mainly from a Christian point of view, I do not regard this as exclusive. Like Woggon (2003:258), I believe that spiritual traditions, which are different from my own, may listen to different stories of the compassion of God, and with him, I trust that these stories speak as completely to issues of friendship and pastoral care in order to inspire a liberating practice of care.

In my work as pastoral therapist, I come upon stories of isolation and rejection (as the story of Linda and her family), but I also come to know people who “have the essential counter-cultural calling to be friends on earth, to offer love which may be in the truest sense be sacrificial, to build community, to be peacemakers and healers, to seek and promote compassion and justice, to walk with the oppressed and help their voice to be heard, to celebrate with all” (Carmichael 2004:197). In an attempt to understand something of the mystery of doing friendship, in the context of the church as a community of friends of God, I will relate some of the stories of friendship with the consent of the owners of these stories. I will then weave them through the wisdom offered by theologians, philosophers and other wise authors who share their experiences and wisdom in the books and articles they write. I will also offer my own reflections on these stories and theories. I make no claim for the universality of the ideas I present in the following chapter or to suggest a prototype for friendship; I offer them as a way to stimulate conversation on how to do friendship.

5.2 TALES OF LIVING FRIENDSHIP

Central to being with people in moments of happiness, stress, achievement, loss, grief, illness, and recovery is the relationship that exists and develops. Something happens to us when we trust ourselves to others and express our deeper feelings. These times are not easily forgotten. Life takes on shades and tones of meaning. Future meetings with people with whom we have shared meaningful moments are filled with both memories and expectations. Strangers become friends who understand something of what we know and who we are. Most of us know people who are special to us because “our lives had intertwined and our minds and hearts have touched” (Pfohl 1980:78).
The first tale of living friendship I want to share is about two strangers who became friends and whose lives had intertwined in a way that both these friends were never the same again. I came to know them when Martha came to see me about her friend, Jane, asking for advice on how to assist her friend best in the troubles she was experiencing. The second tale is about a neighbour who made herself available while giving the other person the ultimate choice as to whether her offer of friendship will be taken. Magda is one of the counsellors at the pastoral centre where I work. The story related here, was told one day during a training class for counsellors. It took place long before she knew anything about caring in any formalised context. Caring actions like these, came to her as second nature. The third tale is about two friends reaching out to a stranger, persisting in their efforts to be her friend until she had no choice but to accept their offer.

The stories were told in the owners’ own words. As Jane is English speaking, I used her own words. As Martha and Magda told their stories in Afrikaans, I translated their words, and offered them the opportunity to evaluate my interpretations of what they said, correcting them where necessary.

5.2.1 A friendship of solidarity

I will tell this tale in two parts, allowing each of the partners her own voice.

5.2.1.1 Jane’ story

At the same time as Jane discovered that her son, Paul, was addicted to heroin, her best friend died of cancer. However, “God provided another friend in her place because He knew I was going to need someone really special in the future”. She continues: “At work it was extremely difficult for me to keep going – it was a nightmare, no-one understood, no-one spoke to me about it [Paul’s problems], they knew but they didn’t speak about it. Martha was the only one who showed love and gave me comfort and understanding. I could tell her anything, and I really did pour my heart out to her all the time.”
Just when things started to get better – Paul agreed to enter a rehabilitation programme, and Jane’s husband (not Paul’s biological father) managed to come up with the finances needed for the program – misfortune struck again. Paul was in the rehabilitation centre for eight days when Jane’s husband was tragically killed in an accident when a motorist crashed into him while he was cycling.

Her friend Martha was the first person she called with the tragic news. “She has stood by me and supported me every minute and in every way – I couldn’t have managed without her, especially now that I was without the support of my husband.”

Although Martha was encouraging her to join the support group for the parents whose children were trapped in drug abuse, Jane always felt, “I could manage on my own. Until one day Martha shared with me how the Lord has spoken to her, and how God was drawing her to become involved in Coram Deo [the pastoral centre where I work]. Suddenly I just felt it was time to attend meetings of the support group.”

That was when I met Jane who, accompanied by her friend Martha, attended her first meeting of the support group.

5.2.1.2 Martha’s story

Friendship was always important in Martha’s life. When Jane started working at the same company as Martha, Martha had to “show Jane the ropes”. Because Jane was the only English speaking person, Martha took her “under my wing”. When they discovered they shared the same love for God, the friendship was sealed. And when Jane’s troubles started, Martha was there to support her, and pray with her. When Martha’s congregation invited Tyrell, a young man who had just rehabilitated from drug abuse to share his story with the congregation, Martha invited Jane and her husband to the sermon. After the sermon, Jane was introduced to the pastor as well as to Tyrell. Afterwards, Tyrell visited Paul, and eventually he agreed to enter into a rehabilitation program. For Martha, “it was the first time I realised what it was to mean something to someone else, and to offer assistance – even a small gesture like inviting Jane to a sermon”. It was through her relationship with Jane and sharing in her pain, that she realised “how we need true friends in tough times”.
When Jane’s husband died, Martha experienced that God “pressed upon my heart to be there for my friend”.

A few months later, Martha was attending the sermon when our pastor, Dr. André Botha preached from Gal 2:6 that we are supposed to help one another carry our burdens, and shared some stories of the pain of parents whose children were engaged in drug abuse. (This sermon was part of this research project. I discuss it in more detail in Chapter 8). She was so touched by the pain and suffering of the parents, that when the congregation was invited to share with me their experience of the sermon, she was the first to make an appointment. That was how I met Martha. She came to share her friend’s pain with me, and decided that she will accompany Jane to a meeting of the support group. In the end, she joined the group as a “supporter”.

Martha ended her story by relating how her friendship with Jane deepened the last year. It makes “me realise what true friendship is, and why we are placed on earth - for each other”.

5.2.2 Reaching out to a neighbour

Magda reflects on the time when her new neighbours arrived: “I was looking forward to the same close relationship I had with my previous neighbours. However, I was quite disappointed when my first attempts to friendliness were received not with the same enthusiasm as it was intended”. When the distressing sounds of anger and violence reached Magda’s ears through the back door, “I understood a little better the aloofness of my neighbour”. Wanting desperately to help, but not knowing what to do, Magda’s husband walked over and invited the family to join their cell group. They were not very surprised when the offer was impolitely declined.

Magda reflects: “I was not prepared to give up. After some serious thought, I decided to make one last effort to befriend my new neighbour, and started out waiting for the right opportunity. One day I walked into her at a shopping centre, and invited her to join me for tea in a nice and cosy coffee shop”. This became a weekly ritual. “One day, when we were comfortable in each other’s company, I casually mentioned that through our back door, we can hear what is going on in their house, without going
into any detail”. The neighbour was astonished, but also did not offer any detail of what was happening in her life. However, the “sounds of violence” grew farther apart, and eventually stopped. The weekly ritual trickled down to occasional meetings, and later dried up completely. One day Magda walked accidentally into her neighbour, and like the first time, used the opportunity to invite her to tea. During their conversation, her neighbour informed Magda that “it is going very well with me, thank you”. Without ever having mentioned the problem of violence, Magda’s neighbour was letting her know that the violence in her life had ended, and that she was thanking her friend.

5.2.3 Caring for Mary

I know two women whose friendship always was an inspiration to me. When I heard their story of caring for their dying friend, the words of Swinton (2000a:105) came to my mind: “Friendship permeates our community and helps keep it human”.

These two friends are Elma, a widow for the last ten years, who “was never close with my mother and is looking for the closeness I missed out on in every relationship”, and Lorinda, who’s mother died at birth and was raised by her aunt whose “caring nature rubbed off on me”.

Elma, alone in a world meant for couples, was looking forward to meeting her new neighbour, Mary. However, her enthusiasm was not returned. Mary was “unapproachable, rigid, prim and proud”. Although Elma and Lorinda’s new friendship with Mary was very much one sided at first, they learned that Mary was bitter and alone. She had lost her only daughter and two of her sons in a motorcar accident, and because she never forgave her son-in-law for impregnating her daughter before they were married, she had also lost contact with the infamous son-in-law and her only granddaughter. All she had left was her stepson and his wife, who had to drive her around, because she couldn’t do it herself.

When Mary was diagnosed with cancer, she blamed the doctor and still tried to keep Elma and Lorinda at arms length, but they persisted. They walked the extra mile with their new friend.
Caring for Mary was not easy. She was “very finicky”. Her food had to be bought from four different shops! Yet, they “never cheated”, even after Mary couldn’t come along on the shopping trips anymore. The friendship wasn’t without humour though. Elma once had to help the swollen Mary when she was stuck in her tiny shower, and there was a time when the wheelchair ran away with Lorinda, a very small and frail person.

The night before Mary died, she hugged Lorinda and told her that she loved her “more than the sand in the sea”.

On being asked “but why?” the two friends replied that caring for Mary was hard, but they gained so much more from the experience. They have learned what it truly takes to “wash the feet” of a fellow traveller on life’s journey.

Sharing in stories like these inspires me and strengthens me. They are keeping my hope up that participation and compassion are not dead – they are only hiding behind the layers of individualism. People like Martha, Magda, Elma and Lorinda, are making a great contribution to “the mending of the society whose safety net has become so torn” (Buford 1996:102).

5.3 THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

When discussing the theory of doing friendship in the next paragraphs, I had the eerie feeling that the Twelfth Century Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx had Jane, Martha, Magda, her neighbour, Lorinda and Elma in mind when he suggested that friendship is a fundamental need, at the heart of what it means to be human. Aelred interprets the creation story of Adam and Eve not as a parable for marriage, but for friendship. He suggests that from the beginning “to be human is to stand in need of friendship” (Wadell 2002:111). I believe that the tales of living friendship related in the above paragraphs, are testimony to the truthfulness of Aelred’s insight. With Wadell (2002:67), Jane, Mary and Magda’s neighbour, I believe that our lives would be terribly impoverished without the gift of our friends. With him, I ask: What is it that friends do for us that we could not do without them? What did Martha do for Jane that she could not do for herself, or Lorinda and Elma for Mary? In the next paragraphs I will explore a few dimensions of the gift of friendship.
5.3.1 Friends are gifts from God

According to Wadell (2002:78), Augustine claims that we do not choose our friends; they are brought to us by God. For him, especially our closest and lifelong friends, are God’s gifts to us given for providential purposes. They are gifts of God’s grace, workings of God’s providential, infinitely creative, and sometimes very surprising love in our lives. Augustine came to see that “intimacy is not something we chase after; it is a grace we unwrap” (Wadell 2002:78). According to Augustine, we know God’s love for us is real through the real friends who love us. Sometimes this gift of friendship is demonstrated in unexpected ways. Recently I had a family gathering at my house. Knowing my limitations regarding cooking, I delegated most of the work to my guests. Each family unit would prepare a different “potjie”, and I would supply rice. When I asked my friend Sandra whether I may borrow her large saucepan to cook rice for 26 people, I was somewhat surprised by, but very grateful for her answer: “I know that you do not like cooking, and I guess that you do not even know how to cook such a quantity of rice. What kind of rice would you prefer, and when do you want me to deliver the cooked rice at your house?” As most of my guests had already arrived when Sandra delivered the rice, my family teased me endlessly, kept on looking for more “deliveries”. It gave me great joy to tell them what happened, feeling very special and loved because someone cared enough for me to go through so much trouble because of me. Although this was not a “life and death” situation, I experienced the action of my friend on a spiritual level. If she was prepared to go through so much trouble just for the sake of it, what would she be prepared to do when I really am in need of care? Because of my work, I usually am the one doing the caring, and it really was a pleasant experience to receive care in such a tangible way – I really experienced the gesture of my friend as a gift.

This incident also made me realise that friendship starts with the small and insignificant, that we do not need the “irrelevantly exotic” (Clapp 1996:204) to build friendship. Rather, friendship building is about “[a]ttending to the little things” (Hunt 1991:151) and to be able to see the almost insignificant as “friendship significant” (Kotzé 2006).
However, when thinking about the experiences of persons who come to see me as pastoral therapist, I cannot agree with the ideas of Wadell and Augustine, especially when they mean that friendship is only a gift from God. I have to ask: What then of those without friends? What about the young man who comes from a rehabilitation centre after eighteen months, with no friends, except for the carnal friends who landed him in trouble in the first place? Does that mean that God is indifferent towards him, that He does not care about him? I tend to agree more with Swinton (2000b:79) who contends that one characteristic of friendship is that it is voluntary. According to him, one of the primary marks of friendship is freedom. Although commitment is an integral part of the relationship, it is not forced. Friends choose to be with one another. I prefer to believe that the other young people in this young rehabilitated man’s community choose not to be friends with him, and that it is not God who does not grant him the gift of friendship.

However, according to Wadell (2002:80), saying that friendships are gifts of God does not rule out some kind of choice and confirmation on our part. For him, friendships demand our active response and ongoing co-operation. According to him, grace and choice are not incompatible, because we must act on the graces that come our way; gifts that are freely given must be freely received. Friendship can be both a grace and a choice, because we cannot only refuse the gift, we can also misuse or neglect it. Does this mean that the young rehabilitated man, in the choices he made in the past, had misused or neglected the opportunities granted to him?

### 5.3.2 Friendship is shaped in the *imago Dei*

Although none of us can love with the perfection and fullness of God, we can “model our love on God’s love; we can seek to imitate and grow in God’s love” (Wadell 2002:80). I believe that this was what Martha did. When we do so, we not only participate in the friendship life of God, but are also transformed according to it and ultimately become one with it. According to Martha, she was changed by her friendship with Jane. She says: “It was amazing to realise what it is to mean something to someone else … I know I will never be the same again”. Nouwen (1976:54) contends that when we make ourselves aware of and grateful for the “few moments in which we can create some space ourselves” caring for others, we may become more sensitive to our inner movements and be more able to affirm an open
attitude towards our fellow human beings. The Trinitarian friendship of God teaches us that we are brought to life through love and we live through love. If we are God’s image and likeness, will the love that draw us to life and perfect us, not be similar to the love we see in God? For Swinton (2000b:46) “[r]elationships which reflect the imago Dei are thus seen to be fundamentally caring relationships”. If God is a communion of persons joined together by generous, life-giving mutual love, then we will grow and flourish only insofar as we practise such love in our own lives. If we mirror the love we see in God, will we not love one another in a way that affirms and celebrates our individuality and differences and remember that such love should lead not to division and separation but to unity and peace? I cannot help but wonder why then do we not see more evidence of this kind of love in our communities? Is it the notion towards individualistic values in our culture that blinds us to this calling into caring relationships? How can we overcome this? (I will return to these questions in Chapter 6, when I discuss obstacles and impediments on our journey towards a spirituality of friendship and hospitality.)

5.3.3 Through our friendships we learn how to care for others

According to Swinton (2000b:78), friendship is seen to be a deeply personal relationship, which is embarked upon for no other reason than that both parties wish to enjoy one another’s company. Friendship is governed by what one might describe as the “principle of care” (Swinton 2000b:78), that is, both participants embark upon the relationship in order that they may care for one another and may experience the care of the other. Although in their tale of living friendship Martha was the one doing all the caring, there were other phases in their relationship where Jane cared for Martha. However, while Martha cared for Jane, other people in her life cared for her, enabling her to care for Jane. (I will return to this argument in paragraph 5.4.1.5.) Truly caring relationships demand passion, selflessness, commitment, and a genuine respect for the interests and individuality of the other. To care for another is not to engulf them (even with love), or to rule over them (Swinton 2000b:47). Every friendship is a lesson in the “discipline of love” (Wadell 2002:67) because the very nature of a friendship is to teach us to be concerned about something other than ourselves.
To care for someone is to enter into a particular type of relationship with them, the hallmarks of which are devotion and solidarity combined with a necessary respect for diversity and individuality even though the two are united within the caring relationship. It is this form of human relationship which “best images the triune God and provides the necessary context for the actualisation of the *imago Dei*” (Swinton 2000b:47). Martha, as well as I, learned this lesson well when Jane’s son Paul relapsed a few months after he left the rehabilitation program. Martha believed that Jane was “too soft” with Paul, allowing him to ruin her financially and emotionally, while her other responsibilities, including her other children and her work, were neglected. Martha, as well as most of the members of the support group, advised Jane to send Paul back to a less expensive rehabilitation facility, as Jane had spent most of her savings in an effort to “save Paul”. However, this was not what Jane wanted. She said: “I will die if I have to send my son to that place!” Martha and the rest of us had to realise that we have to care for Jane on her own terms, not ours.

I believe that this is one of the reasons why Aelred (Chapter 4) as well as Swinton (2000b:47) warn that the act of friendship can be costly. To care for someone means entering into an active, committed and loving relationship with them in which one strives to reach out to be with and for the other, through selfless gestures of love, affection and concern in order to maintain and defend the welfare of the other. For Martha, her friendship with Jane did not come without “a price”. She said: “*When I came home from work, I was exhausted, because during the day I had to support Jane and see that she made it through the day*”. And having to see her friend suffer, while rejecting her own as well as others’ “good advice” did not make it any easier for Martha.

Robinson (2001:56) also warns that “any embodiment of love is risky”. The father in the prodigal son parable ran the risk of being made to look a fool, or of losing his son. The person who offers care in a more formal setting, as part of a care group, or a professional, runs the risk of “failing, of seeming incompetent”.

True friendship does therefore not come without its difficulties. Sometimes we as friends cannot cope with the strain of caring in a sacrificial way. Then there is need for a place where friends can unburden themselves, express their grief, anger,
frustrations and so forth. The maintenance of a “solidarity-friendship” (Swinton 2000b:142) needs a “space” to express their grief and confusion, someone to act as a sounding board for them to express their own emotions. Martha’s husband offered her this space where she could unburden herself from the emotional strain her caring for Jane brought about. In Chapter 7, when I discuss faith communities as healing communities, I build further on this argument, in a section that I call “caring can be dangerous”, exploring ideas on caring for the caregiver.

Friends can also make mistakes. Though imperfect, the faithfulness, solidarity and love expressed by friends through their loving presence and committed perseverance can be fundamental in enabling a person to live through a chaos narrative of woundedness. As Jane remarked: “Although I found Martha's constant caring presence sometimes a bit overbearing (she sometimes wanted to tell me what to do and what not to do, and then I thought that she really do not know what she’s talking about), I know that I never could have made it without that same constant caring presence.” In Chapter 7 I return to this issue when I discuss healing communities.

**5.3.4 Through our friends we learn about ourselves**

Good friends teach us about ourselves, including aspects of ourselves we might prefer not to know. Apart from caring for our physical needs, a caring friend helps us to see things as they really are rather than as we may have created them in our own mind (Swinton 2000b:78). It sometimes takes a reasonably close relationship before one person can talk with another about experiences in which either may have a one-sided or distorted view. It is possible for us to accept differing views from those with whom we are free to exchange information and test perceptions. Therefore, friendships are an important source of knowledge and understanding about ourselves, not only because our best friends come to know us better than anyone else, but also because sometimes our friends know us better than we know ourselves. We actively relate to others because we care. We see a lot more than the surface of those we care for. Often with a glance we can discern that a friend is worried, sad, excited or happy. Hearing what is said both in content and tone is essential. Sharing what is happening occurs through all kinds of direct and subtle communication. In the interactions of life with friends we test our observations, enlarge our understandings, give ourselves, and enrich our lives. According to
Robinson (2001:46), the love of a friend has an epistemic function, as it is the way of revealing the other. Love goes “beyond artificial boundaries to reveal the humanity of the other”. Within stressful situations, in and through the relationship of friendship, a person can be enabled to come to understand their situation in a different light, and in so doing be “enabled to cope more effectively” with stress and stressful situations (Swinton 2000b:96).

Although Jane rejected Martha’s advice on how to treat her son and herself, Martha’s persistent caring invited Jane to think about herself and her other children as well, and not just Paul. It rang true somewhere in the back of her mind, giving her strength when, eventually, she new that she could not go on any more. Gradually Jane realised that Paul could not live at her home any longer, and she made plans to find accommodation for him. At last she found a Halfway House in Johannesburg she could afford financially. The Saturday night, before the Monday that he was supposed to move to the Halfway House, Paul came home after an outing with booze and drugs. Jane realised “the halfway house plan is not going to work. They will kick him out sooner than he had entered the place”. Jane gave him an ultimatum: He goes back to rehab, or she calls the police to arrest him for all the things he has stolen from her. Knowing his mother and her “soft heart”, he refused rehab. Even when she called the police in his presence, he still believed she was bluffing. However, when the police arrived and set the process in motion for his arrest, he realised that she was serious, and agreed to return to rehab. His brother and nephew took him that same night. I sincerely believe that Jane’s caring friend Martha helped her to see things as they really were, rather than as she might have created them in her own mind, as she wanted to see things. Because Martha was outside the immediate circle of Jane’s troubles, she provided a perspective Jane could not see while being caught up in the turmoil of her difficulties. And in the end, that perspective helped her and strengthened her when she had to do what was “the most difficult thing I ever had to do”.

Because our friends care for us “outside the emotional force field of kinship” (Sandmaier 1995a:68), they have the extraordinary capacity to both champion our changes and to insist on none at all. The friends we treasure most persist in thinking us funny, smart and admirable even when we seriously doubt it, and their generous
belief in us give us freedom to sometimes also be bumbling and moody and occasionally be a bit of a bore. At its finest, friendship offers us love without pressure. It is through our friends that we discover that we are “irrefutably individual and that still, we belong” (Sandmaier 1995a:68).

5.3.5 We need a place to relax our hearts

One of the great joys of friendship is the depth of sharing that can occur between friends. We need someone with whom we can be completely open, someone with whom we can “relax our heart” and share all our “confidences and plans” (Wadell 2002:114). Hunt (1991:157) agrees that we need people like us with whom we can be at home without explaining presuppositions at every turn. For Aelred (Wadell 2002:115), the purpose of this sharing is more spiritual than therapeutic. In Jane’s experience, she felt lonely and isolated because she could not share her troubles with her colleagues, and she had no one else. Although she believed at first “I could make it on my own”, she realised, after experiencing ‘relaxing her heart’ in the company of her friend Martha, that she actually could not make it on her own and that she needed the friendship Martha, and later the support group offered. However, Hunt (1991:157) warns that we also need to become friends with people who are quite different, because we need different voices to participate in the conversation.

5.3.6 Our friends help us stay committed

Our friends help us stay committed to the most important goals, projects and aspirations of our lives. According to Pfohl (1980:80), a very important factor in relationships is trust. Caring relationships require dependable and appropriate behaviour if they are to last and grow. Caring needs to be consistent. We cannot establish much of a friendship with someone who greets us warmly one day and is cool and indifferent another. If Martha did this, would Jane ever have trusted her with her deepest pain and embarrassment? Friendship occurs when people learn they can count on us. We “find ourselves becoming dependable, consistent, caring disciples when we value others and apply ourselves to becoming friends” (Pfohl 1980:80). I believe that this is what Martha did for Jane - she applied herself to become a friend for Jane when she consciously made the decision to make herself available to be a friend for Jane. Elma and Lorinda also applied themselves to
become friends with Mary. I believe this is what Derrida (1997:21) means when he argues that it is not possible to love while one is simultaneously, at the same time, the friend of numerous others. If it takes this much effort to be a good friend, you cannot be a good friend for too many persons at the same time.

And sometimes, when our enthusiasm and interest in projects that we once were enthusiastic about wane, we need some way to sustain our enthusiasm for the projects and purposes to which we have given our lives. Especially if they share in them, our friends can help us sustain love and appreciation for these most important activities of our lives. The value of any activity is enhanced when others partake in it as well. We need other people “who care about what we care about, who care about us caring for it, and who care about it with us” (Wadell 2002:71) [Wadell’s emphasis]. No matter how worthwhile a project or activity might be, if we are left to pursue it alone, it is easy to grow discouraged and indifferent. I can testify to the truth of this argument. If it were not for the support of my husband and my friends, I would have given up on writing this thesis long ago. It is only because of the numerous “chats” that my husband revived my own enthusiasm for my work and this research project, finding strength to go on. I also have a friend and colleague whose persistent encouragement and availability when I feel down and dispirited, is invaluable to me. Because she went through the process of writing a thesis recently, she understands and knows how to revive my enthusiasm. For me, the value of this activity is definitely enhanced because of my husband and my friend’s participation and interest in what I am doing. By caring about what I care about, my husband and my friend care with me.

According to Wadell (2002:72), the community of the friends of God, the church, plays an important role in encouraging us in living a life of discipleship, and helping each other with the tests and challenges of a life of discipleship. Although “Jesus predicted a cross for all his followers, … he never said we have to bear those crosses alone” (Wadell 2002:72). The story in the previous paragraph of my husband and my friend caring for me, is about caring with someone on a micro level. I believe that what Wadell means here is that, as the community of friends of God, the faith community is invited to care in discipleship with others in the community, on a macro
scale. However, the story of Linda and her family, is testimony that this is unfortunately not always true about our communities of faith.

According to Friedman (1993:190), friendship provides some of the best examples of “particularized person-based commitment”. Such commitment, not based on generalised moral guidelines, but focused on the uniqueness of a particular person, acknowledges and celebrates the uniqueness of that friend. A friend’s “successes become occasions for our own joy; her judgments may provoke our reflection or deference; her behaviour may encourage our emulation; and the causes that she champions may inspire our own devotion” (Friedman 1993:191). Friendship provides us with an inclination or invitation to take our friends seriously, and to take seriously what our friends care about (Friedman 1993:192). We may be invited to consider our friend’s values and principles, and as we learn about how it manifests in their lives, we can consider our own values and principles in a new light. I have a friend and colleague, Marietjie, whose mission as pastoral therapist is to care with gay people. Through her, I have learned a lot about homosexuality, and the pain and isolation gay Christians have to endure. Her cause inspired my own devotion, not only towards gay people, but any person who is different from me. Through my interaction with my friend, I learned about her values and principles, and considered my own values and principles in a new light. Being Marietjie’s friend enriches my own life – not only my personal life, but also my professional life.

According to Friedman (1993:193), we may find reasons to reject what our friends value and abide by, or we can re-evaluate our own. I have another friend, (I will call her E) whose belief system is grounded in very fundamental values. Recently, a gay person we both know, came up in a conversation we had. E made it clear that according to her belief system, homosexuality is a sin and wrong and that is the last word about it! In the case of my friend Marietjie, I was inspired by her cause and re-evaluated my own values. With my friend E, I also considered her values, but in the end I rejected her point of view, choosing to abide by the non-judgmental and caring values I share with my friend Marietjie. I was invited by these extreme viewpoints my two friends hold, to consider my own point of view, challenging me to re-evaluate the values I choose to live my life by.
5.3.7 Through our friends we learn lessons in ethical ways of being

In Chapter 3, when arguing for an ethical spirituality of participation and mutual care, I discussed my interpretation of the difference between ethics and morality. I argued that moralists stand for the adherence to rules, lacking an awareness of their own responsibility. Ethical behaviour, however, includes the responsible reflection of the consequences of our actions. Ethical concern “arises at the moment when self-awareness emerges and when, therefore, the possible consequences of one’s actions for another human being of personal importance are consciously reflected” (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:205). When I refer to character or goodness in the next paragraphs, it is with this perception of ethical ways of being, in mind.

Through our friends, our character is developed. Good friendships “are indispensable for life because we become good by spending time with good people” (Aristotle quoted by Wadell 2002:72). According to Cooper (2002:206), Augustine argues that “what is loved is key to the shape that our lives – both individual and collective – take. The kinds of things we love, and how we love them, make us the kind of beings we end up being”. We are always better for spending time with good friends, as good friends help us to become our best selves. We grow in goodness and virtue and holiness in company with others, who like ourselves, want to become good. Friedman (1993:196) agrees when she contends that friendship “can be an invaluable source of … moral transformation”. According to her, guidelines for ethical ways of being are “tested” by concrete human lives. Our everyday experiences can seem to confirm or to disconfirm our abstract ethical guidelines, or they can seem inconclusive or irrelevant. Because we might comprehend our own personal experiences in limited terms, or because the range of our own experience might be narrow in virtue of the restricted opportunities of our own lives, we do not always have the experiential or conceptual resources on our own to gain new ethical insights. Friedman (1993:197) contends that although friendship is not the only route, it offers one potential pathway toward such transformations, being widely available and accessible. The needs, wants, fears, experiences, projects, and dreams of our friends can frame for us new standpoints from which we can explore the significance and worth of values and ethical standards. In friendship, our commitments to our
friends, afford us access to whole ranges of experience beyond our own. Based on this “empirical” grasp of the ethically relevant features of the experiences of our friends, we broaden and enrich our own empirical base for evaluating both the abstract ethical guidelines we already hold and alternatives we might consider (Friedman 1993:198). My interaction with my two friends, Marietjie and E, was in fact such an invaluable source of ethical transformation. Abstract moral guidelines were tested by a concrete human life, the gay person my friend E and I were talking about. My commitment to my friend Marietjie, afforded me access to a range of experiences beyond my own. I only hope that my friend E’s base for evaluating her own values and moral guidelines was broadened and enriched through her interaction with me. Because I believe that it is not for me to define what a good person is, I do not mean to say that she should also adopt the values I choose to abide by. My only hope is that she was challenged to consider her stance, evaluating it in terms of the consequences for the gay person we were talking about, and then made a decision about her values and ethical stance in the light of that fresh understanding.

In summary, Friedman (1993:198) contends that:

> Friendship is a close relationship in which trust, intimacy, and disclosure opens up for us whole standpoints other than our own. Through seeing what my friend counts as a harm done to her, for example, and seeing how she suffers from it and what she does in response, I can try on, as it were, her interpretive claim and its implications for moral practice. I can attend to what happens as a result of her acquiescence and accommodation or as a result of her resistance and rebellion.

The stories our friends tell will be informed by their conceptualisations, values and standards. These stories will thus live for us in the terms that reflect our friends’ perspective, one that we not necessarily share. Wadell (2002:73) agrees that we learn in the company of our friends what a good life truly is and what it means to be a good person. According to him, they help us have courage and persevere when faced with hardships, and they sometimes keep us humble. Our friends help us become better than we ever could be. In some ways we are “the handiwork of our friends” (Wadell 2002:73). In a sense I can say that to a certain extent, I am the handiwork of my friend Marietjie.

However, Friedman (1993:205) warns that if we want this to happen, to become better persons because of our friends, we have to balance commitment to our own
values and principles, and those of our friends. Carnal friendships, for instance, will not necessarily invite us to become better persons. I believe that we also have the responsibility to sometimes challenge our friends. A friend tells the following story: “When I was about eight years old, and I for the first time was seduced into behaviour of bullying a smaller boy, my friend told me that what I was doing was not right, because the other boy was smaller than me. Today, almost fifty years later, I still remember that incident. And I believe that played a significant part in me becoming a person who is against all forms of violence.”

Although Martha went to all extents to support her friend Jane, she also pointed out to Jane that she was neglecting her other responsibilities while focusing all her energy and financial resources on helping Paul.

I therefore do believe that friendship is not only about supporting our friends; it is also about challenging them. It is when we reflect honestly, in the context of friendship, upon our stories, beliefs and values, that our participation in each other’s stories can invite us into ethical ways of being (Kotzé 2002).

Kotzé (2006) points out that this is also true in terms of research. Because we are blinded by the discourses that constitute us, we need the eyes and voices of the participants to the research to keep us on the “right” track.

This is also true for faith communities as communities of friends; only when we take friendship seriously will we be able to challenge each other into ethical ways of being. Without a spirituality of friendship, submerged in a culture of radical individualism, everyone’s concern is for him/herself, and friends are there for support and care, but not to challenge us when we neglect our concern for the well-being of our fellow human beings. That is why Hunt (1991:176) contends that friendship provides clues for re-appropriating symbols for the divine, ethical norms with human beings, and appropriate codes of behaviour toward animals and the earth. Most of all they provide the impetus for communities of justice-seeking friends to engage in active reflection and reflective action to create a friendly world (Hunt 1991:176).
5.3.8 Our friends as companions in hope

Life is often hard for us, more than any of us can handle alone. According to Aelred (Wadell 2002:112), no matter how blessed we may be, eventually we face times of adversity and hardship. And no matter how hard we try to bring order and peace to our lives, there are moments when everything seems to be falling apart. None of us can navigate these perils of life alone, and according to Aelred, we should not try to do so. White (1995:105) agrees when he suggests a “nurturing team” to assist people while they navigate through difficulties in their lives. Sometimes we need to be rescued. Sometimes we need others to lean on, someone to take our hand and guide us along when our luck runs out, and this is what friends do for us. At moments of chaos and confusion, suffering and loss in our lives, our friends do not want us to be alone. They want to be with us and help us through our tribulations. According to Sandmaier (1995a:68), we need our friends because they hold us up when we are falling, they persuade us things will get better when we are feeling sad or rejected, and according to Weingarten (2000) they “do hope” for us when we have no hope. That is why Aelred, echoing the Book of Sirach, speaks of friendship as “the medicine of life”, a “tonic for all that might befall us” (Wadell 2002:113). When I reflect on the experience of Jane, these ideas rang true in my mind. In Jane’s words: *I wouldn’t have made it through those difficult times were it not for the support and love of my friend Martha*. The support group also became part of her nurturing team.

In cultures where “the distorting ideology of consumerism, individualism and violence” (Wadell 2002:74) are prevailing, friendships can offer a much more promising and hopeful way of life. Many of us began to make important changes in our lives when we found a friend who shared our disenchantment. Instead of feeling isolated by our convictions, we discovered a companion who agreed that there has to be something better, something more fulfilling, something worthier of our devotion. I do believe that my shared enthusiasm and disenchantment with the situation gay Christians find themselves in, eased the isolation Marietjie, my friend, experienced because of her convictions. And it was Martha’s support as her companion in hope that persuaded Jane to invite more companions in hope into her life by attending the meetings of the support group for the parents of young people trapped in drug addiction.
Wadell (2002:130) adds that we cannot live without hope because hope, along with patience and courage, “fortifies” us in dealing with all the challenges and adversities of life. And according to Carr (1989:54) hope is not merely an option; it is a fundamental component of living. However, hope can easily be lost when we “feel we are navigating life alone” (Wadell 2002:130). Jane testifies to the truth of this argument: While she tried to navigate life alone through all her troubles, she was infected with hopelessness; when she allowed Martha into her private life and shared her troubles, hope seeped back into her experience. Therefore, I agree with Wadell (2002:130) that it is exactly the necessity but precariousness of hope that makes it so important for the church, as the community of the friends of God, to be a “dwelling place of hope”. Robinson (2001:176) agrees when he contends that the “primal ground of hope is not in the future but in the present and above all in the other”.

Weingarten (2000:401) also argues that hope is too important and its effects on body and soul too significant to be left to individuals alone. For her, hope must be the responsibility of the community. Weingarten (2000:401) refers to various versions of the myth of Pandora who opened a jar or a box she was not supposed to open. In one version, she opened a jar and led out all the miseries now known to us. When she slams the lid back on the jar, hope was trapped inside. In another version, when she opened the box all the blessings the gods had put inside, except one, escaped, making it the only blessing available to mortals. In each of the versions of the myth, hope remains in a closed space, contained, whether in a box or a jar. Each version of the myth construes hope as residing inside one object, and by analogy, one individual. Hope is “solitary, solo, alone”. According to Weingarten (2000:401), this view corresponds with the common individualised view of hope as a feeling that is the property or quality of one individual. However, for Weingarten (2000:402) hope “is something we do with others”.

One goal of the pastoral relationship is therefore to guide persons “infected with hopelessness”, in “developing meaningful relationships with a community of hopers” (Lyall 2001:106) – the community of the friends of God. These friends represent God and the whole history of the Christian tradition – an identifiable community that projects itself into the future. Since “hoping is a shared experience it has a
contagious quality” (Lyall 2001:106). People can “catch” the atmosphere of hoping from their friends as the people of God with whom they get involved (Lyall 2001:106).

However, Wadell (2002:131) wonders whether we do live in a culture of hope. For him, hope is the virtue that orients us to fulfilment, the virtue by which we seek, despite hardships and discouragements, our outmost possibilities in life. For Christians, hope is the truly theological virtue, rooted in grace, by which we turn our lives toward God and each day seek God and happiness with God. It is through hope that we never give up on God’s great promises to us. Short of the Kingdom of God, no human being fully comprehends the love and goodness of God or can completely possess “the beatitude of God” (Wadell 2002:132), and it is this radical incompleteness, coupled with the inevitable disappointments and discouragements of life, that makes hope necessary but sometimes also fragile. We may be anchored in a promise that assures us of fulfilment, but hardships in life can make that promise seem not only distant but unreachable, and at such moments our “hearts can feel not the warmth of hope but the chill of despair” (Wadell 2002:132). This is why there has to be a community that embodies hope. This is why the church is so important if there is to be a restoration of hope in our world. We need a people, a “community committed to embodying a genuine story of hope” (Wadell 2002:135). The “real ‘Hope Unit’ should not be the psychiatric ward but the church, the body of Christ” (Wadell 2002:136). Although I agree with Wadell that the church should carry a genuine story of hope, I prefer an argument of “both and” as apposed to “either or”. I would therefore suggest that instead of positioning the psychiatric ward as hope unit against the faith community, both can carry a message of hope.

I believe that the argument of the group of counsellors that the image of God as friend brings God closer to us humans, makes it easier to connect with God (Chapter 4). This argument can also be applied in connection with the notion of hope. Hope demonstrated by friendly companions will be experienced in a more tangible and real way than hope promised by a far-away God. Although Jane is a spiritual person, living in a close personal relationship with God, it was the physical presence and the practical actions of her friend Martha, together with the support group - the embodiment of their friendship - that restored her hope. Her friends, as the body of Christ, was her “Hope Unit”.
But what is hope? For Moltmann (1997:39), our true hope in life is “wakened and sustained and finally fulfilled by the great divine mystery which is above us and in us and round about us, nearer to us than we can be to ourselves. It encounters us as the great promise of our life and this world: nothing will be in vain. It will succeed. In the end all will be well”. Wadell (2002:136) quotes the theologian Thomas Aquinas who described hope as the virtue by which we believe something difficult is nonetheless possible to attain – “usually with the help of others”. According to Aquinas, we are “much more inclined to be hopeful when we have friends to rely on”. For Aquinas, as for Weingarten (2000:401), hope is not a solitary virtue because we never hope *alone*, we always hope *together*. Hope is not something we can achieve for ourselves. Instead, it is a gift we receive, first from God in grace, Christ, and the Spirit, but also from “those who stand by us and refuse to abandon us as we are challenged to fathom the darkness” (Wadell 2002:136). None of us can hope alone. We need companions in hope. This is why hope is connected to friendship and community and hope is impossible without them. What our companions in hope do for us and we do for them, is that we “punch holes in the darkness” (Wadell 2002:137) together. I believe this is why, in the absence of companions in hope in her community, Linda turned to cyberspace for companions in hope.

According to Moltmann (1997:42), the universal church is called to life through God’s universal hope, and represents that hope. He pleads that the church represents God’s coming Kingdom by standing up for the rights of coming generations today, and making itself the voice of the people who don’t have a voice of their own. That makes me wonder how will our churches be different if they could bring hope to the world through participating caring practices as friends of God? If our faith communities were people who “punch holes in the darkness”? What will our faith communities be like, if they embody and witness in the church as a community of friends, hope as a virtue? For I believe that hope is an essential virtue for life because in the absence of hope, we can find it difficult to continue on our journey to fulfilment in God.

After Jane’s husband died (a few days after her son entered rehab), there were times when she was anxious, angry and depressed. There were also times when she felt
utterly hopeless. However, there was never a time when her hopelessness was without the possibility of relief. Through her solidarity-friendship, Martha enabled the process of hope in the face of hopelessness. The gospel narrative pointed beyond the chaos of Jane’s life at that stage towards “the mystery of the crucified God who suffered in order that hope might become a possibility” (Swinton 2000b:143). By embodying that mysterious narrative, Martha (and later the support group) revealed something of the hope of that story in the concreteness of their relationship. In bearing witness to the God whom both of them worshipped, Martha was able to reconnect Jane with a church community, and in so doing enabled her to experience her situation within the context of the community of God’s people. In this way, the relationship of friendship acted as “a bridge between [Jane] and the community” (Swinton 2000b:143). In a very real sense the friendship between Martha and Jane was community.

This tale of living friendship shows the vital importance of social support in enabling people to cope with extremely stressful circumstances. Through the committed presence of her friend Martha, Jane was enabled to develop enough “tension-capacity” (Swinton 2000b:143) to be able to live creatively within the confines of her suffering. Martha’s offering of embodied love, hope, the friendship, and spiritual solidarity enabled Jane to cope constructively with the depression and anxiety that inevitably accompany such trying circumstances.

In order to achieve the kind of friendship described in the above paragraphs, we need love.

According to Lore-Kelly (1983:109), love is probably the most thought about, most written about, and most wondered about of all human experiences. It has been examined in all of its manifestations: physical, emotional, spiritual, and ontological. It is the object of poetry, song, art, philosophy, and moral scrutiny. It motivates almost everyone and is promoted by styles of life as disparate as those expressed in the setting of a nightclub and a contemplative monastery. For Peterson (2005:310), it is one of the slipperiest words in the language. In the next paragraphs, I will explore the love of friendship, mirrored by the love of God for us.
5.4 LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

In classical thought, the possibility that friendship “can be an open offer of love, extended even to the wicked without prior condition” (Carmichael 2004:34), was unthinkable. However, the history of salvation recounted in the Hebrew Scriptures enshrines the mystery of merciful love at every moment. As Creator, God “imparts goodness to creation and draws from that creation human beings in God’s own image, for friendship with himself and one another” (Carmichael 2004:35). In the Bible we see human beings falling from that intimacy and God drawing us back, covenaniting steadfast love to individuals and groups that respond and unite themselves to him. Abraham, Moses, and seekers after divine Wisdom enter God’s friendship. Through the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), the Wisdom tradition imparts “nuggets of advice” on friendship, human and divine. According to Carmichael (2004:35), divine love is revealed in a new way in the incarnation, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus summarises the Law in the two-fold love-command: to love God, and your neighbour as yourself. According to Heyns (1978:131), our lives with our fellow humans are destined to mirror our lives with God. What God is for me, I have to be for others. And what is God for me? Through creation and His keeping of me, through His compassion and His grace towards me, God proves one thing: His love for me. And that is why I, as His representative on earth, through my actions towards others, should reflect this love of God towards humankind. According to Jeremias (1971:213), love is “not just for those with a like mind, but even for enemies”.

According to Lore-Kelly (1983:110), the act of friendship calls for agapic love. Cicero speaks of caritas as the love of friendship (Carmichael 2004:26), and in Latin, agape would become caritas, in older English it becomes “charity” and in modern English simply “love” (Carmichael 2004:39). New Testament writers preferred the word agape over philia (friendship) because friendship was viewed as “inherently worldly, self-seeking love” (Carmichael 2004:37). Swinton (2000b:86) refers to shalomic friendship.

For the biologists Maturana and Varela ([1987] 1998:246), the biological foundation of social phenomena is that “without love, without acceptance of others living besides us, there is no social process and, therefore, no humanness. They define love as
a novel experience brought forth through reasoning, through the encounter with a stranger, or, more directly, through the expression of a biological interpersonal congruence that lets us see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us. This act is called love … the acceptance of the other person beside us in our daily living …. Anything that undermines the acceptance of others, from competency to the possession of truth and on to ideologic certainty, undermines the social process because it undermines the biologic process that generates it.


Thinking of Shakespeare’s comment in Romeo and Juliet “for what we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet”, I prefer to use the word agape to express the creative love of God embodied in our friendships with one another, where we create space for the other and reflect on the consequences of our actions onto the well-being of others.

5.4.1 **Agape – ethical ways of loving**

Robinson (2001:42) refers to agape which is “God’s love for humanity”, or according to Carmichael (2004:36), it is “God’s freely given love”. According to Robinson (2001:44), agape is most often characterised by the term “unconditional”. Nygren (Carmichael 2004:36) describes it as “sacrificial”. It is not based on attraction or achievement or lack of achievement of the other. It is a love of the will, not simply of feeling, and which loves the other “simply because they are the other” (Carmichael 2004:36). According to Heyns (1978:132), agape love realises God’s love for me – not because of what I am worth, but for who I am. He loves me without any preconditions. For that reason I love my neighbour – not because of what he/she is worth, but for what he/she is. My love for others does not exist only as feelings and thoughts, but is being demonstrated in the actions through which I put myself to the service of others. For Robinson (2001:72), agape is about how I relate to my God, my neighbour, and myself. And according to Swinton (2000b:78), friendship in its ideal form reveals something of God’s shalom (that deep sense of God’s peace and well-being) within the relational counters of human beings.

Lore-Kelly (1983:110) describes agapic love as the dimension of love which intensifies the being and power of the other. It is creative love. It accepts whom the other actually is (being) and gives deeper reality to whom the other chooses to be (power). The choice to radicalise our love by accepting the agape dimension is the
choice to allow the creative love of God to be active within us. It is the decision to allow nothing to separate us from the other – not ugliness, nor stupidity, nor hatred, nor fear, nor rejection – for sometimes that brokenness is all we are capable of. According to Lore-Kelly (1983:111), God’s love in us is agape; it is the life empowering pastoral ministry. Community is brought about by agape because it penetrates beyond whatever might separate persons, and supports whatever has the potential for bringing about unity in life.

In John 15:13-15, the word agape is used to indicate the love of a true friend, setting these verses, according to Carmichael (2004:39), at the heart of the interpretation of Christian love as friendship.

For Robinson (2001:44-45), such a love is often expressed in the idea of covenant. It involves several things:

i) It is a gift, and is not based on any contractual terms. It precedes, and may well initiate the relationship;

ii) The concern for the other is constant. Agape promises to be there whatever the response of the other;

iii) As the covenant defies precise specifications, it remains open in terms of possibilities. It has a growing edge which nourishes rather than limits relationships.

The covenant is often not about an individual agreement but about one between whole communities, thus raising the possibility of an agreement that can bring “many people together into a network of relationships” (Robinson 2001:45).

Rather than attempting to find a definition, I will explore a few values depicting of agapic love.

5.4.1.1 Agapic love invites openness and inclusivity

Shalomic friendship is offered in an open relationship not only to those with whom one has a natural affinity, but also towards the outsider; those with whom one cannot “naturally” identify; those with whom one struggles to relate; those with whom the “principle of likeness” would ordinarily exclude from full relational participation within society (Swinton 2000b:86). I believe that if the community Linda and her family were
part of, embraced values of this kind of friendship-love, they were to be offered this kind of friendship, even though they, or rather one part of their family, was outside the “principle of likeness”.

When people experience agapic love, they experience something of the God who inspires it and to whom it points. When they experience something of that God, they begin to experience themselves as creatures who are loved, accepted, and valued; they experience themselves as “cherished beings who is made in the image of God who is love” (Swinton 2000b:86). Jane experienced herself as a cherished being, made in the image of God who is love, through the agapic love offered to her by her friend Martha. However, for Linda and her family, the contrary was true: they experienced themselves not as cherished beings, and in the absence of friendship from their community, more than once they wondered where the love of God was.

For Robinson (2001:73), this “law of love is unnatural …. It is far more natural to defend one’s own interest”. I believe Robinson could be referring to the community Linda and her family lived in, who defended their own interest at the cost of this family in pain. However, I believe that we as Christians are not supposed to keep this love reserved only for others like us. I agree with Maturana (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:197) when he claims that love is “a feature of human co-existence. It opens up the possibility of reflection and is based on a form of perception that allows the other to appear legitimate. In this way, a space arises in which cooperation seems possible and our loneliness is transcended: The other is given a presence to which we relate with respect”. I do believe therefore that agapic love is about creating space for the other – including strangers and enemies. In Chapter 7 I return to these issues when I discuss healing communities.

In experiencing agapic friendship, persons encounter, in a tangible form, the God who inspires and sustains the relationship, an experience which plays a vital part in the development of “health bringing relationships with self, others and God within the shalomitic community” (Swinton 2000b:86). Was that what Jane experienced in her friendship with Martha? Did Magda’s neighbour experience something of the love of God in her neighbour, who showed in no uncertain terms that she cared? How was Magda sustained by her community while she did the caring for her neighbour? Did
she experience agapic community from others? And Martha? Apart from her husband, who cared for her? And Lorinda and Elma?

5.4.1.2 Unconditional offering of love and care as value of agapic love

*Agape* involves the proactive reaching out with positive concern for the other (Robinson 2001:57), and provides faithful presence to the other which offers “inclusive and unconditional care” (Robinson 2001:67).

However, according to Robinson (2001:73), this kind of inclusive love is “impossibly demanding”, because it must lead to a concrete social event, something that goes beyond love of neighbour to love of enemy. For Robinson (2001:73), this is not a “fairytale world in which the enemy suddenly becomes one of us. It may be that the enemy remains the enemy, we nonetheless have to love them. This sets up an attitude of responsibility for the other in every situation” (Robinson 2001:73).

However, the responsibility to respond remains with the individual. Robinson calls this the “core aporia of agape” (Robinson 2001:74), that it demands responsibility for the other and therefore some response, but at the same time we can never know if that response is absolutely right. Magda (par 5.2.2) had no means of knowing how her neighbour would respond when she challenged her. It could have triggered more violence; the neighbours could have moved away; or the husband could have turned the violence towards them. Or Jane could have chosen not to allow Martha into the intimate corners of her life. The decision to open up and allow her colleague to become a close friend, stayed with her. Did she choose not to invite Martha into her private life, she would have missed the blessing of having the support and care of her friend. In other words, it seems as though love and risk go hand in hand – for the receiver as well as the giver. I will return to this issue in Chapter 7, paragraph 7.8.

5.4.1.3 Agapic love calls for equality and mutuality

Friendship requires a balance of similarities and difference. Friendships are not relationships of inequality and subordination, but of equality, mutuality and reciprocal respect. This is true whether the friendship is between a man and a woman, two
women, or two men. According to Wadell (2002:112), Aelred interprets the creation story that the very manner of creating the woman makes her a fitting friend for the man and the man a fitting friend for the woman. The fact that the woman was drawn from the side of the man indicates that she is equal in everything, and it is because of this that deep friendship, partnership, and affection is possible between them. If she was either too far superior to the man or too inferior, there could not be friendship because where differences are too extreme, friendship is not possible. I can believe this is true for ‘natural friendships’, but what then about ‘supernatural neighbour-love’? Is this what Moltmann means when he states that had Jesus abided by the “peer principle”, he would of necessity have had to stay in heaven (Moltmann 1994:39)? (See also par 5.4.3 where I discuss the metaphor “circle of concern”.)

According to Friedman (1993:189), relationships vary considerably: we can relate to others in ways that approach equality and mutuality; or we can relate to others in ways that involve forms of dependency or hierarchies of power and authority. According to her, friendship is a sort of relationship that is

based on approximate equality (in at least some respects) and a mutuality of affection, interest and benevolence. Friendship, in this sense, can occur between or among lovers or familial relations as well as between or among people not otherwise affiliated with one another. To a greater or lesser extent, one can be friends with one’s parents or children, siblings or spouse.

For Robinson (2001:56), the nature of love is to share power, and not to take away from the other the responsibility to see for themselves. I believe what happened between Magda and her neighbour, is what Robinson means. She never imposed her ideas, but open up a relationship in which they both were safe enough to let the neighbour know that “we can hear – we know what is going on. But we give you the chance to sort out your problems on your own terms”. Also Martha did not impose her values on Jane, even though she believed that Jane, by her “soft approach” allowed her troubled son to ruin her financially and emotionally. Martha realised that the responsibility to see for herself at her own time was left to Jane. Jane also had to take responsibility for her own actions and choices, as had Magda’s neighbours.

For Friedman (1993:189), the equality in friendship is not a matter of formal equality measurable in terms of age or years of schooling, but has to do with personality,
attitudes, emotions, and overall character. Friends should be able to respect and take an interest in one another’s perspectives.

I am not completely satisfied with these arguments. I agree with the notion of equality in friendship, when equality refers to the absence of hierarchical or power relations. But if it includes the notion towards sameness or the peer principle, I wonder about love for strangers and enemies? If Magda was only interested in a relationship that was equal and mutual in terms of the peer principle, would she in the first place have bothered to initiate contact with her neighbour? In what ways are we (and I include the wise men and women who share their wisdom and insights in the books and articles they write), influenced by the discourse of individualism? Would someone immersed in a culture of *Ubuntu* (see Chapter 3) also believe that a friendship should be mutual and equal in this sense?

### 5.4.1.4 Agapic love avoids patronising practices

True friendship will avoid engaging in patronising behaviour. Robinson (2001:56) warns that there is always the danger of patronising love, which wants to be good to the other but also wants the other to know that they are different. This happens when I do good to you so that I can feel good about myself. If Martha reached out to Jane so that she could feel good about herself, would Jane have had the confidence to share her deepest secrets and pain with her?

### 5.4.1.5 Agapic love calls for vulnerability

*Agape* love is different in that it involves a natural openness and is essentially vulnerable, partly because you have to wait, and partly because you cannot know the outcome when you share that love. Magda’s husband did not know what will happen when he knocked on his neighbour’s door, and Magda did not know what her neighbour’s reaction would be if she told her that she knew what was happening behind the closed doors of their house. It did not, however, stop them from caring in a tangible way.
5.4.1.6 **Eschatological dimension of Agapic love**

For Braaten (1974:111) eschatological ethics resemble agapic ethics; the reality of God’s eschatological kingdom that came to expression in Jesus’ life and ministry, was the power of unconditional love which means that the friendship, love, intimacy and unity we hope to enjoy on earth will be perfected in heaven. The perfect community of friendship, and therefore the most perfect and enduring intimacy, is found not on earth but in heaven (Wadell 2002:92). The very things to which friends aspire to here on earth but never totally achieve, will be perfectly fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. No matter how hard we try to know our friends and love them, our earthly relationships always reflect the limitations of our nature. I do not believe that this argument renders us the excuse to, while waiting for “someday in heaven” we here on earth do not have to take the well-being of our fellow humans seriously. We have to keep on trying, even though we human beings “are finite, limited creatures whose deepest longings are hindered by our inescapable contingency” (Wadell 2002:93). Therefore, our earthly friendships anticipate and already share in, however incompletely, the perfect friendship of the City of God.

This is my hope for the church as the community of friends of God: that although we are imperfect and struggling, we “are becoming the likeness of God” (König 1990:43). We only need to keep on loving.

5.4.1.7 **Agapic love as the embodiment of the love of God**

According to Robinson (2001:53-54), the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, persons made in the image of God, clearly sets out the sameness of God. Through the incarnation, God chooses to express himself, and embody his attitude in and through humanity. By doing this, he let go of his power and become vulnerable. However, in his embodiment he also becomes intelligible. His love is summed up in his faithfulness and his “inclusive care” and his “capacity to identify with his people”. He is both different and the same. This is partly about God being both divine and human. It is also about God only being known in the particularity of his human narrative. By extension, this reinforces the point that love itself must be embodied. If love “is not

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3 I refer here to Augustine’s metaphor of the two cities, one of God, the other of this world. In this world the two cities exist commingled temporarily, until they are separated at the last judgment (Barnes 1994:66-67).
embodied in relationships and action it is not love, but rather the idea of love” (Robinson 2001:54).

Reflecting on the friendship of Lorinda and Elma and their rather unwilling friend Mary (see Chapter 1 paragraph 1.2.6), I believe this is what is meant with the embodiment of love. Their perseverance, commitment and solidarity with Mary in the midst of her troubles embodied the gospel story that had brought them together. In a real sense the two friends’ loving solidarity-friendship imaged and revealed the friendship of God for Mary in a way that was tangible and committed. Despite their struggle to relate to Mary, the two friends managed to overcome the ‘principle of likeness’ and revealed the “principle of care” (Swinton 2000b:15).

For me, this is what living friendship is – the embodiment of friendship love in the context of the community as friends of God.

5.4.1.8 The self-sacrificial quality of agapic love

According to Robinson (2001:75) *agape* is a disinterested love which is exemplified in God’s love for his creatures. This is not motivated by any desire for personal gain, and is not based upon attractive qualities of the other. Nor is such love based upon the need of the lover, as God has no need, and there is little in sinful humanity which could attract God. As I understand, what Robinson means is that there is nothing “mutual” in our relationship with God. God does not need us, or a relationship with us. He is “self-contained” in the relationship within the Trinity. He is complete and perfect. Yet, he chooses to reach out to us humans, and to engage in a relationship with us – because he wants to. He does not ask whether we are lovable – he reaches out to us in love, offering his friendship, regardless. And if we believe that we are made in his reflection, our love towards our fellow human beings should reflect this friendship love also towards those we regard as unlovable – whether they are strangers, enemies, or simply adherents to another belief system, have another sexual orientation, or are from another race group or belong to a different political party – and not only to those with whom we think we have something in common, or that we can benefit from the relationship. Therefore, if God reaches out to me in friendship, I have to reach out in friendship to others because we are living in the community as friends of God.
Agape then is a “love which enables the unlovable to be valued” (Robinson 2001:75), or granting the other a “legitimate presence” (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:198). Such love is fundamentally about self sacrifice, a love that gives itself away, that sacrifices itself even to the uttermost. It is a “theocentric love which comes to the sinner and is then shared with others” (Robinson 2001:76). If God loves me, regardless of my imperfection, how can I not love my neighbour? How can I turn a blind eye to the family in my community, struggling with the devastating effects of drug abuse, and not reach out in loving support?

However, according to Lore-Kelly (1983:110), although agape is self-sacrificing, it is not self-effacement, self-degradation or self-extinction. Agape can be self-sacrificing because it is the radical dimension of love of self. Agape knows that the self can never be destroyed by giving – surrendering to the deep and unifying power of life – any more than Christ was destroyed by crucifixion.

This brings me to the idea of love for self. Did Jesus not command us to love our neighbour as ourselves? Where does this love of self fit into a notion of self-sacrificial, all-embracing agapic love?

5.4.2 Love of self

According to Robinson (2001:75) eros is the opposite of agape and is defined as “a natural self love, which extends its scope to embrace also benefactors of the self”. For Carmichael (2004:4), where agape is utterly altruistic love, flowing down from God, eros is selfish, possessive, desiring love “that seeks to climb up to God”. According to Heyns (1978:132), eros includes much more than erotic or sexual love. It is a longing for what I miss; a longing for closeness with God. It is an urge towards unity and perfection. To accomplish this, I “use” others. The eros loves the other because the other has some value. And if the value (beauty, intelligence, popularity, etc.) ceases to exist, the eros love also ends. The erotic love will seek community of others because of what it can provide, for example, spiritual enrichment. Erotic love will in the same way avoid community if it has nothing to offer. Erotic love does not give, but takes; it does not serve, but wants to be served; the “I” is at the centre, and everything points towards the “I” and are interpreted in terms of the “I”. According to
Robinson (2001:75), such self love is searching for reward and finding value in the attractiveness of the other.

However, Aristotle initiated a debate about self-love and its role in love for others. According to Carmichael (2004:21), Aristotle contends that self-love indicates a natural instinct of self-preservation. Love of others is like love for oneself, but there are two kinds of self-love: one right, and the other wrong. About right self-love Aristotle contends: “A good person who wishes well to his higher, intellectual self and enjoys his own company, will treat a friend in the same way, for a friend is another self” (Carmichael 2004:22). Does he mean that I will treat the other in the way I want to be treated? That I have to have the well-being of my neighbour at heart? Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas (quoted by Carmichael 2004:118) argues that loving your neighbour “as yourself”, implies that, after God, the second object of love is our own self. Today “right self-love” can be defined “in terms of the value of every person – including myself” (Carmichael 2004:173). It is “to will good to the other as to myself” (Carmichael 2004:173). Tillich (1965:29) contends that self-love is “clearly necessary”. According to him, without right self-love, we become selfish. But the “right self-love is self-affirmation, in the sense in which God sees us, or the sense in which we are essentially created”. Kornfeld (1998:30) adds that those who do not love themselves cannot love others.

Because to me the term “right” self-love, tends to be moralistic and prescriptive, I prefer to use the word self-affirmation as suggested by Tillich.

Therefore, although Christian love, or agape, move in two directions: towards God and towards neighbour, agape can also be seen as “other regard” (Robinson 2001:75-76). He distinguishes between other regard and self sacrifice. It is possible to love the other and feel a due sense of reward and happiness. And in this sense, “other regard and self interest is not incompatible” (Robinson 2001:76). In order to find a balanced view of love, Robinson (2001:78) suggests that all four forms of love: epithymia (desire); eros (the search for value); philia (friendship); and agape (the depth of love) require the others to maintain a balance. Agape has a special relationship with the others, ensuring that they do not become distorted. He warns that eros without agape, for instance, could tend towards the idolatry of the other.
According to Price (1996:90), Augustine saw a connection between the love that is the Spirit, uniting Father and Son, and the human love of neighbour perfected in Christian community. I do therefore believe that agapic love is what constitutes the difference between what Barth describes as “natural friendship” and “supernatural neighbour-love” (Chapter 3 par 3.2.3), or perhaps then *eros* (the love of natural friendship) and agapic love (the love calls for in supernatural neighbour-love). In the following paragraphs I will explore ideas on the deconstruction of the popular views on friendship – of natural friendship - according to which friendship as an “open offer” (Carmichael 2004:34) including the “unlovable” (Robinson 2001:75), is “unthinkable” (Carmichael 2004:34), inviting ideas on supernatural neighbour-love, friendship that reaches beyond peership, into our reflections on friendship. In the paragraphs following these, I explore the metaphor of a “circle of concern”.

5.5 DECONSTRUCTING FRIENDSHIP: FROM ARISTOTELIAN, EXCLUSIVE FRIENDSHIP TOWARDS CHRIST-LIKE, INCLUSIVE NEIGHBOUR-LOVE

Because we are attracted to those whom we believe to be most like us, friends are usually people whom we like, whose company we enjoy, who share our interests and activities, who are helpful and understanding, who can be trusted, with whom we feel comfortable, and who will be emotionally supportive. Those who are different impose an uncertainty and anxiety upon our lives, and we are inclined therefore to avoid those unlike us and form friendships that reinforce the world and ourselves as we might wish them to be (Swinton 2000b:83). Therefore, as I have argued in earlier paragraphs, we are often seduced to base our decisions to become friends with others, or to maintain friendships, on a “more or less conscious balance of advantages and disadvantages …. The value, or reward, of a friendship to an individual depends on the capacity of the other to provide certain ‘services’ such as emotional support, economic assistance, information, allies and connections and resources outside one’s immediate network” (Swinton 2000b:85).

Woggon (2003:267) argues that, according to Aristotelian logic, the “peership principle” draws on likeness, partiality and exclusivity. Carmichael (2004:182) also
warns that Aristotelian friendship could unite only those who are equal, excluding the others. According to her, the church falls into the same trap when a social evening means socialising with “people who are alike, who feel, think and talk the same way”, when people who happen to be different in age and sex split into different groups. However, while peership “evolves within a closed circle of relationships, the friendship of Jesus opens up this circle and changes relationships into friendships” (Woggon 2003:267). As Moltmann states, had Jesus abided by the peer principle, he would have had to stay in heaven (Moltmann 1994:39). (See also paragraph 5.4.1.3.) However, his incarnation and friendship with sinners, with tax collectors, and prostitutes offered affection, respect, and solidarity beyond peership, breaking through these exclusive circles suggested by Aristotle. According to Goodliff (1998:153), we find in the New Testament testimony of friendship between people who are different and an acceptance of one another in our differences for the sake of Christ. Christ reached out in friendship to those who were different and even hostile towards him. Among his friends were the outcasts, the disowned, who in his acceptance found the Kingdom of God come among them. For this reason, Christian friendship cannot be lived within a closed circle of the faithful and pious, of peers in other words, but only in open affection and public respect of others. Through Jesus, friendship has become an open term of proffer. It is “forthcoming solidarity” (Swinton 2000b:86).

The dilemma we find ourselves in, then, is that although we have a calling to love all our fellow human beings in Christ’s commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself that seems to mean that one should treat even strangers as if they were friends, we also recognise a particular obligation to love and help our families and friends. Derrida (1997:21) even advises us not to have too many friends at a time. How are these two related?

According to Price (1996:79), Augustine believes that Christian love shares in the love of God towards his creatures, a love in which there is pure giving and no thought of getting anything in return, since God in the perfection of his being is in need of nothing. However, since human beings share lacks and needs, love between human beings involves “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). Augustine’s thinking is that in an ideal situation, all human beings should help one another, but in the
conditions of this present and broken world, this is simply not possible. None of us can love with the perfection of God – we can only aspire to grow in God’s love. Since we cannot do good to all, we are to pay special attention to those with whom we enjoy closer contact because of the dictates of place, time and other circumstances. Growth in Christian love requires each of us to build our own circle of friends, who love one another as ourselves and help one another to grow in the love of God.

The Twelfth Century Cistercian Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx proposed six kinds of humanity, to whom all agapic love must be shown: relatives; special friends; those bound to us by obligations of duty; fellow Christians; those outside the church (Gentiles, Jews, heretics, and schismatics); and enemies (Carmichael 2004:76) (See also paragraph 4.2.2.2).

More recently, Heidish (1997:23) suggests a formation resembling a series of concentric circles when thinking about family, friends, neighbours and co-workers. In the inner circle are the most intimate people in whom we confide and for whom we will be there, “even in the middle of the night”. Another ring comprises of people who are important to us, and to whom we are important. This circle is somewhat less intimate. We do not confide as much, and have less frequent contact. In the outer circles, there are friends, neighbours and co-workers, who are friendly acquaintances. There are also other areas in which friends, neighbours and co-workers overlap, where artificial distinctions blur. According to Heidish, we all have friends, neighbours and colleagues on different levels. However, she does not take into account strangers and enemies as suggested by Aelred. She also does not mention agapic or self-sacrificial love, which I believe constitutes the difference between natural friendship and supernatural neighbour-love.

Burger (2005:157) suggests the nuclear family and extended family as the first, natural circle where we learn about faith and where we practise the values and disciplines of our faith. He also suggests friendship as a valued source of koinonia. However, we owe the love of God not only to our brothers and sisters in Christ, but to all of humanity. When we love only those who love us back, we have achieved nothing – everybody can do that. Our Christian love is tested when we are
challenged to show love and compassion to strangers and those who are different from us. We owe them that much.

However, I borrow the metaphor of a “circle of concern”, portrayed as a series of concentric circles from Heidish, with a few adaptations, including Aelred’s six kinds of humanity and the concept of agapic love for strangers and enemies, allowing also for the blurring of artificial distinctions and movement between the circles.

5.5.1 Circle of concern

I will illustrate the metaphor of the circle of concern in three diagrams: The first portrays the series of concentric circles and the second explains the circles in more detail in tabular form as well as the movement between the circles. In the third diagram, which I call the Friendship Position Map, I illustrate four possible positions of friendship.

Diagram 1: Circles of concern

The grey covering all the circles, represents God in this metaphor. We can live together because of our relationship with God, and we are connected to each other because of our relationship to God (Buber quoted by Kornfeld 1998:6).
### 5.5.2 Circles of concern in tabular form

In the following diagram I explain the different circles in more detail.

**Diagram 2: Circles of concern in tabular form**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>In the most inner circle is myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Because I love myself with <em>eros</em> love, agapic love is not a challenge, but comes easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>In the second circle is my close family: my husband, children and my very close and special friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I love them also with <em>eros</em> love, because I chose them as my friends and also find some benefit from the relationship. The call for agapic love comes almost naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>The third circle is for those bound to me by duty: my extended family, colleagues, neighbours (in the physical sense: those living next to me, in the same street, or the same block).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some of these can also be in the second circle, as I can choose my friends from my extended family; colleagues can become best friends; as can my neighbours. I love therefore not all of them in the same way. Those I choose as close friends, move up to circle number 2. <em>Eros</em> can be trickled down, but <em>agape</em> is always a challenge in the context of supernatural neighbour-love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>The fourth circle represents my faith community – those with whom I attend church on Sundays, and with whom I work on charity projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The close friends I choose from this circle, will also move up to circle number 2. Because in a way I still have a choice in the faith community I choose to attach myself to, the people I have contact with. They will most probable be like-minded to me - except perhaps for a personality clash here and there. Therefore, <em>eros</em> will still be present, and the challenge for <em>agape</em> not that intense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>The fifth circle contains the strangers, those outside my ‘comfort zone’ or sphere of experience, those people whom I do not ‘know’ and who is different from me in any way: people whose moral values differ from my own; people from other denominations, spiritualities, different cultures, other sexual orientations, and the like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choosing close friends from this circle is less likely, but not impossible. The presence of <em>eros</em> is less obvious, and the call for <em>agape</em> more demanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>The outer circle includes my enemies. I mean this in a real, extreme sense. It includes those who harmed me on a personal level: The uncle who molested me when I was little; my abusive father; the woman who murdered my sister in a moment of madness inflamed by jealousy; the burglar who shot my father right in front of my eyes; the drunken driver who killed my son in a road accident. It can also include enemies in a political sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is only in rare instances that friends are chosen from this circle, but the possibility is not excluded (the parents of Amy Biehl comes to mind). However, the challenge for agapic love is the most demanding in this circle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The first column describes the different circles, and who is portrayed in them;  
* The second column explains something of the kind of love called for in the
corresponding circle.

* The arrows in the two smaller columns on both sides illustrate the blurring or movement between the circles.

We can make friends who once were our enemies. Or someone who is today a close friend can tomorrow be a stranger. The relationship of Jane and Martha blurred in the context of this illustration: they were first colleagues, and then became close friends as they journeyed together through Jane’s difficulties.

The circle of concern is not about physical closeness: the person living next to me can fit into the fifth circle, while someone living in the same house as me, can belong to the sixth circle.

5.5.3 The Friendship Position Map

Building further on the concept of a circle of concern, I suggest a Friendship Position Map. The map is made up by two main concepts:

- the circle of concern, which indicates inclusivity as apposed to exclusivity; and
- ethical ways of love and doing friendship, indicating the level of concern for the well-being of others.

These two concepts are the foundation of the two axes that form the map:

The vertical axis represents the six circles of concern, starting at the bottom with the first circle, the self, and ending at the top with the outer circle which comprises others, including strangers and enemies. This concept of self and other, refers to other individuals as well as communities.

The horizontal axis represents the ethical ways of love: starting on the left with no concern for the consequences of my actions for the well-being of others, or no agapic love, moving to the right side of the axis where I create space for others, reflecting on the consequences of my actions on the well-being of others.
5.5.3.1 Description of the possible positions on the Friendship Position Map

In the following paragraph I give a concise description of each of the possible positions on the Friendship Position Map.

**Position 1: Agape, or ethical ways of doing friendship**
This position represents the kind of friendship where evaluating the consequences of my actions upon the well-being of others, including strangers and enemies, becomes my ethical way of being, or doing friendship. Super natural neighbour love, shalomic friendship and spiritual friendship as described in Chapter 4 would be positioned here.
Position 2: Self-affirmation
This position represents the kind of self-love that does not exclude concern for the well-being of others. It is about care for the self in order to be able to care with others; it is where I learn to do to others what I want them to do to me. It is about self-affirmation. Natural friendship and some forms of Aristotelian friendships could be positioned in this quadrant.

Position 3: Individual egoism
Positioned in this quadrant, I am only concerned for myself with no regard for others or their well-being. Narcissism would also be a characteristic of friendships positioned in this quadrant. Carnal friendships, among others, would be positioned in this quadrant.

Position 4: Utility friendship
Positioned in this quadrant, I do good to others in order to receive something in return, or to be seen or respected for my good deeds; it is about self-love, including benefactors of the self. Utility friendships, as well as certain natural and Aristotelian friendships would be positioned in this quadrant.

5.5.3.2 Movement between the four different positions on the Friendship Position Map

One’s position in the Friendship Position Map is not static. During the course of daily life, a person moves regularly between the different friendship positions. One can also be in more than one position at the same time. To illustrate what I mean by the Friendship Position Map, and our movement between the different positions in the map, I will relate the story of the spider which happened at a recent camping holiday with my family and friends.

One night my husband and I had an argument. While no one of us cared to see the point of the other, we went to bed still not at very good terms. Both of us were at that stage positioned in position 3. However, early the next morning the presence of an innocent spider changed everything. My husband woke up, visited the ablution facilities, and came back to sleep. However, when I had to make my early morning
visit to the ablution facilities, I was stopped in my tracks when I noticed a huge, hairy spider right at the entrance to the tent. I could not suppress a soft scream (I did not completely left position 1 as I still cared for the other campers who were still sleeping) but hard enough to attract the attention of my sleeping husband (which position me in position 4). When he enquired about my scream, he started moving towards position 1, but when I told him about the spider, his only response was that I should make a plan with the spider or find another entrance, he was not ready to leave position 3. I was rather taken aback by my usually caring and concerned husband’s very cold-hearted response, and took some time contemplating my options – killing the spider was no option (part of me kept on to position 1 although I believe that the spider definitely was in position 3), but passing so close to it was not an option either; finding another entrance would mean shifting a lot of stuff, and I did not have that much time (remember, it was early morning and I was on my way to the ablution facilities). By this time my husband thawed from his cold-heartedness in position 3, moving slightly in the direction of position 1 where his concern for me and the spider over-ran his concern for himself, and he offered some advice. He suggested that I use the broom to chase the spider away, which I did. But unfortunately the spider ran into the tent instead of outside (see, the spider had no concern for the well-being of me or my husband!). That was the end of my husband’s morning sleep: he left the comfort of his bed and of position 3, and came to my rescue – leaping into position 1.

Reluctantly I have to position myself in position 3 and 4 for most of the time: being more concerned about my own discomfort than my husband’s wish for a little more sleep, and “using” my husband’s caring nature to come to my rescue. Or I can stretch the situation and position myself in position 2: if I did not take care of myself, I wouldn’t have been able to make him his first cup of coffee.

In the following Friendship Position Map, I position my husband (in dark grey) and my own (in lighter grey) movement through the map.
To a certain extent, the tales of living friendship and discussions in the previous paragraphs focused on friendship in the inner circles in the metaphor of a circle of concern, positioned mostly in the third and fourth quadrant on the Friendship Position Map. However, like I argued earlier, these artificial distinctions blur sometimes. The friendship between Martha and Jane, for example, in many ways fits into the framework of a natural Aristotelian friendship based on reciprocal values between two women who have much in common and find each other’s company pleasant, positioning their friendship in the second circle or position 2 or position 4 on the Friendship Position Map. In other ways, it is a spiritual friendship, calling for agapic, supernatural neighbour-love, co-locating it more in the outer circles, or position 1 on the Friendship Position Map. Nonetheless, it still was a relationship between two persons, finding joy in each other’s company. Therefore, our friendships will not necessarily be positioned in only one position. The following diagram represents the friendship of Martha and Jane, on the Friendship Position Map:
In the following paragraphs I will discuss an exercise I suggest as a useful instrument to sensitise persons to the exclusivity of our friendships, and to initiate awareness of more ethical ways of loving and inclusivity – to open our friendships up to invite the unlovable into our friendships.

5.5.4 Deconstructing friendship exercise

While sharing my ideas on friendship with friends, colleagues and counsellors at the centre where I work, I realised that the discourse of individualism influences to a large extent the views we hold on friendship. The term friendship for most persons only includes those close to us – those in the inner circles of the circle of concern. I therefore developed an exercise to be used to deconstruct these exclusive views we hold on what friendship is. An outline of the exercise is attached as Appendix D and the sheets provided to the participants for the exercise, as Appendix E.

During this exercise, participants are invited to reflect on what they think friendship is, and to rate themselves on how they believe they perform as friends on a scale of 1 to 6. In the next phase of the exercise, the participants are invited to reflect on the inclusivity or exclusivity of their friendships, by reflecting on questions about their behaviour when in the presence of strangers and people different from them, followed by a discussion on the effects of both inclusivity and exclusivity in the community.
A discussion on the friendships of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible follows, and the participants are then invited to compare their perception of what friendship is to the friendships of Jesus. In the next phase, they are invited to reflect on the kind of love asked for to be able to engage in Jesus-like friendships. Again, they are asked to rate themselves regarding this kind of love on a scale of 1 to 6.

The participants are then asked to plot their friendships on the Friendship Position Map, using a blank representation of the Friendship Position Map they received at the start of the exercise.

A short discussion then follows on the circle of concern, the four positions on the Friendship Position Map and the movement through the different positions. At this phase of the exercise, participants usually become aware of how exclusive their friendships are. They are then invited to mark in a different colour where they would position their preferred way of being friend in the light of their new knowledge.

Concluding the exercise, two questions are put forward to the participants to reflect on their experiences:

- Did your perception about what friendship is change in any way? If so, how?
- Do you think your way of being friend will change? If so, in what ways?

According to the reflections of the participants, most expressed the desire to progress towards the position of a spirituality of hospitality and concern for the well-being of others once they understood the different possible positions and where they were positioned on the Friendship Position Map. On the two questions, participants who practised this exercise, reflected as follows:

“I always believed myself to be a very good friend. However, I never realised how exclusive my friendships are, how comfortable I am in my group of friends. In future, I will be much more aware of persons being excluded, and consciously include them in the activities of my group of friends. My friendships will definitely be more inclusive.”
“This made me think who I really am, but that I have to move closer to the kind of friendships Jesus had. In future, I will see strangers in a different light.”

“I would like to still be a good friend, but I will have to take more care of myself in order to give more. I only now realise that friendship has many dimensions. One of those being a friend to myself.”

“Oh Yes!! I always believed myself to be a very good friend. However, after today, I realise how exclusive my friendships are. In future, I will be much more aware of persons being excluded. My friendships will definitely be more inclusive. And I will take more care with my friendships.”

“I have to move towards friendships with those in the outer circles.”

Very few thought they have not changed in any way.

At the end of the exercise, participants were invited to share ideas and recommendations that can contribute to the value of the exercise in inviting faith communities into inclusive, healing communities where strangers can become friends. My intention by doing this, is to acknowledge the local knowledge of the participants to the exercise. I will also be sure that the exercise stays relevant, and keeps on developing.

As I agree with Weingarten (2003) that without being aware, we cannot see what is wrong and therefore we cannot change, this exercise can be a powerful instrument in sensitising communities to the exclusivity of our friendships and other relationships in an individualised society, inviting communities into more inclusive, caring and authentic communities where strangers will be welcome – to re-member our identity as community-of-friends.

The following paragraphs and chapters will be about faith communities reaching out towards those in the outer circles, positioning them mainly in position 1 on the Friendship Position Map, practising ethical ways of love and friendship as a community of friends of God.
5.6 FAITH COMMUNITIES AS COMMUNITIES OF FRIENDS

In the light of the above arguments, Wadell (2002:109) asks with good reason whether the Christian community should not be the one place where we find people who are committed to one another’s well-being, creating space for the other? This is not to suggest every member of the congregation must be intimate friends with every other member, but it is to say we ought to be able to find in the church a community of fellow disciples who care enough about each other’s lives in Christ that we will care about each other’s well-being.

It is also true that while, as friends of God, we are called and empowered in charity to love all human beings, including the closest of our friends, as friends of God, that does not mean that all our closest and most vibrant relationships are reduced to a “watered down general benevolence” (Carmichael 2004:199). As I have argued in the previous paragraphs in the metaphor of the circle of concern, we still love those closest to us in more ways, and with even greater intensity. It is also true that those close to us love us, and therefore make it easy to love them back. Strangers or enemies show no love towards us, and therefore reaching out to them in love asks for more effort. However, the praxis of friendship requires that in addition to forming friendships with people close by, we make efforts to cultivate a much wider network of deepening friendships. (I return to this issue in Chapter 8, where I discuss a habitat for friendships to grow and flourish.)

However, although the Christian friendship we are called to is a unique relationship, it is also in many ways a normal one (Wadell 2002:110). The friends do all sorts of things together, but they do them as spiritual friends, as people who know that whatever they might be doing, they are doing it together in Christ. Spiritual friends do the same things best friends do together, like going to the movies, enjoying lunch or dinner together, or shop together. But they understand their friendship in a particular way. They “know what they hold in common, they know where their hearts are centered, and they know that what they want more than anything else in life is to deepen their friendship with God” (Wadell 2002:110). As they spend time together, they not only learn about the spiritual life, they live it. They live it in the joy they share. They live it in learning to care for one another and being faithful to one another. They
live it when they pray together and when they are patient with one another. They live it when they offer each other advice and are not afraid to challenge one another. They live it when they make one another laugh and when they help one another hope. These are all central elements of the Christian life and aspects of spiritual friendship, and they suggest that spiritual friendships are not so rare and inaccessible that only a “spiritual elite” (Wadell 2002:110) can enjoy them. No, spiritual friendship designate the relationships we have with those intimate friends who share our love for God. We may never use the term “spiritual friendship” to describe the relationship, and may not always explicitly discuss anything religious with these friends, but “we know we learn more about God and goodness because of them” (Wadell 2002:110). The friendship between Martha and Jane is testimony to what Wadell says. They never thought of their relationship as special or spiritual. For them, it was a normal friendship, where one friend helped the other to carry her burdens. But it was not all they did. Like “normal” friends, they did other things “normal” friends do, like having tea together, went to concerts, helped each other out when the workload got out of hand, laughed together, gossiped about their colleagues and the bosses. But that did not take away anything of the solidarity, the shalomic texture of their friendship.

As a metaphor for the church as community of friends of God, Swinton (2000b:101) suggests a flock of geese flying overhead in a V formation. The V formation enables each bird, except the leader, to find an uplift in the air-stream created by the bird ahead of it. The position of the leading bird changes from time to time when the flock alters its flight direction. In this formation the flock can fly longer hours and further distances on the same energy reserves than a single bird. If, for any reason, one of the birds must descend to the ground, another will accompany it in order to help and support it.

The flock of geese represents the faith community as a community of friends. The participants of the church are invited to engage in, and be bound together by a complex matrix of friendships that find their communal source and focus in God’s friendship with humanity and the world. As people inevitably encounter problems or difficulties, this suffering should not be privatised or isolated from the community of friends - the church. Nor should it be “unnecessarily catastrophised or used as an
excuse to exclude, devalue or marginalise people, or even to abrogate responsibility for them by passing them on to ‘specialists’ and ‘professionals’” (Swinton 2000b:101).

Therefore, this thesis calls for the church and the faith community to reaffirm its true identity as a community of friends who are called to love and care with the sacrificial passion of God and who embody that care in relationships which reveal something of his solidarity and commitment towards the world. The form of love that the church is called to live out, however fragmentarily within its earthly structures, is precisely the shape of the love that is revealed in the life of Jesus. The form of love which the church is called to image is revealed and embodied in the passionate friendships of Jesus who sought to reach out to the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ with a sacrificial love that transcends human boundaries and expectations. In a world “that flees from pain and stigmatises suffering” (Swinton 2000b:159), this thesis calls for the church to retrieve its fundamental identity as a passionate community that cares with the fervour of God and reveals care “in and through the precious gift of friendship” (Swinton 2000b:159). It is my belief that the faith community has to live out this quest not only within the boundaries of the church, but in all the facets of our lives, whether we work, pray, play, love or live.

5.7 CONCLUSION

For Christians, friendship has a purpose far beyond one’s own moral and spiritual development. Every friendship should make our world bigger, and Christian friendship should link us to the Kingdom of God. Ultimately, the purpose of friendship in the church is not primarily our mutual edification but to make us the kind of community that can faithfully enact God’s narrative of love, healing, and redemption in the world. If God has befriended us, how are we to befriend the world and the wounded among us? If God has served faithfully, how are we to serve others, particularly those who are wounded? One way is for the church, the friends of God, to “be the community that embodies and exemplifies virtues that can transform the world in hope” (Wadell 2002:118). This challenges the church as the community of friends of God, to “become communities where people help one another overcome barriers to holiness and grow in Christ-like love” (Wadell 2002:117). Unfortunately, for reasons explored in the next chapter, too often this stays only an utopian ideal to our faith communities.
The next chapter comprises three parts: The first part will be about the absence of friendship. I will share with the reader a letter in which a young man addresses his faith community, pleading with them to reconsider their distance from the wounded amongst them. I will then, in the second part, explore a few obstacles and impediments to the value of friendship-love in the context of the church as a community of friends of God in an effort to find answers to the question as to why our faith communities sometimes find it difficult to stay true to their calling for agapic love towards their neighbours. In the third part, I will tell a tale where the same faith community rolled up their sleeves and acted upon the need in their midst, embodying the love of Christ.
CHAPTER 6

A JOURNEY FROM BEING THE STRANGER TOWARDS A SHARED MEAL AMONG FRIENDS

They seem to take the sun out of the universe when they deprive life of friendship

Cicero (quoted by Carmichael 2004:31)

The greatest need in modern civilization is the development of communities – true communities where the heart of God is home, where the humble and wise learn to shepherd those on the path behind them, where trusting strugglers lock arms with others as together they journey on.

Crabb (1997:xvii)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the past three chapters I have argued that humans are essentially relational beings. In Chapter 3 I argued that in a predominant culture of individualism, we are lured away from this fundamental truth about our being. We have lost our image of ourselves as relational beings, believing that we actually can make it on our own. However, as Myers (2000:178) points out, when individuals pursue their own ends and all goes well, it can be rewarding; but when things go badly, there is less social support. Although communities who embrace a mostly individualistic, materialistic lifestyle infected by consumerism, often have a relatively high number of “very happy” people, they also have high suicide and homicide rates. The story of Linda and her family is testimony to the reality that we cannot make it on our own. Therefore, I agree with Crabb (1997:xvi) when he argues that “beneath all our problems, there are desperately hurting souls that must find the nourishment only community can provide”.

Although many authors write about the importance of community, few write about how to create the nourishing community we long for. This thesis attempts to explore through the lived experience of the participants to the research practical ways in which communities can overcome the obstacles in their way to connect to each other through ethical ways of loving and doing friendship. However, I first have to explore what these obstacles are. Therefore, this chapter will be about our struggle as finite human beings to find our roots in our connectedness, to be truthful to our calling to love God and our neighbour as ourselves. It will be a journey from “hostility” towards
“hospitality” (Nouwen 1976:43). I will first introduce a letter from a young person addressing his congregation, pouring his heart out onto his congregation whom he believed had abandoned him and his family in the face of their struggle against the devastating effects of drug addiction. I will then reflect on our vulnerability and the obstacles we face in our individualistic and materialistic culture obstructing our journey in becoming participating communities as friends of God. At the end of the chapter I will relate a story where a community overcame these obstacles and, through practical acts of caring, connected with a wounded family.

My intention is not to suggest a prototype of connecting through friendship, but rather to offer through the lived experience of a few people, together with the insight and wisdom of philosophers, theologians and other authors, some ideas about the “how” to do friendship.

6.2 A LETTER TO THE OOSTERLIG CONGREGATION

I received the following letter from a young man who was in the vice of drug abuse for a long time. His road to recovery was marked by several relapses. He wrote this letter during this period of recovery. It was published in “Netwerk”, the monthly magazine of Oosterlig Congregation.

“This letter is from me, a brother in Christ who survived the hell of drug abuse. It is also from the other brothers and sisters who suffer.

Only recently I called out with Job: “My spirit is broken – I don’t want to live anymore! My own family keeps their distance and acquaintances have forgotten me! Since my difficulties have begun, people who live blissfully despise me, and they will even kick me when I am down.”

But with the grace of Jesus everything has changed.

Christ Jesus sacrificed His life to pay for my sins and to save me from the hell of drug abuse! Only now do I know that through my difficulties the Lord educated me and through suffering, He showed me what obedience really means. I can now rejoice and say that I belong to God!
Fortunately, I now also have someone in heaven, Jesus Christ, who can present my case and who will protect me! But here in the congregation of Oosterlig, where God had long ago prepared a place for me, I don’t have anything significant.

Inspired by my love for the Lord, I address this letter to you today:

Why have I never felt at home among you? Why have the congregation and its pastors never taken pity on me? Why did I have to search through rubbish bins when I was hungry? Why did I have to drink at strange fountains when I was thirsty? Why did I have to use newspapers to cover me when I was cold?

You know, my dear brother and sister in Christ, we are all the same in the eyes of God; I too am only a person moulded out of clay.

I try to walk the straight line to help those who follow me and struggle to walk to become strong, and not powerless. I try to help them to gain hope that will bring relief, but I am stumbling and battling to stand up straight. My growth is exceedingly difficult!

Are those who are strong in their faith not supposed to notice the difficulties of others and help them to carry their burdens? Are we not supposed to think of others and do what is necessary in order for them to enhance their faith?

I take the liberty of asking: why was my family punished for my drug abuse? Amongst you, community of Oosterlig, they experienced no warmth or acceptance. Over a period of nearly twelve years they had merely five calls and one visit from you! I praise God for my family! They taught me something of the unconditional love of Jesus Christ.

Let us love one another with the genuine love coming from God. If someone is capable of this love, then he is a child of God who knows Him. We should not think only of ourselves and our own pleasure. To love means to be patient, friendly and
compassionate. We should accept one another the way Christ accepted us, because if we do, we honour God.

I greet you all. May God have mercy on you! The God who always has been and who is, and who always will be”.

6.3 PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY - AN OBSTACLE COURSE?

When reflecting on this letter, I have to agree with Guder (1999:45) when he contends that there are obviously profound contradictions between the message of the gospel of love and the unloving way in which Christians frequently live as communities. He refers to “the what of the gospel and the how of our witness”. I also have to agree with Carr (1989:53) who contends: “[I]t looks like evidence that we, the Christians who glibly speak of God’s love and ours, have in practice proved insufficiently loving”.

However, I also have to agree with Clapp (1996:200) that the Church is a way of life lived not with the expectation that Christians can, through “managerial arts or sudden heroism”, make the world right. It is instead a way of life lived in the confidence that God has, in the Kingdom of Christ, begun to set the world right – and that someday Christ will bring his Kingdom to its fulfilment. In the meantime, through ethical ways of loving, through creating space for the other and through evaluating the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others, I believe that we have the responsibility to alleviate the worst effects of the predominantly individualistic world we are living in.

I sincerely believe that the members of the community to whom this letter has been addressed, are more ignorant than intentionally wicked and unloving (Clapp 1996:153). The question remains, however, why does it happen that the how of our witness does not reflect the what of the gospel? What stands in the way of our faith communities to live out their calling to love God and to love their neighbour? To embrace them all in friendship? When Nouwen (1976:43) argues that a characteristic of our spiritual life as Christians is to reach out to the many strangers - and I take the freedom to include the wounded - whom we meet on our way through life, why do so
many strangers find it so hard to find “a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found”?

Wadell (2002:42) joins in this argument when he argues that despite our inherent need for friendship and togetherness, in many respects we seem much better at loneliness than we are at intimacy. With him, I ask: “Have we sabotaged our happiness by becoming more adept at isolation and loneliness than we are at intimacy and friendship? Is it true that we have learned best how to be strangers to one another – even to the people with whom we live everyday – but that this has happened so quietly and gradually we hardly realise how disconnected we have become?” Kotzé (2006) wonders whether we are “trapped” in the discourses of our culture to the extent that we cannot escape at will. It is as if we know what has to be done, we know we should do it, but we are incapacitated because we are at the same time also the stranger in need of friendship and community. How can we “feed others while at the same time we are starving”? When discussing these ideas, my teenaged daughter responded: “Why, this is so true! I saw that on our recent holiday in the behaviour of the youngsters around the pool. It seems so clear that all everybody wants, is to find someone to be keen on, and to be liked in return. Why is it then so difficult to find that someone? Why are the girls so mean to the boys, when all they want is the boys to take notice of them, to be liked by them? And the boys behave in the same way towards the girls. It was quite amusing to watch this game”.

It seems to me that participating in community life as friends of God, to journey from hostility towards hospitality, or from a narcissistic preoccupation with the self towards ethical ways of loving where we create space for strangers and take into account the well-being of others, moving from position 3 to position 1 in the Friendship Position Map discussed in Chapter 5, can be as full of obstacles and challenges as participating in an obstacle course! In the following paragraphs, I will explore some of the obstacles and impediments to friendship and communal life. I will explore a few ideas, trying to understand why, despite God’s merciful word and our inherent need for friendship and intimacy, a young man finds it necessary to address his community of faith in the way he did in the letter above. Although many of the ideas discussed in this paragraph were discussed in earlier chapters, I will revisit them again in the context of being obstacles on our journey towards participating communities as
friends of God. This section is therefore not a detailed discussion of any of the ideas presented, but refers to some ideas that intoxicate our participation in friendships and communal life. As I explained earlier, being a white South African woman, and relying to a great extent on individualistic, Christian insight while doing this research, most of my arguments are flavoured by an individualistic, Christian tradition. Due to my experience during workshops I presented and which were attended by people of European descend as well as more traditional African backgrounds, I do believe that the experiences of people in South Africa, from a more traditional African background, will differ to a large extent from those described in the following paragraphs.

6.3.1 The lifestyle in modern times

Where we live and how we live has changed in ways that are not always healthy for friendship and intimacy. Few people immersed in an individualistic lifestyle know what it is to “live in a true neighbourhood”, and our neighbours “are strangers who happen to live next door” (Wadell 2002:43). Although our increased mobility offers us the freedom to go where we want when we want, it uproots us and works against the stability necessary for relationships to begin and to grow. Developing friendships demands that at least occasionally we slow down and stay put. According to the French philosopher Derrida (1997:15), “engagement in friendship takes time”. Friendship therefore requires people who are able to slow down long enough to get to know one another, who can be “available to one another long enough for friendship to take root and grow” (Wadell 2002:43). If Magda (Chapter 5, paragraph 5.2.2) was not prepared to slow down long enough to make time for the tea-drinking sessions at the coffee-shop with her neighbour, and if her neighbour did not respond by giving up her own time to get to know her new neighbour, both of them would have missed the opportunity to develop a friendship which made a difference for both of them. If we are caught up in the rat race, we often have no energy left to reach out in friendship to others. Although we are in need of friendship, we often have no resources left to make the effort. Therefore, when we really are in need of a listening presence, we would rather pay a therapist than make a friend! Magda could have offered her neighbour the telephone number of our pastoral centre or another good therapist, and in terms of time it would have been more “productive” for the neighbour to make an appointment with a “professional” instead of the weekly sessions with her
neighbour in a coffee shop. I cannot help but wonder if the outcome would have been the same? Have they found more in each other’s company than the “solving of the problem of violence” in the neighbour’s house? Magda responded to these questions with the following remark: “This happened a long time ago, and it was not as if we became the best of friends. But I still remember it clearly, because of the effect it had on me. I was rattled by the simplicity of it all: that something as simple as a few cups of tea could have an effect like that! I actually did nothing! It opened my eyes to possibilities I have to offer that I never thought of before. I also learned a valuable lesson: My first reaction to the sound of violence from my neighbour’s house, was one of confrontation. Fortunately my husband talked some sense into my head. At the end I took the longer road and befriended my neighbour, investing more time in her, which I learned was the better thing to do. I used this knowledge ever since”.

For Magda it was worth the effort and time spent to build a friendship with her neighbour. It happened many years ago, and still has an impact on her life. If she took the option of sending her neighbour to a therapist or call in the police, she would have lost out on a life changing experience.

6.3.2 Individualism

In Jesus’ times, friendship was “significant and much sought after” (Southard 1989:210). However, today friendships are impaired by the “haughty individualism” (Wadell 2002:44) of the individualistic culture. We live in a society that teaches us to put ourselves and our needs before the needs and well-being of others. Southard (1989:210) argues that the multiplication of choices we have, has made the difference: The variety of personal preferences came out of the Seventeenth Century philosophies of universal benevolence, made possible, and extended by the emerging capitalism and exploration that opened myriad opportunities for economic, social and political advancement. The ancient, enduring choice of a friend was an encumbrance to entrepreneurs. According to Southard (1989:211), the “elitist, restrictive elements of friendship have not survived in an opportunistic society”.

According to Goodliff (1998:153), what he calls “narcissism”, stops us seeing the world through the other’s eyes. Therefore, blinded by our own ego-centrism, we refrain from evaluating the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others,
impairing our capacity for the ethical ways of love I argued for in Chapter 5. In the context of the Friendship Position Map I discussed in paragraph 5.5, a person whose primary concern is individual rights and his/her personal well-being, would, as a “poor candidate for friendship” (Wadell 2002:44) be positioned mainly in the third quadrant together with selfishness and hostility. Sweet (1999b:307) refers to “felt-needs” as opposed to “God-wants”. Felt-needs leave people feeling content with themselves and at peace with the world. However, according to him, faith is more than self-fulfilment; faith includes loving God and loving one’s neighbour. It also calls for the creation of space for the stranger, positioned in the first quadrant in the Friendship Position Map, together with hospitality and ethical ways of being.

The very qualities requisite for friendship, such as generosity and thoughtfulness, the capacity to evaluate the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others, are “hardly nurtured in a society that tells us we must look after ourselves first because nobody else will” (Wadell 2002:44). Such an understanding of the self sees us not primarily as social and relational beings who need others in order to develop and flourish, but as “essentially private, solitary and autonomous individuals for whom relationships are more likely an unwanted restriction than the key to our humanization” (Wadell 2002:44). If this is the way I see myself, what happens then when I become wounded, and find myself in a situation where I am in need of support of others? When I admit that I need someone else, am I a “failure” because I am not the autonomous individual the discourse of my culture wants to convince me I should be? Could this be the reason why many people decline the invitation to join the support group for the parents of young people trapped in drug abuse, with words like: “Thank you, but we are fine” or “Thank you, but we are coping. We will attend when things get worse”? Will they perceive themselves as failures when they did not succeed in making it on their own? Jane remembers her reluctance to join the group: “I am so trained to believe that I have to cope on my own, I truly believed that I did not really need the support of others – I believed that Martha’s support was enough. In fact, being a very private person, the idea of spilling my guts in front of others was very scary. I kept thinking: What will they think of me for not being able to get my own house in order?”
White (1995:104) also refers to dominant cultural notions of what it means to be a "real person", as "independent", "self-possessed", "self-contained", and "self-actualising". We have to achieve this mainly through separation, and by admitting that we need friends, we risk being pathologised as having "dependent natures". Jane remembers: "I was raised to the belief that you have to stand on your own two feet. That was why it took me very long even to tell my parents about Paul's problems. Besides the fact that I wanted to spare them the pain and worries, I did not want them to think that I came running back to them when things were getting tough".

Goodliff (1998:153) warns that to overcome these barriers is not easy in a culture that is driven by the destructive effects of competition in every sphere, and individualism so easily spawns a self-reliance and self-absorption that is "toxic to friendship". Southard (1989:211) agrees that the social foundation of friendship has been undermined by the economic individualism of modern society. However, according to Wadell (2002:45), we realise ourselves as persons not by withdrawing from the sometimes messy complexities of relationships but only through the full mutuality of fellowship in a common life. We are not fully formed individuals for whom intimate relationships are arbitrary possibilities; rather we grow into true individuality and personhood only in and through relationships with others. Wadell (2002:45) quotes Emmanuel Mounier who writes: "The we … is prior to the I" because selfhood does not pre-exist our relationships, but is made possible by them. According to Mounier (Wadell 2002:45), one might almost say "that I have no existence, save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is … to love". Jane agrees when she reflects on her experience: "It was almost as if I came to life through the caring friendship of Martha and the support group". These ideas also correspond with the idea of *Ubuntu* discussed in Chapter 3, as well as the ethical ways of loving I argued for in Chapter 5.

According to Wadell (2002:46), the heart of friendship is the need to communicate our self, to share our soul and spirit with others in the hope that we might live in communion with them. This reciprocal communication of selves is the most humanising and life-giving activity, and it is "the life-blood of friendship – whether it be friendship with God, the special friendship of marriage, or friendship with others" (Wadell 2002:46).
6.3.3 The gospel of consumerism

Another obstacle in our journey towards participation in a community as friends of God, is the individualistic culture’s increasingly economic understanding of life. This master narrative “shapes our view of the world, our understanding of ourselves, and certainly our sense of what matters and counts for success” (Wadell 2002:46). It teaches us what to value and care about, what we should desire, and it guides our understanding of happiness and fulfilment. In an individualistic society the fundamental value of anything is determined economically. In this regard, Wadell (2002:46) asks whether we value friendship less because it has no cash value? Is family life no longer worthy because when we devote time to our spouses and children we are not being economically productive?

Another facet of this economic understanding of life, is that because we are attracted to those whom we believe to be most like us, friends are people whom we like, whose company we enjoy, who share our interests and activities, who are helpful and understanding, who can be trusted, with whom we feel comfortable, and who will be emotionally supportive. Therefore, decisions to become friends with others, or to maintain friendships, are based on a “more or less conscious balance of advantages and disadvantages …. The value, or reward, of a friendship to an individual depends on the capacity of the other to provide certain ‘services’ such as emotional support, economic assistance, information, allies and connections and resources outside one’s immediate network” (Swinton 2000b:85). Magda balanced the advantages and disadvantages of her friendship with her new neighbour, and still decided that she was prepared to make the “investment” in friendship. However, for the neighbours of Linda and her family the stakes were too high, and they decided against investing their time and energy in this wounded family.

Therefore, in this “gospel of consumerism” (Wadell 2002:47) love becomes a form of salesmanship in which we must make ourselves an attractive “product” so that another person might “invest” in us. The worst example of this form of consumerism I came upon, was the advice a young mother received from a paediatrician. After years of trying for their own baby, Joan and her husband adopted a son, David. However, from the start, David proofed to be a troubled child. At long last, when he
was two years old, they consulted a paediatrician about the problems they experienced. David was diagnosed with among others Attention Deficit Disorder with hyperactivity. However, the doctor made not much of an effort to explain the diagnosis or possibilities for treatment with the devastated parents. His advice was very short and to the point: “If I can give you good advice, give this child back to the adoption agency”.

In this discourse of consumerism, love becomes a matter of trying to “sell ourselves” to others by finding a way not only to make ourselves desirable to them but also wanted and needed by them. But what chance does a two year old boy have in “selling” himself to potential parents? In a consumerist society friends are “just another commodity, something to be bought, used, and disposed of as we see fit” (Wadell 2002:47). In consumerism, a friend is “another novelty that is quickly and easily replaced when something new and more interesting comes along”. Wadell (2002:47) quotes Storkey who observes that “[i]nstead of being taught to love people and use things, we are more often taught to love things and use people”.

Derrida (1997:20) agrees when he contends that “one should not reckon with friends as one counts and reckons with things”. He warns that some people ignore the sharing or the community of friends, because they prefer things to friends. They stock friends among things, and they class friends at best among possessions, among good things. Instead of treating things as things of friendship, as affairs belonging to the sphere of friends, serving the cause of friends, assigned first and foremost to friends. According to him, “one must not only prefer friendship, but give the preference to friends”.

Consumerism also teaches us that nothing lasts, including relationships. If a product wears out or break down, we do not repair it, but throw it away and buy a new one. We are conditioned to think that eventually everything grows obsolete. For Sandmaier (1995a:34), friendship seems a bit “like grocery shopping, as though we can simply survey the aisles of potential buddies and pluck a few off the shelf at will, like so many bags of attractively packaged potato chips”. However, this consumer vision of friendship leaves no room for the realities of shy or abrasive personalities, individual abilities to negotiate intimacy and conflict, or “being new in town” – like the
woman who was going through a divorce, and when she attended a “community braai” at her congregation, instead of offering assistance, they ate her food while she was attending to her children! (Chapter 1, paragraph 1.2.6). This vision of friendship also leaves no room for the realities of a troubled child in need of a loving and caring home where he can grow into a loving and caring adult. In a consumerist society, it is then only the “likables” who have friends, and the “unlikables” who have to go without the blessing of a community of concern. However, in communities driven by agapic love, we will befriend the unlikables to the example of Jesus.

For Wadell (2002:48), a good relationship is “not one that never knows struggles or never grows stale, but one in which the friends do not abandon one another when it does”. Fortunately for David, his adoptive parents resisted the consumerist voices of their culture, and did not abandon the child they believed God entrusted to them when things grew stale. David is now 44 years old, and still a troubled person. He was recently diagnosed with a bipolar disorder. And his adoptive parents are still supporting, caring and loving him.

According to Wadell (2002:48-49), consumerism and materialism undermine friendships in mainly two ways:

i) Firstly, they seriously misunderstand what a good friendship is. Although no one would deny that good friendships can be satisfying and meaningful and thus fulfil needs, the principal aim of friendship is not the fulfilment of our needs, but caring for and well-being of others. Need fulfilment is a result of good friendship; not its purpose.

ii) Secondly, if we have never been taught to rest content with anything, we will not be able to sustain the commitment, presence, and faithfulness real intimacy demands. If we believe that what we own matters more than who we love, we will hardly be unselfish enough to seek the good of another for her or his own sake; or find joy in expending ourselves for their well-being, which is exactly what friendships require.
The way I understand this argument in the context of the Friendship Position Map I argue for in paragraph 5.5, is that we are to stretch ourselves and reach for ethical ways of doing friendship in the first quadrant where evaluating the consequences of my actions upon the well-being of others, including strangers and enemies, becomes my ethical way of being, or doing friendship, like Joan and her husband did in taking care of David; or we will stay trapped in our own self-centredness in the third quadrant, which represents the kind of narcissistic friendship where I am only concerned for myself with no regard for others or their well-being.

I cannot help but wonder how the belief that our mind, body and soul are separate, impacts on the ethical decisions and choices we make in life’s daily rounds. Joan believed that she could not abandon the child God entrusted to her care. If she carried the belief that her relationship with God has nothing to say to her role or responsibilities as mother, would she still have made the decision to take care of David? In the following paragraph I explore these ideas.

6.3.4 Fragmentation due to the scientific era

According to Kornfeld (1998:5), in the time of the Scientific Era which has just preceded us, people believed (and many still do) that mind, body, and soul were separate. And because of this dualism, “that intellectual system that separates spirit and matter”, is still at the core of most contemporary scientific thinking. Because of this dualistic belief, there developed a division of labour and power in which physicists investigated matter while psychologists looked at the mind, doctors treated the body, and clergy watched over the soul.

In the process of this fragmentation, religious practice was moved to the periphery of ordinary life. Clergy’s most important role became that of “preparing others for the hereafter” (Kornfeld 1998:5). As I discussed in Chapter 3, by the Eighteenth Century educated people in the West thought that God had gone away from the perfect, well-oiled machine he created, as it ran by itself, without the supervision of its creator.

In a belief system like this, how can we even start to think of God as our friend? And our communities as friends of God?
However, before the birth of this scientific revolution, religion “had the upper hand in the developed world. The world was very much understood through the eyes of theology” (Kornfeld 1998:5). Does that explain why in the time of Augustine, Aelred and Aquinas the normal description for Christian was ‘friend of God’, as I discussed in Chapter 4?

However, according to Kornfeld (1998:5), we have also been blessed by many fruits of the Scientific Era. Because scientists have studied in depth the particularity of matter, we know more about the parts that make up the whole. Specialisation has been necessary, and because of it, we know more about ourselves and our world. In the field of theology, specialised ministries contributed to knowledge about the relationship of the soul to mind and body, contributing to a growing awareness of holism. Scientists have been opening our eyes to our place in an expanding universe. They have also discovered how our brain and neurochemical systems allow us not only to think, but to feel. As our very bodies strive to understand and make meaning of our lives, these systems also allow us to experience soul. They have taught us that “through our relationship to God, we are connected to each other, and that we need community that supports us” (Kornfeld 1998:6). (See also Chapter 3, paragraph 6.)

6.3.5 Sectarianism

When Jesus said “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22), he said it to the assembled community. When St. Luke described the descent of the Holy Spirit it was upon the community, one hundred and twenty (at least) praying and waiting followers of Jesus together in one place (Peterson 2005:239). We are a community. We are not ourselves by ourselves. We are born into communities, we live in communities, and we die in communities. However, although we realise both the necessity and the nature of our lives in community, we also become aware of the difficulty and complexity, and seductions all around us to find an easier way, a modified community customised to our own preferences. According to Peterson (2005:239), sectarianism is like a tendency, an ever-present pull to something smaller, and a reduction that enables us to exercise control. It involves deliberately and willingly leaving the large community, embarking on a path of special interests with some others, whether a few
or many, who share similar tastes and concerns. It sometimes then happens that I see in another person not a brother or sister, but an enemy (Burger 2005:151).

Peterson (2005:240) contends that “sectarianism is to the community what heresy is to theology”. The impulse to sectarianism has its roots in “selfism” (Peterson 2005:241), the “conceit that I don’t need others as they are but only for what they can do for me”. Peterson (2005:243) refers in this regard to Narcissus who “starved to death on a diet of self”. But, Peterson (2005:244) argues “holy living, resurrection living, is not a self-project. We are a people of God and cannot live holy lives, resurrection lives, as individuals. We are not a self-defined community; we are a God-defined community. The love that God pours out for and in us creates a community in which that love is reproduced in our love for one another”. However, according to Peterson (2005:244), we gather with other people in the name of Jesus, but we predefine them according to our own tastes and predispositions. One problem with our world, according to Doherty (2003:29), is that we have developed into an individualist society that has become fragmented and uncaring. People desire community, yet are afraid of it.

6.3.6 Fear

Nouwen (1976:45) suggests that many forms of what he calls “hostility”, usually pervaded with fear and anxiety, prevent us from inviting people into our world. According to him, the assumption is that strangers are a potential danger and it is up to them to disprove it. Although we have good intentions and want to help others – to feed the hungry, visit the prisoners and offer a shelter for travellers – we have surrounded ourselves with a wall of fear and hostile feelings, instinctively avoiding people and places where we might be reminded of our good intentions. This fear and hostility are not limited to our encounters with “real” strangers or enemies like burglars or hi-jackers. In a world full of competition, we can become infected by fear and hostility when we experience others as a threat to our intellectual or professional safety (Nouwen 1976:47). Or, as Kornfeld (1998:22) suggests, we tend to look for ways in which we are similar to others; it makes us feel at home, less anxious. However, in our attempt to find people like ourselves, we often do not see others as they really are. We “screen out the ways in which they are different”. It is in acting upon these perceptions of “alikeness” – rather than listening for differences – that
misunderstandings arise in community. According to Maturana (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:200), it is only those who are willing to “extend the domain of legitimacy of the other” to “cover all human beings”, who can be moved by the fate of others and include them in their ethical reflections.

What happens when we fail to acknowledge the “legitimate presence” (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:198) of others is that places created to bring people closer together and help them form a peaceful community have “degenerated into mental battlefields” (Nouwen 1976:47). A visit to the grocery store can become such a battlefield when fear overcomes a person when meeting his neighbour whose son is trapped in drug addiction. Because of not knowing how to act, the person avoids his neighbour and let go of an opportunity to offer comfort. When the wounded neighbour is aware of the person avoiding him/her, the opportunity to offer care and comfort, is then turned into a mental battlefield.

Closely linked to Nouwen’s argument of hostility, is the idea of “dehumanization” offered by Weingarten (2003:161). She contends that whether “in relation to people we will never meet, or strangers we are about to meet, or those who become ‘strange’ through the wear and tear of everyday life, we are constantly confronted with the recognition or reaffirmation of our common humanity”. When we experience people as wholly different from us, as the other, (for instance a person suffering from addiction to drugs) it is possible to feel a wide range of negative emotions towards them, such as disgust, revulsion, contempt, rage, hatred, or terror. These feelings not only contribute to our experiencing them as other, but the experience becomes self-perpetuating, justifying continuous expression of these feelings (for example, every time I pass him/her in my neighbourhood). Over time we dehumanise the other person. Dehumanisation, the process by which people are viewed as less than human, a process that individuals, groups or nations all do, “obstructs caring about the other. Perceiving someone’s shared humanity is a prerequisite for compassionate witnessing” (Weingarten 2003:161). If I believe the “addict” or “junky” to be a non-person, if I am not willing to “extend the domain of legitimacy” (Maturana & Poerksen 2004:200) to him/her, how can I be concerned about his/her well-being, and include him/her in my ethical reflections?
Peterson (2005:282) suggests that Luke, as a second-generation Christian had experience of being excluded from the community of Jesus by well-meaning guardians of God’s integrity and holiness. He had observed how often and persistently the most hospitable place in the world, the community of the resurrection, can quickly become cruelly inhospitable. Observing this increase of concern for who is “in” and who is “out”, he suggests that “the old-timers” are trying to protect the “purity” of the community against dilution or contamination.

McFague (1987:176) calls this fear of the stranger, the other, the outsider, “xenophobia”. She warns that the seriousness of xenophobia in our time can scarcely be overstated. According to her, one of the effects of xenophobia is that it denies to others that which is justly theirs, namely our companionship. The mother whose son was addicted to drugs, was denied the care and comfort that was justly hers, when her neighbour turned away from her in the grocery shop! The fact that we live in a global village and must accept that fact if we are to survive does not mean that we will accept it, or even know how to accept it in significant ways.

Jordaan (2006) touches on another effect of fear on our journey towards ethical ways of love when he argues that the high crime rate in South Africa infects us with fear, always expecting the worst. According to him, the result of this fear is that our homes become blockhouses with peep-holes to the outside, in which we lock ourselves and those we care for, cut off from the outside world. Isolation like this impedes participation in the rhythm of life outside the sphere of work and family life, and the ideal of participation in community life dies with the concomitant focus on survival of the own. I experience this effect often when inviting persons to attend support group meetings scheduled “after dark” to accommodate those who work, and receive the polite answer: “Sorry, I do not go out after dark. It is too dangerous”.

However, according to McFague (1987:176), the inclusive character of the Christian vision, epitomised in the shared meal with the outcast and the stranger – the church as a community of friends - is a powerful counter-model to this fear of strangers. It focuses on exclusion as the heart of the problem, insisting that what we fear most, the outsider, is “not necessarily the enemy but is rather only the stranger”.

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When we as the community of faith, can re-member our identity as community-of-
friends, and welcome outcasts and strangers to the shared meal where we can learn
to know the enemies as strangers, and the strangers as friends, possibilities for
Christ-like friendships are opened up. Unfortunately, in this broken world we are
living in, we sometimes “need” enemies, as I explore in the following paragraph.

6.3.7 Sometimes we need enemies

Clapp (1996:152) offers an interpretation of the lack of compassion Jonah felt
towards the Ninevites God decided to forgive after their repentance (par 1.1.2), when
he asks: “Why was Jonah so threatened by God’s grace towards Nineveh? Was it
because it challenges his “specialness”? Clapp (1996:152) suggests that it deprives
him (Jonah) of that most precious possession of those seeking unambiguous
purpose and ambition in life – the “unqualified evil enemy”. According to him, clearly
defined enemies give us a brisk, clear identity and course of action. We become
those who oppose this obvious evil, and what we must do with our lives is battle to
squelch or eradicate it. With Clapp (1996:152), I ask: “What happens when these
very enemies who have provided us the definition of our goodness are called into
community alongside us?” If I define myself and my “goodness” by exactly not being
like my neighbour who is struggling with the effects of drug abuse, how can I then
reach out to them in friendship?

I agree with Clapp (1996:153) that what we can learn out of Jonah’s narrative, is in
the end God’s question for ourselves: Whatever we think of the city of Nineveh, of
any place, it is not our creation, and its inhabitants “often operate as much out of
ignorance as out of wickedness” (Clapp 1996:153). As they are not beyond God’s
presence or concern or mercy, how can they legitimately be beyond ours? With
Clapp (1996:153), I believe that what the church is called to, is not a spirit of
superiority, insulation or triumphalism. It is called, like the monk Zosima (Clapp
1996:154), to “attach our souls” to “those who were the more sinful”.

What I believe Clapp is saying, is that when we recognise that those outside the
church, those outside our immediate circle of family and close friends, those not like-
minded to ourselves, are also faithful and truthful, though not to the same belief
system than us, then we are not abandoning or compromising our own criteria of
faithfulness and truthfulness. When we embrace the “enemy”, the “sinful” who provided the definition of our own “goodness”, into community alongside us, we do not abandon our own belief system; we acknowledge that no part of creation is outside God’s caring presence. And when they are not beyond God’s presence or concern or mercy, they are not beyond ours. Therefore, if I reach out in loving care to my neighbour who is struggling with the effects of drug abuse, it does not mean that I condone that behaviour. It only means that I seriously believe that nobody is beyond God’s presence or concern or mercy, and that nobody should be beyond mine.

I believe that Kornfeld (1998:32) also has a point when she contends that our enemies are sometimes our mirrors - I project onto my enemy everything in myself that I cannot stand, tolerate, acknowledge, or accept. Is that another function our enemies fulfil? However, Jesus’ instruction that we love our enemies requires that we discover those parts of ourselves that we dislike and disown. She suggests that it is by looking at what we do not like in our enemies, that we can discover a denied, disliked part of ourselves that we had once found unacceptable, that we can love those who have frightened us or whom we have dismissed. Does she mean that, if I struggle with tendencies towards substance abuse, I may tend not to tolerate people who are trapped in such behaviour patterns? But if I recognise what I really feel, I will be able to reach out in loving support to exactly those I once found unacceptable? I know a wounded young woman who has, apart from other issues she is struggling with, a secret – something so unspeakable that after two years of therapy the closest she came to talk about her secret, was to hint on the existence of the secret. This woman is very outspoken about how “gross” gay people – especially gay women – are and how “wrong” it is what they are doing. In the light of Kornfeld’s argument, I speculate about the possibility that this woman’s secret could be that she knows very deep inside herself that she is gay. And because of this unacknowledged knowledge, she “hates” gay women because of the threat they represent, but if she could come to know and befriend that part of herself, her “hate” towards gay women could be turned into love and support?
6.4 A NEW SENSIBILITY

In the light of the above arguments, I agree with McFague (1987:13) that it is evident that some significant changes from traditional models and concepts would be necessary for expressing the relationships between God and the world and between God, ourselves, the world and our neighbours. According to her, language that supports hierarchical, dualistic, external, unchanging, atomistic, anthropocentric and determinative ways of understanding our relationships is not appropriate any more. She suggests language that will support ways of understanding the God-world and the human-world relationships as open, caring, inclusive, interdependent, changing, mutual and creative. Nouwen (1976:48) also argues that when we have become sensitive to the painful contours of our hostility we can start identifying the lines of its opposite towards which we are called to move: hospitality.

I therefore argue for a turn from the “anthropocentrism and individualism so deeply embedded in an individualistic religious tradition” (McFague 1987:9), or in the words of Nouwen, that we need to turn away from hostility (Nouwen 1976). According to McFague (1987:8), the most fundamental tenet of the evolutionary, ecological perspective is that the question of what an entity is most basically, is answered in terms of its relationships. It is how they behave within the system they are part of that determines which model will be used to describe them. Therefore, as the life of a cell is best understood in terms of ecological relationships among molecules, the living organism is best seen in terms of its environment. She argues that to feel in the depths of our being that we are part and parcel of the evolutionary ecosystem of our cosmos, is a prerequisite for contemporary Christian theology. McFague (1987:10-11) argues that the mechanical model where the world is understood on the model of a machine, be replaced with a more organic, “mutualistic” or ecological model, allowing for the deep relations between space, time and matter, which relativised them all. She describes the ecological or mutualistic model as a model of living things which are acted upon and which respond by acting in their turn; such a model will relativise the differences that have in the past been viewed as absolutes; it is the difference between an aesthetic and an utilitarian perspective, between one that appreciates others and one that merely uses the other. An aesthetic sensibility towards the cosmos is one that values what is unselfishly, with a sense of delight in

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4 I borrow this metaphor from Sallie McFague (1987)
others for their own sakes. Such appreciation and delight are a necessary step in turning from an anthropocentric to an ecological, mutualistic sensibility – towards hospitality.

Thus, in the evolutionary, mutualistic model, all entities are united symbiotically and internally in levels of interdependence but are also separated as centers of action and response, each valuable in its own ‘beingness’, however minimal or momentary that may appear to us. The symbol of the mountain and the human being bent toward each other, if allowing more agency and response to the mountain than can be empirically defended, does express an attitude of respect for otherness rare in the traditional Western sensibility.

McFague (1987:11)

The biologists Maturana and Varela (1998:246) argue that biology shows us that we can expand our cognitive domain, through a novel experience brought forth through reasoning, through the encounter with a stranger, or through the expression of a biological interpersonal congruence that lets us see the other person, opening up for him/her room for existence beside us.

Because this ecological, mutualistic model suggests an ethic towards others, where we create space for the other and reflect on the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others, I believe that it fits the metaphor of God as friend, and the faith community as friends of God – “friends of the Friend of the world” (McFague 1987:171).

These ideas also resonate with Nouwen’s ideas on hospitality. Hospitality for Nouwen (1976:49) means primarily “the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy”. Maturana (Maturana and Poerksen 2004:197) also agrees when he contends that love is about creating a space where the other is given a presence to which we relate with respect.

In the context of the Friendship Position Map (Chapter 5 paragraph 5.5), it seems that the above arguments position contemporary perceptions of friendship, clouded by individualistic perceptions as exclusive and private, where concern for the self takes precedence over concern for the other, allowing no space for the other, in the third quadrant which represents the kind of narcissistic friendship where I am only concerned for myself with no regard for others or their well-being. In contrast, the “inclusive, open and public” friendships modelled by Jesus (Swinton 2000:83), the
kind of friendship that calls for the creation of space for the other and concern for the well-being of the other, fits in the first quadrant where evaluating the consequences of my actions upon the well-being of others, including strangers and enemies, becomes my ethical way of being, or doing friendship.

However hard the prevalent value system within contemporary individualistic societies tries to convince us otherwise, and keeps us trapped in the third quadrant, the model of friendship as it is revealed within the life and death of Jesus offers a radically different set of priorities and a profound different mode of valuing human beings. In the friendships of Jesus, people are no longer identified by their professions, their pasts, their race, religion, their handicaps, woundedness or any other human characteristic. All are called to become friends of Jesus and thus they become equal even in the midst of their diversity as each one shares in the common friendship of Jesus. The God revealed within the gospels is a God who seeks out and becomes the friend of the rejected, the despised and the outcast, inviting us to keep journeying towards sharing in community as friends of God – towards the ethical ways of love and being portrayed in the first quadrant of the Friendship Position Map.

**Diagram 6: From hostility towards hospitality**
6.5 INVITING STRANGERS TO THE SHARED MEAL OF FRIENDS

According to Carmichael (2004:17), Aristotle mentions an essential ontological precondition for friendship, the sharing in some kind of “communion”, or koinonia. According to him, “friendship depends on community”. This koinonia would acquire fresh significance in the New Testament and become a key concept in Thomas Aquina’s doctrine of Christian love (caritas). According to MacFague (1987:172), the shared meal among friends suggests some clues to the kind of community that we seek: it is “a joyful community; it is an inclusive fellowship; it is concerned with basic needs”.

But the shared meal of friends embodies the vision of inclusive fulfilment concretely: in this one image we see joyful plenitude at all levels and for all beings. The shared meal that satisfies the body and delights the spirit, the meal to which all are invited, including both human and nonhuman outcasts, is the metaphor for the community established by God as friend …. There is, however, a paradox implied in this shared meal: at a meal for friends, the stranger is welcome.


Wadell (2002:10) agrees when he contends that one of the consequences of living in friendship with God, is that we cannot envision charity only as a singular virtue an individual possesses, but also as a communal way of life. Friendship with God is not a solitary enterprise but something “the baptized are to pursue together” (Wadell 2002:10). We join the community of the friends of God through baptism, and we nurture and sustain this life through the prayer and practices of the church.

According to Wadell (2002:46), the heart of friendship is the need to communicate our self, to share our soul and spirit with others in the hope that we might live in communion with them. This reciprocal communication of selves is the most humanising and life-giving activity, and it is “the life-blood of friendship – whether it be friendship with God, the special friendship of marriage, or friendship with others” (Wadell 2002:46).

According to Robinson (2001:80), the stress on “inclusivity which sees the other as part of common humanity leads to the principle of community or fellowship – something that fits in to the basic human need of belonging”. Concern for particularity of the other leads to the principle of freedom and diversity. Community is “not about
the solidarity of a community over against others and the rest of the world but rather about an inclusiveness which opens communities to others, and which is thus outward looking and also self-critical” (Robinson 2001:80). Would this mean that when we say “everybody is welcome”, we should be careful not to mean “everybody like us is welcome”? For Robinson (2001:80), the idea of freedom is not simply negative freedom (freedom from oppression or constraint) or positive freedom (freedom which enables), but involves freedom to learn, to develop, to take responsibility for the self and other (Robinson 2001:80). After a sermon in our congregation, where the message was about our calling to share the burdens of our neighbours, and some stories of the pain and isolation parents of children who are addicted to drugs were shared, the same person who avoided his neighbour at the grocery store, came to see me. He told me about the regret he felt due to his behaviour. But as he gained more understanding and insight, he already was making plans how he could reach out to this wounded neighbour.

Resonating with these ideas, are Nouwen’s (1976:49) suggestions regarding hospitality. For him, hospitality means primarily “the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy”. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines; to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment; it is the liberation of fearful hearts so that words can find roots and bear ample fruit. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity to others to find their God and their way. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the lifestyle of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his/her own.

According to Robinson (2001:98), loving God is about participating in community. It is about being hospitable towards strangers. The following story is to me living testimony to what Robinson means by participating in community, and what Nouwen means when he invites us to be hospitable.
6.6 A TALE OF HOSPITABLE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY

The Thursday before a long weekend, Carla attended for the first time the support group for the parents whose children are trapped in drug addiction. Carla was very excited, because her son, Jack, was expected home for the first time after three months in a rehabilitation facility on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. The members of the support group welcomed her, and offered the wisdom they acquired through much hardship and tears. They shared generously their experiences, warning her against taking certain ways of action, suggesting other ways. Everybody hoped that Jack’s story would have a happy ending, contrary to so many others.

However, when Linda, the founder member of the group, called Saturday morning just to show her goodwill and ask how things were, we knew things were not well at all: Jack took off with a lame excuse in his mother’s car. And Monday when he had to catch the bus back to the South Coast, he refused. Carla was at her wit’s end. Everybody put their heads together: Marietjie, the therapist at the centre with most experience in this kind of work, Jack’s therapist at the facility, Amanda, Linda, Marianne, Hansie, Alta, Elizabeth and me. We all knew there was only one thing to do: Jack was in no condition to make sensible decisions; he had to go back to rehab. And not by bus, the odds are too great that he will skip the bus. He had to be driven by car, and not by his mother. We needed therefore at least two men, strong enough in case Jack run amok – as most of the members of the group knew the chances were good.

After a lot of telephone calls our plans were in place. Adriaan, a young man always willing to be of assistance, and Nico, who recently rehabilitated and who offered his help at the centre where I work, were on standby. The moment Carla could convince Jack to go back, they would be ready to leave. From a training class for counsellors at the centre, I collected funds for petrol and toll fees.

And Wednesday afternoon, just before six o’clock, Nico, Adriaan and Jack hit the road. Just after midnight Jack was delivered safe and sound at the rehabilitation facility. As there was no money for them to stay over, Nico and Adriaan had to drive back straightaway. At ten on Thursday morning Nico stumbled into his workplace with
bloodshot eyes. Adriaan was more lucky – after a cup of coffee and a bit of post mortem in my office, he went home for a well deserved nap.

To a certain extent, this story reminds me of the shared meal, where strangers are welcome, as metaphor for the community established by God as friend and the faith community as friends of God. Neither Adriaan nor Nico knew Carla or Jack. Nonetheless, they were prepared to drive about 1600 kilometres through the night for this stranger, because they cared about the well-being of Carla, Jack and the rest of the family. To me, McFague’s (1987:173) argument that in a universe indifferent to human good, the bonds of friendship, both in the rite of hospitality and in the bond of goodwill uniting citizens, became essential, rang true.

McFague (1987:174) also reminds us that it is important to remember that if we take as our model the hospitality the church extends to the stranger, it can in no way be a community of like-minded friends but must have at its very heart the inclusion of the other, the different. This was very true regarding Jack and Adriaan. As a very “well-behaved and responsible” young man, the world of drug abuse was “alien” to Adriaan. In Adriaan’s view, Jack was different - a stranger. They were not like-minded at all. But still, Adriaan was prepared to take up the challenge and to do what was necessary to care in a very practical way.

6.7 CONCLUSION

To me, this tale of living friendship, extended to strangers, is a source of hope. I agree with Carr (1989:54) that our preoccupation with relationships expresses a form of hope. According to him, the lonely individual or isolated community seeks a contact with someone else or another group through which they may find a sense of permanence in an unreliable world or temporary gratification in a joyless environment. However, as the experience of Linda and her family shows, these lonely individuals do not always find that person or group to offer them space or a sense of permanence in a joyless environment. Therefore, with Kornfeld (1998:4) and McFague (1987:172-3), I plead for the emergence of new kinds of community, based on the principles of non-hierarchical, mutual helpfulness, for communities of care found in neighbourhood action and outreach groups where wounded persons can experience “love in action”; where wounded persons can as strangers be invited
to a shared meal among friends. What feeds my hope, is that through the pain of one family\textsuperscript{5}, and the determination of one mother that others will not suffer the way she had to\textsuperscript{6}, a new kind of community emerged where, through the caring action of the community, the support group was positioned to reach out towards a wounded family, inviting Carla and Jack to a shared meal, where they could experience the embodiment of ethical ways of love.

I therefore agree with Kornfeld (1998:11) when she suggests that the “community itself heals”. When acceptance, affirmation, support, care – agapic love – are given to members of the community, they thrive. They are alive. A “loving community is a natural therapeutic milieu in which people who are open to it can heal, grow, and mature” (Kornfeld 1998:86). Sometimes this love is expressed by what people do for each other when they support, listen, engage in practical acts of caring, affirm, tell the truth – caring enough for a stranger to be willing to drive through the night to take him back to safety and the possibility of healing. And sometimes simply by being themselves, members help others make changes in their lives – like Magda did when she opened herself for friendship with her neighbour. According to Kornfeld (1998:87), communities often have in them members who have significant, life-changing influence on others. And for McFague (1987:175), to be friends of Jesus means to stand with him and with all others united by and committed to the common vision embodied in the shared meal extended to the outsider .... It means being willing ... to join in mutual responsibility with God and others for the well-being of this world .... It means welcoming different others and many others into the community, for such friendship is not limited to the like-minded few: it invites and needs all who share the vision.

The understanding of friendship and the model of the church as a community of friends which I argued in the last few pages, holds great potential for the creation of a personal and corporate “space for love” (Nouwen 1976:157). The identity of the church community is determined by its call to care for and commit itself to the world with the same passion which can be seen in Jesus as he committed himself to humanity in his life and ministry and ultimately on the cross. As the above story of living friendship illustrates, the relationship of friendship is one “important conduit

\textsuperscript{5} I am referring to Linda’s family.
\textsuperscript{6} Linda was the driving force behind the founding of a support group for families who are struggling with the devastating effects of drug abuse.
through which this loving care can be expressed in tangible ways that reveal something of the God who inspires it” (Swinton 2000b:157).

According to Clapp (1996:197), we can care and be cared for only in genuine community. Therefore, in the next chapter I will explore a spirituality of hospitality, in the context of participation from the community of friends in the lives of the wounded among them, building on ideas of how certain practices of witnessing can contribute to the creating of healthy communities. With Carey and Russell (2003:15), I believe that the more people engage in positively witnessing each other’s lives, the greater solidarity and collective care is developed, and the less people become dependent on individual therapy.
CHAPTER 7

A SPIRITUALITY OF HOSPITALITY: TOWARDS HEALING COMMUNITIES

“[H]ealing means, first of all, the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention .... It is indeed one of the highest forms of hospitality”

Nouwen (1976:68)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As human beings we grow through relationships that draw us out of ourselves, give us life, teach us how to love, and lead to deepening communion (Wadell 2002:45). Selfhood does not pre-exist our relationships, but it is made possible by them. The most “fundamental spiritual inclination” of our nature is this “desire to be in communion with others” (Wadell 2002:45). For him, “to be human is to be possessed by the aching need to give our self to others and to receive the gift of another’s self in return” (Wadell 2002:45). The heart of friendship is the need to communicate our self, to share our soul and spirit with others in the hope that we might live in communion with them. This reciprocal communication of selves is the most humanising and life-giving activity, and it is “the life-blood of friendship – whether it be friendship with God, the special friendship of marriage, or friendship with others” (Wadell 2002:46).

Swinton (2000b:101) agrees when he contends that the bonds of friendship enable each individual to find the strength to be human and to remain human irrespective of their circumstances, as suffering is understood as an inevitable part of the human condition, and as such something to be understood and cared for, rather than battled against and defeated. Swinton (2000b:102) refers to the parable of the lost sheep, showing the importance of reconnecting the individual to the community. Therefore, to befriend someone is to enter into a relationship that reconnects the individual, not only with the church community, but also with their essential humanity. In this way, wounded persons will not be left behind by the community as it journeys (like the young man who pleaded for mercy and grace in a letter addressed to his faith community), nor will the community pass by those whom society rejects and marginalises (like Linda and her family). The community should therefore by nature be with and for others, just as God is with and for others, and according to Swinton
(2000b:102), the relationship of friendship is a primary “conduit” through which this healing presence is manifested. As such, it will seek to embrace all wounded persons, striving to “absorb” that suffering, by offering them acceptance, understanding, hope and meaning. In this way, the church as a community of friends, can effectively enable them to reframe and redefine their situations, in a way that allows them to grow into mental health and maintain their dignity and humanity even in the midst of woundedness.

Healing has therefore not simply to do with the individual, their woundedness and the healer, but expands to embrace the wider community that forms the context for the individuals’ distress (Swinton 2000b:103). If pastoral care as a ministry of the church that participates in the Jesus story of the compassion of God and, in a way, continues to tell that story, it “needs to participate in the friendship of Jesus” (Woggon 2003:262). And it is in this context, that pastoral care and counselling have to assist communities to be “channels of the friendship-love of Christ” (Carmichael 2004:197). Therefore, the purpose of pastoral care and counselling is, at least in part, to “help people gain a greater understanding of the stories of their lives, to interpret their stories in a new way, and on the basis of that fresh understanding to find their lives transformed” (Lyall 2001:50).

In Chapter 3, I argue for an ethical spirituality of participation, contending that pastoral care cannot be left to the professionals alone. In the context of the imago Dei and of shalomic community, we all are ethically committed to the well-being of our neighbours. In Chapters 4 and 5, I argued for the re-membering of the metaphor for God as friend and the church as a community of friends of God, and in Chapter 6 I explored a few ideas that obstruct us and our faith communities on our journey towards living out our calling as friends of God. In this chapter, I argue for a spirituality of hospitality, for the transformation of our faith communities into communities of friends; that is, into healing communities. I argue that the first step towards healing communities, communities that will take up the challenge of becoming conduits through which the healing presence of God can be manifested, is to learn to befriend others (strangers?) and to create a safe space where their stories can be listened to.
7.2 HEALING AS CREATING SPACE FOR THE STRANGER

Kornfeld (1998:4) argues for the emergence of new kinds of community, based on the principles of non-hierarchical, mutual helpfulness - communities of care found in neighbourhood action and outreach groups where wounded persons have experienced "love in action". When acceptance, affirmation, support, care – agapic or ethical ways of love – are given to members of the community, they thrive. They are alive. A "loving community is a natural therapeutic milieu in which people who are open to it can heal, grow, and mature" (Kornfeld 1989:86). Sometimes this love is expressed by what people do for each other when they support, listen, show practical acts of caring, affirm, tell the truth. And sometimes simply by being themselves, members help others make changes in their lives. Communities often have in them members who have significant, life-changing influence on others (Kornfeld 1998:87). According to Southard (1989:155), our humanity is enlivened by the wisdom that comes through a Christian community.

According to Carmichael (2004:197), Goodliff (1998:103), Nouwen (1976:66), Theron (1996:13), and Woggon (2003:263) it is important in a Christian spirituality to stress that every human being is called upon to be a healer. With Goodliff (1998:103), Griffin (1995:29-30) and Nouwen (1976:70), I believe that a general atmosphere of careful attention by all the members of the community can sometimes heal wounds before special care is demanded. Woggon (2003:263) points out that friendship is the first level or type of pastoral care, which is the “indispensable necessity” for all other, deeper levels of pastoral care. The model of friendship presented in the life and work of Christ offers, according to Woggon (2003:263), real possibilities for therapeutic change. Committed friendship that reaches beyond culturally constructed barriers and false understandings, and seeks to resurrect the person, is a powerful form of relationship, as it offers hope and new possibilities to people. Such a model of caring is open to both trained specialists and so-called lay people alike. We all are therefore healers who can reach out to offer health, and we all are patients in need of help. Non-specialists tend to underestimate their own human potential and refer to “those who have titles, thereby leaving their own creative power unwed” (Nouwen 1976:66). Griffin (1995:29) also uses the term pastor [healer] in the broader sense to mean men or women, lay or ordained, who see themselves as trying to respond to the need of others as part of their response to God. Nouwen (1976:66) contends that when we
see healing as “creating space for the stranger”, it is clear that all are invited to offer this so much needed form of hospitality. When I use the word ‘healer’, I therefore include both specialists (pastors, psychologists, therapists, pastoral counsellors) and non-specialists (neighbours, friends, family, empathetic strangers) in a community as friends of God.

However, Kornfeld (1998:70) reminds us that we must make a distinction between being a facilitator and being “the healer”. We have to remember that we are not, in and of ourselves, healers. We are facilitators in the mysterious healing process that has already begun in those who call us for help. Carmichael (2004:197) refers to “friendship facilitators”, when we as healers assist people to become channels of the friendship-love of Christ. Therefore, although I use the term “healer”, it is with this intention of healers actually being facilitators in mind. It also includes the notion of friendship. The healer can therefore be either a “professional caregiver” or a “friend” or a “professional-friend”.

In the context of my quest to invite faith communities to practise authentic participatory, inclusive, loving, caring relationships as a community of friends of God, I will first explore the narrative quality of human experience and pastoral care, followed by ideas on the healing power of stories shared. I will then explore ideas on compassionate witnessing, drawing disparate peoples into a more intimate awareness of each other, contributing to the creation of participating, inclusive, loving and caring communities of friends – healing communities where strangers are invited into becoming friends.

### 7.3 THE NARRATIVE QUALITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories. However, these stories do not simply describe the self; they are the self’s medium of being (Frank 1995:53). These stories are shaping of life, and have real, not imagined, effects. These stories provide the structure for life (White 1991:28). They are the “map and destination” (Frank 1995:1) of our lives. Stories are a way of redrawing maps and finding new destinations (Frank 1995:53). When we are wounded, and we loose our destination and map, we have to learn to think differently. We learn that by hearing ourselves tell our stories, absorbing others’ reactions, and experiencing our
Joshua is a young man, approximately 25 years old. He was since his early childhood a “difficult, busy child”. He was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome as well as Attention Deficit Disorder with hyperactivity. He often was involved in “quarrels”, and was labelled as a problem child. When he was ten years old, he smoked his first “dagga zol” with the garden worker, and eventually he ended up using heroin regularly. After years of pain and suffering, for him and his family, and spending many months in rehabilitation facilities, and many hours with his therapist, he is now clean for more than two years. However, Joshua still finds it difficult to make new friends. He knows that he has to stay away from the carnal friends from the old days. Finding new friends with his life narrative of heroin addiction following him like his shadow, is not easy. He forgave his community of faith for not being there for him, and longed for his faith community to forgive him, and offer him the opportunity to make amends. He wanted to be part of a ministry, because he knew that he has “something worthwhile” to offer. At last, he was invited into the leadership of the “Boiler Room”, a ministry of our congregation where a group of young people gather regularly on Friday afternoons, praying. In this group, Joshua discovered the healing power of community.

In the next paragraphs, I will weave Joshua’s story through ideas on stories and community. I will not attempt to provide a detailed narration of Joshua’s whole life narrative. I will only refer to his experiences to give life to the theories and knowledges I discuss as Joshua and I understand them.

Joshua comprehended his life not as disconnected actions or isolated events but in terms of narrative. He conceived his life as a “web of stories” (Anderson & Foley 2001:4), the unending succession of people, dates, and facts that filled his life woven together into a coherent whole. All the incidents where he was experienced as “troublesome” and “quarrelsome” were linked together, forming the plot of his story as being “difficult” and “the troublemaker”. The story of his name also attributed to the meaning he gave to these incidents:
Joshua’s father named him after a character in a novel. When Joshua was still very young, he saw the words “born to trouble” on the back cover of this book, and assumed it to be the meaning of his name. We (Joshua and me) speculated on the significance of this assumption and the meaning he attributed to his name on the choices he made and the life narrative he built for himself as “troublemaker”.

Stories were the vehicles through which Joshua assessed, asserted and constructed his sense of self: his personal identity.

Personal stories perform a specific function: they draw together the disparate fragments of a person’s life and forge them into a unified whole that they can then identify as their “self”. At first, the fragments of Joshua’s life formed a unified whole as “the troublemaker”. Later, by listening to Joshua’s story, the group of young people gathering on Friday afternoons, also participated in this process of self-unification by providing a context within which his narrative fragments could be externalised and moulded into a unified whole (Swinton 2000b:115). In this narrative, Joshua was a leader and a wounded healer. We are our stories, as “each remembered event constitutes a story, which together with our other stories constitutes a life narrative, and, experientially speaking, our life narrative is our life” (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). At first Joshua’s life was that of “troublemaker”; later on his life became that of the “wounded healer”.

On the journey of life, the storyteller

dispels the darkness by building a campfire around which the people can become a community. In the light of that fire from which the community feels warmth and through which they can see the faces of one another, the storyteller gathers lives into a story. Hearing it, the people remember who they are and who they will be. Discovering their place, they take root and grow.


Joshua found community around the campfire of the Friday afternoon gatherings. He remembered who he was: the wounded healer. Discovering this, he took root and grew.

However, beyond being simply a character conveyed in the stories of others, each of us is the primary author of our own life narrative. We continuously and actively author
and re-author our lives through story, articulating for ourselves and others the choices we make and the things we have done.

Therefore, Joshua’s life narrative was significantly shaped by the choices he made, the actions he took, and the friends he made. He re-authored his life from being the troublemaker to being the wounded healer.

7.3.1 The archaeology of stories

The telling of stories is nothing new. Ancient storytelling can be traced back to the bards. A bard was a poet whose duty it was to compose poetry and narration to retell the exploits and praise the heroic deeds of various tribal leaders. They used story, poetry, music and other art forms to communicate their message (Miller 2003:31). Other ancient storytelling forms can be found in caves with symbols written on the wall to tell the tales of wars and adventure. Some of those symbols also told about mundane life events like chores and caring for families. Storytelling “became the vehicle to pass on the history and traditions of one generation to the next” (Miller 2003:32). In pre-modern times, folklore and traditional stories provided a capacity for experiencing illness and woundedness (Frank 1995:7).

Stories have been around for such a long time because God created humanity with the capacity to interpret their surroundings. Kornfeld (1998:85) argues that God has planted within us a need to make meaning out of our lives. And meaning-making is possible because of the physical processes of the brain that make memory possible. According to Miller (2003:33), this longing to understand the bigger questions is a deep need that cannot be filled with mere facts. God did not choose to reveal a list of facts to us. The Old Testament was given to humanity in the form of narratives and poetry. Even the writing of the law took place in the midst of the deeply compelling story of God redeeming his chosen people.

7.3.2 Stories as agents for connectedness

Miller (2003:36) argues that we are extremely receptive to stories, because of the collapse of the grand story in Western society. For centuries, almost everyone was connected to the same story. Before the Enlightenment, God was central to people’s
view of the world (Goodliff 1998:28), and each person had the same beginning to his or her story: “In the beginning God created ...” This story defined people’s lives. It created a comfort and safety, a “type of glue that held everything together” (Miller 2003:36). However, after the Enlightenment and during the Seventeenth Century, people had lost faith in the ability of religion to give adequate answers to the problems of humanity, and reason replaced the old dogmas and traditions (Goodliff 1998:29). In modernity and science, all the facts must add up, and the telling of stories became secondary to science (Frank 1995:7). This removes the most human aspect of being alive – our relational connections. And this is exactly where the longing in the human heart begins, in a longing for relational connections. Because life is “messy … [n]ice, neat, prepackaged messages do not address the human condition like they once did” (Miller 2003:38). That is why stories connect with people because they acknowledge the realities of everyday life.

The experiences of women in one of the many refugee camps in Tanzania in the aftermath of the massacres that occurred in Rwanda in the early 1990’s, illustrate this longing for relational connections (Anderson & Foley 2001:3). The women suffered from sleeplessness. The women, who witnessed the murder of family and friends, had been told by the camp officials not to talk about their experiences. As the women followed these instructions, the memories of the carnage haunted them, and they could not sleep. The psychologist visiting the camp set up a story tree – a safe place under a huge shade tree - for the women to speak of their experiences. Every morning she went to the huge shade tree. The first day no one came. The second day one woman appeared, told her story and left. Another showed up the following day, and another and another. Within the span of a few days scores of women were gathering under the tree each morning to listen and to share their tales of loss, fear and death. Finally, after weeks of listening, the psychologist knew that the story tree was working: the women in the camp were sleeping.

Although most of us never have witnessed the horror of civil war, nor experienced the aftermath of genocide, we can visualise women gathering under a tree to remember. We may not understand the spectre of family slaughter nor comprehend thousands of refugees living in squalor, but we do know about fear and sleeplessness. Part of the power of narrative is that it enables us to make deep human connections that
transcend unfamiliarity in locale and experience. Stories “transport us to times and places we do not know. Through narrative, we become spiritual travellers undaunted by time, distance, or new landscapes. It is as if stories have mystical power to invite us, willingly or unwillingly, to enter unknown worlds” (Anderson & Foley 2001:4). I believe that it is this capacity of stories to transcend unfamiliarity in locale and experience, that makes compassion possible: I do not have a child suffering from drug addiction, but through the stories of others – first Linda and later the parents in the support group, the pain and isolation caused by the effects of drug addiction, touched me at a level where I had no choice but to undertake this research project, inviting faith communities to care with their wounded.

According to Kornfeld (1989:85-86), just as our capacity to remember is given to us by God, so is our ability to forget. When we experience great pain or trauma, we sometimes forget those memories because the event is too much to bear. These experiences are not permanently lost to us, as they are remembered by the cells of our bodies. Emotional memories that are stored by the neurochemical processes of the brain can be retrieved and relived. And it is usually only when people are in a safe place with dependable people, like the women in the refugee camp, that they can remember painful experiences they need to forget. They remember these when they are strong enough and have the support to make meaning of them. While these memories are usually retrieved in a therapist’s office, they can also be recovered in the safety of loving community. Because of the safety and support of our communities, we “can know ourselves and we can allow others to know us” (Kornfeld 1998:86). It was in the safety of the community, around the campfire of the Friday afternoon gatherings, that Joshua could allow the others to know him.

As for the women in the refugee camp, and for Joshua at the Friday afternoon gatherings, there is tremendous healing in being able to tell one’s story in a safe environment that is free from judgment and condemnation. The “simple act of listening to a person’s story can help rebuild the identity of someone who is struggling with loss and change” (Swinton 2000b:116). By being listened to, we can “know more fully who we are” (Kornfeld 1998:21). For Frank (1995:55), the “way out of narrative wreckage is telling stories”.

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For Joshua, eventually his way out of his narrative wreckage was the telling of his story in the community of the Friday afternoon gathering, where he was neither judged nor condemned. It was “the final piece of the puzzle to make my healing complete”.

We also have micro narratives that describe specific events in our lives (what happened yesterday) as well as macro narratives (family background, culture, religious traditions) that make sense of our lives on a broader level. There is a close relationship between how people describe their immediate past experience and their broader worldview (Lyall 2001:45).

### 7.3.3 Communal nature of our stories

Storytelling appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others. Some of the stories we tell are passed down to us in our families or in the culture or in our religious traditions. Because of these stories, we ascribe certain meaning to particular life events and regard others as without significance (Freedman & Combs 1996:32). When people tell their own unique stories, they compose these stories by adapting and combining narrative types that cultures make available (Frank 1995:75). Therefore, within a social constructionist worldview, it is important to attend to cultural and contextual stories as well as to individual people’s stories (Freedman & Combs 1996:31). The stories that persons live by are rarely, if ever, “radically” constructed – it is not a matter of them being made-up, “out of the blue”, so to speak (White 1991:28).

Although people tell uniquely personal stories, they neither make up these stories by themselves, nor do they tell them only to themselves (Frank 1995:170). Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationship have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions (White 1991:28). The stories we call “ours” are already bits and pieces we have gathered from others’ stories (Frank 1995:163). Therefore, cultural stories determine the shapes of our individual life narratives. People make sense of their lives through stories, both the cultural narratives they are born into and the personal narratives they construct in relation to the cultural narratives.
This explains to me, as I have argued in the previous chapters, the successes the individualistic culture we live in, have in blinding us to our essential relational being, convincing us that we are self-fulfilled and self-contained and that we can actually make it on our own.

Because we are communal creatures, our storytelling and story-making contribute mightily to the creation and maintenance of human communities. Self-narration is therefore not simply an individual activity. Storytelling and story-living is also a community activity. They build bonds, make identification possible, break down barriers, and enable us to recognise the commonality of our experiences. Even more so when their context is a community of faith, formed by a story that is both the story of the congregation in that place at that time and the grand narrative of the Christian Church stretching back over two millennia (Lyall 2001:48).

7.3.4 Weaving together the human and the divine

When we weave together the human and the divine, we are attentive to another story that is not completely our own, a narrative that has the power to transform. Weaving together the human and the divine enables us “to hear our own stories retold with clarity and new possibility. And when our own stories are retold, our lives are transformed in the telling” (Anderson & Foley 2001:7). A good deal of pastoral care consists of listening to people tell their own stories. The healer’s task can be seen as one of helping people understand their own story in a new perspective and facilitating them to locate it within the much larger story of God’s dealing with humankind. Taken together, the biblical stories speak of what it means to live before God and what it means to live without God (Griffin 1995:44).

The experience of Carla and Jack, when two strangers have been willing to offer their time and energy to drive a person in need through the night to safety and the possibility of healing (Chapter 6, paragraph 6.6), illustrates that acts of caring can make these links as effective as any other form of healing action – and the community of friends can do this as effectively as “professionals”.
7.3.5 The narrative quality of pastoral care

According to Lyall (2001:44), narrative has become an important vehicle for the communication of truth in theology; narrative or story is a means of expression uniquely suited to theology. Lyall (2001:45) argues that “much of ‘the Christian fact’ has a narrative quality”. While the Old Testament tells the story of Israel prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, it is itself full of good stories which are not simply stories “with morals” (Lyall 2001:45), but stories “which in their telling and hearing disclose something of the human condition”. In the New Testament we have four different stories of the life of Jesus, which are in effect four different interpretations of his life. Also, Jesus taught by making use of stories. The parables he used were not good illustrations to punctuate his points, but the stories he told revealed the hidden mysteries of God. Miller (2003:40) contends that although Jesus did explain some of the parables, he did not tie everything up into nice, neat packages. Instead, he told stories, based on the experiences of the people. He also told stories of things people had never thought of – he told stories that caused people to think. These were “not trim, tidy, well-edited messages. They are raw stories aimed at the heart by way of the ear” (Miller 2003:41). More recent understanding of the parables has moved beyond seeing them as illustrations of general truths about God and humankind, to seeing them as “possessing their own power to disclose both the realities of human life and the radical nature of God’s grace” (Lyall 2001:45).

Our collective life experiences are interpreted through a personal narrative framework and shaped into a master story that, in turn, influences subsequent interpretations (Anderson & Foley 2001:11). We do not shape this narrative alone. Our stories are set in the context of a wider story (Lyall 2001:48). There are many outside influences over which we have little control. We are more co-authors of our stories than solitary narrators of our lives. Therefore, according to Anderson and Foley (2001:12), understanding our story in relation to God’s story is necessary for persons of faith. However, even though others, including God, have a part in authoring our story, we are ultimately responsible for the narrative. The power of interpretation is always ours. It is therefore always possible to narrate our lives in another way – we need not be trapped in our stories (Anderson & Foley 2001:12). It is possible to find new stories for shaping meaning in our lives and by so doing bring forth new worlds of possibility (Anderson & Foley 2001:18).
Joshua “discovers alternative ways to experience suffering” (Frank 1995:119), when he reflects that “although my journey through addiction was not a pleasant one, I know that I have gained a wisdom which I can use in helping others. I do believe that God has a plan for me, and will use me in His bigger plan”. Storytelling is an “act of hope … because it carries within it the power to change” (Anderson & Foley 2001:12).

The combination of religion and counselling has the potential to help us find inner strength through connection with God in friendship, and to find peace through the involvement with community through friendship. Just by being there, the healer is able at times to convey God’s blessing, understanding and support to a person’s struggle (Lyall 2001:90). The Boiler Room gatherings conveyed God’s blessing, understanding and support to Joshua through the community-of-friend’s understanding and support.

For Frank (1995:55), the conventional expectation of any narrative, held alike by listeners and storytellers, is for a past that leads into a present that sets in place a foreseeable future. Stories of woundedness, however, are wrecked, because the present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely thinkable. Frank (1995) describes three types of woundedness, which I find helpful in the context of healing communities, where friends allow one another a friendly and safe space, building a campfire where stories can be told, reconnecting to their own life experiences.

### 7.4 NARRATIVES OF WOUNDEDNESS

In his book “The wounded storyteller” Frank (1995) describes narratives of woundedness. Although Frank’s ideas were inspired by illness, he also refers to the experiences of Holocaust survivors, and his ideas echo in most stories people tell of their journeys through the difficulties of their lives. I therefore argue that when Frank refers to ‘illness’, it can also be interpreted as ‘woundedness’.

Frank (1995:75-136) describes three types of narratives of woundedness:

- the restitution narrative;
• the chaos narrative; and
• the quest narrative.

In the next paragraphs, I will describe these three narratives briefly.

7.4.1 The restitution narrative

Anyone who is sick wants to be healthy again. Moreover, contemporary individualistic culture treats health as the normal condition that people ought to have restored. The plot of the restitution has the basic storyline: “Yesterday I was healthy, today I am sick, but tomorrow I will be healthy again”.

Normally people prefer restitution stories, and experience discomfort at hearing stories of woundedness told in other narratives. Restitution stories are strengthened among others by television advertisements for non-prescriptive drugs. Behind these commercials lies the modernist expectation that “for every suffering there is a remedy” (Frank 1995:80). The consequences of this master narrative are complex. The ill person is portrayed in misery and often in social default. Then the remedy is introduced, and physical comfort is restored and social duties resumed. Living in the contemporary culture, we see these commercials without noticing them – they set in place the narratives of the stories that real people tell about real illness. They not only condition expectations for how sickness progresses, they also provide a model for how stories about sickness are told. I believe that this adds to the expectation that when Joshua was sent to rehab for the first time, he would be perfectly fine when he returned after a few weeks!

The restitution plot is ancient: Job, after all his suffering, has his wealth, health and family restored. This can however, leave the reader with the impression that somehow Job got it right. And for Joshua and his family a feeling of why he/they could not get it right when he was not perfectly fine when he returned from rehab.

In a predominantly individualistic culture, where we see ourselves as essentially private, solitary and autonomous individuals and where the consumerist idea that when a product wears out or break down, we do not repair it, but throw it away and buy a new one, are as applicable to humans as they are to things, as I have argued
in Chapter 6, the restitution story is the culturally preferred narrative. But, in the words of Frank (1995:96): “What happens when those who have always spoken of their own experience in the language of survival find that language has nothing left to say about themselves, once the viability of restoration has run out?” – as was the case with Joshua and his family?

7.4.2 The chaos narrative

Chaos is the opposite of restitution: its plot imagines life never getting better. Stories are chaotic in their absence of narrative order. Chaos stories are hard to hear – the teller is not understood as telling a “proper” story, or even living a “proper” life, since in life as in story, one event is expected to lead to another. When Joshua’s mother found out about his addiction, she sent him for rehabilitation with the expectation that he will be “cured” when he came back. When he relapsed, that expectation was negated, and chaos followed. Because chaos negates this expectation that one event will lead to the next, it is experienced as threatening.

While restitution stories are preferred, chaos stories provoke anxiety. They are hard to hear, because:

- they reveal vulnerability, futility and impotence;
- they tell how easily any of us can be sucked under; and
- they do not have happy endings.

In chaos stories, there is a hole in the story that cannot be filled. The story “traces the edges of a wound that can only be told around …. The teller of chaos stories is, pre-eminently, the wounded storyteller, but those who are truly living the chaos cannot tell the words” (Frank 1995:98). These stories cannot literally be told but can only be lived. However, the voice of chaos can be identified, and a story reconstructed.

Although the personal and cultural dislike for chaos stories take the form of “simply being unable to hear the story” (Frank 1995:100), people living chaos stories ask recognition of the chaos of their stories. Until the chaos narrative can be honoured, the world in all its possibilities is being denied. To deny the chaos story, is to deny the person telling the story, and people who are being denied, cannot be cared for. The chaotic body is disabled with respect to entering relationships of care. It cannot
tell enough of its own story to formulate its needs and ask for help. Often it cannot accept help when it is offered (Frank 1995:109). Linda’s reflection on her experience during Joshua’s addiction, confirms these ideas, when she said: “The devastating effect of Joshua’s drug addiction on our family, is beyond words!”

I also believe that these ideas cast some light on what was happening in a community of faith that isolate and reject their wounded rather than reaching out towards them in care and compassion.

However, even the chaos passes for most of us. I believe that the chaos does not pass for everybody and that due to a variety of reasons, many are stuck in the chaos. However, the stories the participants brought to this research journey, directed its course towards narratives where the chaos were conquered. I can only speculate about the effect when the chaos does not pass – the connection with suicide, the “escape” the abuse of substances offers, and many more. In Chapter 9 I express the hope that another researcher will be inspired to build further on ideas on never-ending chaos.

### 7.4.3 The quest narrative

The quest narrative meets suffering head on. It accepts woundedness and seeks to use it. Something is to be gained through the experience. The quest narrative affords the wounded person a voice as the teller of his/her own story. In the quest narrative the teller does have a story to tell.

In the restitution story the active player is the remedy: it can be either the drug or the physician or both. Chaos stories remain the wounded person’s own story, but the suffering is too great for a self to be told. The voice of the teller has been lost as a result of the chaos, and this loss then perpetuates that chaos. The quest speaks from the wounded person’s perspective and holds the chaos at bay. It affords the wounded their most distinctive voice. Most published illness stories are quest stories.

Quest stories tell of searching for alternative ways of being wounded. As the wounded person gradually realises a sense of purpose, the idea that woundedness has been a journey emerges. In quest stories, the interruption is reframed as a
challenge. The past is reinterpreted in terms of the present and takes on an enhanced meaning.

The quest self-story is about finding voice itself, which is found in the recollection of memories. The storyteller’s responsibility is to witness the memory of what happened, and to set this memory right by providing a better example for others to follow. The quest story accepts woundedness as a calling, a vocation. The quest narrative recognises that the old intactness must be stripped away to prepare for something new. Quest stories reflect a confidence in what is waiting to emerge from the suffering (Frank 1995:171). However, Frank (1995:180) warns that the quest of finding meaning in suffering “can only be undertaken oneself; to prescribe this quest to others is arrogance”.

The story of Linda was turned into a quest narrative when she made herself available to assist me in founding a support group for the parents whose children engage in patterns of drug addiction. She says: “I know the pain in the absence of friendship; of isolation and rejection; of not knowing what to do with no-one to turn to. I still remember the desperation of having to take my son to a rehabilitation facility in the Karoo – I had to drive all the way by myself; I had to deal with him on my own when he tried to kick my car’s window out in an effort to ‘escape’. I will do anything in my power to be there for others, so that they do not have to suffer the way I did”.

Joshua, after his rehabilitation from heroin addiction, is studying theology through the Rhema Bible College. He completed his studies recently. For Joshua, his name is symbolic of his journey through chaos towards becoming a wounded healer. He said: “I always thought my name meant ‘born to trouble’. But through the process of redemption, I found through the grace of God new meaning to my name: it really means ‘thunder ruler and mighty protector’. I take the ‘mighty protector’ very literally; I am going to make it my life’s quest to protect God’s church.” When I thanked him for his willingness to share his hard earned wisdom with me and all the readers of this thesis, he answered: “It was not an enjoyable journey. But I am grateful to God that now I am able to contribute to His Kingdom precisely because of my woundedness. The woundedness and the chaos are now in the past. I am now proud to be a
wounded healer”. Joshua found his quest to offer a caring listening presence for others who are still struggling through their chaos.

It is in this possibility of the storyteller reframing a narrative of woundedness, of telling and re-telling our stories, so that in the end we tell ourselves out of the narrative wreckage of our chaos stories of woundedness, into a hopeful future narrative, where the hope of a caring listening friend can take root and grow.

7.5 WHEN STORIES ARE SHARED

Healing means first of all allowing wounded persons to become sensitive and obedient to their own stories. Healers become students who want to learn and wounded persons become teachers who want to teach. The wounded “learn their own story by telling it to a healer who wants to hear it” (Nouwen 1976:69). For Joshua, as the wounded storyteller (Frank 1995:98), in telling the events of his life, the events were mediated by the telling. But for that to happen, the wounded teller needs a healer who “is ready to be hospitable” (Kornfeld 1998:49). Joshua’s therapist and the Boiler Room gatherings were the healers who were hosts who patiently and carefully listen to the story of the suffering strangers. Wounded persons are guests who rediscover their selves by telling their story to the one who offers them a place to stay. In the telling of their stories, strangers befriend not only their host, but also their own past

Nouwen (1976:69)

Hedahl (2001:99) also stretches this point when she describes listening as a divinely linked activity, a listening-with-God-present that “brings a particular gift to the speaker”. To “listen” another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another (Hedahl 2001:82). This is what Weingarten (2000:160) describes as “compassionate witnessing”, when we need our community to express the pain in our hearts, drawing disparate peoples into a more intimate awareness of each other. The other participants of the Boiler Room gatherings were compassionate witnesses to Joshua, and for each other.
7.5.1 Healers as compassionate witnesses

In telling the events of one’s life, events are mediated by the telling (Frank 1995:98), and to listen to another person’s story, to create space for the other to tell his/her story, is to give another “voice” (Weingarten 2000:392). Witness requires voice as its medium, and voice finds its responsibility in witnessing (Frank 1995:165). People actually seek the company of healers as caring listeners with material that for them has remained silent. The healer’s ability to listen drives people deep into their own unspoken or unspeakable layers of being and forces them to put words to their silent material (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:12). Griffin (1995:58) explains voice when he says that pastoral listening “may well have as its object to enable those who are listened to, to find their own words which will enable them to engage with God”. Voice is not an individual achievement of self-knowledge, but rather a “possibility that depends on the willingness of the listeners that make up the person’s community”. In this view, voice is contingent on who listens with what attention and attunement.

Joshua agrees with this argument when he contends: “Without the caring presence and the willingness of Marietjie [his therapist] to listen, my classmates and the Friday afternoon gatherings at the Boiler Room, I would not have found the real meaning of my name or my purpose as wounded healer – for me this represents my voice”.

Voice depends on “witnessing” (Weingarten 2000:392). For Griffin (1995:51), to listen is to “engage the heart and the imagination along with the ear. It is an active, intentional and demanding response which involves the whole body in attentiveness and interpretation”. I believe that this is one of the greatest gifts we can give our friends.

For Weingarten (2000:392) the focus is away from voice itself, to the context in which voice is produced – that is towards witnessing. She contends that we are always witnesses. People speak and we hear, whether we choose to or not. In the context of my argument for healing communities, it is therefore not ambitious, large-scale projects we need to invite communities to participate in caring practices; it lies in this small, everyday and mundane opportunities to witness the lives and experiences of those among us. The challenge is to raise the awareness of the faith community to
the abundance of opportunities available. The Friendship Position Map discussed in Chapter 5, can therefore be a powerful instrument.

Witnessing takes place in and out of spoken and written language. Witnessing “fractures language in ways that mirror the fractures of language experienced by those whose experience is witnessed” (Weingarten 2000:393).

Kornfeld (1998:34) and Swinton (2000:116) warns that it is sometimes difficult to be with people who are in intense pain, who are fragmented, or who speak about feeling empty, without wanting to do something about it. Although these feelings can come from care and empathy, this desire to do something can also be caused by the healer’s own need not to be anxious, or his/her “need to be needed” (Heidish 1997:128). According to Kornfeld (1998:34), the healer then compulsively tries to help the people who come to see us change. We as healers have a need to cheer them up, or solve their problem, or talk them out of their worries for our sake. Sometimes a “savior complex” (Heidish 1997:128) deludes us into thinking that we have more power to “save” the troubled or the suffering than we actually do. I do believe that this is also true about our friends and family.

Frank (1995:110) also warns against this immediate impulse of listeners to “drag the teller out of this story, that dragging called some version of ‘therapy’”. Although getting out of the “chaos” is to be desired, people can only be helped out of the chaos when those who care are first willing to become witnesses to the story. According to Swinton (2000b:116), what people sometimes need, is not someone to do something for them, but someone to be something for them. We have to accept that sometimes there are no answers. Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:15) refer to the movie Sophie’s Choice, where a mother had to choose between her children, and ask: “How could we possibly advise Sophie on this choice? What could we say if we were the caring listener to whom she chose to tell her story?” They contend that the caring listener must be willing to endure the ambiguity of the moment where there are no answers. According to Frank (1995:109), until the chaos narrative can be honoured, the world in all its possibilities is being denied. And to deny a chaos story, is to deny the person telling the story, and people who are denied cannot be cared for. Therefore, chaos is
never transcended but must be accepted before new lives can be built and new stories told (Frank 1995:110).

When there are no answers, when the end is uncertain, we can still participate in a meaningful moment. Our listening, caring presence is often the catalyst for that meaningful moment. We are just there. This is meaningful to the person in pain. It happens because the listener has exhibited risk and commitment.

Wicks and Rodgerson (1998:17)

According to Kornfeld (1998:27) sometimes we only need to be a “supportive, accepting presence who ‘keeps the client company’ while the [woundedness] becomes clear”. In order to achieve this, both the healer and the wounded person must learn patience. Kornfeld (1998:27) quotes the Tao Te Ching who asks:

Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and your water becomes clear?
Can you remain unmoving
till the right action arises by itself?

Thinking about the story of Martha and Jane (Chapter 5), Martha and I had to learn this kind of patience while witnessing Jane as she struggled with the effects of her son’s addiction on her family. We had to keep Jane company until the right action arose by itself. Sometimes it is as if friendship is about waiting together.

According to Frank (1995:31), sometimes we cannot fully attend to chaos stories of woundedness because they are an implicit critique of the modernist assumptions we live by. In this regard, Goodliff (1998:174) refers to “Freud’s ‘talking cure’”. Theron (1996:11) also expresses his concern that the emphasis of pastoral counselling tends to be too much on “success”. Bosch (1979:31) also warns against the influence of capitalism, in the sense that in everything we undertake we think in the categories of success, yield and dividends. The result is that we “feel terribly embarrassed when we cannot report tangible results”. Therefore, trained as “fixers of humanity” (Hedahl 2001:5), we as healers want the wounded persons who come to us with their stories of chaos to reinstitute the restitution narrative. Kornfeld (1998:11) agrees that sometimes there is nothing much we can do to “fix” a situation. She advises that we have to “learn to accept our limitations and to develop patience. Often we cannot know the effect our accepting attitude or simply our presence has. We may feel ineffective, only to learn that in a caring session a seed was planted that much later bore fruit”. My experience in caring with Jane, resonates with these ideas. While Jane
had to work out her own solution to her problems at her own time, the caring and healing presence of her friend Martha, the support group and myself, sustained her and gave her strength.

For Frank (1995:112) the objective is not “to romanticize chaos; it is horrible. But modernity has a hard time accepting, even provisionally, that life sometimes is horrible. The accompanying denial of chaos only makes the horror worse. This horror is a mystery that can only be faced, never solved”. Frank (1995:112) pleads for a consciousness that does not see wounded people as “in need of fixing”, but to be honoured for “what they are being”; what they need is healers who are prepared to witness their stories of woundedness. The value of witnessing lies in allowing the wounded person to “speak outside of the language of survival” (Frank 1995:166). Again, for me this is as true for the 'professional' as for the friend offering a listening presence and caring heart. Jane did not need a professional; she needed friends who were willing to allow her to speak outside the language of survival. Joshua reflects on his experience with a therapist who honoured him for his being without trying to fix him all the time: “Marietjie allowed me the space to vent my emotional build-up. Her listening and caring presence was unconditional and unwarranted”.

However, Carr (1989:85) warns that the Christian calling is not merely to be, but by being and believing to achieve. Without vigilance we can slide into a cycle of mutuality confirming belief and inaction. I believe that what he warns against, is to lay at night in my warm bed, listening to the wind blowing outside, thinking about the homeless, feeling compassion for them, and praying for them. But then, in the morning, go on with life, doing nothing about the situation, accepting it as one of life’s many discrepancies. This also reminds me of Nevi Basson, a colleague who once said that when someone is drowning, we cannot stand on the river-bank, shouting “I’m here for you!” or “How would you like me to help you?” In such a case, we have to take action and throw him/her the life-line. Even small gestures, like serving tea to the other guests, while visiting a friend who just received the news that her son has died, can make a difference.
In the following section I will explore, in the context of compassionate witnessing, the art of listening in a safe and friendly space where stories can be received by friends offering this space.

7.5.2 Compassionate witnessing

The experience of Wilmien illustrates what I mean by compassionate witnessing:

After a marriage of 25 years, Wilmien decided to end her marriage. After twenty five years she could not go on with a relationship in which she never felt safe or cared for. She grew tired of hoping for the better days that was always promised, but never came. Due to her husband’s “difficult” personality, he never was popular with Wilmien’s family. In fact, they “rejoiced” when she eventually took the final step of divorce.

However, although she made the decision, and knew she did not want to – could not - continue with the marriage, it was not easy to turn her back on the shared memories of so many years. She mourned her marriage, and struggled with feelings of disappointment because she could not make it work. She had to move to another city, and although lack of money was not new to her, she felt the responsibility of being the breadwinner for two sons and herself.

Wilmien found care and comfort among her friends and her colleagues. And although they tried to be supportive, her family could not understand why she was so sad – in their minds she should “put it behind her and go on with her life”. For them, she was finally rid of the husband whom they perceived only a burden to her. In tears, Wilmien confessed one day: “I am so cross with my mother! I will never again be so stupid to think I will find an ounce of sympathy from her! She just cannot understand! She only likes me when she thinks I am okay. She doesn't even want to listen to me when I try to explain that I am heartbroken, that I am anything but okay. From now on, I will put on my happy face when I have to see her. She just cannot understand how I feel.”

For people like Wilmien, the predicaments and concerns they have about their lives contribute to a sense of isolation and disconnection from other people who may otherwise hold special significance in their lives. I believe Wilmien was living a chaos
narrative, and that the people close to her experienced discomfort listening to her story. Like the interviewers of Holocaust survivors directed the stories towards another narrative that exhibits the resilience of the human spirit (Frank 1995:101), Wilmien’s mother wanted to direct her towards a restitution narrative; she wanted her to be “fine” again. She wanted to keep the talk tolerable for herself by steering (or trying to) Wilmien towards what she thought would be the end of her misery, by advising her to put everything behind her and go on with her life – she was rushing Wilmien to move on – to change. However, Wilmien’s mother forgot an essential principle of healing: people change only after they are first accepted as they are. People do not change when others try to change them (Kornfeld 1998:34). Wilmien experienced this as her mother trivialising her experience.

According to Carey and Russell (2003:5), if our preferred story of who we are remains only a conversation in our own head, it will not have the sense of being “real”. This sense of realness or authenticity only comes when our preferred stories are witnessed and responded to by a significant audience. Frank (1995:109) contends that until the chaos narrative can be honoured, the world in all its possibilities is denied. And to deny a story is to deny the person telling the story; and people who are denied, cannot be cared for. In her attempt to drag Wilmien out of her chaos story, to rush her to move on, her mother denied Wilmien the experience of being cared for, resulting in feelings of isolation and frustration which attributed to her pain.

When we acknowledge each other’s despair, we transform it. If we do not, like Wilmien’s mother, we enhance it. This is the essence of compassionate witnessing. That is why even a small gesture can have great impact. For Weingarten (2003:207) the heart of this kind of chosen witnessing is: “[f]eeling seen, feeling known, we can change”.

In everyday life we have opportunities to witness people who are in situations similar to our own and people whose life circumstances are different. The former is like looking into a mirror (like Wilmien’s already divorced friends witnessing her chaos story); the latter like looking through a window (like Wilmien’s friends who are still married witnessing her pain). In both cases, however, the task is the same: we want
to convey that we understand and that our understanding makes a difference to us. In each act of witnessing “we give a gift: in effect we say, ‘Your suffering has mattered. Knowing about it changes me. Your pain is not in vain’” (Weingarten 2003:207).

Like Weingarten (2003:206) I believe that life is messy and does not lend itself to following protocols. However, protocols provide initial structure, which can help until we get comfortable with our own ideas of applying a new idea. In the following paragraphs I will explore some of the facets of compassionate witnessing, in the context of journeying from being unaware, disinterested or even hostile strangers towards aware, intentional compassionate witnesses participating as friends of God in creating healing communities. As the first step on this journey, I propose the simple act of learning to listen.

### 7.6 A LISTENING HABITAT

According to Nouwen (1976:68), the first and most important aspect of healing is an interested effort to know the wounded person fully, in all their joys and pains, pleasures and sorrows, ups and downs, highs and lows, which have given shape and form to their life and have led them through the years to their present situation. We cannot heal if we do not know fully the wounds that need healing. Therefore, healing means the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who are wounded can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention. Hedahl (2001:98) refers to a “theology of listening”, where a positive listening space is created. She calls this space a “listening habitat”, defined as a compassionate context in which the divine and human presences are held together in the background of any listening/speaking event. Heidish (1997:60) calls this a “ministry of presence”, and for Kornfeld (1998:34), our first role in the healing of others is to be with them as they discover their wholeness, to learn to practise the art of being accepting – “practicing the presence of God”. For Heidish (1997:68), this does not mean simply attentive silence. It means eye contact, those small noises we make to say, “I’m with you; I’m hearing you”. It means focused attention which does not make the speaker feel you are really planning the dinner or watching the clock or rushing the conversation along. It does involve facial expressions and body language, conveying your empathy and attentiveness. Heshusius (1995:122) refers to a participatory mode of
consciousness where egocentric concerns do not stand in the way. According to her, a participatory mode of consciousness “relates to a way of being with others and with the self that is passively alert, vigilant but not intrusive” characterised by both the totality of the act of interest and the participation of the total person.

According to Hedahl (2001:98), “pastoral” listening is a theological activity, where the process is nuanced in unique ways through faith perspectives (Hedahl 2001:15). Kornfeld (1998:61) refers to “holy listening” which can be an act of prayer. When we are truly listening, we are engaged in meaning-making, an activity that for the healer is profoundly religious. When we are listening deeply, we sometimes are waiting “for the other to speak or feel or know .... As we are waiting, we sometimes experience a sense of being in a state of silent, wordless prayer .... And sometimes, we are aware of a Presence holding us in the hovering silence” (Kornfeld 1998:61).

However, Griffin (1995:51), Hedahl (2001:98), Heidish (1997:68), Heshusius (1995:117), Kornfeld (1998:54), Nouwen (1976:68) and Weingarten (2003:197) warn that listening is an art that takes practice and patience, that must be developed, it is not a technique that can be applied. It needs the full and real presence of people to each other. It is indeed “one of the highest forms of hospitality” (Nouwen 1976:68). And as we grow more skilled in the art of listening, we become privileged witnesses “to wondrous, sometimes humorous windows into the human condition” (Heidish 1997:69).

Although we speak and hear others all the time, few of us truly listen (Hedahl 2001:2; Kornfeld 1998:23; Weingarten 2003:197). Therefore, for Nouwen (1976:68) listening to know through and through is such a healing service because it makes “strangers familiar with the terrain they are travelling through and helps them to discover the way they want to go” (Nouwen 1976:68). The pastoral listener must be primarily intent upon incarnational listening, exhibiting the divine readiness and presence to the speaker that keeps in view the godly heart of the listening habitat (Hedahl 2001:99).

Therefore, our most important question as healers should not be “what to say or to do?” but “how to develop enough inner space where the story can be received?”
Healing is the humble but also very demanding task of creating and offering a friendly empty space where wounded persons can reflect on their pain and suffering without fear, and find the confidence that makes them look for new ways right in the centre of their confusion (Nouwen 1976:69).

Joshua reflects on his experience on Friday afternoons as follows: “If it was not for the safe environment of the group at the Boiler Room, where the others cared to listen to my stories, my journey towards healing would have stagnated. Their receiving of my story contributed to the completion of my healing process”.

This is what I believe narrative therapy has to offer: providing ways of listening for the alternative and preferred stories and identities of the people who seek the assistance of a therapist. According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992:29), it is a mechanism through which the therapist and the client participate in the co-development of new meanings, new realities and new narratives. They argue for a “not-knowing” position where “the therapist’s role, expertise, and emphasis is to develop a free conversational space and to facilitate an emerging dialogical process in which this ‘newness’ can occur”. For them, the emphasis is “not to produce change but to open space for conversation”.

### 7.6.1 Learned ignorance of the healer

Healers are, more than anything else, “listeners to and interpreters of stories. Persons seek out a pastoral counsellor because they need someone to listen to their story” (Gerkin 1984:26). However, the healer is more than someone who listens to stories, “[h]e or she is also a bearer of stories and of a story. The [healer] does not come empty-handed to the task of understanding the other’s story and offering the possibility of a new interpretation. The [healer] brings his or her own interpretation of life experience” (Gerkin 1984:27). Hedahl (2001:47) argues for “a capacity to hear through many wrappings”. This is not an easy process because communication has to take place across two language barriers, not only that which exists between the healer and the wounded person, but also that within the healer him/herself as he/she tries to understand what is going on in the wounded person, as well as in him/herself (Gerkin 1984:27). Talita, one of the members of the Friday afternoon gatherings, explains her experience while witnessing the story of John, a friend of Joshua from
his “addiction days” and whom he invited to the Friday afternoon gathering, as follows: “When I first saw John, he looked like a ‘dark horse’. His life style was written all over him! While John told us about his pain, he explained that he found himself in a very deep hole, and he had no idea how to get out of it. While I was listening to him, his identity as the dark horse and drug addict completely melted away. Nothing he did in the past to his body, to himself or to others mattered anymore. I recognised myself in his lostness, his solitude. I knew that to be lost like that, is the worst form of heartache. Although my pain has nothing to do with heroin addiction, I know the pain!”

To cross these barriers, listening is a foundational skill for intentional, compassionate witnessing and requires a willingness to be deeply touched. For this to happen, like Talita, we have to “open our hearts as well as our ears” (Weingarten 2003:197). We have to have “an openness to the new” (Hedahl 2001:47). We have to “get ourselves out of the way” (Heshusius 1995:122). This kind of listening is non-judgmental and accepting. It gives space and time for the other person to drop down into her/himself to see what there is that wants to be brought forth. It creates an opportunity for the speaker to plunge into confusion and uncertainty, knowing that she/he will be accompanied by a steady companion who will listen to her/his story “without taking it over” (Weingarten 2003:197). Hedahl (2001:100) calls for a vulnerability in the healer that disavows the prideful power of the “solution person” and allows for new insights on the part of the listener as well as the speaker. For Griffin (1995:71) the biggest barrier to genuine listening is the assumption that we already know what the other person is trying to communicate to us, or that we assume too soon that we have heard and understood what has been said to us. Heshusius (1995:121) points out that when we are preoccupied with any aspect of the self, we construct distance between ourselves and the people we listen to based on the presumed prior existence of the self as a separate, individual entity. This distance is maintained by responding in terms of the self, although we think we are listening to the other.

Therefore, we have to listen “without wanting anything from it” (Heshusius 1995:121) [Heshusius’ emphasis]. The listener should engage the speaker in a mutual listening experience, by listening for patterns, themes, what is not said, the gaps and silences, sour notes and grace notes, by listening for things beside the facts and, in some
cases, for the contradictions; for thresholds, for evidence of change, for God and others simultaneously. We have to listen for the “unique outcomes” in people’s lives and the “counterplots” associated with them – “seemingly ephemeral, often forgotten experiences that contradict” the dominant problem story (Wylie 1994:43). Listening in this way, the listener seeks out the “healthy tissue, the protective antibodies” (Wylie 1994:43). It is, however, not about helping people to discover their “true” nature or their “real” voice. It is about “opening up possibilities for people to become other than who they are” (Wylie 1994:44). It is about the “unraveling of mysteries” to uncover the alternative plot, nurturing a freer, more robust feeling of personal agency and individual identity (Wylie 1994:46).

Hedahl (2001:101) pleads that what is at stake, is that we should learn to listen to the love of God. True listening is an act of love – divine and human. Learning to listen is “preparation for the astonishment of grace and love”. Talita remembers that day when John shared his story with the Friday afternoon group:

While we were praying, I held John’s hand very tightly. I wanted him to feel my understanding of his pain. Then it was as if an electrical shock shot his pain through his hand into mine and into my soul. I could feel his pain as if it was mine. It was the most intense experience of my life. Although I had nothing to say to make it better for him, I know that my presence made a difference to him.

For that to happen, we have to “wipe clean the slate of our own preconceptions, ideas, and assumptions so that it is truly quiet inside our heads” (Weingarten 2003:197). We have to be sure that we are really listening to the other person and not to ourselves making sense of or interpreting what the other is saying. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:28) refers to a “not-knowing” approach, which requires that our understandings, explanations, and interpretations not be limited by prior experiences or theoretically formed truths and knowledge. As healers, we are to be aware of our own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings (Gerkin 1984:45). We as listeners have to monitor our own “listening blind spots” (Hedahl 2001:76).
Griffin (1995:72) warns that our ability to hear can be held in check by the fear of what may be heard. Sometimes we do not want to see or hear evidence of our own anger, turmoil, doubts or fears, and then find it safer to protect ourselves against seeing or hearing evidence of these qualities in other people. Frank (1995:101) adds that hearing is difficult because listeners have trouble facing what is being said as a possibility or a reality in their own lives. When the heart is filled with prejudices, worries or jealousies, there is little room for a stranger. In a fearful environment it is not easy to keep our hearts open to the wide range of human experiences (Weingarten 2000:392).

Another barrier in our truly witnessing a chaos story, is our desire to find an explanation or “secondary gain” for the person’s behaviour. According to Frank (1995:107)

[s]uch an explanation, applied by healthy analysts to ill people, is a bit like the clock that has stopped but is still correct twice a day. Something is explained, but the whole notion of “explaining” requires imposing a purpose on behavior. Much illness behavior can only be understood when the would-be interpreter is able to enter imaginatively into a world without purpose.

Nouwen (1976:76) argues for a “learned ignorance” that enables one to receive words from others and the Other with great attention. This “poverty of mind” allows for an on-going growth in gentleness and receptivity. A voluntary poverty of mind makes especially professionals open to receive constantly new knowledges and insights from those who ask their help. According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27), the healer is a “conversational artist” whose expertise is in the arena of creating a space for and facilitating of a dialogical conversation.

Real hospitality, however, is not exclusive but inclusive and creates space for a large variety of human experiences (Nouwen 1976:77). When we are willing to detach ourselves from making our own limited experience, the criterion for our approach to others, we may be able to see that life is greater than our life, history is greater than our history, experience greater than our experience and God greater than our God. That it is poverty of heart that makes a good host. With poverty of heart we can receive the experiences of others as a gift to us. Their histories can creatively connect with ours, their lives give new meaning to ours, and their God speak to ours in mutual revelation (Nouwen 1976:78).
Therefore, because our own capacity for understanding is bounded by the horizon of our own experience, in caring for another we open up the horizons of our understanding to admit the intrusion of the world of the other. For Talita to receive the story and the pain of John, she had to open up the horizon of her own experience. Although her own experience had nothing to do with heroin or addiction, she recognised the pain. She allowed her understanding to be challenged in the hope that something new may be shared in the encounter so that her capacity for understanding could be extended (Lyall 2001:57).

So a spirituality of hospitality requires poverty, the poverty of mind and the poverty of heart. When we want to train to be of service, to be healers, we talk about “training towards a voluntary poverty” (Nouwen 1976:79). Real training for service asks for a hard and often painful process of “self-emptying”. The main problem of service is to be “the way without being ‘in the way’” (Nouwen 1976:79).

As a “professional”, I realised that I was making some progress on my journey to “learned ignorance” when I received a somewhat inverted compliment from a wounded person. Bernard was about 20 years ago in a car accident, and was in a coma for several weeks. He sustained some degree of brain damage and was boarded and put on pension. He came to see me as aggression and violence entered his relationship with Sue, a woman he loved dearly. The relationship was in danger due to the effects of aggression and violence, and Bernard came to me to “help me fix the relationship”. After a few months of regular conversations, the relationship improved as aggression and violence steadily took up less of the relationship, and we were reflecting on our journey together. We were talking about what helped him, and what not, when he suddenly said that I should please stop studying, because “I do not want you to become as clever as some of the therapists I encountered in the past”. I was rather taken aback, but what he meant became clear when he added: “My visits to you are the only times I feel that I’m really listened to”. He continued to explain that this experience of being heard was the most influential factor in his plight to ban aggression and violence from his relationships.
I do believe that, have I taken a stance modelled by more traditional ways of doing therapy and conveyed “preconceived opinions and expectations about [Bernard], the problem, or what must be changed” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:29), the outcome of our conversations would not have been the same. However, I express the need to know more about what Bernard had been saying, forgetting my self with no “professional I” with whom I was preoccupied or who was judging what Bernard was saying. I extended my “not understanding” of what he was saying as long as possible to allow Bernard the space to develop his own understanding of the meaning of what he was saying (Weingarten 2003:198). I was curious about the meaning he attributed to his experiences. In my conversations with Bernard, my intent was not to challenge his reality or his story, but rather to learn about it, and to let it be re-told in a way that allowed the opportunity for new meaning and a new narrative to emerge. My intent was not to “talk or manipulate [him] away from his ideas, but rather through not-knowing (non-negation and non-judgment) to provide a starting point for dialogue and the opening of conversational space” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:35).

7.6.2 Genuine curiosity of the healer

Weingarten (2003:198) proposes the asking of questions as an integral part of listening that serves it in very specific ways. We ask questions seeking clarification, when we are not certain we have understood what the person has said, and we ask questions that seek elaboration when we want to encourage the speaker to develop his/her meaning. When we ask questions, it should be born out of genuine curiosity, out of not presuming to know what the speaker means but “wanting very much eventually to understand” (Weingarten 2003:198). Griffin (1995:74) also warns that questions should not be asked out of our premature assumptions as to where the nub of the matter at issue is like to lie, or because we are anxious and feeling out of control. He suggests that before asking any question, it is a good idea to know what we will do with the answer!

We are not to “get” what a person means at once. Often people feel soothed when they sense that we want to understand them, and that we are in the process of understanding (Kornfeld 1998:54). In order to listen well to another, we have to “be able to extend our not understanding as long as possible so that the people we are listening to can themselves develop an understanding of their meaning” (Weingarten
When describing deconstructive therapeutic practices, White (1991:38) refers to a curiosity in regard to those alternative versions of who a person might be. He does not refer to just any curiosity. For him, it is “a curiosity about how things might be otherwise, a curiosity about that which falls outside of the totalising stories that persons have about their lives, and outside of those dominant practices of self and of relationship”.

When the speaker is kept at the centre, it is less likely that the listener will intrude his/her thoughts, feelings or meanings into the process. Meanings “evolve in conversation and are not objects stored on shelves to be retrieved when given the chance” (Weingarten 2003:199). What we need when we are wounded, is not someone who wants to show off his/her ability to guess at what we mean, but a listener who wants us to understand ourselves (Weingarten 2003:199). According to White (1991:29), we can generate and facilitate alternative stories of the persons we are listening to, by listening for experiences that contradict the dominant or problem saturated stories that constitute their lives, which he calls “unique outcomes”. White (1991:30) calls these “mysteries that only persons can unravel as they respond to the [healer’s] curiosity about them. As persons take up the task of unravelling such mysteries, they immediately engage in story-telling and meaning-making”. To facilitate this process which White (1991:30) calls “re-authoring”, the healer can ask a variety of questions, encouraging persons to situate the unique outcomes in sequence of events that unfold across time according to particular plots, and to reflect on and determine the meaning of those developments. White (1991:33) warns that re-authoring is not simply a process of “pointing out positives”, but a process that actively engages persons in unravelling mysteries that the healer cannot solve.

The listening process is a collaboration between the listener and the speaker. The listener is informed by the speaker so that he/she can ask questions that serve the speaker. Attending to signs of distress, is another aspect of the collaboration between listener and speaker, the one who witnesses and the one who is witnessed. Therefore, it is important that the listener pay close attention to the effect of the questions on the speaker, especially when talking about very painful experiences, as the aim is not to re-traumatise the speaker.
In order to proceed on our journey towards participatory communities as friends of God, we have to develop the capacity for compassion. In the next paragraphs, I will suggest certain personal capacities that can be helpful when we want to become aware, deliberate compassionate witnesses, building on healing communities.

7.7 THE COMPASSIONATE HEART OF THE HEALER

As friends and as healers we have to receive the story of our fellow human beings with a compassionate heart, a heart that does not judge or condemn but recognises how the wounded person’s story connects with our own. We have to offer boundaries within which the painful past can be revealed and the search for a new life can find a start (Nouwen 1976:69). Weingarten (2003:163-171) suggests a set of personal capacities that can be helpful when we want to turn unwitting witnessing into something deliberately chosen: awareness, safety, empathy, Aidos (shame) and compassion. Of these five capacities, awareness is the cornerstone.

7.7.1 Awareness

Awareness is a constant in our lives, even though what we are aware of shifts continuously. There are also variations in our awareness. Too much awareness – like hyper vigilance - tends to narrow our focus and shut out a great deal of what is happening at the moment. Too little awareness – as in denial or numbness – also limits our scope of attention. The right kind and amount of awareness produces calm and clarity, even in the face of stressful conditions (Weingarten 2003:164).

Awareness is not a gift, but a skill that can be developed with practise. We all face moments when we must decide if and how to become involved with a wounded person. These judgments often put us into a delicate balance, where common sense may not be quite enough (Heidish 1997:64). According to Weingarten (2003:164), awareness includes the ability to anticipate and realise woundedness on the one hand and the capacity for knowledge and transcendent feeling on the other. Griffin (1995:27) calls this an “informed neighbour”. Martha was an informed neighbour, able to assist Jane through the difficulties she experienced; Linda’s community was not aware of the pain of their neighbour, and therefore they were not able to be witnesses for this family, and therefore they missed the opportunity to act upon the
invitation to be healers. To the contrary, to a certain extent they were the “enemy” instead of healers. Linda’s family were strangers in their community of faith.

Without awareness, we will not notice situations that involve woundedness. Awareness provides the opportunity to stay present so that we can contemplate what we want to do. Aware, we can observe whether or not we are safe, what else is happening, and who the potential allies are in the environment (Weingarten 2003:164-165). Heidis (1997:65) calls on us to be able to integrate responses from our heads and hearts as we weigh the factors in a decision to intervene.

### 7.7.2 Safety

Safety is a fundamental human need. Aware that something could be or needs to be done, we still need to assess our physical and emotional safety, and that of others who may be involved, before we decide to offer compassionate witnessing. In a sense we must assess our readiness to be involved with others (Weingarten 2003:165). In the case of Linda and her family, their neighbours and community, once they were aware of the woundedness of this family, had to assess the consequences for them in the community should they offer compassionate witnessing: “What will the other neighbours say if we become involved with this family?” “Will we risk our ‘status’ in the community should we take sides with this family of strangers?” “What are the risks involved if I allow my children to befriend a young person who is engaged in risky behaviour like drug abuse?”

### 7.7.3 Empathy

When we respond out of sympathy to a wounded storyteller, we often feel comfortable. Even when we are sharing feelings of loss and pain, we are being moved by a familiar place in ourselves and we meet another at a similar point (Kornfeld 1998:53). It is our own emotional response to another’s pain. Empathy, however, requires from us “to journey into the unknown” (Kornfeld 1998:53) [Kornfeld’s emphasis]. Weingarten (2003:166) offers a definition of empathy as “[f]eeling what someone else feels, or trying to”. For Robinson (2001:46) empathy is “the expansion of the self to include the other” and also “the accepting, confirming, and understanding human echo evoked by the self”, and for Goodliff (1998:179)
empathy "is the act of metaphorically stepping into another’s shoes, seeing the world through their eyes and following their story". Where empathy is feeling what someone else feels, sympathy is our own emotional response to another’s situation – often sorrow or concern. Empathy is a movement beyond the concern for the self, and involves “abandoning personal dignity” (Robinson 2001:47). Empathy helps us experience our shared humanity. However, this movement towards the other does not lose the individuality of the one who cares, but according to Robinson (2001:47) the movement away from self concern enables distance which allows us to see ourselves more clearly. It also enhances the value of the other, bring forth the value they possess and enabling them to disclose what is unique about themselves to themselves and to the other. Empathy is then “a way of knowing the other and enabling the other to know herself (sic)” (Robinson 2001:47). The agapic love, the ethical ways of doing friendship I discussed in Chapter 5, lies at the base of empathy.

Empathy seems to be linked to helping behaviour, a quality most people think its good to have. Weingarten (2003:168) however warns that there is a danger of too much empathy when healers place themselves at risk by not carefully managing their empathy and that as a society we insufficiently support the healers on whose empathy and competence we count.

I experienced this some time ago when the son of family H, with whom I journeyed quite a while, died of an overdose of heroin. I was trying to make good for the lack of empathy they received from their community of faith, exhausting most of my reserves. For trying to stand up for the pain and suffering of this family, I became alienated from my own community of faith.

Another danger Weingarten (2003:168) warns about can affect anyone whose empathy leads him/her to take actions that jeopardise his/her safety. My friend and colleague empathises with wounded people to the extent that she accompanies mothers at the small hours of night to the dangerous and dark alleys of the underground world of the drug scene, looking for their children, the possibility of finding them dead on a sidewalk, not excluded. She not only jeopardises her physical safety, but also her relationships with her own family. In paragraph 7.8 I explore this point further when I discuss ideas on witnessing the healer.
7.7.4 Aidos

The Greeks have a term, Aidos, name of the goddess of reverence and righteous shame, associated with concepts of inner integrity and personal honour. Shame is common in the aftermath of violence or violation, or when we have neglected others’ feelings and indulged our own selfish desires and interests at their expense. This is a painful emotion for victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators. Weingarten (2003:169) distinguishes between righteous shame and toxic shame. For her, toxic shame is when the “victim” takes on the shame that the wrongdoers deserve to feel, but “bypassed” them. Carr (1989:149) refers to guilt as a form of fear and anxiety which can become morbid. Righteous shame, on the other hand, is a shame someone feels that expresses deeply held values; for example, it can be consistent with a person’s abhorrence of injustice and rejection of any form of abuse. For Robinson (2001:187), shame evolved to maintain the bonds in the communities of which the person is a part. It involves tact and sensitivity to others, including respect for the values which are shared in the community or network of relationships. This shame acts as a protector of the self worth in relation to the community – it enables the person to remain alive to the different ways in which potential actions, situations or relationships might bring the pain of shame. Carr (1989:149) adds that in a proper sense of guilt, the penitent can be aware and so forgiven.

Once Joshua became aware of what he has done, he wanted badly for his community of faith to forgive him. He also needed to forgive them for their lack of support in his and his family’s darkest hour. Although he believed that God forgave him, he needed to experience this forgiveness through the actions of his community of faith; the embodiment of the forgiveness of God through the body of Christ – the faith community. He kept on praying, and allowing the “holy spirit to work with me”. However, this was not all he did. He kept on looking for opportunities where he could become involved, where he could be of assistance and give something back to the community. He desperately wanted to be involved in the Boiler Room, a ministry for the youth who are “not your regular churchgoer”, but all his efforts came to nothing. Although he knew that he had much to offer, he realised that the leadership of the Boiler Room was not ready to forgive him for what happened in the past. Out of desperation, he went to see one of the senior Pastors at our congregation, and
poured his heart out. This time, this Pastor did not turn a deaf ear to his plea. He took Joshua personally to a Boiler Room gathering, and introduced him as part of the leadership, where he was at last heartily welcomed.

When he became part of the leadership of the Boiler Room, the forgiveness of God for what he did wrong "became alive. It was the beginning of a journey through restitution towards reconciliation between me and my community of faith".

According to the Gyatso (1999:121), it is very helpful to develop an attitude of regret and repentance where feelings of shame are concerned. However, for him (1999:122) this does not imply a sense of guilt. While it is natural and to be expected that we should have feelings of discomfort in relation to our past misdeeds, there is sometimes an element of self-indulgence when this is extended to feelings of guilt. It makes no sense to brood anxiously on the harmful actions we have committed in the past to the point where we become paralysed. The appropriate action is to find some means of reconciliation with God, and then it is a matter of acknowledging and accepting any negative feelings we may have in relation to our misdeeds and developing a sense of sorrow and regret for them. But then, rather than stopping at mere sorrow and regret, it is important to use this as the basis of resolve, for a deep-seated commitment never again to harm others and to direct our actions all the more determinedly to the benefit of others. Disclosure or confession can also be very helpful. We should remember that as long as we retain our capacity of concern for others, the potential for transformation remains.

Joshua did not stop at sorrow and regret. He used that as the basis of resolve, for a commitment to serve his community and direct his actions determinedly to the benefit of others.

7.7.5 Compassion

While the dictionary defines compassion as a feeling of sorrow or pity for the sufferings or misfortunes of others, Weingarten (2003:169) believes that compassion is better understood as suffering with another with the intention of relieving that person’s suffering, not getting mired in it as well. To practise compassion one has to have an open heart, but not an overwhelmed one. This is absolutely essential for
aware and active witnessing – “[k]nowing our own limits is part of living a compassionate life. It helps us to use our resources optimally” (Weingarten 2003:170). This does not mean placing restrictions on compassion – for self or other, because the more one feels compassion, the more there is. But “the failure to care for the self tears the fabric of the world as surely as failing to care for others, for we are also someone’s other. Compassion is served by complexity and discernment, not by qualifiers and conditions” (Weingarten 2003:171).

It is therefore another facet of witnessing others: that healers shall realise that witnessing the self is part of witnessing others.

7.8 WITNESSING THE HEALER

In order to survive, we develop basic beliefs or assumptions about ourselves and the world. Most people operate with a belief in their personal invulnerability, with a view of themselves in a positive light, with a belief in a meaningful and orderly world, and that others are trustworthy. Trauma disrupts these basic assumptions about the world, not only for the trauma victims, but also for those who care to witness their narratives of woundedness. Therefore, caring for others can be “a dangerous thing” (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:184). Or as Kornfeld (1988:281) puts it: Healers in community are “affected by the human condition. Sometimes they become lost in it”.

Helping professionals who consistently work with trauma victims often suffer from secondary stress syndrome, vicarious traumatisation (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:183) common shock (Weingarten 2003:223), or burn-out (Kornfeld 1998:282). According to Kornfeld (1998:282), burn-out is also experienced by community members and other healers who habitually “give themselves away to others”. She refers to burn-out as “spiritual malaise”.

Because of the danger of burn-out, we as healers need to set up our lives so that self-care naturally arises as an outcome of compassion for all beings. However, cultivating loving attention to the self equal to that cultivated towards others may be harder to do for people immersed in belief systems that rely heavily on notions of individualism, in which the self is viewed as separate from others. In an Ubuntu orientation, a fundamentally different conception of the self is proposed. Weingarten
(2003:223) quotes Thich Nhât Hanh who describes interbeing as: “My well-being, my happiness, depends very much on you, and your well-being, your happiness, depends on me. I am responsible for you, and you are responsible for me .... Therefore, in order to take care of you, I have to take care of myself”. In this way of thinking, caring for ourselves is an aspect of caring for others and vice versa.

In terms of the Friendship Position Map (Chapter 5, paragraph 5.5), I believe what Weingarten means, is that we have to position ourselves on the Friendship Position Map also in the second quadrant, which represents self-affirmation, which is the kind of self-love that does not exclude concern for the well-being of others. It is about care for the self in order to be able to care with others, and where we learn to do to others the way we want to be done to ourselves.

Therefore, witnessing others with compassion needs a solid foundation of witnessing the self. It is helpful for healers to know when we need to care for ourselves and also when we need to disengage from the sorrows of others to live our lives fully, joy and all. Weingarten (2003:224) describes it as follows: “Experiencing joy does not profane suffering: it is part of living well. Compassionate witnessing makes living life well more likely”.

### 7.8.1 Helping nucleus

Preventing or recovering from burn-out requires “more than adding exercise to one’s weekly schedule or developing a hobby” (Kornfeld 1998:284). Heidish (1997:95) suggests that if you are companioning someone in difficulty, to involve other caregivers to form a “helping nucleus”. This nucleus can comprise of other friends, other co-workers, other members of various communities: church, workplace, neighbourhood, and others. Spreading the net wide is important to prevent wearing out. It is also important on a spiritual level, because it involves co-operation and community. It surrounds the wounded person with a variety of support. Kornfeld (1998:39) also points out that many times we as healers forget that we are functioning members of a “wholeness network”. She advised that we recognise the “healing gifts” of other members in this network. I have a friend who is going through a tough time, as her husband walked out on her after a marriage of 31 years. She is also battling against depression. Her group of friends formed a team, making sure
that there is always someone available to her – when friend A needs a break, she will call friend B and tell her that she (A) needs a break and will keep her distance for a while. Friend B will then make herself available, until she feels that she needs some distance, and will then make sure another friend is available before she retreats. This way, our friend knew that there will always be a friend available to her when she needs someone, and her supporters never felt that the burden of caring for her was too much to bear.

7.8.2 Companions on the way

According to Goodliff (1998:223), one of the main reasons for burn-out can be found in the fact that most of us are “singularly ill equipped” to fulfil the task we burden ourselves with. Kornfeld (1998:285) agrees that it is the lonely healer in community who burns out. It is therefore important to find supportive companions who will listen to us, who will understand what we are doing, and give us encouragement in those times of exhaustion and elation, failure and freedom. We have to intentionally seek out friends whom we can trust and who can provide different roles in our lives. We need a “cheerleader” in our lives who will support us, see our gifts, and encourage us. We need a “harasser” who prevents us from taking ourselves too seriously. We need a “spiritual guide” who will help us with our fears and give us a proper perspective on life (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:195). Therefore, appropriate self-care will allow for the development of friendships in our lives (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:190). With all the resources of spirituality, theological reflection, training and supervisory care, there is still nothing quite as encouraging as companions on the way. These companions range from a supportive and understanding spouse to colleagues on teams and friends in pastoral ministry whose journey we share (Goodliff 1998:226). Of particular importance is the companionship of a “community of peers” (Kornfeld 1998:285); that is those who share a similar calling and who have pursued a similar journey. Such companionship, where one can truly be one’s self without being overly defensive, is a sure sign of the community of faith to which we belong. It shows us that the task of building community, which belongs in part to pastoral care, is not impossible, nor is it a pipe dream, but a living possibility pointing as a sign to the kingdom of God yet to come in all its fullness, but gloriously present in Jesus Christ (Goodliff 1998:226-227).
7.9 CONCLUSION

To listen to one another's stories and to help each other make sense of the world through our stories, is not simply a therapeutic technique. Rather, such action is one of the essential building blocks of a shalomic community, a community of friends of God. Listening to one another's stories is a vital pastoral act that builds, defines and affirms the reality of a community of friends of God. A church that truly images a God, who is a listening God, must become a church that knows how to listen and is prepared to hear what all of its people are saying. This will enable the church to notice and faithfully offer care to the most vulnerable amongst its people. A healing church is a "hearing church; a community of true friends, is a community which listens with the ears of God, which feels with the heart of Jesus and which reaches out to the wounded in the healing power of the Spirit" (Swinton 2000b:119).

According to Clapp (2002:210), we have in the Bible a new language of friendship, a language of participation instead of management. The church has thus the freeing task of proclaiming and embodying the gospel, and in so doing teaching and cultivating an alternative language, a contrast culture, for friendship – a language and culture that support friendship as a full-fledged social, political practice and enable it to realise more of its rich potential (Clapp 1996:210).

However, although we must love all people equally, Augustine (quoted by Price 1996:78-79) contends that since we cannot do good to all, we are to pay special attention to those with whom we enjoy closer contact because of the dictates of place, time and other circumstances. Therefore, growth in Christian love requires each of us to build our own circle of friends, who love one another as themselves and help one another to grow in the love of God. According to Price (1996:79), this ideal of friendship gave Augustine a "special interest in the development of religious community; here more than anywhere he hoped that true Christian fellowship could be realized on earth". Nouwen (1976:55) adds that on our journey from hostility towards hospitality, we first have to recognise the strangers in our own familiar circle – which I interpret in the context of this thesis, as our communities of faith.

The Christian fellowship found in religious community offers another opportunity, as according to Swinton (2000b:157), friendship is a learned skill, based on, among
other things, social opportunity, the religious community lends itself to being a habitat for the growth and development of this skill. We learn how to develop friendships as we encounter others in community. Friendship is the product of an ongoing process of socialisation and personal encounter that continues throughout the life cycle, within which individuals learn the rules of communicating and relating and work out the boundaries that encompass their encounters. I believe that as we experience friendship, we are enabled to share that experience with others, as Nouwen (1976:54) argues: “When we make ourselves aware of the hospitality we have enjoyed from others and are grateful for the few moments in which we can create some space ourselves, we may become more sensitive to our inner movements and be more able to affirm an open attitude towards our fellow human beings”. Swinton (2000b:157) points out that one of the main difficulties for many within the church community is that we simply do not encounter, or are unaware of, many of those who are marginalised within society: men and women who suffer from AIDS, people with mental health problems, families who struggle with drug abuse, and so forth. Because of this, many do not gain the opportunity to learn how to become friends with those whom they might perceive as strangers because they are in some way different. And because of the discourse of individualism of our culture, as I have argued in previous chapters, we tend to befriend those with whom we feel comfortable, people who are more like us. However, Swinton (2000b:157) argues that even if people are quite different from us in many respects, we have the tendency to come to like someone simply as a result of having regular personal contact with them. Therefore, I believe that the church community needs to think seriously about how best it might bring together people who are not “natural” partners.

I therefore believe that the church as a community of the friends of God has the task of creating a habitat for friendships to flourish and grow. That is what the next chapter will highlight.
CHAPTER 8

HABITAT FOR GROWING LIVING FRIENDSHIP

God as friend says, “Let us, all of us, break bread together in fellowship and joy.”

McFague (1987:168)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of friendship in Fourth Century pagan literature was of friends having a single soul, through complete harmony in pursuits, aims and convictions (Price 1996:83). Where pagan society thought this ideal realisable only between a man and a tiny circle of his closest friends, Augustine applies these ideas of friendship to the new context of Christian fellowship, where all members of the church are united by a common goal and need the assistance of one another to attain it. For Augustine, Christianity stimulates joint action where the whole company of believers is united by a common aspiration that inspires the actions of each one.

For Augustine, true happiness consists in overcoming the separation between distinct human minds and creating a spiritual life developed and enjoyed by a number of friends together. In this way life on earth can imitate, however imperfectly, the communion of saints in heaven (Price 1996:85), because Augustine saw a connection between the love that is the Spirit uniting Father and Son and the human love of neighbour perfected in Christian community (Price 1996:90).

However, the question remains: If the Christian is to love all humans, including his/her enemies, what room is there for the particular, mutual love of friendship? Augustine’s distinction between different degrees of human love allowed him to find an important place for friendship within the range of love of neighbour. Augustine believed that ideally all men would love one another in God, with “an intense, mutual and ordered love” (White 1992:203). However, such a state is impossible in this life. All that can be hoped for now is for a Christian to love a few reciprocally, in an intense friendship founded in love of God, and to extend this love as far as possible to others, including strangers and enemies (White 1992:203). Although in Augustine’s time only men were regarded as worthy of friendship, I argue that we can
safely say that today the invitation to friendship and to love our neighbour includes all human beings.

The understanding of friendship and the model of the church as a community of friends which I argued in the previous chapters, including the metaphor of a circle of concern, holds great potential for the creation of such a personal and corporate “space for love” of neighbour. It has become clear that the identity of the church community is determined by its call to care for and with and commit itself to the world with the same passion which can be seen in Jesus as he committed himself to strangers, to the wounded, in his life and ministry and ultimately on the cross. The “relationship of friendship is one important conduit through which this loving care can be expressed in tangible ways that reveal something of the God who inspires it (Swinton 2000b:157).

Therefore, strengthening distinctive Christian community in friendship is, according to Clapp (1996:193), one of the most formidable challenges the church faces in our world. As I have argued in earlier chapters, individualism breaks down and inhibits real community. However, although I argue for stronger Christian community, I do believe that we are by no means totally at a loss! In the next paragraphs I will explore a few suggestions of rebuilding Christian community as a community of friends of God, starting from where we are.

With Clapp (1996:204), I argue that Christian cultural resources such as Christian language, the performance of Scripture and the Eucharist can enable the church to embody a kind of friendship not otherwise available. Where the social and economic demands of an individualistic lifestyle create space for material attainment, but destroy space for the practice of friendship, the church “may have a surprising new mission: to establish a cultural space for the birth and supported practice of friendship” (Clapp 1996:205).

While Clapp (1996:187) suggests that the church regards itself as a way of life and not simply a “spiritual retreat” or “the promoting society of a belief system”, Sweet (1994:28) argues for the church to give up its “organized religion” and stop offering
people an “institution”. The church must take up its “Way, Truth and Life” and start offering people a life-way, a life-truth, and a life.

What I would like to suggest in this chapter, is not another program or a “newly fabricated blueprint”. It is, instead, a “word about the locale many of us dwell in and about strengthening the Christian community that already gives us life” (Clapp 1996:189).

I do not believe, therefore, it can only be something exotic or difficult or culturally distant or grand or otherworldly that can create the habitat for cultivating genuine Christian community. I do believe that we need something as very much down-to-earth as the Christian practise of friendship. This chapter will therefore be about building on existing church community, allowing space where faith communities as friends of God can learn the art of caring-in-friendship – creating a habitat where friendship can grow and flourish.

8.2 LEARNING THE ART OF CARING-IN-FRIENDSHIP

According to Swinton (2000b:144), all people are made in the image of God and as such demand respect and the offer of loving accepting relationships. Such an acknowledgement has radical implications for how we value individuals and the types of ethics and practices we adopt. In creating an atmosphere where fear, suspicion and destructive ignorance and prejudice are at least reduced if not banished, people can be educated and informed about the realities rather than false public perceptions of woundedness like drug abuse, mental illness, AIDS and so forth. In this way the church community will have moved some way towards enabling the actualisation of the *imago Dei* in those suffering or living chaos narratives of woundedness.

If the church is truly to notice what is going on within the lives of those whom it strives to serve, it will have to have a strategy which will allow people regularly to come into contact with one another and to learn the “art of caring-in-friendship” (Swinton 2000b:120). Donahue and Robinson (2001:28) agree when they argue that many churches today “lack intentional community life”. A community that is aware and intentional about being a resource for wholeness must create new structures in which members will share responsibility for healing activities in a more inclusive and
participatory way (Kornfeld 1989:40). According to Donahue and Robinson (2001:43), the church cannot compete with other institutions in terms of entertainment value. But the church can compete in terms of community, as the church is the only place where most people have a reasonable promise of finding healthy, functional, accepting relationships. Therefore, what we need is to develop a system of care that “will tap into and creatively utilise, the ‘hidden’ pastoral resources of the whole Christian community” (Swinton 2000b:121).

In the next paragraphs I will share stories where the church in her pastoral ministry explored new and imaginative ways in which the type of friendship that this thesis has called for had been enabled and sustained, and where the opportunity for relational development was made available to those who needed it.

8.2.1 Caring clusters

For me, it is a comforting thought that although community may be “jostled, deprived, squeezed”, it is “as persistent and hard to kill as a rattlesnake” (Clapp 1996:194). According to Clapp (1996:195), part of strengthening Christian community is “simply recognizing, acknowledging and building on the community that already exists, but that we have been trained to ignore or deny”. For Swinton (2000b:121), care groups are one context within which people can learn about one another and discover what it means to care and be cared for. Donahue and Robinson (2001:48) suggest that small groups offer everyone to play a part and become transformed through working together. Doherty (2003:116) suggests that newcomers should be welcomed to the group, by always having a vacant chair included at their meeting as a reminder that a new member is always welcome. Kornfeld (1998:20) also reminds that communities are “made of networks of caring clusters”. While Swinton refers to care groups, Donahue and Robinson to small groups, and in my congregation we use both small groups and cell groups, I prefer Kornfeld’s term of caring clusters because to me it conveys more effectively the caring nature of the group of persons I believe we need when we want to establish the supported practise of friendship in a community of faith.

The following story of the journey of two women through friendship and illness is for me living example of what Kornfeld could have meant with a caring cluster.
8.2.1.1 Special friendship at the “Roadhouse”

At Coram Deo, the pastoral centre where I work, we are always looking for fundraising projects. Lorinda, a lady in her late fifties, and always involved in all sorts of projects, suggested that we start a project on Friday afternoons, offering ready made meals to the congregation for supper at the end of the week. We called it the Roadhouse (“Padkafee”). Although Lorinda suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, and she was not strong, she took initiative, and organised all participants into four teams. She took charge of the team responsible for the Friday curry and rice menu.

Thea is in her thirties, a person always willing to be of assistance. When she learned of the Roadhouse, she volunteered to help, although she insisted that “I will do anything but cook”. She was assigned to Lorinda’s team, who took her under her wing. It was not long before the two women gathered on Friday mornings, cooking curry and rice! And soon a precious friendship developed between the two women – a friendship that did not end when the project that brought them together, ended. For Thea it was “the most precious friendship I ever had. Lorinda was to me like a mother. When any problem crossed my path, Lorinda was the first I turned to for advice and comfort. My car knew the way to Lorinda’s house so well, it could have driven itself!”

A few months after the Roadhouse was terminated, Lorinda had to undergo surgery on her neck. Thea faithfully visited her in hospital, and when she was discharged from hospital, Thea took it upon herself to nurse Lorinda back to health. Just after she could walk again, Lorinda fell, and sustained injuries to such an extent that needed another operation. Since then, Lorinda was in and out of Intensive Care. Thea was faithful on her side. When she was not in hospital, Thea visited her every morning. They prayed together, and Thea read to her from the Bible. She even helped her to the toilet, and fed her purity with a spoon when she was not able to eat. She prepared all Lorinda’s medication for the day and put it within reach before she left for work.

During this time, the husbands of the two women became friends as well. And when Lorinda died after three months in Intensive Care, Thea and Barries were there for
the mourning widower. They invited him to braais at their house, and offered the silent man with few words, a caring presence. By taking care of Lorinda’s widowed husband, Thea was comforted in the loss of her friend. Her friend’s death left Thea with a “hole in my sole. I have nobody to talk to, no shoulder to cry on. My life feels empty now that my friend is no longer part of my daily ritual.”

When reflecting on her friendship with Lorinda, Thea longed for the Fridays they cooked together: “I couldn’t wait for Fridays. We had so much laughter and fun together. Lorinda’s friendship formed me into a more whole person; God came to life in me because of Lorinda’s presence in my life. Even Barries thanked God for Lorinda’s presence in my life, as he could see the difference in me because of her.”

What this narrative of Thea and Lorinda illustrates, is that since in practise the members of the Christian church are divided by social barriers and those clashes of interest that are inevitable in the secular world, fellowship is best realised in small communities, where the members know each other intimately, share the same aspirations, and work together to achieve them for all. This creates “a life of common loyalties, feelings, hopes and goals, where all the members imitate Christ and become, through union with him, one heart and one soul” (Price 1996:84). Kotzé (2002:18; 2007) refers to “material transformation” that happens in the community that forms while congregations are building churches, and working together on fundraising events. Therefore, according to Southard (1989:203-204), wisdom works among us as created beings by a move from specific friendship towards the universal love of God. For him friendship is an appropriate context for the progression of wisdom because it begins the work of love in a way that humans can appreciate without much deception. These “vertical walls within which we initially nurture friendship can become horizontal stepping stones across shaky ground to embrace strangers” (Southard 1989:204).

Thea’s relationship with Lorinda and the wisdom and maturity she gained through their friendship, prepared her for another experience:

One very cold Sunday afternoon, Thea and Barries’ doorbell rang, and when she opened, their stood the most dismayed family, asking for lodging. They were
evacuated due to inability to pay rent, and have slept the previous two nights in a park. Thea’s heart was touched, and she invited them into her house where she offered them refreshments.

After they caucused, Thea and Barries decided that they cannot take this family in. Their house is too small. But they cannot do nothing either. So they started calling all the numbers available to them, of everybody they could think of who would be able to help this family. After seventeen telephone calls to answering services, they were very frustrated, and close to despair. At long last, they drove the family to a nearby church where the evening service was about to start. When they were assured that the family would be taken care of, they left for their home.

Thea was determined to do something about this situation, and came to talk with me. In the end, we published an article in the magazine our congregation distribute monthly, informing the community how they can participate in caring practices beyond their own means, or the means available to the faith community. We attached a list of all the shelters and other forms of housing available to homeless people and people in need, with contact details, suggesting that they keep the list ready at hand to refer to when needed. Thea concluded that “my frustration of not being able to help was not in vain. Perhaps I needed that experience, so that others now will know what to do in such a situation.”

According to Southard (1989:155), the church is to provide the accepting climate for personal change. Our humanity is enlivened by the wisdom that comes through Christian community. Encouraged by others, we express the highs and lows of our experiences. When significant others in our lives accept our stories, it also adds norms that help order the rest of our lives into meaningful narratives. In our churches, this should be an integral part of ministry, in the form of support groups, of caring clusters, encouraging the acceptance of highs and lows in humanity through open discussion of personal frailty (Southard 1989:156).

8.2.1.2 Peer networks and the “Birthday Club”

Southard (1989:211) suggests what he calls “peer networks”, which is a more relaxed, less encompassing style of friendship that can be developed as alternative
for the receding family networks in an entrepreneurial society. He advises that with the decrease in traditional friendships and family ties, networking has become an urban necessity. In an opportunistic blending of cultures, a more redemptive form of friendship may be built upon peer networks. The theoretical basis has already been presented in the Christian belief that “friendship is a schoolmaster for the creation of authentic intimacy that will be transformed into universal love” (Southard 1989:212).

At Coram Deo, the pastoral centre where I work, we have a ministry that we call the “Birthday Club”. Monday mornings and evenings the club gathers at Coram Deo, congratulating everybody in the congregation who celebrate their birthdays during that week. The purpose of this ministry is to reach out to all the members of the congregation by congratulating them on their birthdays. The “by-product” of this ministry is the koinonia the members of the club who do the calling experience, and the friendships that are formed and flourish.

Marianne and Mossie are two of the members of the Monday Morning Birthday Club. Marianne is a housewife who sometimes takes care of her two grandchildren, and Mossie is new in the congregation, after she retired recently. For Mossie, Monday mornings at Coram Deo is “my life line to community. I was used to being among people, but since my retirement I was mostly alone at home while my husband is still working.” She continues: “What I like most is the people I come to know. Through the stories the others share, I learn how courageous some people are, and I feel that I grow as a person through sharing in these stories – it is as though the others’ courage rub off on me.” Marianne always wanted to make a difference, and tried a few other ministries. But at Coram Deo and the Birthday Club, “I feel at home. I was so afraid to come the first time, I could not sleep the night before from fear that I will not be accepted. But to my surprise, I found a place where I feel safe and loved, where I feel that I belong.” Sarie added that the Birthday Club is a place where “I can let go of my bulwarks and take my masks off”.

Mossie remembers the day when we were working on another fundraising project. We bought out the Barnyard Theatre, and sold tickets with meals included. The morning before the show, volunteers were packing prepared meals for 450 people into prepared boxes. During the morning Mossie landed herself in a huge
embarrassment, and locked herself in the toilet. The first person she thought of calling to come to her rescue, was Marianne. She said: “Marianne is my best friend ever! She helped me out of a gigantic embarrassment – I do not know what I would have done, have I not known Marianne. When I called her, she came immediately. She even drove to my house to collect the things I needed. I am so glad that just the previous week I invited her into my house, so that she knew where everything was.” To which Marianne commented: “I cannot believe how scared I was to come the first time to the Birthday Club. Now I know a lot more people, and I feel as if I have grown a lot more self-confidence. I really am glad that I could be there when Mossie needed me. I appreciate it that she trusted me with her embarrassment. Perhaps I really am worthy of being of service, and making a difference.”

Sarie’s participation in the Birthday Club renders her the opportunity to do what she does best: pray. She prays for her new friends and their children (I will not be surprised if it was due to Sarie’s prayers that my son passed matric!), and she prays for all the friends she congratulates with their birthdays.

To me, these tales of friendship confirm my argument that opportunities to build friendship is available in abundance in life’s daily rounds, and that we need not to introduce major or large-scale projects to invite communities to re-member their identity as community-of-friends. We only need to become aware of the opportunities that are already there in abundance.

8.2.1.3 Caring in the bush

In chapter one I related the story of Brenda, who joined a hiking trip of Dr Francois Fourie, one of the ministers in my congregation, who established a hiking ministry. Brenda, who recently lost her husband, took part in a hiking week-end, and found comfort and care in the presence of her fellow travellers in the forest. Since then, I often tapped into this ministry of my colleague by referring persons who came to see me as pastoral therapist, to take part in the hiking trips, with promising results. Mornè, a young man in his twenties, who just moved out from living with his mother, and who was struggling with the effects of choices he made earlier in his life, agreed keenly to participate in a hiking trip. He commented after the trip: “Thank you for introducing me to these kind people. This was the best week-end I had in years! I am
now inspired to take up hiking, as I always enjoyed outdoor activities. The humour and caring presence among everybody there was amazing. Although I was not that keen on all of the singing, I realise that it added to this almost holy atmosphere.”

Jannie, who suffers from schizophrenia, and was invited by another co-worker at Coram Deo on a hiking trip, commented: “The hiking trip will stay with me as an experience of spiritual growth. Francois, our loving and capable tour leader and guide, mirrors the metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. He made me feel unique and worthy. Each one of the hikers has made a vital impact on my life. This was not only a wonderful, enjoyable week-end away, but also a demonstration of koinonia and fellowship in the grace of God – a genuine communion with a community of friends”.

8.2.1.4 The Boiler Room

At my congregation we also have a ministry which we call the “Boiler Room”. It is based on the concept of creating a friendly space where the members of the congregation – especially the youth, but adults are also welcome - can gather regularly to pray together. The idea is for anybody at any time to be welcomed. Even coffee, tea and other refreshments are available.

Not without some effort on the part of the organisers, the Boiler Room became gradually a meeting place for young people who are estranged from the more “formal” ministries the congregation has to offer – especially after it was painted in all the colours of the rainbow. Joshua, rehabilitated from heroin addiction, needed a place where he could meet young people. He knew he had something to offer to other young people struggling with the hardships of life, and prayed that God would show him where he could be of service. Then he was introduced to the Boiler Room. He reflects on his experience: “The Boiler Room means an awful lot to me. In the first month I made six new friends. And all of them are making a positive contribution to my life. I can be open and honest without fear of judgement or rejection! Where everybody else sees me as this ex-heroine junkie, I experience love and acceptance and care and trust in this group. I believe we all are broken in some ways, and we all need one another in the same way.”
John, a friend from Joshua’s “addiction days”, called him one day and pleaded for help. He relapsed and was in a bad way. Joshua invited him to the Boiler Room, and when he arrived, everybody welcomed him. When John shared his story with the group, everybody exerted and encouraged him. They wanted him to know that there is hope and that they will be there for him – even if the only thing they can do is pray. For everybody present, it was an emotional experience. According to Joshua, there was “not one dry eye”.

The following Sunday evening during the gathering of youth groups, the leader shared the story of John, and invited everybody with a cell-phone and available airtime to send an SMS to John. He explained that SMS stands for “Show My Son”. John received sixty SMS’s that Sunday, and during the following week about 300. All these messages of encouragement and hope pulled John through to the next Friday’s gathering at the Boiler Room, where everybody prayed together. At the moment, John is in good shape. For the first time in his life, according to him, he experiences the love of God.

Reflecting on this experience, Joshua said: “The Boiler Room is a very special place. To me, this is a true reflection of what the body of Christ should stand for. This is real Church. We are not confessing Christians; we are confessing sinners who acknowledge our unending dependence on God. I would like to call this experience ‘modern monasticism’.”

Joshua’s participation in the Boiler Room, opened another door to him: When the student who was employed by the Church to open up and lock the church buildings at night resigned, the job was offered to Joshua. For the first time he earned his own money. Joshua reflects: “What makes this more special, is that the same community who rejected me, offered me this opportunity and trusted me with this responsibility. It is as though God used something very bitter and changed it into something sweet.”

8.2.2 TeamNets

Sweet (1999b:301) suggests that in the post-modern Reformation church, the fundamental organising principle of ministry is “I can’t be me without you”. *Me* needs its flip-side *we* if we are to be what God is calling us to be. Collectively we are better
than any of us individually. In contrast to committees that take minutes, vote, make decisions and recommendations, TeamNets “fix problems”. TeamNet members are self-directed, empowered, and trust one another. It is the TeamNet that becomes the hero, not a presiding chairperson or the “lone hero”. In a TeamNet, the decision-making process and style is “teambased” (Sweet 1999b:302). Leaders of TeamNets “start out with the assumption that there’s a team and they’re a part of it”, where the leader of a committee “talk the team talk, but struggle to walk beyond solo” (Sweet 1999b:301).

I believe that without the effort of a TeamNet, Jack would not have been back in rehab. In Chapter 6 I related the story of Carla who joined the support group for the parents of young people trapped in drug abuse just before a long weekend; of how the group supported her and advised her on possible pitfalls to be careful of when her son Jack came home for the first time since he entered a rehabilitation programme; of how Jack relapsed and how in the end two young men drove through the night to take him back to the rehab facility in Natal. All involved – the members of the support group who called Carla because they travelled the road and they were concerned and they cared; I, who took charge of the team, inviting more people to become involved; the counsellors who sponsored money for petrol and toll fees; the two young men who were prepared to leave what they were doing to be of assistance; Marietjie, my friend and colleague who stayed with me for “moral support” until everything was organised – had only one purpose in mind: to help Carla and to help Jack – to “fix” this problem. Collectively, the team was able to take action and make a difference in the lives of Carla and Jack and their family and friends– more than any individual alone could have done.

8.2.3 Stepping stones

For me, building community in friendship is about honouring and taking small steps, trusting that God is always bigger than our imaginations. None of these projects described in the preceding paragraphs were ambitious or on a grand scale. They are about a few people coming together, believing that they can make a difference. Sometimes they only met once or twice to assist with a fundraising project, like preparing the food parcels for a picnic in the Barnyard Theatre. Others are longer lasting, like the Birthday Club. These projects are building on existing church
community, allowing space where faith communities as friends of God can learn the art of caring-in-friendship. They create a habitat where friendships can grow and flourish. They provide the vertical walls within which we initially nurture friendship, to become the horizontal stepping stones across shaky ground to embrace strangers. Or as Joshua remarks: “Caring clusters are the bridges between hostility and hospitality”.

However, communities are always changing; they never fully arrive. True communities are always becoming. Kornfeld (1998:20) suggests that communities need to adjust their balance: Like the gymnast on the balance beam, communities need to become flexible and in motion – letting go, holding on. Communities that are in motion do not become insular; they freely look out to the world, see it, and respond to its need. We therefore need to be transformed in order to “share in the very being of God” (2 Peter 1:5). To open ourselves to this transformation, we must grow in true fellowship, through developing bonds of mutual love and common hope (Price 1996:91). In the next section, I suggest that one way of accomplishing this, is through the healing gifts of our faith traditions.

8.3 HEALING GIFTS OF OUR FAITH TRADITIONS

According to Kornfeld (1998:17), religious communities are bound together through their experience of God’s “covenanted relationship” with them and their promise to respond through faithfulness. Holy days, festivals, and related religious practices celebrate God’s saving works and nourish a sense of communal identity and historical continuity. These practices also provide an opportunity for members of the community to care for each other and to express their commitment to social justice (Kornfeld 1998:17). Therefore, we have to discover – and in some cases to uncover and recover – the healings gifts in our faith traditions (Kornfeld 1998:36).

In the following paragraphs I will explore components of the religious life of my faith community in the context of the faith community being invited into becoming a community of the friends of God.
8.3.1 Worship and liturgy

According to Goodliff (1998:136), worship is not to be simply a cultic experience, liturgy alone, but it involves serving the wider community in a variety of ways. We should not seek to separate the worship of God in the liturgy of the Church from expression of that worship in service to others. He refers to the abhorrence of the hypocrisy of worship without love for others. Wadell (2002:15-16) agrees when he asks: What does worship do for us? If we find ourselves in communities of worship week after week, has it made a difference in our lives? Has it changed us? Has it made us see the world differently? Has all our worship had any lasting transformative effect, or does worship comfort us in ways that are misleading? Have we “made worship safe and, therefore, empty?”.

The support group for the parents of young persons who are trapped in drug abuse, wanted to stop talking and do something about the pain of all other wounded persons in similar situations. Together we talked and planned. One of the actions we decided on, was a sermon, with the purpose of informing the congregation about drug abuse and its effects on the families involved. We also wanted to suggest ways in which they could become involved and care for families affected, as we believed that the isolation the families experienced, was more from ignorance than ill intentions on the part of the congregation. The group decided on one of the Ministers of our congregation, Dr Andrè Botha, whom they believed would deliver the message they wanted best. Andrè was then invited to attend a few of the meetings of the group, where they shared their stories of pain and frustration. They even suggested the theme and scripture for the sermon – Galatians 6: “Bear one another’s burdens”.

The sermon was then delivered according to their needs: it started with information about drug abuse and its devastating effects on the human body. The minister referred to these effects as damage to the brain the same as any other illness of the brain, such as Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, or brain damage caused by a motor car accident. Although initially the person suffering from addiction places him/her self in danger by engaging in risk behaviour, in the end the person suffers from brain damage.
The sermon proceeded then towards the effects of drug abuse on the whole family, sharing real life stories of the members of the group with their permission. One of the stories shared, was from a letter of a mother:

“We are in such deep despair, Lord please help us. We don’t know which way to go. He begs from our ministers, the members of our congregation and anyone who crosses his path. Nobody invites him in and ask what they can do for him as a person. Some give him money – that is of course the worst thing one can do. Others refuse because they know of his problem. He doesn’t have warm clothes or bedding anymore. He spent some time in jail, but nothing seems to help. I wish I could send a fax to the Lord to ask what progress we have made, because I do not know how much longer we have to pray for an answer.”

A father wrote: “It is early on a Sunday morning, it is Fathers’ Day. I lie awake pondering on the path my life has taken. It is still dark and cold outside when suddenly the shrieking of the phone sounds next to me. I lift the receiver and hear the already familiar ghostlike voice of my son: hallo Dad, happy Fathers’ Day. Thanks my son. You guys are probably still in bed? Yes, it is still cold and dark. Then the son says: we have been queuing since early in the morning to be counted, Dad. We are more than 80 here, it takes a lot of time. It is not pleasant; I am having a rough time. I know my child, but what can we do? The day you started to use heroin you made a choice, you will have to be strong. Then the son says: Dad, I want so much to be out of jail for a while before being sentenced, because the sentence can be 7 or 10 years. I just want to have a nice bath and get rid of the lice for a change. Please help me! Then the father says: We have done all that we can do. Can I talk to Mom please? I love you Dad. Thanks, I love you too.

I hand the receiver over; my heart reaches out to my child. A thousand times the questions keep running through my head – how long still Lord? Will You not consider intervening in his life to make a new person out of him? Is he in the pods with the pigs like the Prodigal Son now or how long will this go on? To me Fathers’ Day is incomplete without my son.”
The minister proceeded then to explain that most of us do not know how to help, and the families in need do not know how to ask for the help they so desperately need. Where does one ask for help when others keep looking away? When your friends abandon you? When no-one knows what to do or say? He then shared with the congregation practical ways of offering friendship and comfort suggested by the support group.

At the end of the sermon, the congregation was invited to share their experiences of the sermon with me. To my astonishment, 31 persons gave their names, inviting me to make appointments to discuss the sermon with them!

I summarise the comments of the congregation into the following categories:

i) Parents concerned for their young children seeking advice on how to prevent them becoming involved in the risk behaviour; suggestions for a support group for parents of young children to share ideas about parenting skills; for some the sermon was a “wake-up call”.

ii) Offering assistance: One father offered to take young men on a week-end trip to the Bush; a group of young persons offered adventure week-ends; young people who travelled the road and are rehabilitated, offered their “hard earned skills in overcoming drug abuse” (Nico, one of the young men who drove overnight to take Jack back to rehab, offered his assistance here. He also helped to convince a grade 10 schoolgirl to enter a rehabilitation programme.)

iii) Reflection on their own prejudices, and intention to adjust their behaviour towards friends, family and neighbours affected by drug abuse; one person said it was an “eye opener”; another that it was “unsettling”.

iv) Suggestions for further action like: consciousness raising; support group for young people from rehab, etc.

v) Ask specific advice on how to support a friend or colleague. (It was after this sermon that Martha accompanied her friend and colleague Jane (Chapter 5) to the support group.)

vi) Reflection on the sermon: the stories of lived experiences touched most respondents deeply; the practical guidelines of how to care were very helpful; the balance between offering intellectual information and the
stories of lived experience; learning and stimulating further reflection; call to move from moral correctness to grace.

In the following paragraphs I will explore a few characteristics of worship and how it can help form the congregation into a community of the friends of God.

8.3.1.1 Recognising the power of the church’s regular gathering and worship

According to Clapp (1996:195), even the simple act of getting up and going to Church on a Sunday morning, add to the distinctiveness of Christian community. Although Christian community requires much more than this level of commitment, Clapp (1996:195) advises that this should not be taken for granted or ridiculed. When we participate in the service, we are acknowledging a reality outside of ourselves and the world as it is otherwise known. We are confessing at least the possibility of being accountable to something or someone other than our individual desires and needs. We therefore should not underestimate the “stubborn, profoundly formative power” (Clapp 1996:195) of worship itself.

The mundane act of singing together, according to Clapp (1996:195), sets Christians apart and influences character, as shared song is “a profound way of remembering, solidifying and celebrating our commonality”. If in nothing more than our continuing acts of worship, then, we have community and the basis for building stronger community.

Marianne reflects on her experience in worship as follows: “We are always sitting at the same place in church, with the result that by now, we know all the others in the seats around us. Last Sunday, a man told us about the heart surgery his daughter is due to undergo on Monday morning. We offered our best wishes and prayer that everything will be okay. Next Sunday we will learn how the surgery went, offering care and comfort and more prayer to this ‘stranger’”.

8.3.1.2 The use of stories

Wadell (2002:25) suggests that in Christian worship we have to be apprenticed in the language of God. Christian worship should help us remaking ourselves from crucifying the Word, to faithfully embodying the Word. It is through the “constant rehearsal of the stories of God that we learn to love and to live in the language of God that is Jesus, and therefore are gradually transformed in our new identity as the community of the friends of God” (Wadell 2002:26). The stories of God we find in Scripture are not incidents from a far off past to which we occasionally turn for inspiration, but the stories by which we want to know, understand, and live our lives now. Remembering liturgically is to recall and appropriate the stories, traditions, and practices we want to illumine, guide, and ultimately transform our lives. According to Wadell (2002:26), what makes such worship poignant is that it releases Jesus from the confinement of the past so that he can live in and with us now. Persons and events are not merely recalled but participated in.

While a sermon tells people what to think, a story “forces people to do the thinking for themselves” (Miller 2003:41). When a story becomes personal and people begin to become unsettled and challenged by it, then they have been touched in a place where facts fear to tread. It is a place so personal that it can spark an inner transformation.

Almost all the people who responded to my invitation to reflect on the sermon discussed in the previous paragraphs, commented on the stories shared in the sermon, and how they were touched and moved by them. Karien said: “The letter of the father inspired me how to deal with my friend’s brother who suffers from schizophrenia, and constantly wants to borrow money. I now realise that he has to take responsibility for his own actions. I feel freed from his manipulation. It was the father who admitted that he could not get his son out of jail, even though he loved his son and wanted to, who inspired me. This son had to take responsibility for his own choices and actions. The sermon and this personal story shared helped me to make difficult decisions.”
8.3.1.3 Worshipping dangerously

According to Wadell (2002:16), true Christian worship is dangerous, “far more a risk than a consolation, because true Christian worship initiates us into the stories and practices of a God whose ways are so maddeningly different from our own and, therefore, full of hope”. True worship allows God to work on us, sanctifying us, purifying, renewing, and reforming us; indeed, doing all that is necessary to make us new creatures in Christ. Nobody should enter worship and remain unchanged.

The ongoing effect of Christian liturgy and worship should be to form us, the church, into communities of friends of God. According to Wadell (2002:16), this is not a quaint, pious sentiment but the most accurate and captivating way to describe the radical change of self and community faithful worship should engender. We are not naturally friends of God because we do not naturally seek the way of God, or we approach our relationship with God in the same way we approach so many other relationships in our lives – as something we can control, limit, direct and manipulate according to our own interests and plans. Consequently, we become as deft at exploiting God as we are at exploiting others.

After the sermon discussed above, Bessie realised that without forgiveness, loving relationships is impossible. She said: “We have a responsibility towards one another”. Bessie and her husband have friends they knew were struggling with a family member who suffered from addiction, and whom they were neglecting for some time due to a misunderstanding. They decided to visit these friends that same day – “We wanted to show them that we are not fair weather friends. That was what the sermon did to me: I realised that we are not to treat our friends shabbily, we have to be there for them”. As Bessie heard the gospel in the church, she was confronted with her own Christian exclusivism that seeks to hold Christ to ourselves, to have him and his promises for us but not to share them. According to Guder (1999:18), there is a kind of Dead Sea spirituality in many parts of the church, where the blessings and edification of knowing Jesus are hoarded; “it all flows in, but little flows out”. He refers to a form of discipleship that is “very inward, self-centered, benefit oriented”. This was the challenge for Bessie on that Sunday: to share what has flowed in and poured it out onto her wounded friends.
Southard (1989:157) insists that some commitment must be made through attitude and action to share love, effect reconciliation, ask for forgiveness. For him, the worship of God is the power for full fellowship and healing through the body of Christ. The way of wisdom is that statements of belief must be authenticated in action. Southard (1989:158) object to doctrinal statements for their “inability to connect the revelation of God through his Son with the way we respond to him, to ourselves, and to each other”. For him, the power of a worshipping community is manifested in a new quality of relationships. Bessie’s visit to her friends was an authentication of her belief in action. As was Stefan’s, when he resolved to make small talk with his neighbour further down the street whom he knew was struggling with the drug abuse of his son. Up to now, he avoided the man because he did not know how to react. Now he knew “I have to create a safe space where my neighbour can share his woundedness when the need arises. I will no longer avoid him, but invite him to talk with me and tell me how I can be of assistance”.

The goal of Christian worship is to create and sustain a community of friends of God who, because they are the friends of God, commit themselves to embodying and proclaiming and practising the ways of God’s reign in the world. According to Southard (1989:171), worship is “the power and wisdom through which our humanity is confessed and celebrated in the church”.

According to Southard (1989:162), the function of the church is to “apply the mind of Christ to the daily habits of persons whose personality and circumstances have not placed them in the right place with the right thoughts at the right time, according to the established criteria of holy habits, social success, or self-actualization”.

However, according to Wadell (2002:17), such a life is not without risk, but it is the vocation of the friends of God, a vocation into which we are initiated as we learn and practise the ways of Jesus, the perfect embodiment and exemplar of friendship with God. However, if we approach worship as something safe and comfortable and constantly reassuring, and not as the setting in which we learn the “dangerous ways of God” that come to us in Christ, worship becomes a ritual of “hopeless consolation” (Wadell 2002:18). Too often churches try to tame the liberating power of worship by making it something we defuse and control instead of something that provokes,
challenges and changes us. We make worship safe and predictably soothing, a practice designed to assure us that all is already well with us in lives that are already pleasing to God.

After André’s sermon, Stefan commented: “We felt warm and comfortable and safe; we thought we did not have a worry in this world! Now I realise that anybody is at risk. This sermon was a pointer of warning to myself. I thought I was safe. I was so excited about my newly founded knowledge, I shared it with everybody who cared to listen.” I realised that this sermon was not safe and predictable soothing, and therefore inspired the congregation in learning the dangerous ways of God. It also was not easy for Stefan to admit his neglect of his neighbour, and to approach him the next time he ran into him at the greengrocer; offering his neighbour friendship took some courage.

Kotzé (2006) finds it significant how these stories used in the sermon, stories from the lives of living people, inspire people to act differently, but not the stories from the Bible. It is as if we are so used to the old stories, that they become “lifeless metaphors” – they become rhymes we can repeat without being aware of their meaning.

8.3.1.4 Consumerism and worship

According to Wadell (2002:19), our lives are sometimes so jammed by our needs, desires, preferences, anxieties, and concerns that the Word of God cannot break through. Then we have a kind of worship that “masquerades at praising God but whose real intent is to celebrate and compliment ourselves”. Wadell (2002:20) points out the crucial difference between entertainment and celebration. In a culture in which “entertainment is approached with religious zeal, everyone, including God, has an obligation to please us”. Where entertainment asks nothing of us, worship asks for our lives, to become active participants in the reign of God. Donahue and Robinson (2001:58) add that Christians want change without challenge, strength without suffering and community without commitment.

Entertainment is a species of consumerism, and according to Wadell (2002:21), much of contemporary worship has been taken over by the logic and categories of
consumerism. In the logic of consumerism, the minister becomes a salesperson trying to market a product to a congregation. When worship becomes captive to consumerism, you need a God people will like and a message they are willing to buy. In consumerist Christianity it is the gospel that must conform to the needs, interests, and fancies of the congregation, and not about inviting the congregation to grow in conformity to Christ. In consumerist Christianity we find not a community of friends of God, but an assortment of isolated and often divisive individuals whose lives are connected by nothing more than the slender thread of choice.

By contrast, Wadell (2002:21-22) [Wadell’s emphasis] suggests that through worship

we are to see ourselves not as consumers and not as self-interested individuals, but as a people, a community formed and centered around a self-giving God who calls us to friendship through Christ and the Spirit. Put differently, the church is the community that lives from, in, and for the friendship of God that comes to us in Christ. If we see this as our vocation, as the summons God extends to all of us, then we know that in this friendship we are entrusted with the task of being God’s people in the world, of witnessing God’s ways in the world, and of furthering God’s purposes in the world.

Karien commented on the sermon under discussion: “I was sitting there in the church, thinking about my own pain and worries which have nothing to do with drug abuse or addiction. But the message that we have to bear one another’s burdens, made me realise that I am not alone. I am part of this community of friends. And only the thought that I am not alone comforted me. Also the message of grace, forgiveness and acceptance helped me to realise: If there is hope and grace for someone addicted to drugs, then there is also hope and grace for me! I also have the need to give something back to the community – I want to give something back, to become involved in Coram Deo.”

Through worship, we become “new knowers of old things” (Southard 1989:159). The group process is complete when the mystical sense of communion with God becomes the prophetic reality of action in our world. Our new knowledge must be conformed to the old way. We have to ask: “Does our testimony ring true with that of other believers? Do others see the mind of Christ in our attitudes, or only a projection of our own desires?” Karien became a “new knower” of the old truth of God’s grace, and the comfort of belonging to a community of faith when she was reminded of the grace of God, and when she experienced it during the sermon.
If the worship and liturgy of the church should form us into a community of the friends of God, then can we not also say that through such worship we grow together in spiritual friendship and help one another in a gospel life? (Wadell 2002:109). It was through worship that Martha was inspired to suggest to her friend Jane to attend the support group for the parents of young people trapped in drug addiction. And it was through worship that Martha was inspired to accompany her friend to the group, as that was the only way her friend was willing to go. And it was through worship that Martha was inspired to keep on attending the group meetings, offering her prayers and assistance to more than her friend Jane.

According to Carr (1989:55), the Christian minister involves him/her with people who are already in complex ways, often hidden from him/her, interacting with each other. In specific activities such as worship and prayer, the minister is establishing a connection or relationship between God and us or between this world and the next. I believe that this was what happened to Martha. She explained her experience as follows: “What touched me during the sermon, was that what was happening to my friend resembled the experiences related in the sermon. Since the time when Tyrell [a young man in our congregation who share the testimony of his recovery in church a few months earlier] told his story in the church a few months ago, I knew I had to do something for Jane. I just did not know what or how. I cried with her, and I prayed with her. Now I know of something more that I can do: I will invite her to the support group, and I will come with her, because I know she will never do it on her own.”

In order to invite faith communities into becoming communities of friends of God, I believe that we have to reclaim and give more deliberate attention to Christian language in worship.

8.3.2 Worship: the language of friendship

According to Wadell (2002:22), language is a matter of someone speaking and others trying to respond. In Jesus, God speaks to us. Our task is to hear the Word, to open our lives to receive it, and to begin to live according to it. To take up the Christian life and “to be transformed from strangers to God into the friends of God, we must allow the Word we call Jesus to become the guiding grammar of our lives”.
For Wadell (2002:23), Jesus is not only a person to follow, Jesus is also a new language to learn. In order to witness to the Word of God, we must first become adept in its grammar. Our task is to move from being inarticulate with the Word to being eloquent practitioners of the Word. I believe that Andrè’s sermon became the guiding grammar of Martha, Bessie, Karien and Stefan’s lives.

Clapp (1996:196) reminds us that although language is not the whole of reality, it plays an indispensable role in making things and relationships real. He contends that to reclaim and cultivate Christian language will check and challenge practices promoted by the predominant world system. The Trinitarian and ecclesial language Andrè used in his sermon, challenged the “adequacy of the grammar of atomistic individualism” (Clapp 1996:196). The sermon interpreted everyday life events in Christian language, enlivening imaginations and opening up formerly undreamed-of options, such as Bessie’s visit to her friends, Martha accompanying her friend to the support group, inspiring Stefan to reach out to his wounded neighbour, and Karien to offer assistance, no matter how mundane the task.

This, however, is not easy because the language of God is unlike any other. It not only twists our tongues, it changes our hearts. The “divine language is so new and so different that when it is spoken in Jesus it sounds utterly strange to us – all this talk about forgiveness, turning the other cheek, being poor for the sake of the kingdom, and serving the needs of others before attending to our own” (Wadell 2002:23). Learning the language of God implicates us in an ongoing transformation of how we think about everything. In Jesus, God speaks a different language, a “wonderfully hopeful one because it is a language that affirms trust instead of betrayal, a language that seeks community instead of rivalry and division, a language that works for generosity instead of selfishness and domination, a language that values service more than self-promotion, and a language that practise forgiveness and peace because it knows the futility of vindictiveness and violence” (Wadell 2002:24). It was this language that spoke to Karien as she experienced the hope and comfort of community, the forgiveness and grace and peace. It was also this language which inspired Karien, Martha, Bessie and Stefan to be of service to their wounded friends and neighbours.
In the Bible we have a new language of friendship, a language of participation. The church has thus the freeing task of proclaiming and embodying the gospel, and in so doing teaching and cultivating an alternative language, a contrast culture, for friendship – a language and culture that support friendship as a full-fledged social, political practice and enable it to realise more of its rich potential (Clapp 1996:210).

Although I believe that the sacraments of baptism and the eucharistic task of celebration have much to offer inviting the faith community to re-member their identity as community-of-friends, the participants did not bring stories of lived experience how these traditions formed them into a community of friends of God to the research journey. Because I am committed to the values of participatory action research, I follow the direction the participants provided on our research journey. I will therefore only shortly discuss how I believe these sacraments can nurture a spirituality of participation and mutual care. Reflecting on the absence of stories in this regard, I can only speculate about the reasons. Tillich (1965:6) offers one possible explanation, when he suggests that religious symbols and goals have been “challenged and sometimes destroyed by the emergence of technology, bourgeois ways of life, nationalism, and the quasi-religions”, resulting in the “loss of the power of religious symbols in general” (Tillich 1965:50). In Chapter 9 I express the hope that another researcher will take up this thread and investigate it further.

### 8.3.3 Baptism

Baptism symbolises union with Christ (Ladd 1974:548). It means union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It is a symbol of spiritual death and resurrection. According to Peterson (2005:303), baptism definitely places our unique and personal name in the company of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because we do not baptise ourselves – it is always something done to us in the name of the three-personed God in the community – the resurrection life by which we become our true selves is accepted as previous to and outside of anything that we can do for ourselves. We are turned around, no longer going our own way but living as members of the community that follows Jesus. We “cannot be trusted on our own in this business” (Peterson 2005:303). Baptised, we begin to get a feel for what it means to participate.
With Wadell (2002:53) I believe that the church is the community where people through baptism, are initiated into a way of life that ought to be in deliberate contrast to the system of consumerism and individualism. This initiation remains unfinished; in fact, what baptism begins must continue and be constantly rehearsed in worship. The liturgy and worship of the church should form us in the very values, attitudes, dispositions, and practices that not only teach us about intimacy and friendship but help us become capable of achieving them. The aim of “baptism and our subsequent worship is not to produce a ‘good consumer’ but a good person, a saint, a true friend of God who knows what it means to be a true friend of others” (Wadell 2002:54). The church should be the befriending community of a befriending God, a God who is patient, hopeful, and faithful with all of us.

In the absence of stories from the participants, I reflect in Chapter 9 on the possibilities after I have had to exit this research journey, to continue looking for opportunities to explore the sacrament (or symbol7) of baptism in the context of inviting my faith community to re-member their identity as community-of-friends.

8.3.4 Eucharist

According to Ladd (1974:547), the unity of the body of Christ is further illustrated by the Eucharist. In 1 Cor 10:17 Paul uses the symbolism of a loaf of bread broken in pieces and distributed among the worshippers to illustrate the oneness of the individual members. Because they have a prior unity with Christ, unity exists among the participants of the Eucharist. The drinking of the cup is participation in the blood of Christ, and the eating of the bread is participation in the body of Christ. Ladd (1974:547) argues that although the cup and the bread are a memorial of the death of Christ, and are used in memory of Jesus’ death, eating and drinking involve more than a memory of a past event; they also represent participation in the body and blood of Christ, and therefore participation in his body. The “bread and the wine are vehicles of the presence of Christ …. Partaking of bread and wine is union (sharing) with the heavenly Christ” (Hauck 1976:805).

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7 According to Ladd (1974:548), it is widely debated to what extent Baptism and the Eucharist are sacramental and to what extent symbolic. However, this is not to minimise the importance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
Küng (1976:224) argues that in “the Lord’s supper” the community is constituted as a body. Not that the community is only the body of Christ when it shares in the Lord’s supper; but it is in the meal, in which all eat one bread, the body of the Lord, that the fact that the community is the body of Christ appears in concrete form as nowhere else. The Lord’s Supper is fellowship with Christ, and so fellowship with other Christians; their common union with Christ naturally leads to a union of those who share the Lord’s supper, a communion of Christians among themselves. The one is not possible without the other, because they all partake in the same bread, Christ. By the meal they share, members of the Church are united with the Lord and with each other (Küng 1967:223).

In the light of my argument for the re-membering of our identity as community-of-friends, I agree with Clapp (1996:210) that the Eucharist offers an opportunity for the church, the body of Christ, to proclaim a different language and live a different culture for the practise of friendship, and to rehearse them in the Eucharist. In the absence of any language that can help articulate the significance of friendship and family for our personal and political existence, the church can proclaim the gospel’s attitude towards friendship and celebrate it in the Eucharist. Christian friendship is “something that God accomplishes rather than what we do …. By first of all making us his friends, Jesus frees us to be friends to one another” (Clapp 1996:208).

In Chapter 4 I refer to Aquinas who argued that friendship with God is experienced and developed through life and activity in conformity to God’s will, and prayer, and the sacraments lie at the heart of this relationship. For him, the Eucharist is the effective sign and means of union, the sign of supreme caritas which lifts our hope, and unites us with God. Wadell (2002:27) refers to Aquinas who argues that we become God’s friends by “eating” Christ. We grow in friendship with God by feeding on the one who is exemplar of that friendship. As we are reborn in Christ through baptism, we eat Christ through the Eucharist. We acquire the self necessary for friendship with God by eating the life of Christ, by absorbing everything about him into our daily lives. When at the Eucharist we eat the body and drink the blood of Christ, we consume Christ entirely – his attitudes, his outlook, his values, his example – and we allow him to transform and to challenge our everyday lives.
Linda agrees: “If the Eucharist would have been served to my family in our sorely trying times, we would have been strengthened and reminded of God’s endless love and friendship”. I would have expected the leadership of the congregation to initiate such a gesture, and it could have been done at our home, in the presence of a care group, or publicly. I believe the time has come that we should take the bread, break it to the outcastes individually, and as the community of friends of God take the wine and celebrate Christ’s existence amongst us. Is it about the prescriptions (especially of the Reformed churches) of how the Eucharist should be served, or is it about the body of Christ, that had to be broken, in order for us to be healed?”

My work in my faith community does not end with this research journey. I will continue to explore ways in which my faith community can celebrate their identity as community-of-friends through the sacrament (symbol) of the Eucharist. With Tillich (1965:54) I believe that the classical, traditional Christianity has lived in great symbols, and with him, “I do not wish to lose them”. With Tillich (1965:54), I believe that we are “faced with a desperate task, in some respects: to try to reinterpret Christian symbols so that they may become powerful again”.

Linda believes that that “we need to understand what God’s intentions were with these symbols. The symbols still have the same power, but the meaning we have given to them, made them ‘traditions’. We need to go back to His word and understand what He said about these sacraments”!

8.4 ENGAGING COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES IN THE INVITATION OF BECOMING FRIENDS

Swinton (2000b:158) warns that the church needs to examine critically its own structures for institutional barriers and exclusive theological understandings based on false premises that might separate or overlook important sections of its community. It needs to begin to develop strategies where the church community can encounter and learn to live with strangers and the wounded among them. In the preceding paragraphs I have discussed how caring clusters and our faith traditions can encourage, support, mobilise and empower naturally occurring relational networks, and how they can provide support for those who are struggling with woundedness. In
the next paragraphs, I will discuss how communication structures, through a church magazine, can be employed in inviting the faith community to examine critically their theological understandings, inviting them to notice and understand what is going on within the community and to be aware of the importance of listening and presence for people whose lives have been devastated by woundedness.

8.4.1 A plea for grace …

In chapter six, I shared a letter that I received from a young man in the vice of drug abuse, pleading with the community of faith to have grace for him and his family. I shared this letter with the community in the “Netwerk”, our church’s magazine which is distributed monthly, when, for the third time in just more than one year, we had to bury a young person who died of drug related causes. I used the opportunity to remind the faith community of a series of sermons about hospitality, inviting them to put into practise ideas shared during the sermons. I also invited the readers to discuss the letter and its effects on them with me. I attach this article as appendix F.

When nobody responded to my invitation, I asked a group of counsellors at Coram Deo, the pastoral centre where I work, to reflect on the letter. I gave them no background information – only the article to read. The following conversation took place:

Carina: *This letter is an accusation against us, the faith community. On the other hand, if we knew, we could have reached out to this family. It is not that we are unwilling. If only we have known …. But this letter sensitises me.*

Cecilia: *The community is overwhelmed by all the need. One does not know where to help and where not to. I think that for this kind of problem, one needs specialised care. For this young man, a blanket against the cold was not what he needed. He needed more than a roof over his head, and was probably not what he wanted at that stage. My compassion and support would have been for the parents and those around him.*

Rietjie: *I would like to know whether the community knew about this family and their pain.*

Petro: *In this letter, you can replace drug abuse with any other form of suffering. I know lots of people who feel the same about the church - who needed
support from their community of faith, but found none. There is no care in the church community.

Magda: This letter does nothing for me. I would like to know what this family has done for the community? Do they only want to receive?

Rietjie: Reading the letter aroused anger in me, because there was no care for this family. But we have to be realistic and distinguish between drugs and other forms of pain. People do not talk about drug related problems. And the drug-problem asks for other forms of help.

Carina: We have to be aware of snobbishness in our community. Perhaps this family felt that others were looking down on them?

Rietjie: If they kept it a secret, we cannot blame the community for not caring.

Petro: I experience this letter as a charge against me personally. I recognise myself. When I hear of someone’s pain, I say “Oh shame” and go on with my life.

Andries, a friend whom I asked to comment on the letter, responded as follows:

How is it possible for a young person to experience this kind of apathy in our congregation, who boasts that we are a congregation that reach out towards those in need? I ask the following questions:

- Did the family “hide” their problem from the community?
- Do we only reach out to those known to us because they are active participants in our community life?
- Do we reach out only to those who ask for help? Or have we learned to see Jesus in those who suffer?
- Did we give a stone when this young man asked for bread? Was it because we decided that his problems were his own making? Did we turn away from this family because we judged them as unworthy of our compassion and care?
- Did our knowledge about people addicted to drugs and our perception that they always tell lies, prevent us from reaching out to this family?
- Who is this young man? Do I know him? Will it add to his recovery if I contact him and ask for his forgiveness? That the congregation repents its lack of love?
• Now that the pain of this young man found a place in my heart, how will I react differently in future? Will I have more compassion?

• Do the people in the congregation know how to reach to persons in need? Do we teach them to listen as part of healing?

What I have learned from these comments, is that I certainly succeeded in stirring up some thought. However, our faith communities (these respondents are members of three different congregations) still have a long way to go before we will be a community of friends having a single soul, through complete harmony in pursuits, aims and convictions as was the ideal in the Fourth Century.

8.4.2 Sir, do you have R100 for me, Sir?

A young man in our congregation, who was trapped in addiction to heroin, had the habit of telling all sorts of tales to members of the congregation, especially those who knew his parents, with the intention of getting money to sustain his drug habit. It happened then that some of the persons, who gave money to him, expected the parents to pay the money back – even though the transaction was agreed upon without their knowledge or approval. When the father approached me with this problem, I suggested that he write something for the “Netwerk”. He started the article by relating information about what the cost per month is to maintain a habit of drug abuse, warning them that their money (they gave to these young people) are going directly into the pockets of the drug dealers. He then invited them to follow a different approach: “Although we have to be careful not to attribute to the drug lords’ pockets, we cannot judge and reject these young persons. They need our prayers and spiritual support. Therefore, instead of giving them money or sending them away, invite them for a chat. Over a cup of coffee, you can plant a seed that can germinate with God’s grace at God’s time and change this young person’s life forever.”

As a result of this article, Robert approached this father. He confessed that one Saturday afternoon, while he was watching football on TV, this same son came knocking on his door, and he sent him away. After reading this article, he realised that the least he should have done, was to start a conversation with the young man. He comments: “After reading this article, I realised that I could have made a
difference, but let the opportunity pass – an opportunity that will never present itself again”.

However, we can witness in and out of spoken language. It is not only through the spoken or written word that communities can be invited to participate in caring practices. Symbols and metaphors can also be employed. The following stories I will share, is about a tradition that started as a ministry at Coram Deo.

8.5 CANDLES OF COMPASSION

At Coram Deo we have another ministry which invites the congregation into participation in the caring with ill persons. Each Sunday, members of the congregation who are ill or have to undergo surgery are selected. At the end of the sermon, members of the congregation who know them are invited to collect a candle to give to their ill friend as a symbol of the care of the whole community. By doing this, not only one appointed sick-visitor or curate is blessed with the task of visiting the sick. From the person who sponsors the candles, the person who sponsors the elegant bags in which the candles are carried, to the whole congregation who care to take part, are invited to participate in this caring practice. And the ill person is blessed with the care from the whole congregation.

Maread, who received a candle after she had surgery, wrote a letter of thankfulness, saying: “Thank you so much for the candle that Basil and Elsa brought me when I was in hospital. The candle has burned out – only a shell is left – but the thoughtfulness and compassion it represented, will stay with me for a long time to come.”

Johan, who received chemotherapy, wrote after he received his candle: “My thankfulness for the candle stems from the knowledge that I was put in this community of friends where, when I stumble or fall down, there will be a safety net preventing me from being shattered …. By giving me this candle, you as my community of faith, took my name on your lips and in your prayers – it made me feel as though God himself put out His hand and touched me”.

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For Lindie, the candle of compassion symbolises the prayers and blessings of her community. It reminded her of “the smell of agape-love”.

For me, it is a privilege and a blessing to be part of a system that enables my community of faith to participate in and experience this kind of compassion and care. I am blessed to be in a position where I can contribute to the forming of the whole faith community into a special kind of community – a community of the friends of God who contradict the world in ways that are full of hope.

8.6 A SPECIAL KIND OF COMMUNITY

The worship and prayers of the church form us into a special kind of community, one that exists not for its own sake. According to Wadell (2002:28), a life of friendship with God should never turn the church away from the world; rather, it should instruct the church in precisely how it is called to serve the world. The friends of God do not flee or abandon the world, but sometimes are called to contradict it in ways that are full of hope. Therefore, worship does not end when we leave the church building, but continues and be completed in the witness of our lives. We are called to envision a wholly new way of being human altogether, so imaginatively creative and willing to embrace all men and women as neighbours – even those neighbours who “insist on being our enemies” (Wadell 2002:30). Martha’s journey contradicting the world to bring hope started with one friend she wanted to support and care with. It continued through many meetings of the support group where she touched many lives and brought hope to many who thought they were hopeless. Thea’s journey started when she met a very special friend, and continued, reaching out to the strangers who knocked on her door on a cold Sunday afternoon.

For many more persons listening to the sermon André delivered (par 8.3.1), who understood that small steps on a road of risky behaviour, can end in brain damage, and that they would never again see an addicted person in the same light, envisioned a wholly new way of being human in a life where strangers will be embraced and invited to become friends. All the men and women, who offered support and assistance, were formed into a special kind of community, one that exists not for its own sake, but for service to the whole world.
It is my wish for our communities of faith as communities of friends of God that we will move from the “destructively familiar to the creatively strange” (Wadell 2002:30); That we will be imaginative, hopeful, and prophetic for the sake of the strangers – the wounded amongst us and the world; That we will commit ourselves to be a community characterised “not by lethargy or cynicism or timidity or divisiveness, but by the joy and hope and courage that ought to mark the friends of God” (Wadell 2002:30); That we will be open and receptive to be formed through worship into the concrete practises of love and friendship; That these concrete practises of love and friendship will be about building one another up, and about the kind of active commitment we have for one another when each day we seek what is best for each other, when each day we devote our energies and attention to the needs and well-being of others and find joy in doing so.

However, I have to be realistic and realise that out of a group of about eight hundred people, only thirty-one men and women made the effort to share their experiences of the sermon discussed in paragraph 8.3.1 with me. I have to realise that not everybody who was touched by the sermon came to see me. I also have to realise that some in the church was not touched at all. To the contrary, I believe that there were those who were disappointed that the “sin of addiction” was being presented as an illness, asking for compassion and support while they deserved to be punished. I have to realise this, because faith communities are made up of a mixture of friends and strangers.

8.7 FAITH COMMUNITIES AS MIXTURE OF FRIENDS AND STRANGERS

I find hope in Augustine’s suggestion that the church is made up by a “mixture of saints and sinners” (Price 1996:26), or as Peterson (2005:226) puts it, “a mixed bag of saints and sinners”. However, I allow myself the liberty to, in the context of this thesis, replace “saints” with friends and “sinners” with strangers. Augustine came to see this mixture not as an unfortunate accident, but that it belongs to the very essence of the church, as a community of men and women who have been called to holiness and friendship but are still strangers. Peterson (2005:252) also points out that utopian communities are not featured in the biblical story. A common need to
recognise their strangeness unites all members of the Church, strangers and friends alike. For a spirituality of hospitality and friendship we depend on the prayers of the whole church for a genuine tolerance of one another, especially those who we consider to be strangers because their viewpoints are different from ours. We also depend on the sacraments and the preaching performed by all the ministers of the church, the worthy and the unworthy alike. The Church remains holy in that it is the “ark of salvation, whose prayers and sacraments are the channels of divine grace; but the holiness is not the scrupulous purity of fastidious souls who shun the company of [strangers]” (Price 1996:27). When we believe that Christ took upon himself the anguish of a sinful world, we also believe that there is a deep solidarity that binds Christ to strangers.

According to Augustine (Price 1996:28), Christ gave an example of solidarity with strangers that must be imitated in the Church of God: if Christ bore the sin of the world, we too must “bear” (tolerate) strangers. If the church “were to seek to exclude them, it would not secure but lose its holiness, because it would have ceased to follow its divine Lord” (Price 1996:28). Therefore, Augustine believed that Christians were not to form a separate group, but take part in the life of the broader society (Price 1996:37). Wadell (2002:53) agrees when he contends that the church should be a befriending community that not only welcomes all who comes to it, but also offers them a place where the “grammar of intimacy and friendship can be learned. Moreover, if authentic friendship is an endangered species in our society, then an urgent ministry of the church today may be to help create a supportive environment where true friendship and rich intimacy can be witnessed, embodied and experienced”. It does not mean that every person in a Christian community must be an intimate friend with every other person. It means that “our churches should be communities in which people respect one another, support one another, challenge one another, encourage one another, love one another, and share together a gracious and hopeful vision of life”. In such communities real friendship can be learned and blessed intimacy experienced. I agree with Wadell (2002:53) when he warns that this is not to idealise our churches; rather, it is to challenge them to be what they are called to be.
8.8 CONCLUSION

By speaking its own language of friendship and celebrating its own culture of friendship, the church can engender and support the community-building practice of friendship. What we need is not one more program in which to overexert our already overextended will, but a language that reorients vision on an object more compelling than that which “managerial argot” can reveal or contain. Like we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, genuine friendship will become a more viable practice not by virtue of plying more techniques, but as we see and live a reality that lures us beyond ourselves and our plans and efforts, by allowing us to dare believe that reality as it is known by the “bureaucratic manager” is not the only reality we can live. It is not “the shot heard around the world”, or the “occupation of the White House” or the “redirection of Parliament”. It is a vital performance of Christian culture; it is its own wild and wonderful politics; it is one of many, many fruits of church as a way of life (Clapp 1996:211).

Therefore, this is my quest for faith communities: A church that takes seriously its identity as community-of-friends, which will do everything that it can to seek ways of reaching out to strangers and wounded people, offering them hospitality and the healing presence of the community of the friends of God in their woundedness.

In the next chapter the participants and I will reflect on our journey towards participating faith communities as friends of God.
CHAPTER 9

REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Life is the greatest art form – especially life lived in community

Sweet (1994:93)

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, I reflect back on this research journey the participants and I undertook. First, I reflect on the research process and what I have learned as the researcher as well as a participant to the process. My fellow travellers on the research journey are then invited to reflect on their participation in the journey and how their participation impacted on their stories and their lives. I then discuss possible contributions of the research journey to practical theology and pastoral care, and how these insights, as transformative knowledge, can contribute to the lived experience of faith communities in caring with and empowering wounded persons. I suggest further possibilities for exploration that this research journey had opened up; I also reflect on places where we wish we could have paused or lingered more, but had to pass on our journey. I conclude with my own reflections and dreams after I had to exit the journey.

9.2 MY REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

In this section, I will reflect on my participation in this research journey, deconstructing my own voice in the process. I will look back on the journey, asking myself: did I do what I said I was going to before we departed on this journey? I will reflect on the direction the journey took, reviewing the detours we made, and reflect on the decisions we had to make when we were confronted with a fork in the road. The documenting of the research journey will be reflected upon in terms of accountability.

9.2.1 The wisdom of ignorance

Throughout the research journey, I had to realise that in the area of woundedness, mine is not an authentic voice – I never experienced isolation due to woundedness the way some of the participants have. I therefore had to ask myself: what role do I
have? Clearly I should not speak for or about people whose experiences I do not share. Often researchers have been accused by feminists and minority groups (Ballard 1996b:104) of misunderstanding and misinterpreting realities of which the researcher is not a part. Yet, according to Ballard (1996b:104) on issues of oppression and disempowerment, researchers, as part of their community, may be seen as either part of the solution or part of the problem. Referring to the area of disability, he contends that “the focus of research needs to move from disabled people and on to disabilist society”. The majority who are not disabled are inevitably part of disability issues in their society, and need to address the roles they play in creating, or in challenging, disabling theories and practices. It is my opinion that the same is true about wounded persons, and communities who either enhance the woundedness, or work towards caring with and empowerment of wounded persons. Ballard (1996b:105) suggests an “emancipatory paradigm” that would focus on disabilist societies (I take the freedom to add wounding communities), rather than disabled (wounded) people, and researchers would be accountable to, and work toward empowerment with, people experiencing disability (woundedness). In such an approach, both “researcher and researched become changers and changed” (Ballard 1996b:105).

I also allowed the wisdom of ignorance to guide me on this research journey. Sweet (1999b:310) illustrated the wisdom of ignorance with the story of Socrates, appointed by the Delphic oracle in the late Fifth Century B.C. as the wisest man in Greece. When he was told of his selection, Socrates said: “Since the god proclaims me the wisest, I must believe it; but if that is so, then it must be because I alone of all the Greeks know that I know nothing”. Through my not-knowing, I was compelled to keep asking questions to learn from the participants. And because of the power that lies in the telling of stories “to carry us to remote places” and to be “emotionally hijacked” (Anderson & Foley 2001:4), I shared in the pain of my wounded fellow travellers, as well as their hope for a changed society. I believe my not-knowing added to me as researcher to become, together with my fellow travellers, changer, but also changed.

9.2.2 Reflecting on the research process

As I explained in Chapter 2, I committed myself to research that constructed knowledge according to the stories that my fellow travellers on the research journey
had to tell. Therefore, the direction of the journey was dictated to a large extent by the stories the participants brought to the journey, as well as the literature that presented itself during my searches through the library catalogue and available books and articles, as well as the literature suggested by my promoters, colleagues and friends. I had to realise that in the same way I can only respond to the pain and suffering of persons in whose stories I share, as I explained in Chapter 2, I could not possibly study everything written on the topic this research journey attempted to cover. I have to realise that there are many more stories I could have included, and that could have steered the journey on another direction, have I known about them.

I also have to realise, that through the questions I asked, or not asked, I influenced the direction of the research journey, even though I was committed to the ethical ways of coming to know I described in Chapter 2. As Poplin (1996:145) warns, we should be careful to continue to question our own methods of qualitative research as well, by asking ourselves questions like: How much do we still limit our vision in qualitative inquiry? How much of our “data” are not allowed to see the light? How much do we not see either? How much do we still limit our “data” by the questions we ask, the way we observe and analyse, who we are? I realise that, the same way I recognised a story someone told as a possible companion to the research journey, I could have missed opportunities for stories that could have contributed to the research journey. I also realise that the way I listened to a story, and the explorative questions I asked, resulted in the telling of the stories highlighting certain aspects, while other parts of the story remained hidden and forgotten. Although the participants were invited to add anything at any time to the stories they told, and although some of them did, I believe that many dimensions of the stories stayed untold and unsaid.

As I was committed to participatory action research, I also have to ask myself whether I have achieved what I intended to when I started on this journey.

### 9.2.2.1 Participation

Looking back on the research journey, I have to ask myself whether the journey really was one of participation. When I understand participation as the bringing together of action and reflection, theory and practise (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:1),
or creating a social space where participants can share experiences and information (Park 2001:81), I believe I have succeeded. While discussing this report, the participants agreed that the theoretical outcomes of this research journey are grounded in the perspectives and interests of those immediately concerned (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:4) – both the wounded and those who offered friendship.

However, when I think about the experiences of Linda and her family, I know that I could have listened to her voice with more attention. Were I more attentive to her needs, I would have recognised the opportunity to invite her and her family into the heart of the congregation, by facilitating a process where the Eucharist could have been served to them (see Chapter 4, paragraph 4.2.2.5 and Chapter 8, paragraph 8.3.4). It was only while she was proofreading the report that we both grasped the opportunities such an action could have opened up. However, like I suggest in paragraph 9.5.2, my work in my community does not end when this research journey ends. I look forward to inviting Linda to “design” with me an occasion where she and her family, together with all the significant others in their life, can be invited to enjoy a shared meal and the Lord’s Supper.

9.2.2.2 Action

The way I understand the primary purpose of action research, is that it has to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2). As a wider purpose, action research has to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being of human persons and communities. For Martha, to realise what the effect of her caring presence on the well-being of Jane was, was both practical and useful. According to her, “being aware of the ‘power’ of my caring presence, I will ‘apply’ this ‘gift’ more consciously in future”, contributing to the well-being of her community.

Although the recommendations in this report do not include anything exotic or other-worldly or mind shattering, through the re-membering of our identity as community-of-friends, through the practise of friendship, I sincerely believe that the well-being of the human persons as well as my whole community-of-friends can be transformed. I already experience this transformation through practical knowledge through the Friendship Position Map, and the deconstructing friendship exercise I introduced to
persons through workshops, especially in the community of Coram Deo – the pastoral centre where I work. As Linda observes, “it is the first small steps towards inclusive, participating, caring communities-of-friends”.

If I have to highlight one thing that I have learned through undertaking this research journey, it will be the simplicity of it all. It is not the scientific revolution, or the war in Iraq or the end of the war in Iraq that will change the world. The love of a friend who is prepared to wait with a wounded friend until the right action arises by itself, will change the world. It is not research projects undertaken on a grand scale that will make the difference, but the willingness of researchers to allow the voices of wisdom from ordinary people to surface and to inform those willing to learn.

9.2.3 Documenting the research

Like Clapp (1996:11), I believe that readers and writers are in a relationship as “complicated and possibly as dangerous” as a blind date. While writing this report, I was acutely aware of the dangers of the obstacle course this journey was to me. Imagine undertaking an obstacle course through unknown territory, with a “blind date” partner!

The territory was to a certain extent unknown territory to me, because theology in an academic genre is not my home territory; theology and the lived experience of it is. I refer to a blind date partner, because apart from the usual uncertainties between reader and writer, my reader is an examiner, whose home territory is theology in an academic genre.

And like Astley (2002:126), I believe that language is a “complex, many-sided thing that can easily lead us astray”. At the root of much of the confusion in everyday speech lies the fact that people do not always recognise or spell out the actual implications of their language. And with McFague (1987:181), I believe that when we speak to God we are most conscious of how inadequate our language is for God, something we “more easily forget when we speak about God”.

Because I was writing the report of the research journey both the participants and I undertook, I realised that the voices of the participants could be marginalised by my
own voice, or the academic voice that was also part of the journey. I therefore invited the participants to review the drafts of the report, and to make suggestions for revision of any part of the report. Because Linda participated in the journey also by editing the text, I invited her to add her own voice, interpreting my interpretations of her story and her experience of woundedness. I believe that by giving Linda this opportunity to participate even in the report-writing of our journey together, I not only deconstructed my power in the research process, it also added to the authenticity of the report. By giving a “two-way account” (Tootell 2004:57) of the research, I acknowledged the contribution of the participants. By writing in words and concepts that ordinary people will understand, I believe that this research will be of some use as “transformative knowledge” (Pattison & Woodward 2000b:50).

Writing about a topic as well-known and well-lived as theology and friendship, also proofed to be much more challenging than I expected it to be, for several reasons. To both of the topics, my problem was not to find literature, but sifting through the available literature, deciding what to invite to participate on the journey and what to leave behind. On my research journey, I often had to make decisions regarding how deep to enter into the topic under discussion. I only hope that what I presented through this report represents a balanced view. And that other researchers could be inspired to take up some of the other possible routes the participants and I had to pass.

Another challenge was that everybody thinks themselves an expert on the topic of theology, in the sense that even though only relatively few are true experts in academic theology, each person is the expert in his or her own theology; at least in the sense that it is almost certain that no one knows more of their own theology than they do themselves (Astley 2002:123). The same arguments are applicable to friendship. I also realised how easy it could be to romanticise friendship, and to become normative and prescriptive. Through constant reflection, asking the inputs of the participants and the comments of my promoters, I hope that I avoided this trap, and provided a balanced view on what the participants (both persons telling their stories and the numerous philosophers, theologians and other authors who participated in the journey through the books and articles they wrote) and I found
significant to say about how to do friendship in the context of faith communities embracing their identity as community-of-friends.

I also faced the challenge writing about an “ordinary” topic such as friendship, where the contribution to the academic field of practical theology and pastoral care are vested exactly in the ordinary, everyday affairs of ordinary people. I realise how easily the obviousness of my arguments can obscure the transformative power of a spirituality of friendship in communities as counterbalance to the individualistic culture we are immersed in.

I make no claim for universality of the ideas I presented in this report. It is also not my intention to suggest a prototype for friendship. I offer them as a way to stimulate conversation on the topic; to theologise about the metaphor of friendship from a perspective of faith communities as communities-of-friends …

However, in spite of the challenges I faced, writing this report helped clarify, refine and re-story my own way of thinking about the research journey. Reflecting on my journey through this research, I realised how participating in this research contributed to the enrichment of my own professional identity as a “practitioner researcher” (Tootell 2004:58).

9.2.4 Ethical ways of caring

In this section I will reflect on the ways participation in the research journey affected me and my therapist self. I will discuss ways in which my ethical ways of doing therapy was challenged, as well as my ethical ways of being in the world.

9.2.4.1 Friendship facilitation

After many months of working on this research journey, I know that I will never be the same again – not in terms of my personal ways of being friend, nor in my capacity as pastoral therapist. I have to agree with Woggon (2003:260) when he argues that friendship as model of care allows us to move beyond pathology and offers an alternative to the professional model of a “medico-centric” culture. I prefer to think of pastoral therapy as a process of friendship facilitation, rather than the therapeutic
models individualistic society have to offer. As a pastoral therapist, I have become a “friendship facilitator” (Carmichael 2004:197). I have learned that although caregivers can be tender in touch, only friends are tender in feeling (Hunt 1991:22).

When a colleague, a pastoral psychologist in private practise, one day asked me to stand in for him in a specific case, I realised the significance of my newly-founded identity as friendship facilitator. My colleague was called out to the deathbed of an elderly man in hospital. Because he was already engaged in another appointment, he asked whether I could go in his place, as this was urgent: the man was dying and could not wait until his therapist could fit him into a busy schedule. It was when my colleague offered me the fee due for the visit, that it really struck me: What is happening in our communities, when a dying person has to pay for someone to guide him through this last journey he will ever make on this earth? What if he does not have the money to pay for a “professional”? Where were his friends? His family? Why could they not guide him through the process of dying? Were they caught up in the discourse of “professionalism”, that nobody else than a professional can do the job? What if my colleague could not find someone to stand in for him, and the man had to die alone?

This incident also made me realise how privileged I am to be employed by a faith community, where this kind of ‘service’ is available to everyone and does not come with a “price-tag” (Sandmaier 1995b:35). It also underlined my argument for healing communities, where networks of friendship offer hope and new possibilities for wounded persons. Being a friendship facilitator therefore has two sides of the same coin: first, it is about my identity as pastoral therapist and the way I invite friendship into the healing process the persons come to see me and I enter into; secondly, it is about facilitating the process of transformation in my community of faith into a healing community, embracing the metaphor of friendship in our relationships with one another, in the creative use of opportunities in everyday living where strangers can learn to become friends.

It also resonates with the concern Woggon (2003:263) voices that certain styles of professionalism can become a “form of captivity for pastoral care” when it “depends on society, conserves institutions, and serves to maintain social order”. However,
claiming or reclaiming the dimension of friendship in pastoral care means to use and fill the structures of professionalism so as to follow the model of care, which is evident in the Jesus story of the compassion of God. And with Woggon (2003:263), I believe that the model of friendship presented in the life and work of Christ offers real possibilities for therapeutic change.

I can only speculate about the possibilities when friendship facilitation is turned into a professional quality. What will the implications be if friendship facilitation becomes part of the training of all the professional caregiving occupations, like Social Workers, Pastors, Nursing staff, Psychologists, Psychiatrists? How will it impact on an individualistic society when a psychologist in private practise can tap into the structures of local congregations, letting them know of a lonely individual who cannot wait to be invited into a caring cluster?

9.2.4.2 The challenge to change

The challenge to change in the context of friendship is mutual. Even as caregivers, we are challenged to change by those who we care for. In caring for persons trapped in addiction and alcoholism, the parents and families of those persons, for couples whose relationships become instable and wavering, the teenagers who struggle to find their way through life, the gay person who only wants acceptance and not judgment, I am challenged every day to “break through my denial, to look at my life, my values, my lifestyle and to make changes, so that I can live my calling with integrity” (Woggon 2003:265).

9.2.4.2.1 Withholding judgement

More than once, while witnessing the stories of woundedness told by the parents whose children are trapped in drug abuse, I knew that I have changed. For one thing, I will think more than twice before I judge a parent - in fact, any person - because I know that I have not walked in their shoes.

9.2.4.2.2 Image of God

My image of God also was challenged, as through sharing in these stories, I was privileged to see into the heart of God. If mortal parents are capable of such an
enormous capacity to love and forgive and love again, I can only imagine the love of God for us!

9.2.4.2.3 The significance of the insignificant

I also have learned that small things can have a significant impact. And I now know that a caring presence often means much more than a thousand words. More than once the weight of my perceived inadequacy to lighten the pain of these parents wore me down. I remember my own feeling of surprise each time when I am thanked for the difference I made to a parent in the group – I always felt: But I did nothing! I felt so powerless in the face of the enormous pain and suffering of these parents! And when they answer that I have made the difference by caring with them, by being there, by creating the space where they could care and suffer together with others in the same position, I have to agree with Goodliff (1998:180) that in the pastoral task of healing the wounded soul we dare not embrace the “philosophy of the technical society”, where the skill with techniques is all that matters.

9.2.4.2.4 Relational quality of the counselling exchange

I have learned that the emphasis upon the relational quality of the counselling exchange is not surprising, given Christianity’s understanding of human existence following the patterns of the divine life: we are made in the image of God, and he is Being-in-relationship, the triune God. And we are the community-of-friends. I do not mean to say that therapeutic skills and techniques are obsolete – of course we need them. What I do mean, is that the healing power of community should not be sidelined or underestimated. I believe with Kornfeld (1998:10) that our care and counselling should grow out of our participation with others.

9.2.4.2.5 Forgiveness

I also have learned that we need to forgive each other for not being perfect, for making mistakes, for being fallen but redeemed (Sweet 1999b:304). In Chapter 7 I refer to the pain I suffered on my journey with family H whose son died at the doorstep of our church building. Because I was profoundly touched by their pain, enhanced by what they perceived as lack of empathy they received from their
community of faith, I almost ran out of most of my reserves. For trying to stand up for the pain and suffering of this family, I felt alienated from my own community of faith.

Joshua’s struggle towards healing also touched me at a level beyond explanation. I related to his longing for an opportunity to make good for his misdeeds of the past, and respected him for his repetitive efforts to find forgiveness from his community. The pain of Joshua and of Linda (his mother) each time his initiative was politely declined, was also my pain – enhanced by the realisation that I am part of this community who finds it so hard to forgive. The words of Wadell (2002:54-55) rang true, when he said that if our lives have been broken by infidelity, betrayal and violence, the love we need must first take the form of a healing as we are gradually brought back from death to life, from despair to hope. We should be able to find such a powerful, restorative love in God and in the community – the church – which pledges to embody God’s ways.

9.2.4.2.6 Self reflection

However, as Guder (1999:46) argues, the community in incarnational mission is not perfect. It is made up of forgiven sinners, of “beggars who tell other beggars that they know where the bread is”. God’s forgiving love continually confronts and conforms the very human community of faith, and calls it to repentance and continuing conversion. The community incarnates its witness to love in no other way more profoundly than in its honest admission of its own sin and its continuing growth toward the fullness of that love. In other words, the community embodies the gospel of love as it lives out its forgiveness before all the world. This is a genuine struggle. God’s radical love constantly reveals our lovelessness, our ability to create boxes and boundaries that reduce the meaning and concrete impact of that love. We “move along in our pilgrimage as saintly sinners or sinful saints, constantly aware of our own dependence upon the love which we are called and empowered to share. We need evangelising ourselves so that we can evangelise. We need to experience the cleansing and restoring power of God’s love so that we can be its agents” (Guder 1999:46).

I therefore believe that we need to forgive each other for not being perfect. These incidents also highlight for me the significance of the lived experience of real persons
in real life in our theological reflections if we want them to make a difference. It is about “ethics located in discourse and praxis with” (Kotzé 2002:18). It is about taking seriously a theology that is grounded in the challenges and fulfilments of ordinary life and its ordinary religious concerns, rather than in the controversies of the academy.

9.2.4.3 Exclusivity in Pastoral Care

During this research journey, I was invited to reflect on ethical ways of caring by at least two incidents: During our last interview, Jane commented on a support group she contacted some time ago. The first question she was asked, was whether her son accepted Jesus as his personal saviour. When she hesitated before answering the question, the man she spoke to, proceeded by saying that if he has not, they will not be interested in helping him. On her question, “But what should happen to him then?”, the answer was “He will suffer, and then go to hell”.

Another incident, however not directly linked to the research journey, was while I was discussing a new project of Coram Deo with another colleague: We have a project where families in our congregation “adopt” a family affected by HIV/Aids in Eersterust (an impoverished coloured community in the East of Pretoria), providing a crate filled with groceries on a monthly basis for the adopted family. When my colleague enquired how we provide food for the souls of these people, it took me some time to realise that what he meant was that we have to use this opportunity of monthly contact to evangelise the persons involved in the project.

These discussions made me realise that I want to take sides with Goodliff (1998:133) and Lyall (2001:107) that it is unethical and counterproductive to use pastoral care as a means of evangelism, or exclude those who are not Christianly enough. Goodliff argues that pastoral care in the community “should not be seen as a useful supplement to the real task, that of saving souls, but as an essential response to the call of Christ to care for ‘the least of these’ his brethren, amongst whom are included all who religion would want to exclude”. According to Goodliff (1998:132) too often social action in evangelical churches is barely concealed evangelism, or at best “the sugar that sweetens the evangelical pill”. It is the decoy to attract sinners onto our patch so that we might “bag” them and convert them. I agree with Goodliff that such a
policy “lacks integrity and those ‘sinners’ who get close enough to smell it get put off by the stench of hypocrisy that surrounds it” (Goodliff 1998:132).

The gathered church model is particularly prone to the dichotomy of member/non-member, saint/sinner, believer/unconverted. Whenever the church draws such hard lines around itself it ceases to be Church in the same way as Jesus was human, but becomes a religious institution standing under the judgment of God. Instead, the church which views itself and those around it as fellow members on a journey of faith enables it to care for whomever, that should be without calling upon the conditions of an acceptable level of faith beforehand. With Goodliff I am convinced that God is at work in every human life, and those whom the church is often quick to dismiss might be further on the road to genuine faith than some within the churches who make those judgments. Again, Augustine sets an example when he invites pagans to join the Christian Church, the *civitas Dei*, on its pilgrimage through the world (Barnes 1994:80).

I agree with Lyall (2001:107) that pastoral care should not be used as a means of evangelism, and that there is “nothing so profoundly evangelical as good pastoral care. This is the place where the gospel becomes an embodied response to human need and grace becomes incarnate”.

Therefore, this is my personal conviction: to care with the wounded regardless.

### 9.2.5 The telling of stories

On this research journey, “research as stories” was part of the “complex web of experiences” that attempted to “help us understand and value our differences, our common humanity, and our interdependencies” (Ballard 1996b:106). My hope is that through this research as stories, these accounts became part of other’s individual own experience, to be adapted and applied, in all their complexity, to other settings and other people (Ballard 1996b:102). When Lyall (2001:45) argues that “we love stories because our lives are stories”, I hope that, through these stories of friendship and care with wounded persons, others will recognise in the attempts of the participants to move, temporally and painfully, their own story. I hope that the stories related in this report, were affirming and empowering, coming from knowing that
others see uncertainty and complexity as central to their research experience, to be enjoyed and worked with, rather than to be fought against or managed by research methodology (Ballard 1996b:102).

I agree with Lyall (2001:45) that telling of stories can be therapeutic. Therefore, through participation in this research journey, through the telling of their stories, the participants also made sense of their own stories. In the following section I relate the experience of the participants.

9.3 REFLECTIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In the following paragraphs, I will share some of the reflections of the participants on what their participation in this journey meant to them and how their lives have been changed as a result of their participation.

9.3.1 Marthatjie, the smile, and the flowers

After Martha shared the story of her friendship with Jane with me, I wrote a letter to her, reflecting on her story. In one section, I asked

> You wrote: “For the first time I experienced the wonder of being able to mean something to someone else”. Was it really the first time, or are you forgetting other experiences? Where did you learn to care for others like you did for Jane? Where did you learn the “art” of friendship?

And further in the letter, reflecting on her ability to be a caring presence:

> I am curious as to where you have learned this caring, this “being present” where human suffering is evident? Who, of all the people you know, will be the least surprised to know this about you?

When we discussed the letter, Martha remembered that it was not the first time she cared, it was only the first time she experienced her caring activities consciously. She re-membered one day, when she was about 7-8 years old, her father (he was a deacon) came home from visiting a family in the congregation, who was extremely poor and had no food. When he started collecting food for this family, Martha and her brother offered some of their toys for the children in the family.
She also re-membered another incident: Her grade four teacher was the writer Nita Griessel. Martha’s mother is living in a retirement village. When Martha told her mother of her participation in this research journey, her mother told her of the time she read a story written by Nita Griessel, where she related the narrative of Marthatjie who always smiled and brought her a flower while she was still a school teacher. Martha’s mother recognised her daughter in the character, and bragged endlessly by her friends!

Martha also remembered her own daughter, who recently quit her stable, well-paying job to work among the homeless on the Cape Flats.

Martha concluded: “Maybe this is a cycle: I have learned from my father, my daughter from me; maybe it is in our genes!”

For both Martha and her mother, Martha’s participation in this research journey was an invitation to re-member parts of their past that were hidden under layers of many other, “more important”, memories. By re-membering her identity as a caring person, Martha also grew closer to God. She said: “Because I am obedient to the command to love my neighbour, and to be of service, I grew closer to God, and I am experiencing more and more peace. After I came to see you the first time, that night I experienced this wonderful peace. The same after I brought Jane to the group.”

9.3.2 The wounded healer

Before my last interview with Joshua, he learned that his “anchor” in the Boiler Room leadership has resigned. He was quite disappointed, because he knew that he does not yet have a strong enough voice in the faith community to take on the leadership of the Boiler Room. Without the support of this specific person, he feared that the project would lose momentum. His stepfather was also diagnosed with cancer.

Joshua experienced his participation in this research journey as encouraging. He reflects: “Knowing that there are people like you, people who care enough for the wounded to be interested in finding practical ways to turn society around, gives me hope for the future of the church”. However, because of his struggles in the past, and continuing battle to find a place in the faith community, he is somewhat cynical about
the results. He says: “My pain is too great. Although I appreciate my participation in this journey as an opportunity to make a difference for others, I am sorry to say that for me personally, this is too little too late. I am battling with what the church is doing to sinners”. Although he believes that “I will never have a voice – I simply have too much to say”, this opportunity, this “little voice” participation in this research journey offers, was to him “an honour and a privilege, especially if somebody else in the same situation could benefit from what I had to say”.

Joshua believes that participation in this research journey was to him the first step towards the task he believes God has summoned him for, although the detail of that task is not clear at this stage. But “it has to have a tremendous impact – all my pain and suffering could not have been in vain”.

I really don’t know if my promise to use what little power I have as the friendship facilitator in my community of faith to keep the Boiler Room going, was of any consolation to him. I know it was not enough for me.

9.3.3 I know the kind of friend I want to be

According to Ballard (1996b:101), we learn about ourselves by observing, or by vicariously trying out an experience or a role, we expand our notion of who we might be, both in terms of who is like us, as we conceive and construct and reconstruct ourselves, and who is not like us. This is one of the ways in which we learn how we should be toward and with others. I believe this was what happened to Jane through her participation in this research journey.

When reflecting on her participation, and after she read the report on the research journey, Jane realised one thing she never will forget: friendship is a two-way thing. Although the emphasis during the research journey was on the support Martha offered her when she needed it most, she re-membered her identity as also a caring friend. She recollected incidents when she was in a position to offer support to friends who needed it. Jane reflects on her feelings while reading the report: “While I was reading what Martha said, how tired and drained she was sometimes, and how she needed the support of her husband, I actually felt guilty. I did not realise at the time that I was such a burden to her! Until I realised that any relationship is changing
all the time. Our friendship was always like that. There were times, like when Martha’s father died, that I was there for her. If I have learned one thing through participation in this project, it is to be more sensitive, and be aware of not draining your friends. I am very grateful for Martha, and she was my biggest support when I needed her most. But now I want to give back to her. And yes, you can say I am proud, that I do not want to be a burden to someone else, but I believe it is more because I care for others, and take their well-being seriously. And because of that, I believe a friend should be sensitive not to put a burden on someone if it is too heavy for her. You must know who will be able to take it, and who not. That is very important to me”.

At present, things are working out very well for Jane and Paul. He is still at the rehabilitation facility, and doing very well. Reflecting back on everything that happened, Jane learned even more about herself: “I know now more than ever that I have to trust my own inner voice. There were times that I have listened to the advice of friends – Christian friends – and afterwards I realised it was the wrong thing to do. The Bible says you must seek the advice of Godly people, but at the end of the day you must listen to your heart because that is where the Spirit of God is. I know that Paul is where he should be. It never would have worked if I took the advice of the group and send him to that horrible place. Fortunately I was able to, I had the money – had I not, things would have been different”.

9.3.4 First steps

When I invited Linda to join me on this research journey, she was very enthusiastic. She remembers: “During the time that our son had a drug problem, I made so many wrong decisions. I knew I could make a difference in the lives of parents who also suffer under the drug abuse problem on advising them on what worked for me and what not. I was also convinced that God, through Jesus Christ, could make a difference in the lives of persons suffering from addiction and their loved ones. Because of my son’s recovery I felt that I owe it to society to become involved in this specific field, and I felt that society should change their minds regarding recovering addicts and should support them more. During my first visit to Coram Deo and my discussion with Ryna, Ryna suggested that we start a support group. I immediately agreed because I knew that an initiative undertaken by a community of believers to
care for loved ones affected by a drug problem can only contribute to the speedy integration of recovering addicts into society”.

However, everything was not going as smoothly as we all wished it to be. Linda reflects: “Although the support group was quite successful in providing support to other parents, the commitment of the greater community to support the recovering addicts was still lacking. Even the support of the parents whose children were still suffering from addiction. I kept wondering why were so few parents prepared to attend meetings?"

However, through her involvement in this research journey, Linda learned more about the community of faith, and what it takes to be a true community-of-friends. “I realised that a change of heart of believers is what is needed! To become a friend of God and a friend of sinners so that we can become a community of friends of God, we all need to look at the disposition of our hearts and our relationships with God. We need to know God’s heart better. We need to understand our calling, what God expects from us. We need to learn to become servants! The life of Mother Theresa is a good example of what I mean. Although she never did one single great task/undertaking, she gave her life in serving others. In being a servant, she became a great leader. Mother Theresa further said: ‘Love does not measure; it just gives. In the world love cannot remain by itself but must be put into action through service. Whatever we are like, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do but how much love we put into the doing … (so) … put your love in living action. The hunger for love is much more difficult than the hunger for bread. In loving others you are loving God Himself …. We cannot do great things. We can only do little things with great love … Keep the joy of loving God in your heart and share this love with all you meet’.”

For Linda, participation in this research journey, was only the beginning. Although she lost some of her enthusiasm about involving the greater community of believers into “loving the unlovable”, she believes that “the suggestions made in this report are the first steps in educating the ‘community of the friends of God’. The more this community practices, the better we will become in doing what is right in God’s eyes – to support and care with compassion for the wounded.”
Linda’s last word: “My son Joshua is still recovering – day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. Only God knows when the healing/recovery process will be completed. If only the community of the friends of God, including myself, realise that sanctification is a lifelong process. A process that requires acceptance, forgiveness, patience, compassion, and unconditional love. The recommendations made in this report, may be the start of involving us all in structuring a new framework to facilitate a new generation of believers, a community that is truly in a friendship relationship with their God and their fellow human beings”.

9.3.5 More voices of the participants

Although not to the same extent, all the participants voiced the affect of participation in the journey. Among others, Magda’s participation in the journey sensitised her to the effect of her words and deeds on other people. Before sharing her story on this journey of caring for her neighbour, she never realised the positive impact she had on her neighbour’s life. This made her realise that “we do have a responsibility towards the people around us. We have to speak out when something is wrong. But that does not mean confrontation. This is where the trick lies: through a loving and caring attitude, in friendship, you have to decide together with the other person what avenues to pursue.”

For Marianne participation in this research journey “made me feel worthwhile to think that I have something to offer”, and Mossie realised that she has courage, because her usual concern for “what will the people say” did not stand in her way to share her story of embarrassment “with whoever will read this report”.

Inspired by the reflections of these participants, and their gratitude for being part of a project which they believe can contribute to a better living for us all in inclusive faith communities who embrace their wounded, I will discuss in the next section the transformative knowledge I believe this research journey has brought to the field of practical theology and pastoral care, and how these insights can contribute to the lived experience of faith communities in caring with and empowering of wounded persons.
9.4 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND PASTORAL CARE

The following section is about the contributions I believe this research journey has brought to the field of practical theology and pastoral care through a pastoral theology of participation and guided by the process of participatory action research. I reflect on how the arguments presented in this report, can contribute to the sense of community in faith communities; on how the metaphor of friendship is a voluntary relationship entered into with intention and maintained with love and connotes responsibility, mutual influence and commitment on both sides of the human-divine equation; on how our faith communities can be strengthened by the re-membering of our past as community-of-friends; how to co-create authentic participatory, inclusive, loving, caring relationships, through the stories of lived experience of real people that speaks of care and love, conveying an effective message of changed life with God and each other, creating possibilities for wounded persons to experience the healing powers of community.

9.4.1 Inclusive communities

It is in the notion of a shared spiritual life which heals and overcome the isolation of the individual that Augustine’s teaching on friendship and community find their richest development. Christian community on earth is a preparation for the communion of saints in heaven, where we shall be totally transparent one to another, and share the vision of God in union with each other. This, Price (1996:91) argues, is nothing less than a participation in the unity in plurality of the Holy Trinity itself. The deepest need of human beings is to be so transformed that we come to “share in the very being of God” (2 Peter 1:5). To open ourselves to this transformation, we must grow in true fellowship, through developing bonds of mutual love and common hope. It is here, perhaps, that we today have most to learn from the message of Augustine. I agree with Jones (1982:130) that “companionship is for the bringing home of our scattered and fragmented selves, for the making of a heart at home itself. When I am truly at home with myself in God, I can then be truly present to my friends and fellow pilgrims”. It is in this message that the contribution of this thesis lies: that we open our eyes to the isolating effects of the discourse of individualism on our lives, and
that, re-membering this part of our faith tradition, we open ourselves to embrace our fundamental relational being – to become community-of-friends.

With Kornfeld (1998:10) I believe that becoming aware of our wholeness is good news, and it leads us to community. Just as God holds the wholeness of creation, our connections to each other hold and sustain us. Our healthy communities can hold us, nurture us and change us. And uncaring, individualised communities can harm us, as was the case with Linda and her family. Faith communities are being challenged to become authentic places where members can experience their wholeness. Communities can be the “holding ground” where they help their members discover their own solutions to problems and conflicts. I agree with Jones (1982:130) [Jones’ emphasis] when he argues that

[It is all very simple. Companionship is your hand stretched out to me when I am frozen and lost. It is the film of sweat between pressed cheeks. It is your seeing in me the terrific thing. It is my waiting attentively on your hurt and listening to your fears. It is the tears, the laughter and the joy we share in the Lord. It is walking together the way of the cross and living together in the power of the resurrection. In short God’s life is our life.

Looking back at this research journey, I have to agree with Theron (1996:22) that in our communities of faith we have unmined treasures of care. This research journey identified, recognised and celebrated these gifts, acting as a counterbalance to the isolating effects of the individualism of our culture. This research journey offers a few suggestions in mining that treasure of care, of learning the art of caring-in-friendship. The first suggestion is about the employment of our faith traditions.

9.4.1.1 Mining for the treasure of care through liturgy and worship

It was through an ordinary sermon that Martha was invited to take up her calling and introduce Jane to the support group; it was also through an ordinary sermon that a few of the members of the congregation were invited to evaluate the consequences of their actions upon the well-being of others - into more ethical ways of doing friendship.

However, this sermon was not an ordinary sermon, like all the other sermons on all the other Sundays. It was different in at least two ways:
i) **Tales of living friendship**

One way in which this sermon was different, was that as part of his preparation for the sermon, the persons affected by drug abuse were invited to share their experiences and knowledges with the pastor. The tales of lived experience of persons who were part of the congregation, brought the facts about drug abuse and its devastating effects on the lives of real people to life, inviting the congregation to evaluate the consequences of their actions upon the well-being of these families. Therefore, one contribution of this research journey to the field of practical theology, is that a sermon based on the lived experience of real people like you and me, living in the real world, is a powerful instrument in mining for the treasure of care in the congregation.

ii) **The language of friendship**

The next characteristic of the sermon that distinguishes it from other sermons, was the core languaging of the sermon. This sermon was a challenge for transformation; a challenge to think differently about our being in the world; an inspiration to be of service to our wounded neighbours and friends. Therefore, this research journey suggests that for a sermon to be effective in mining for the treasure of care, and to inspire the transformation of the congregation into a community-of-friends, the congregation have to be apprenticed in the language of friendship.

However, if there were no opportunities for the congregation to practise their newly found insights, where they could be apprenticed to learn the language of friendship in practical ways, the possibility for transformation could be missed. If the support group did not exist already, Martha would not have a place to go with her friend. If the Birthday Club was not there, Marianne would not have had the opportunity to offer her service to the community, and she would not have met Mossie. Without the Roadhouse, Thea would have missed the experience of a life-changing friendship with Lorinda. Therefore, a significant tool in mining for the treasure of care, can be found in caring clusters.
9.4.1.2 Mining for the treasure of care through caring clusters

The one recurring theme that stood out during this research journey, was the significance of caring clusters in the community, where persons are granted the opportunity to learn the art of doing friendship.

Much pastoral theory and technique involves one-to-one, and sometimes couple or family, situations. This research journey offers a counter model, one in which it is recognised that in faith communities it is not only the religious professional or lay person who supports change. The community itself also heals. It is here that the responsibility of faith communities lies to take up the challenge as habitat to establish a cultural space for the birth and supported practise of friendship; space where faith communities as friends of God can learn the art of caring-in-friendship; creating a habitat where friendship can grow and flourish.

i) Opportunities to create caring clusters

The stories of love and care shared in this research journey were born in caring clusters (Chapter 8) where “those who are mindful of concern” (Kornfeld 1998:11) could learn the skills to help the community develop its potential for supporting life. The Birthday Club, the Roadhouse, the group of women and men who worked together to put food parcels together for a fund-raising event, the Boiler Room, were opportunities where these women and men could learn to know persons they did not know before, to invite strangers to become friends, to undertake a journey from hostility to hospitality. They were places where everybody felt safe, free to admit imperfection and brokenness, places where healing and conversion were “not only possible, but usual”. They were places “where the faith and the Holy Spirit of love were kept alive” (Doherty 2003:18). The friendships between Thea and Lorinda at the Roadhouse, and Marianne and Mossie at the Birthday Club are examples of the possibilities for the growth of friendship under such circumstances. Without the support group for the parents of children addicted to drugs, Jane, Carla, family H, and lots of other parents who attended the meetings of the group, would have to go without the support they found in the community of others who could share in their pain and suffering. None of these opportunities were created through grand or ambitious projects. They were part of mundane events born from ordinary people’s desire to be of service to the community.
Therefore, one powerful instrument for mining the treasure of care in our faith communities, concerns the creative use of possibilities in life’s daily rounds to create caring clusters where strangers can learn to be friends.

**ii) Authentic community needs time and nourishment**

I agree with Sweet (1999b:307) that at the heart of the human enterprise is our participation in God. However, for Sweet participation in God means less taking on the divine attributes than taking on the divine ambition and activity in the world – compassion, outreach, and self-denial. It is therefore about more than imitation of Christ. It is manifestation of Christ’s energies through the power of the Holy Spirit. And that it is also about being community-of-friends.

However, I agree with Hunt (1991:152) when she warns that a sense of community cannot be forced. It does not emerge just because people are in the same room or have made vows in the same fashion. It emerges slowly as a network grows between friends who share similar values and who nurture one another – it is “slow work” (Peterson 2005:312). Because we are divided by social barriers and clashes of interest, we have to learn how to know others in small communities. It took many Friday afternoons at the Roadhouse for the friendship between Lorinda and Thea to grow into a life-changing experience, and many Monday mornings at the Birthday Club for Marianne and Mossie’s friendship to grow into a relationship where Mossie could trust Marianne with her embarrassment. A primary task of the community of Jesus is therefore to maintain this lifelong cultivation of love in all the messiness of its families, neighbourhoods, congregations, and missions (Peterson 2005:313). The Christian life is a pilgrimage of growth in Christ (Doherty 2003:19). This research journey suggests therefore that instant community is not genuine community; authentic community needs time and nourishment as it emerges slowly as a network grows and strangers become friends.

**iii) Celebrate the diversity of human beings**

As I argue in Chapter 3, individuals are to be respected, with all their uniqueness and diversity. According to Burger (2005:160), we received different gifts and talents from God, which add to the richness of our lives. We also need diversity of gifts in
order to do the work God is expecting from us. When arguing for a spirituality of participation and mutual care, my intention is not that individuality should be denigrated. What I argue for, is to recognise and acknowledge our responsibility to evaluate the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others, to stand together and to support each other, without sacrificing our diversity. As Goodliff (1998:110) warns, we should not lose the significance of the individual, it should only be relativised by the place of the community of believers. Or as Kornfeld (1998:12) points out, we need community but we are not to be “swallowed up by community”. I do believe that we need those “extroverts” who cannot survive without a horde of friends around them as much as we need the “introverts” who find the companionship of one or two best friends sufficient to experience being cared for. It is not about the quantity of our community, but the quality.

Therefore, what I argue for is not a programme where everybody is expected to be part of a small group. What I argue for is a faith community who takes its calling to be a habitat, a safe space, where friendships can take root and grow, seriously. The words of Nouwen (1985 January 24) say it all:

The word *community* has many connotations, some positive, some negative. Community can make us think of a safe togetherness, shared meals, common goals, and joyful celebrations. It also can call forth images of sectarian exclusivity, in-group language, self-satisfied isolation, and romantic naivety. However, community is first of all a quality of the heart. It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. Community is the fruit of our capacity to make the interests of others more important than our own … The question, therefore, is not “How can we make community?” but “How can we develop and nurture giving hearts?”

When I argue for the creative use of every day events in life’s daily rounds as opportunities to create a space where friendship can take root and grow, I am not referring to the kind of project where people are gathered together in a small group to discuss one or another topic, and which often result in an exclusive gathering of persons where only those ‘like us’ are welcome, leaving the ‘shy one’ delivered up to her own tender mercies. In Chapter 8 I narrate Marianne’s surprise at her experience with the Birthday Club. She was previously part of groups like those described above, and spent a sleepless night before she dared to join the Birthday Club. What was different at the Birthday Club, was the spirituality of friendship, where “everybody” was welcomed, and not only “everybody like us”. The Birthday Club was a place where friendship with God illuminated and guided our friendship with others,
befriending the strangers who come our way. Therefore, when mining for the
treasure of care, we have to *celebrate the differences and diversity among us human beings*; it is not about loosing the significance of the individual, but about the individual being relativised by the community; it is not about being swallowed up by community; it is about befriending the strangers who come our way, embracing them in friendship.

iv) **Groups supported by a friendship facilitator**

One of the factors distinguishing the Birthday Club from the previous groups Marianne attended, was that at the Birthday Club, she experienced supported practice of friendship. While our communities are blinded by the discourse of individualism, and we like to be with people like ourselves, unsupported groups sometimes fall back on the practices dictated by the discourse of individualism, resulting in exclusivity. As Doherty (2003:61) contends, when “everyone is included diversity can be uncomfortable and difficult”. In groups supported by a friendship facilitator, however, members are sensitised to the metaphor of friendship and inclusivity. Until our faith communities have learned the language of friendship as our first language and transformed into communities-of-friends, we need to be facilitated towards a spirituality where ethical ways of doing friendship will be as part of our being as the air that we breath. In some instances the transformation process will ask for a friendship facilitator in a “formal” position (like myself); in most instances “ordinary” people from the community who already are aware of our roots as friends of God, living a spirituality of friendship and hospitality, will be the pioneers in introducing this spirituality, this culture to the whole community, working towards healing communities.

Another practical wisdom suggested by this research journey, therefore is *when mining for the treasure of care in our communities, we therefore need friendship facilitators who can apprentice members in the language of friendship and ethical ways of doing friendship.*

v) **The Friendship Position Map**

In chapter 5 I discussed the Friendship Position Map, depicted in diagram 7.
Quadrant 1 is the preferred position on the Friendship Position Map, where I am concerned about the effect of my actions upon the well-being of others, and quadrant 3 the least preferred position where I am only concerned about myself and my own well-being. As it is unrealistic to expect to be always in the first quadrant, most of us continually move through the different positions. The preferred position is depicted by the circle in diagram 7. Once a person understands the different possible positions and where he/she is positioned on the Friendship Position Map, most express the desire to progress towards the position of a spirituality of hospitality and concern for the well-being of others in the first quadrant. Therefore, when mining for the treasure of care in our communities, this research journey suggests the Friendship Position Map as a powerful instrument to sensitise persons to more ethical ways of doing friendship. Creative possibilities to expose the community to the insights the Friendship Position Map has to offer, can be explored. One possibility is an exercise as part of training workshops of group leaders, lay – and other counsellors, Bible study groups, and the like. It is already accepted as part of a training programme for
all group leaders in my faith community. Another possibility could be to introduce these ideas to the faith community during a sermon on Sunday. Therefore this research journey suggests that persons can be sensitised to ethical ways of doing friendship, recognising our responsibility to evaluate the consequences of our actions on the well-being of others, through exposure to the Friendship Position Map.

9.4.2 The metaphor of friendship

I agree with Moltmann-Wendel (2000:41) when she argues that the image of God as friend opens up parental images of God which often have connotations of dependence. Jesus himself was no dependant, obedient son. On the contrary, he was very critical of his own family of blood relations: he regarded his disciples and his friends as his family. One ideal of early Christianity was the familia Dei, the family of God, a community which is not constituted through ties of blood but is voluntary and constituted by friendship. For many friends have replaced family as our primary relational referent, as our “significant others” (Hunt 1991:18) or the members of our “club of life” (Morgan 2000:77). However, the image of friendship does not suppress the images of parents; it adds friendly freedom and support to the trust and security of parental images. It also connotes co-responsibility, mutual influence and commitment. While patriarchal Christian theology has emphasised laying down one’s life for one’s friends, Hunt (1991:10) prefers to focus on sharing and enjoying life with friends, a common, accessible experience.

If Jesus’ practise of sharing meals is one of the most important elements in his life and activity, I am with Moltmann-Wendel (2000:41) amazed that in the light of Jesus, who is experienced here so centrally as a friend, no Christology of friendship has ever developed. With her, I find it also amazing how few open brotherly and sisterly or messianic friendships have so far stamped the face and the thought of Christianity. A friend too can heal and forgive. Friendship too can liberate and transform.

I agree with Hunt (1991:168) that there is plenty to recommend the divine as “friend” as a solution to the so-called problem of God-language - diversity, complexity, and newness are all served. I also agree with her that it is not suggested as a final solution, but a “temporary solution to an unsolvable problem”. No language, however nuanced and metaphoric, is sufficient to “name that which defies naming. That is the
point. Theologizing just keeps going" (Hunt 1991:168). I therefore do not intend to argue away any of the metaphors referring to the Being of God, like the metaphor of God as father. We need exactly because of the diversity of the Being of God, a diversity of metaphors to describe the Being of God. The metaphor of God as friend only highlights another dimension of the Being of God.

What I argue for is not a Christology of friendship, because of the risk that “doing friendship” can become just another dogma, a set of rules of how to do friendship. What I argue for, is an awareness of our roots as friends of God, a spirituality, a culture, where ethical ways of doing friendship become part of our being, as the breath we inhale is part of our being. Just as all of us share the air we inhale, we can share in community life as a community-of-friends. When that happens, my first reaction will not be to “dump” my “tedious” friend: my instinctive reaction will be to call in the help of more friends, to form a helping nucleus, so that together we can care for our wounded friend. When that happens, a doctor will not advise the adoptive mother of a troubled child to give him back to the adoption agency: the doctor (aware of his/her professional quality of friendship facilitation) will instinctively tap into the network of available helping nucleuses to help this family raise their child; and this family's community of faith, re-membering their identity as community of friends, and therefore constituted by friendship, will be there to offer support and nurture when the going gets tough.

My hope is that through this research journey, the metaphor of friendship will move closer to finding its rightful place in theological reflections.

9.4.3 Re-membering

It is not the quest of this thesis that the Fourth Century ways of being Christian will be restored to their original state like “frozen vegetables defrosted in a microwave oven” (Goldstein 1998:11). According to the example of Tibet, we can expect that, when we invite faith communities to re-member their identity as community-of-friends, some individual cultural traits can re-emerge identical with the past, others will reappear somewhat changed, and still others will not re-emerge at all. Tibetan religion has not simply reappeared. Rather, a dynamic process of adaptation has occurred and is still occurring (Goldstein 1998:11). Maggie (Chapter 1) did not take on the identity of her
grandmother – she only was strengthened by the knowledge that her grandmother was a woman made of steel, and applied that knowledge in her present circumstances. She also became a woman made of steel, although she did not have to sew to keep her family together.

In the same way, our faith communities can be strengthened by the knowledges of our past as friends of God. When making our past as community-of-friends part of our identity, our community-of-friends will not have exactly the same face than those of the Fourth Century Christians. We do not want our community-of-friends to be exclusive and reserved for educated males. We also do not want to let go of the benefits the scientific era offers, the better and more comfortable existence material development promises. But we do not want the language of individualism to be our only language – we also need the language of community. What I argue for, is not a “new surge of faith” but an “unworried coming into the open of what had been there all along” (Goldstein 1998:10), so that we can gather the pieces of our past as friends of God to become community-of-friends.

9.4.4 Giving voice to plebeians

Sometimes I experience theologians as concentrating on philosophical concerns abstracted from material and political matters, where the suffering of innocents becomes a “logical conundrum rather than a spiritual and ethical problem” (Clapp 1996:13). As a “plebeian”, I do not want a theology that cannot say what Trinity or eschatology has to do with socio-cultural engagement. I want a theology that will help me and the people who come to consult me about the problems they experience in their lives, survive Christianly. When Jesus heals lepers, he deals with them as here-and-now sufferers without getting into debate about the origins of their sickness. Therefore, on my journey through this research, I realised more and more that I have a “penchant for the practical” (Clapp 1996:13).

I remember one specific day when I picked up a book on caring practices, and I experienced unfamiliar feelings of anger. The night before, Linda told me about an incident where her son’s effort to make right for his wrongdoings of the past was once more rejected by some of the “professional” theologians in my faith community. I was working on the topic of healing communities (Chapter 7), and have read
numerous books on care and community. I realised that my reaction was not because I was tired or worn out due to my involvement in caring practices or my participating in this research journey; it was because in spite of all the books written on care, and all the “nice” things said and prescriptions on how to care, I did not see or experience much of it in the spirituality or the actions of persons who certainly as part of their training were introduced to some of these ideas. Carr’s (1989:53) argument resonated with my ideas, when he argues that in pastoral ministry the church does not seem able to use the opportunity to make effective links between human relationships and the gospel interpretation of God’s dealings with us. As a result it is in a bind: it speaks fluently of care and love, and tries in various ways to offer both, but it lacks a gospel, an effective message of changed life with God.

The frustration I experienced underlined to me the significance of the contribution plebeians have to make to the field of practical theology today. I once again have to agree with Astley (2002:130) when he contends that theology does not necessarily have to be “so very sophisticated” in order to communicate religious truth. As Styer (2006) puts it: “They [theologians] have knowledge in their heads. But it only becomes wisdom when it is used”. I therefore do believe that for a pastoral theology to be relevant, it requires to be rooted in the lived experiences of human beings.

In Chapter 2 I argued for a pastoral theology that develops theoretical understandings of and practical guidelines for the ministry of care, informed by ongoing interaction between theory and practice. Through the tales of living friendship of plebeians shared on this research journey, through the lived experience of the wounded persons in my community as well as the experiences of those who are involved in caring activities, we have added to practical wisdom, to a pastoral theology that is not only about the art of teaching clergy how to baptise babies (Pattison 1988:217), but which is about transformational knowledge and the possibilities for developing new insights and directions for action; which is community owned, and not the product of an elite minority group (Pattison 2000:247). Through the tales of ethical ways of doing friendship presented in this research report, we have added to the transformational knowledge, producing new ways of seeing and new possibilities for acting, inviting others to grow into communities-of-friends.
It is not my intention to minimise the intellectual. It’s just that I believe that “theology that cannot be put into practice is no theology at all” (Haugk & McKay 1994:9). This thesis is less interested in “railing against the vices of the age or in cautionary tales for a new paradigm” than in “rolling up the sleeves and do something about them” (Sweet 1994:8).

9.4.5 Theological reflections grounded in lived experience

In his book *Becoming a thinking Christian*, Cobb (1993) argues that real Christian theology is not a matter for professionals. According to him, every Christian is a theologian. And according to Carr (1989:58), pastors (I interpret as pastoral therapists like myself) are also theologians, but for them (us) by contrast with their (our) academic colleagues, religious experience is a crucial component in their (our) life and ministry. Their (our) own experience of God sustains them (us); they (we) cannot claim to be God’s servants without being able to give personal content to the term “God”. They (we) affirm both the tradition which is described as the Christian faith and the continuing experiences of God which it comprises.

Religious experience, therefore, has to be assigned value as a datum in our theological reflection. But, as Carr (1989:59) warns, it cannot be isolated from common human experience. These ideas came to life when Adrian Styer (2006) walked into my office one day. Adrian is “not a recovering addict; I am a new creation in Christ”. For the last seven years he is involved in programmes for persons still struggling to overcome the effects of drug abuse. One of these programs is what he calls “friendship groups”. The principles of these groups are based on the basic message from the gospels: “Love your neighbour through thick and thin, and keep on loving them”. According to Styer (2006), none of the seven groups running at present, are hosted by a church. Because he believes that this is a ministry that belongs to the church, he initiated an experiment: For six months, they asked the input of every participant in the friendship groups on what their needs are, what makes the group work, and the like. The purpose of this experiment is to take these suggestions to “the churches” as a basis to start their own friendship groups. (They are at present in the second month of the experiment.) Adrian is not a “professional” theologian. In fact, his only formal qualification is a grade ten certificate. But he has
something to say to the field of practical theology, if only the professionals will grant him the voice.

With Friedman (1993:197), I do believe that the more we know about real lives lived, the more we gain insight into living realities. On this research journey my reflections on friendship were informed by countless people, including my friends, persons who came to see me who were struggling to be friends or find friends or keep friends or part with friends, and my fellow travellers on the research journey. I intended to filter these perceptions through a theological lens. I invite readers to do the same. Although there is “no simple set of twelve steps or four spiritual laws that will make [friendship] happen” (Guder 1999:59), I hope that others will be inspired, or rather invited, to enter into relationships of friendship like the ones depicted in the stories told in this research report. It is my hope that, through the stories of lived reality shared on this research journey, that this will be where the most significant contribution of this research journey will be found for the field of practical theology. In conclusion, I will give a concise summary of the most significant suggestions this research journey has to offer on how faith communities can co-create authentic participatory, inclusive, loving, caring relationships, to become a community-of-friends; of God and of each other where practices of mutual care are both implicit and explicit:

i) Liturgy and worship are powerful instruments mining the treasures of care and friendship in the faith community, through the language of friendship and the telling of tales of real people living real lives.

ii) In caring clusters persons can be apprenticed in ethical ways of doing friendship, widening the support system.

iii) Possibilities in life’s daily rounds can be creatively formed into caring clusters where strangers can learn to be friends.

iv) Authentic community needs time and nourishment as it emerges slowly as a network grows and strangers become friends.

v) Through the use of the Friendship Position Map, persons can be sensitised to ethical ways of doing friendship, recognising our responsibility to evaluate the consequences of our actions upon the well-being of others.

vi) Because the language of friendship is not the first language of the individualistic culture we are emerged in, a friendship facilitator can be
helpful in facilitating the process of transformation from hostility to hospitality.

vii) Re-membering our roots as friends of God, a spirituality, a culture, where ethical ways of doing friendship can become part of our being, as the breath we inhale is part of our being. Just as all of us share the air we inhale, we can share in community life as a community-of-friends.

viii) The tales of ethical ways of doing friendship as practical wisdom, add to transformational knowledge, producing new ways of seeing and new possibilities for acting, inviting others to grow into communities-of-friends.

It was not easy to decide when to exit this research journey. In the next section I reflect on some of the issues that presented themselves in the course of this research journey, but which we had to pass.

9.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

In paragraph 9.2.3 I discussed the challenge of what material to include in this research journey and what not to, and how the stories the participants brought to the research in a sense determined the course the journey would take. In the following paragraphs I will reflect on some of the possible routes on the journey we had to pass, in the hope that someone will someday pick up the threads and proceed where we had to exit the journey. I also reflect on one story that arrived too late.

9.5.1 Never-ending chaos

One such a decision was about chaos narratives discussed in Chapter 7. For the participants the chaos ended and they moved on towards quest narratives. Kotzé (2006) justly asks what happens when the chaos does not pass. I believe that this is one area that will benefit from further exploration. I can only speculate on the relation between suicide and chaos narratives. When thinking back about the persons who crossed my path and who committed suicide in the end, the possibility of never-ending chaos comes to mind. In the light of the possibilities this research journey has opened up and the possibilities the metaphor of friendship has to offer, I believe that if a person in such a never-ending chaos narrative can be embraced by a healing community, a community that offers care, mutuality, and nurture, witnessing the pain
and suffering, that wounded person can be empowered to live his/her life as fully as possible. The miracle of being given attention by a community who cares, can make a difference in the high suicide rate.

Another question that arises, is about the use of substances: What is the connection between never-ending chaos and the abuse of mind changing substances? Do they offer escape from the chaos? And if the chaos can pass, will it have any effect on the pattern of abuse? Or will it then be too late, because the abuse of substances creates its own chaos? In the light of this research journey, the metaphor of friendship in healing communities has much to offer. The chaos can be transformed into a narrative of hope and resilience at an earlier stage in a healthy, participating community-of-friends, practising ethical ways of doing friendship by being concerned about the effects of their action upon the well-being of others, offering loving care and support instead of judgment and isolation.

I can only hope that another researcher will be inspired to take up these threads to explore further.

9.5.2 Faith traditions in community-of-friends

Trapped in the research paradigm I chose as a basis for this research journey, I had no choice but to accept the course my journey took regarding the faith traditions in my community of faith. In Chapter 8, when discussing a habitat for friendships to develop and grow, I explored faith traditions as a possible source or habitat. I do agree with Wadell (2002:10) that friendship is something the baptized do together. However, I wonder about the exclusivity this notion could endorse: if baptism binds us together in friendship, what about those outside the church? The strangers? I would have appreciated the opportunity to explore these ideas further.

I also am curious about ways in which the faith community can celebrate their identity as community-of-friends through the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the light of Linda’s experience, I also believe that serving the Eucharist to wounded persons and families offers a powerful way of inviting them into the heart of the congregation, where they could experience the friendship-love of God in a very tangible way. Although I have to exit this journey now, my work in my community of faith will not
end when the journey ends. As friendship facilitator, I will keep on exploring these possibilities participation in this research journey has opened up.

9.5.3 Friendship without a price-tag

We need to focus on friendship facilitation when we want to create healthy communities as communities-of-friends. With Woggon (2003:260) I believe that a focus on friendship allows us to attend not only to the symptoms of pathology but to issues of human relationships, personhood, spirituality, value, and community. Communities of faith need to facilitate friendship as part of the culture of the community, when they want to become healing communities as communities-of-friends.

I also agree with Woggon (2003:263) when he contends that the first level or type of pastoral care is friendship, which is the indispensable necessity for all other, deeper levels of pastoral care. I realise that I am in a privileged position being employed by a faith community in the capacity of a friendship facilitator, including both my capacity as pastoral therapist and facilitator of a spirituality of friendship in my community. Although this suggestion is not in the field of research, I would like to use this opportunity to make a plea towards all faith communities and institutions like hospitals and homes for the aged to work towards a spirituality of friendship, and to include the ability of friendship facilitation among the professional qualities of all caregivers. If the hospital where my colleague was asked to accompany a person on his last journey, could offer the quality of friendship facilitation to him, that could have made a difference. I am not saying that paid therapists would not have journeyed with love and compassion. What I am arguing for is that all healers – professional or lay – learn the skill and the ability of friendship facilitation. Although friendship facilitation always work towards healing communities, where networks of friendship offer hope and new possibilities for wounded persons, friendship facilitation can take many forms. On the one hand, it is about the way a therapist invites friendship into the healing process of the persons who seek the counsel of the therapist; on the other hand, it is about facilitating the transformation process into healing communities, about the creative use of opportunities in everyday living where strangers can learn to become friends.
In the case of the dying man in hospital, more than one facet of the quality of friendship facilitation were required: first in the therapeutic approach of the therapist towards the dying man, and secondly, in facilitating the process where others (family, old friends, volunteers) could be invited to take part in the therapeutic process, where they could learn how to befriend the dying man. It is my dream, however, that through the ongoing facilitation of friendship, our communities would be transformed into the kind of healing communities where nobody would have to rely on strangers to accompany them on their last journey on earth – that willing companions will be available in abundance.

9.5.4 What friendship groups could have had to say

Although I hope that my journey as friendship facilitator, towards healing communities, will continue for a long time to come, one of the challenges I faced on this research journey, was to make the decision when to exit the research journey. It was with regret that I left the possibility to be informed by the above-mentioned destinations behind; what makes it bearable is the hope that another researcher after me will be inspired to take up the lead and explore further. However, when I already have made the decision and exited the journey, when this report was almost completed, I met a person, whom I recognised as someone I would have welcomed as a companion on this research journey. I knew that, had I met him earlier on the journey, this journey could have taken a different course. In paragraph 9.4.5 I refer to Adrian Styer who walked into my office on a Wednesday afternoon. As friendship facilitator, I am intrigued by his work with what he calls “friendship groups”. I know I will be waiting in anticipation for the outcome of his experiment – to listen to the voice of his friendship groups, what they have to say. I know that I will keep in touch, and in all humbleness I hope that he will be generous and include me in his theological reflections. It was too late to invite him as fellow traveller on this research journey; will he invite me on his journey?

9.6 MISSING PIECES

Reflecting back on this research journey, I believe that the participants and I have found some of the pieces that were missing when we departed on our journey. I realise, however, that although we have now more of the pieces, we could only start
to put our lives together in fresh configurations as a community-of-friends. There are still thousands of pieces to be found before they can be stitched together into a “sensible collage”. However, being part of this journey, re-membering the pieces of our identity as community-of-friends and building these pieces we could find into a collage of a healing community as community-of-friends, was a privilege and an honour. It was the first steps towards healing communities of faith as communities-of-friends. I can only hope that others, on other journeys, will find more pieces, stitching more pieces into a more sensible collage.

9.7 IMAGINATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE KIND

In this last section, I will reflect on some of my dreams and hopes that were born from my participation in this research journey. Like dreams and images sometimes are, they are born from other images from our daily routines and tasks. And like dreams and images sometimes do, mine refuse to be put in any sort of order. I will present them here as they presented themselves to me.

In “modern times there was simply too much of meum and tuum – me and you”. The church centres on the self but at the same time “decenters the self in favor of God-centered service and selfhood” (Sweet 1999b:305).

Another dream I have for my community of faith, is the fierce tenderness Hunt (1991:22) describes: She calls friendship “fierce” because of the intensity of attention. It can be hard “to be known so well, to be understood and transparent to friends who pay attention”. However, we all “crave the tenderness that only those we love can offer”. For her, tenderness does not affect the ferocity, but it is the quality of care and nurture that only friends share. I do agree with her that caregivers can be tender in touch, but that only friends are tender in feeling.

I learned from Hunt (1991:152) that attention to friends generates community. And I learned from Simone Weil (1951:75) that “[t]hose who are unhappy have no need of anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one’s attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle” [Weil’s emphasis]. I wish this miracle for all the wounded persons in this broken world we inhabit.
Plato defined justice as friendship. Injustice is not being there for others when we are there for ourselves (Sweet 1999b:307).

Meyerhoff (1982:113) recounts the parable concerning the founder of the Hasidim, the Baal Shem Tov:

When the great Hasid, Baal Shem Tov, the Master of the Good Name, had a problem, it was his custom to go to a certain part of the forest. There he would light a fire and say a certain prayer, and find wisdom. A generation later, a son of one of his disciples was in the same position. He went to the same place in the forest and lit the fire but he could not remember the prayer. But he asked for wisdom and it was sufficient. He found what he needed. A generation after that, his son had a problem like the others. He also went to the forest, but he could not even light the fire. “Lord of the Universe,” he prayed, “I could not remember the prayer and I cannot get the fire started. But I am in the forest. That will have to be sufficient.” And it was.

Now, Rabbi Ben Levi sits in his study with his head in his hands. “Lord of the Universe,” he prays, “look at us now. We have forgotten the prayer. The fire is out. We can’t find our way back to the place in the forest. We can only remember that there was a fire, a prayer, a place in the forest. So, Lord, now that must be sufficient.”

My final dream for my faith community – for all our communities – before I reluctantly, finally, have to exit this research journey, will be that when we need wisdom, we will remember that there was a place in the forest, a prayer, and a fire; and when we are granted the wisdom we are seeking, we will re-member our identity as community-of-friends, decentring our selves in favour of God-centred service and selfhood; loving our neighbours through thick and thin; that we will keep on loving them; inviting fierce tenderness into our relationships with one another; offering the miracle of attention to the wounded among us, avoiding the injustice of not being there for others when we are there for ourselves.
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INVITING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO RE-MEMBER THEIR IDENTITY AS COMMUNITY-OF-FRIENDS

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for your interest in this project about ‘inviting faith communities to re-member their identity as community-of-friends’. The terminology and purposes will be negotiated at our first conversation. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, I thank you. If you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind.

The aim of the project

This project is being undertaken as the requirements for a Doctorate degree in Practical Theology – with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy. The aims of the project are:

(i) To create a social space where people who are sidelined and isolated from their communities as a result of their woundedness can tell their stories – whether it is stories of chaos, or quest stories, telling of their search for alternatives ways of living their journey through their woundedness.

(ii) Secondly, I want to create a platform where people who did participate in care and experienced the blessing of taking care or being taken care of can tell their stories and share their experiences. My hope is that through the telling of these stories, others can be inspired to participate in caring practices.

(iii) To co-create with my fellow travellers on this research journey - the participants in this study - ways in which faith communities can be invited to re-member their identity as community-of-friends, participating in caring practices for the wounded among us.

Participants needed for the study

About 10 persons who would participate by sharing their stories of woundedness, of participating in caring practices or of being taken care of, will be included in the study.

What will be required of participants

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during the conversations – either individual conversations or group sessions - to be used in the research project.

If you decide to take part in the project, you will be expected to participate in a series of conversations and / or / group discussions. After each session, you will receive a summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or provide feedback regarding the summary. Although the sessions will be in either
Afrikaans or English, the report will be written in English. Therefore, all the summaries as well as other correspondence will be in English. At your request, it can be translated in Afrikaans.

If you have participated in the study, you will be requested to read the summary and comment or change anything related to you or your family.

**Free participation**

You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without any consequences to you.

**Confidentiality**

The information obtained during our discussions / group sessions will be discussed with my promoter and will be used in the project. With your prior consent, the conversations will be audio-taped. Should you choose not to have the sessions on audio-tape, I will make notes during the sessions. A summary of the sessions will be available at the conclusion of the project for your review. Your comments, corrections and/or feedback will be included in the final report.

The information collected during the project will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet and will be destroyed after conclusion of the project.

**Results of the study**

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details (names and places) will be distorted to ensure your anonymity. You will have the choice to use your own name or a pseudonym of your own choice.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

**Questions of participants**

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project, either now or in future, please feel free to contact me:

Ryna Grobbelaar  
Tel: 012 998 6732  
Cell: 083 271 6875

Or my promoter Prof. Dirk Kotzé at the Institute for Therapeutic Development  
Tel: 012 460 6704

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Practical Theology, Unisa and the Institute for Therapeutic Development.
Appendix B

INVITING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO RE-MEMBER THEIR IDENTITY AS
COMMUNITY-OF-FRIENDS

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

I have read the Information Sheet concerning the project and I understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.
3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project, that the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but that any raw data the project depend on, will be retained for three years.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
6. I am aware that Ryna’s promoter will read the material.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

_____________________     ____________________
(Signature of participant)     Date

_____________________    ____________________
(Name of participant in capital letters)    (Signature of witness)
INVITING FAITH COMMUNITIES TO RE-MEMBER THEIR IDENTITY AS COMMUNITY-OF-FRIENDS

CONSENT FORM FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION BY PARTICIPANTS

1. I have read the draft of the project.
2. I had the opportunity to make changes to that information, including suggestions, corrections or comments to summaries pertaining to my participation.
3. I agree for my suggestions, corrections or comments to be included in the research project.
4. I have read the final draft of the research report and agree that this is an accurate and satisfactory account of the process.
5. I understand that the information obtained during the discussions may be included in an article format for publication. I also understand that should I decide that I do not wish for the information to be published, I am able to withdraw my permission at any stage of the participation in the project.

I hereby give my permission for information concerning myself, to be used in the written report of the project and in the publication. I understand that my confidentiality will be preserved throughout the study, in the written report of the project and in the publication. I also understand that any information that may lead to my identification will not be used or included in the project report or publication.

I prefer the following name (either own name or pseudonym) be used in the research report or any other publication resulting from the project.

Name to be used………………………….

(Signature of participant)     Date

(Signature of participant in capital letters)     (Signature of witness)
DECONSTRUCTING FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Exercise outline

1. The purpose of this exercise

2. Describing friendship

Question 1: How would you describe friendship? (Write ideas on flip chart.)

Question 2: On a scale of 1 to 6, where do you position yourself as friend, where 1 represents a bad friend, and 6 a very good friend?

3. The peership principle

Question 3: How do you usually react when you cross paths with someone who is different from you? For example someone from another faith tradition, race or culture, a person with disabilities, or just somebody you do not like?

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 6, where 1 is not inclusive at all, and 6 is very inclusive, where do you position yourself?

Discuss the consequences of the peership principle

- Unite only those who are the same
- Closed circle
- Exclusivity

4. Jesus' friendships

Question 5: How would you describe the friendships of Jesus depicted in the Bible?

Discussion:

Jesus offers affection, respect, and solidarity beyond the peership principle
Had Jesus abided by the peership principle he would of necessity have stayed in heaven!

Question 6: Where would you position yourself on a scale of 1 to 6 for friendship beyond the peership principle?

5. Love

Question 7: What do you think constitute the difference between our friendship and those of Jesus?

Discussion: commandment to love one’s neighbour

Question 8: How would you describe agapic love?

Discussion: Love as creation of space for others, of being able to evaluate the consequences of our actions upon the well-being of others.

Question 9: On a scale of 1 to 6, where would you position yourself regarding concern for the well-being of others?

6. The Friendship Position Map
(Each participant is handed a blank Friendship Position Map. Explain the two axes)

Question 10: Referring to the ratings you gave yourself so far, en what you have learned about friendship and the example Jesus set us, where would you position yourself on the Friendship Position Map? Use a blue pen to mark your position.

7. Circle of concern

Discussion on your experience so far: Questions to stimulate conversation: Did you experience any difficulties in marking your position? Do you think it is possible for us in our broken world to always love others in this way? Will we always be the same? Is
one dot sufficient, or do we need more of a bubble to represent our position? Is it ‘wrong’ to have those close friends with whom we feel comfortable and safe?

**Short presentation on:**
- The 6 circles of concern
- The four possible positions on the Friendship Position Map.
- Movement through the different positions: the story of the spider

Question 11: With your new knowledge, mark now your position on the Friendship Position Map with a red pen.

Question 12: Were there any differences between the position marked in blue, and the one marked in red? Why? (Short discussion)

8. **Conclusion**

Question 13: Did your perception about what friendship is change in any way?
Question 14: If you answered yes, how?
Question 15: Do you think your way of being friend will change?
Question 16: If you answered yes, in what ways?
Question 17: How did you experience this exercise? Do you have any recommendations that can contribute to the value of this exercise in inviting faith communities into inclusive, healing communities where strangers will be welcomed?
DECONSTRUCTING FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Information sheet for participants

1  My personal friendships
   1 ___________________________________________________________________ 6

2  Inclusivity / exclusivity
   1 ___________________________________________________________________ 6

3  Jesus’ friendships
   1 ___________________________________________________________________ 6

4  Concern
   1 ___________________________________________________________________ 6

5  The Friendship Position Map

6  Conclusion

Did your perception about what friendship is change in any way?

If you answered yes, how?

Do you think your way of being friend will change now?

If you answered yes, in what ways?

How did you experience this exercise? Do you have any recommendations that can contribute to the value of this exercise in inviting faith communities into inclusive, healing communities where strangers can become friends?
FRIENDSHIP POSITION MAP

Other / Inclusive

No concern for the well-being of others

Always concerned about the well-being of others

Self / Exclusive