HOUSE VISITATION IN THE MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST: BANE OR BOON?

by

JOSEPH MODISAOTSILE MOTLOBA

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SUPERVISOR: PROF MJ MANALA

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ABBREVIATIONS

MRCC - Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ

HTO – Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding

HKSA - Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika

AIM – Africa Institute for Missiology

NHKA – Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika

BHK – Bantoe Hervormde Kerk

GCA – General Church Assembly

MRMU – Maranatha Reformed Mothers Union

HKF – Hervormde Kerk Family

SUMMARY

Welcoming visitors is part of our African culture. This research tries to reflect on house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC), and the impact thereof, if any, in the spiritual lives of congregants. Traditionally, pastors, elders and deacons alone bear the responsibility of visiting families in the MRCC. This research therefore reflects on the issue of house visitation in the MRCC where it is seen and understood as the duty and responsibility of pastors, elders and deacons only.

The research is a passionate call for the MRCC, as a church, to work on a ministry design where all members will be actively involved in visiting one another, a move from the traditional one where only pastors, elders and deacons visit households. Arguments are also presented on how technology could be used to the advantage of the church in this task.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

House visitation; Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ; Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika; General Church Assembly; HKSA Almanak; bane; boon; pastor; elder; deacon; ministry design; extending responsibilities; community of believers.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 General overview and introduction

One of the most important parts of our African culture is to welcome visitors. A friend once told me how one day he was taken aback by a taxi that came to a halt at his gate. When he was about to go and enquire as to what was happening, six people alighted from it. It was his uncle who was staying in a rural village in the Free State, his wife and their four children. They had decided to visit him without even telling him that they were coming! To make matters worse, they were going to stay for the whole long weekend that stretched from Friday (their day of unexpected arrival) to Monday afternoon. According to my friend, they did not bring anything to eat or any toiletry.

My friend told me that he was very angry that they decided to come without even informing him. His initial reaction was to confront them with the aim of giving them a piece of his mind. He approached them with an intention of stopping the taxi from leaving them behind, but his wife persuaded him to allow them to stay, because in our culture as Batswana people we say "Moeng goroga re je ka wena" meaning that the Batswana people become very happy when they receive a visitor, because it is time for festivities. And how true this is! According to my friend, after spending some time with his unexpected visitors, all was forgotten and he even slaughtered a goat for them to enjoy. Thus the above idiom became part of the reality of hospitality.

Just like my friend, I am a Motswana man who grew up in a very rural area, looking after goats and cattle. My parents named me *Modisaotsile*, a Setswana name meaning "the shepherd has arrived". To be able to be a good shepherd, you need to know the basics of being a shepherd. There are skills to be learnt, and one of the secrets is that a shepherd must be "friends" with his flock. S/he must know them and they must also know her/him. The only way to make sure that your flock multiplies is to take good care of it. Taking good care means knowing every one of your flock by name. In that way, you will be able to know when one is missing or not well. I believe that it is the same in the congregation.

House visitation is one of the pillars balancing or holding the congregation from collapsing. A visitation from leaders of one's church must be like when the flock hears the voice of the shepherd, or see him/her approaching. A jubilation emanating from the knowledge that his/her presence brings about "protection" must be the same as when members of the congregation receive a pastor or office bearers (elders and deacons) as visitors. The joy of having men and women of God in your house is immeasurable.

As I already indicated above, there is a Setswana saying: "Moeng goroga re je ka wena" implying that the Batswana people often look forward to receiving a visitor. In most cases a chicken or even a goat (like in the case of my friend) is slaughtered in order to welcome the visitor or visitors. My idea of visitation as a Motswana is that of the whole family being around to welcome an important guest, with the hope that his or her visit would be a blessing to the whole family. In most cases a visitor is a carrier of good news, sometimes even delicious food from the big town or city.

This kind of thinking influenced the way I understand house visitation by church office bearers. What is house visitation? How are we supposed to do it? Should we arrive unexpectedly, like my friend's uncle and his family, or is house visitation supposed to be organised, with a well organised program with dates and times? Can office bearers, expect to be welcomed with joy or to be prepared for disappointments? What are the results of house visitation? Does it add value to a member's Christian life?

As a pastor in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (hereafter MRCC), I know what is expected of me by the church as far as house visitation is concerned. Every pastor of the MRCC must also have the same knowledge because we use the same church order, same decisions of the church and we were all trained in the same way. I grew up in a church tradition where the pastor and the elders would visit my home and have discussions with us. The pastor used to come at least once a year, and the elders and deacons came before every Holy Communion. It was later on when I started to understand the traditions of my church, that I understood why it was like that.

Even though I was still a young person by then, I could always see how these visits affected my family through their pastoral visitation. There was always a spirit of joy when the family was expecting the pastor, elder and deacon. The presence of the leaders of our congregation in our humble home, their discussions and prayers always made us to feel very proud and blessed. The visit signified the dedication of the church office bearers. The closeness brought about by the visit was always highly appreciated. Those

personal questions about school, health and church attendance had an impact on us as the family.

Whenever we misbehaved, we would be reminded about the pastor's visit and that he will be told to reprimand us. My parents, especially my mother, always looked forward to these visits, because my father would then attend services for those few weeks after the visit. Of course, such visits also meant one chicken less in the family, because our pastor was always given one when he left. However, the chicken was given out of sheer generosity and appreciation of the visit rather than out of compulsion.

1.2 Problem statement

The tradition of the MRCC is that house visitation by office bearers, i.e. pastor, elder and deacon is an important task to be performed without failure by these office bearers. It is even stated in the church order of the MRCC, revised as recently as 2006, that pastor, elder and deacon of the MRCC must visit their members. The following four sub-articles of the church order of the MRCC shed light on this issue:

- a) Sub-article 3.2.1a)iii lists one of the functions of a minister in congregation as being to "conduct visitation of all households at least once annually" (2006:3).
- b) Sub-article 5.3.3 states that elders "must visit before every Holy Communion, all the families, members and office bearers in their respective wards where the Bible should be read, a prayer and pastoral conversation be conducted with members" (2006: 20).

- c) It is also stated in *Sub-article 5.3.4* that elders "must visit all the families annually with the minister" (2006: 20).
- d) Sub-article 5.4.3 states that a deacon "visits families and members in his/her ward every month to collect offerings" (2006:21)

I have been the administrative officer of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ since 2003. The position gives me an opportunity to interact with congregations and circuits on an ongoing basis. The interaction gives me an opportunity to observe closely and critically how the church operates. One has come to the realization that most members of the MRCC long to see their office bearers visiting them. I have met members who decry the fact that their pastor, elder or deacon has not visited them in a long time. Sunday services though important, do not bring about that closeness experienced during house visitation. Church members tell me that it is not enough to see their office bearers at the church service. They say that there are instances where you need to speak with them face to face in your own home.

My concern is the seeming decline in the number of pastors, elders and deacons who still visit their members as required. In the MRCC that must never be the case because it is very clear from the above sub-articles that the church expects her office bearers (pastors, elders and deacons) to do house visitation.

My hunch is that lack of house visitation alluded to above may cause harm to congregations and members. The following negative consequences can be pointed out:

- a) It deprives members of:
- the joy and blessing experienced when church office bearers visit one's home,
- ii. the opportunity to experience and develop the necessary intimacy with church office bearers who are church representatives and therefore representatives of the body of Christ.
- b) It also leads to:
 - i. lack of spiritual nurturing of families and individual members;
 - ii. lack of spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation

House visitation is without doubt very important and necessary for church growth, health and well-being. I trained as a minister for five years at the then *Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding* (Reformed Theological Training). *Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding* was a theological institution, situated in the Klipdrif farm in Hammanskraal, where ministers of the then Hervormde Kerk van Suidelike Afrika (HKSA) were trained. Diplomas issued by the *Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding* were endorsed by the University of Pretoria. The institute was later renamed *Africa Institute of Missiology (AIM)* and it relocated to the MRCC's church office in Pretoria. The students of *AIM* are now part of the student body of the University of Pretoria.

After completing my studies at the *Hervormde Teologiese Opleiding*, I was called to a very small congregation in Hennenman in the Free State. I did not know the state of that congregation, until I arrived there. I found out that the membership did not qualify the congregation to be granted congregational status. The church order of the MRCC (2006:38) clearly states that a congregation is granted congregational status only if there are fifty (50) or more confirmed members. There were fewer than twenty confirmed members.

Fortunately there were two very active elders, who were prepared and willing to stand by me in the drive to bring the congregation to life. We did what the Church expected us to do: visiting the flock.

The three of us drew up a list of all the members of the congregation, regardless of whether they were attending services or not, and their addresses. We then drafted a program that allowed us to visit every household within three months. We started after my arrival in March 1996, and by the time of my official welcoming function in June, we had more than sixty (60) people, including children, who were attending church services on Sundays. Our visitation was divided into three: first, for members who were actively attending services, and secondly, for members who were no more attending services. The third was concentrating on people who were not members of the church. These ones we reached by asking members to invite to their houses when we were to visit.

Our concentration was on the reasons why former members were no more actively involved in the activities of the church; why members were reluctant to attend services regularly; what members expected the church to do to remedy the situation and on what more should be done in future to ensure that the church retained its members.

We established a strong church council of well-trained elders and deacons. There were workshops where these office bearers were trained about their responsibilities as church leaders, and among these was house visits. When I left after six years' service, the membership had risen to over one hundred confirmed members. The only logical explanation was that the revival of a tradition of house visitation, amongst other things, was behind the big turnout by members of the MRCC in Hennenman congregation. This is the tradition that Calvin adhered to and carried with enthusiasm. Baumann (1977:1) writes about Calvin: "Most people may not think of Calvin as a pastor, yet he was above all a pastor, concerned with shepherding those in his flock. ... but his pastoral care for people permeated all he did." The question is, if such positive outcomes could be realized in such a short time because of active and effective house visitation programme; why should pastors, elders and deacons neglect this important church task?

1.3 Research questions

House visitation in the MRCC: is it bane or boon? It is the aim of this research to find out what might be the reason for this decline in the number of pastors and elders who still do house visitation in the MRCC. I would like to establish what impact this lack of house visitation has on membership. Does it affect attendance and members' contributions? Is

lack of house visitation not one of the causes of exodus of members from the MRCC? Do members feel neglected to an extent that they end up leaving the Church? Is there a connection between the decline in membership and lack of house visitation in the MRCC? What is house visitation? How are we supposed to do it? Should office bearers arrive unexpectedly or is house visitation supposed to be organised, with a visitation program? Can office bearers expect to be welcomed with joy or to be prepared for disappointments?

This research work is aimed, firstly, at establishing whether house visitation in the MRCC is bane or boon. Secondly to list and discuss the role players, namely pastors, elders and the church members. Thirdly, it will concentrate on the empirical research through which people are interviewed in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views. A research schedule will be used to interview the respondents, as according to Dreyer (2004:38), "interviewing is a very traditional and widely-used method of data generation."

1.4 Research aim

The aim of this research is:

To study and research whether the role of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ has any impact, positive or negative, on the growth of the Church.

1.5 Research objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1.5.1 To determine if pastors and elders of the MRCC are doing house visitation as they are expected to do.

The office of the MRCC national superintendent of the presbytery and deaconate has recently compiled a training manual for elders and deacons in cooperation with elders and deacons nationally (2007:1-8). The manual has been designed to make sure that elders and pastors do house visitation, because the information required in completing the reporting tools attached cannot be obtained without having visited the households.

1.5.2 To establish the reasons why pastors and elders are not doing house visitation as they are expected to do.

The question facing the MRCC is: "Are pastors and elders too busy to do what is expected of them?" The Agenda of the eight General Church Assembly of the HKSA (MRCC), reflects the fact that the MRCC was to decide on giving her pastors permission to be involved in what has been termed "tent-making ministry" (HKSA 2000:13). These are pastors who work full time elsewhere, but also expected to fully and actively take part in the activities of the church. Congregations have called some of these pastors to serve them, and they stay in the manse with their families. During the day, they go to work and in the afternoon and weekends, they serve the congregations (or they are expected to serve the congregations).

1.5.3 To highlight the importance of house visitation to congregational health and well-being in the MRCC.

Serving the congregation means performing pastoral duties as outlined in article 3.2 of the MRCC church order (2006:3). Amongst the conditions set out in the MRCC church order for the establishment of a congregation, is "membership of not less than fifty (50) confirmed members" (2006:38). My calling in ministry, especially as the administrative officer of the MRCC involves visiting congregations regularly, and my observation in the past five years is that most congregations do not meet this condition. It is possible to find a congregation with less than fifty confirmed members.

It is highly impossible that the circuit assemblies, as the bodies entrusted with the task of granting congregational status, could have granted the status without establishing whether all the conditions have been met. The inescapable conclusion for me was that membership declined after the granting of congregational status. Is lack of house visitation not one of the causes of the exodus of members from the MRCC?

It is aimed by this study to establish where the problem lies. Is it with the thinking of the church that house visitation is important, whereas the people who are supposed to do it think otherwise? Are there no enough guidelines to give office bearers direction? Is lack of house visitation the main cause of the decline in membership of the MRCC? What is house visitation? How are we supposed to do it? Can we as office bearers, expect to be welcomed with joy or to be prepared for disappointments? What are the results of house

visitation? Does it add value to a member's Christian life? The aim of this study is to try to answer these questions.

1.5.4 To establish methods that can help ensure that house visitation as an important task receives appropriate attention notwithstanding impediments. This involves recommending a ministry design that will promote house visitation albeit by members and not exclusively by office bearers.

1.6 Research methodology

The study will be in the form of an empirical research through which people are interviewed in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views. The researcher prefers qualitative research over a quantitative one. Hoepfl (1997:1) citing Johnson writes: "He notes that qualitative methodologies are powerful tools for enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning, and that they 'have gained increasing acceptance in recent years." He goes further by indicating that qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry (1997:2). What Hoepfl (1997:2 says is significant and convincing for the researcher to choose qualitative research approach, namely: "Qualitative research reports typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, 'may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience." This insight is so impelling that, this researcher finds himself preferring the qualitative method. Interviews will be conducted within the participants' natural context.

Carruthers (2007:64) distinguishes between three types of interview: *structured*, *semi-structured* and *unstructured*. He warns against choosing unstructured interviews: "... a caution concerning unstructured interviews: 'The graduate student can very seldom employ the unstructured interview in his research because skilled use of technique requires a great deal of training and expertise'" (2007:64).

Commenting about the semi-structured interview method, Carruthers (2007:65) goes further to say that: "the dominant data collection method was the use of schedules. The minor method was by interviewing a sample of the study sample. Mention has already been made of the fact that the graduate student is almost obliged to use a semi-structured interview if interviews are to be held at all". The next step will be deciding on the respondents of the study.

1.6.1 Sampling

This research is about the impact of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. The respondents of the study will be retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members of different age groups. The researcher is concerned with house visitation in the MRCC, and it is for this reason that the respondents of the study will be retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members between 25 and 75 years of age in the Ebenezer Circuit (Pretoria and Hammanskraal area) and Shalom Circuit (Durban area).

The researcher understands that it would be ideal to interview as extensively as possible in the MRCC, but because of the time and resources constraints the study will only be confined to the above areas. This will also be done taking into consideration what Dreyer (2004:36) meant when he said that "not all places are equally suitable for research."

By including retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members between 25 and 75 years of age, the aim is to ensure that, even though there are limitations, these are not going to affect the results in any way. The researcher agrees with Dreyer (2004:37) when he said, "The sample should be large enough to make meaningful comparisons possible in relation to the research questions, but not so large that the nuances and details are lost." According to the researcher's plan, the two groups chosen should provide information enough to help in coming to a logical conclusion to the research questions.

1.6.2 Data analysis

It is important for the researcher to interview people because, as stated by Dreyer (2004:3), "we often do not know what people think, feel and expect with regard to religious matters; we do not know their daily struggles, the life situations with which they have to cope or their theologies. Empirical research is one way in which we as theologians can try to gain insight into the context in which we practice our theologies. There is thus a growing consensus that empirical research can contribute to our contextual theologies". It is therefore important for a researcher to interact with his/her research subjects in order to get authentic data. Dreyer (2004:28) rightly states: "the field of qualitative research is in fact, a rapidly evolving field with a number of new or revised

approaches and techniques for data collection and analysis" (2004:17). What other way, therefore, would assist the researcher to gather the required data, other than collecting data and then analyzing it further? The researcher needs to explore by conducting qualitative research because "one of the strengths of qualitative research is its flexible, exploratory nature".

The researcher is going to invite the above respondents to take part and to be as honest as possible, since Elliot (2008:690) also states that "pastoral leadership must be freely and willingly undertaken 'as God would have you do it' with no trace of self-serving or 'lording it over' the flock". He goes further by stating that "a domineering mode of leadership can be avoided only when elders 'walk the talk' and lead not by domination but by inspiration" (2008:690).

1.6.3 Limitations of the study

The researcher is fully aware of the limitations or shortfalls of this research project. By choosing a limited area to be covered during the research, it simply means that the desired results of finding out whether house visitation in the MRCC is a bane or a boon, will not be sufficiently representative. The results will obviously reflect the views of members in Ebenezer Circuit (Pretoria and Hammanskraal area) and Shalom Circuit (Durban area) only. There is also the danger that the results might be relevant to the areas to be covered only, resulting in them being not hundred percent reliable. The reasons given by someone in a rural area might not reflect what might have been the results in an urban area.

It is still the researcher' view that the results of the research, regardless of the limitations, may still assist the MRCC as a church to critically look at the issue of house visitation; and whether it is still relevant, after having looked at all the sides.

1.7 Practical Theology

This research is conducted in the discipline of Practical Theology. According to Heitink (1993:1), practical theology "now identifies itself as a theological theory of action" and it is therefore important that the researcher understands it as such. Heitink (1993:149) further states that "the critical character of a theory of action may be discerned in the dialectic relation between theory and praxis, which is defined historically and on the basis of the given situation". He also points out that praxis is understood as "the action of individuals and groups in society, within and outside the church, who are willing to be inspired in their private and public lives by the Christian tradition, and who want to focus on the salvation of humankind and the world" (1993:151). To the researcher, it is important to hear what members of the MRCC say about house visitation. Is failure of some members to attend church services regularly a result of lack of house visitation?

When defining theory, Heitink (1993:151) says: it "is understood as a comprehensive hermeneutical-theological statement that relates the Christian tradition to experience, to the life and actions of modern humans". As part of trying to find answers to the question: is house visitation in the MRCC boon or bane, the researcher has to look at the house visitation in the Hervormde (Reformed) church family. The researcher is also going to

look at the topic taking into consideration the present context the MRCC finds itself in, to determine whether modern way of life necessitates a change in the approach to house visitation.

The researcher decided to look at whether house visitation or lack of it affected the growth or decline in membership in the MRCC. It is therefore appropriate that it should be done by applying research methods of Practical Theology. According to Manala (2006:16), "Practical Theology is the ideal discipline within which church practice can be investigated with a view to possible improvements." The MRCC can only bring improvements after thorough research as to whether house visitation is a boon or bane, i.e. whether there is any connection between lack of house visitation and decline in membership.

Manala (2006:17) goes further to state that "as a field of study Practical Theology needs the ability and resilience to reflect critically on the communicative religious actions in the church and society in order to be able to probe and challenge the status quo." Pastoral work as a communicative religious action studied in Practical Theology needs ongoing critical reflection in order to establish defects in the relationship between theory and praxis in order to bring improvements that will ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Van Der Ven (1988:7) states that "praxis is not the monopoly of practical theology. Therefore the central problem is: is practical theology more than the application of these praxisoriented disciplines; is it more than applied theology?" Citing Pannenberg, Van Der Ven (1988:7) further says that "the relation between theory and praxis has to be interpreted as

the core question of practical theology. It is the 'crux theologica practica.'" It is therefore important to look at the connection between theology concerning the problem and the practices of the MRCC as Manala (2006:17) states citing Hestenes, that "Practical Theology is concerned with both theology and practice."

According to Pieterse (1998:176), "Practical theology, as it has developed since the [nineteen] sixties and seventies, is a contextual and critical theology focusing on religious praxis. It not only describes and reflects on religious praxis theologically, but also theorises on a renewed praxis that is transformative in nature in the light of the values of the reign of God". He asserts further: "My view of practical theology includes the following: it is a critical, contextual theology of a liberational, transformative nature; it is a theological theory of religious communicative actions that is based in a critical hermeneutical framework, works with a theory of action, and is empirically oriented; it has a specific methodology that can gather scientific knowledge of the praxis it is studying" (1988:177). Practical theology is thus a critical and exploratory theological theory aimed at critically and systematically analysing and evaluating the teaching and work of the congregation and society with a view to bringing about transformation or improvements based on empirically derived findings.

When speaking of methodology, Coffman (1994:44) states as follows: "the task is understood as theological inquiry, utilizing psychological and behavioral science data and theory, but culminating finally in theological statement' Pastoral theological method is the process of extricating theological statement from particular human experience". It

is interesting that Coffman, in the above quotation rightly points to the inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity of practical theology and particularly pastoral work. Practical theology is thus in continual interaction with other social sciences.

1.7.1 Practical Theology approaches

The three South African practical theological approaches, proposed by Burger (1991) that are going to be briefly discussed here are the confessional approach, the correlative approach and the contextual approach. The researcher will at the end of the brief discussion indicate which practical theological approach will be used for this research.

1.7.1.1 The confessional approach

The confessional approach is, according to Manala (2006:19): "the study of God's Word from the point of view of the church's ministry." He continues: "The study of the Bible, which is regarded as the only source of practical theological knowledge and norm also for practical theological praxis, is central." Use of the Bible as the only source of practical theological knowledge and norm is in itself a big limitation as it depends on proper interpretation of the Scripture. Manala (2006:29) correctly states, citing Farley: "if the interpretation of the authoritative texts is done properly, all other interpretations will take care of themselves."

The experience of humans is therefore of no importance to proponents of the confessional approach. It is appropriate to agree with Manala (2006:30): "The confessional approach considers human experience as subjective and therefore, not to be included as basis for

practical theological reflection. This means that the realities of the situation within which Practical Theology is being reflected upon and practised and the actual religious actions of the faith community are not taken into account. This is indeed a deficiency on the part of the confessional approach." The confessional approach therefore has serious limitations and the results of a research of such an approach cannot therefore be trusted.

1.7.1.2 The correlative approach

The correlative approach is an approach that: "allows for more creativity and critical interpretation of the religious statements about God and actions aimed at mediating God's coming to God's people in their world, in a way that is relevant to the situation" as observed by Manala (2006:33) citing Wolfaardt. Manala (2006:21) also indicates that Practical Theology may be defined as the theological theory of Christian communicative actions which enable one to communicate faith through speech, symbols and behaviour. It is through the correlative approach that doors are opened for experience to be brought in. According to Manala (2006:34), the creativity and critical interpretation that are manifest in the correlative approach allow for some freedom to scientific research and critical analysis. Manala (2006:34) continues: "Practical Theology is the theological bridge that brings text and context together in a lively interaction. The dialogue between text and context is thus an important means of getting to the truth." The approach that follows is the contextual approach which subsequently receives attention.

1.7.1.3 The contextual approach

The contextual approach is practical theological approach where context is the "primary source of knowledge and reflection" (Manala 2006:25). According to Manala (2006:24), proponents of the contextual approach value greatly, as the name suggests, data from the context as a prerequisite for practical theological practice. Manala (2006:39) citing Wolfaardt, rightly concludes by saying that Practical Theology from the contextual perspective values the social science input more than the input of the Christian tradition while the correlative approach seeks a mutual correlation between science and the Christian tradition.

1.7.1.4 The practical theological approach chosen for the current research

Based on the above brief explanation and analysis of the three approaches, the practical theological approach for this research will be the correlative approach. It is because there will be room for interacting with the real situation in which the people to be interviewed for this research find themselves.

1.8 Ethical issues

It has already been stated that the study will be in the form of an empirical research through research schedules and interviews in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views. The respondents of the study will be retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members between 25 and 75 years of age. It is important to interview the respondents. This is one way of knowing exactly "what people think, feel and expect with regard to religious matters," according to Dreyer (2004:3).

The research will however not enlist people who are considered to be vulnerable, e.g. children. Even then, the researcher is obliged to respect respondents' rights. The researcher is therefore promising to ensure that the rights of the respondents are respected and protected at all times. As Dreyer (2004:6) says, "The first guideline for ethically responsible research is that the *dignity* of participants should not be violated in any way." The respondents will therefore be treated with respect at all times during the research process. The researcher promises to make sure that the dignity of the respondents is not violated in any way.

The researcher is going to approach the respondents with the highest respect, and no one is going to be forced to participate if he or she is not comfortable. This will be in line with what Dreyer (2004:6) means when he says "voluntary participation by respondents may be seen as a general guideline". The researcher further promises that the identity of the respondents will be kept as confidential as possible; just as Dreyer (2004:7) indicates that "the *anonymity* of respondents should be maintained as far as possible."

It is of utmost importance that "no physical or psychological suffering may be inflicted on any research participant" (Dreyer 2004:7). The researcher is also not going to deceive the respondents, as openness and honesty will be maintained throughout the research process.

The researcher, as a pastor in the MRCC who occupies a position of power as the church's administrative officer, might find himself being tempted to use his influence in

getting the information from the respondents. People might feel "obliged" to participate

in the research as a result of the researcher's "position of power". It is therefore promised

by the researcher that, just as Dreyer (2004:8) warned that "vulnerable people should be

handled with special sensitivity", all the respondents will be handled with sensitivity and

no one will be forced to unwillingly take part in the research process.

1.9 Chapter outline

The researcher is demarcating the study into 6 chapters, namely, chapter 2 dealing with

the literature review; chapter 3, the understanding of house visitation in the MRCC;

chapter 4, the understanding of house visitation in the Hervormde Church Family;

chapter 5, presentation and critical analysis of the results of the empirical research and

chapter 6, recommendations and conclusion.

1.10 Cost of the research

The research will involve a lot of travelling. Flight tickets, petrol costs, toll gate and other

costs that might be incurred when the researcher travels around will need to be grouped

together under travelling costs.

Travelling costs = $R30\ 000-00$

Accommodation costs = $R10\ 000-00$

Digital Voice Recorder = R900-00

Notebook = $R6\ 600-00$

Digital Camera 7.0 Mega Pixel = R1 500-00

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Stationery (pens, papers, markers, etc.) = R1 000-00

Other costs = $R2\ 000-00$

Total estimated: R52 000-00

The next chapter deals with literature review, especially literature dealing with the

historical development of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, Rev. Mpanza's

visitation as a model, Western worldview as compared to the African worldview and

clericalism and the priesthood of all believers.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher looks at literature dealing with the historical development of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, with a closer look at Rev. Mpanza's visitation as a model. The researcher also looks at the Western worldview as compared to the African worldview, as well as clericalism and the priesthood of all believers.

My topic is: House visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ: bane or boon? Is house visitation in the MRCC bane or boon? Is lack of house visitation not one of the causes of the exodus of members from the MRCC? Do members feel neglected to an extent that they end up leaving the Church?

For a study as this, literature review is of the essence. Literature review helps in the provision of information regarding origins of particular researched institutions and uncovering the roots of current successes or challenges faced by the organisation being researched. The value of literature review is that it links the current research with research already done. Creswell (2003:29-30) articulates the value of literature study thus:

1) It shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported; 2) it relates a study to the larger ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling the gaps and extending prior studies and 3) it provides a framework for establishing the importance of [your] study as well as benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings.

Kumar (2009) also states: "It tells the reader about aspects that have been already established or concluded by other authors, and gives a chance to the reader to appreciate the evidence that has already been collected by previous research, and thus project the current research work in proper perspective". The sources consulted and discussed in this section include dictionaries, scholarly journal articles, books, dissertations and theses, especially by scholars, pastors and members of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika. Relevant literature from outside the two churches was also consulted. The information obtained in these sources includes theories and the significance of the praxis of house visitation. Practical Theology as we have learned above is a critical and exploratory theological theory aimed at critically and systematically analysing and evaluating the teaching and work of the congregation and society with a view to bringing about transformation or improvements based on empirically derived findings.

What follows is thus a brief literature review that highlights the history of the MRCC and its ministry. Also highlighted in the literature review are concepts that scientifically define and clarify the meaning of pastoral care of which house visitation is an important strategy.

2.2 Historical development of the MRCC

The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) was established in 1923. According to Dreyer (2009:31), on the 29th April 1923 the evangelist Andrew Mlaba, along with approximately 400 congregants broke away from the Free Church of Scotland in Kwazulu-Natal. This was due to the fact that the Free Church allowed missionaries, who were not ordained, to minister the sacraments.

Rev Mlaba read about the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) in the newspapers. He requested a meeting with the church leadership, with a view of "getting material and spiritual support" from the NHKA (cf. Dreyer 2009:32). Banda (1996:63) on the other hand states that Rev Mlaba's reason was to seek the "protection and membership of the 'NHK van Natal'". Banda tries to explain "protection" in the political context of the time, thus explaining the rationale why Mlaba sought protection. At first the church was referred to as *Zulu Hervormde Sendingkerk* and it was based at Lufafa. A second group joined Rev Mlaba in 1927. The group was under the leadership of the Dutch Reformed Church evangelist Mayaba (Dreyer 2009:32).

A more active minister, Rev Stephanus Phillipus Mpanza, an evangelist in the Dutch Reformed Church, was called to the congregation to continue with the work started by Rev Mlaba. This was because Rev Mlaba had become too old to continue with his work. Rev Mpanza accepted the call, was ordained and established a new mission post at New Canaan. He continued to play an important role in the development of the Zulu mission (Dreyer 2009:32-33).

According to Banda (1996:96) the coming of Rev Mpanza to Lufafa was a breath of fresh air since "he breathed new life into the church and spurred congregations towards greater activity with a high level of competence and dedication." Rev Mpanza was dedicated to his work as a minister of religion. He was a very involved person, especially when it came to pastoral work. Banda (1996:96) says Rev Mpanza "did extensive visitation to congregations, making rounds virtually to all outposts manned by his other colleagues and where necessary visiting the sick and serving the sacraments wherever he went." The 'extensive visitation' helped in the numerical growth of the church in Lufafa. The visitation also allowed him to know his flock to an extent that he was highly involved in dispute resolution. He attempted to resolve several quarrels in a spirit of finding peace but where stern steps were necessary he acted accordingly (Banda 1996:96). He also believed in 'orderly church governance'. Banda (1996:96) says that "he held and insisted on properly constituted church council meetings. He regarded their decisions as authoritative..."

It seems to the researcher that it was because of his dedicated service to the church that it grew and expanded in Zululand. One of his assistants, Simon Sithole, was appointed as an evangelist in 1952. He was appointed for the area "between Pietermaritzburg and Durban" (cf. Dreyer 2009:33). As a result of that appointment a new church was built at Gracourt.

Dreyer states that something wonderful happened in 1955 when "the whole *Independent Zulu Methodist Church* with four ministers (Mhlane, Mbonwa, Mchunu and Mazibuko) applied for inclusion in the Hervormde Sendingkerk" (2009:33). The influence of Rev Mpanza's hard work did not confine itself to Zululand, but a new development took place in the same year (1955), with the establishment of a Sotho speaking congregation near Koster in the former Transvaal. The congregation was served by an evangelist Lukas Tsoai. A year later his brother, Abiel Tsoai, started missionary work near Hekpoort. Due to these developments, the name of the mission church changed to *Bantu Hervormde Kerk (BHK)* (2009:33).

The BHK held the first General Church Assembly from 19-22 July 1977 at Turfloop. A decision was then taken to rename the church *Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika* (*HKSA*) and the first moderator to be elected by the HKSA was Rev A Kupa (Dreyer 2009:35). The name 'HKSA' was changed to Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) in 2006 at Bizana, Eastern Cape during the tenth General Church Assembly.

2.3 Rev. Mpanza's visitation as a model

Rev Mpanza's dedicated service to the church and the fact that he did extensive visitation to congregations, making rounds virtually to all outposts manned by his other colleagues and where necessary visiting the sick and serving the sacraments wherever he went, strongly brings to the fore the issue of the importance of house visitation. The question is whether the extensive visitation helped in the numerical growth of the church at Lufafa, and its expansion to other parts of South Africa. Is house visitation a bane or boon?

The researcher wants to determine through this research if pastors and elders of the MRCC are doing house visitation as they are expected to do. Are they following in the footsteps of Rev Mpanza? Is there a lesson to be learnt from Rev Mpanza's work? It is also important to establish the reasons behind the perception that pastors and elders are not doing house visitation as they are expected to do. Are they overworked or over committed to other things? The researcher wants to highlight through this research the importance of house visitation to congregational health and well-being in the MRCC. It is also important to establish methods that can help ensure that house visitation as an important task receives appropriate attention notwithstanding impediments. It might also lead to a proposal of a ministry design that will promote house visitation albeit by members and not exclusively by office bearers. Learning from people like Rev Mpanza might assist the MRCC in reviving the tradition of house visitation.

According to Dreyer (2009:39) "the MRCC works in communities which are generally poor, such as informal settlements. Poverty has a direct influence on the availability of facilities, the remuneration of ministers resulting in part-time ministers, the ability of congregations to serve poor communities in terms of material goods, etc. connected with poverty are issues like high rate of unemployment, crime and psychological problems (i.e. depression). Congregations also find it difficult to strike the right balance between the deaconate and apostolate." Because of this fact, most pastors of the MRCC are involved in what is termed 'tent-making ministry', where the minister has a day job but is also responsible as a pastor of a congregation. The researcher's view regarding the effect

of this situation in relation to this research subject is that absence of a minister when he or she is busy with another job besides the congregation, leads to a vacuum in terms of service to be delivered to God's flock. Serving two masters has always been a big challenge, and therefore ministry cannot be an exception.

2.4 Western worldview as compared to the African worldview

The MRCC is an African church. As it is rightly stated by Manala and Theron (2009:165-166) the MRCC "is a Reformed church that operates in Africa. It is one of the mainline churches that have neglected the African world-view and opted for the Western way of living, functioning and providing service." The fact that the MRCC is a church that operates in Africa means that it has to try to avoid the influence of Western way of living, functioning and providing service. Unfortunately due to the fact that the MRCC has been greatly influenced by the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) and other churches functioning in a Western way, the influence is there for everyone to witness. This influence, according to my observation, unfortunately, impacts negatively on the growth of the church.

Dreyer (2009:40) continues: "the MRCC, as a traditional reformed church, tends to find solutions in optimizing structures. Reformed churches, through the centuries, built on the Presbyterian-Synodal System of Church Governance. This lends itself to a formal structure of official meetings, strong leadership and little scope for innovative thinking and quick adaptation to circumstances." It has to be acknowledged that structures help to formalise work to be done in a congregation, and therefore one cannot just draw a line

across to do away with them. Formal structures of official meetings are indeed of importance. On the other hand, it can also be noted that these formal structures of official meetings can also be a disservice to the MRCC since ordinary members could be deprived of an opportunity to get involved as the focus would be on meetings and formulation of polices that are rarely successfully implemented.

New innovations with regard to MRCC services seem to be the way to go. Dreyer (2009:40) points out: "MRCC focuses on the Sunday service. This leads to the tendency of centralizing all activities around a church building, primarily on Sundays. In such a way, many people who are working on Sundays are excluded from the church. It also inhibits the ability of the church to flow with the community." Focusing on the Sunday service, according to the researcher, is neglecting servicing members on other days through house visitation. Most people today work throughout the week, including Sundays. While the importance of the Sunday service cannot be over emphasised, a church that concentrates exclusively on Sunday services, runs the risk of not taking care of these members.

Another factor that needs serious consideration is the church's Western orientation. Manala and Theron (2009:167) rightly state: "... the predominant orientation of the Western church's ministry in Africa towards the Western world-view has definitely led to the neglect of the African world-view. This is a problem for the church's ministry in Africa because the Western world-view ignores and excludes the needs felt and experienced in the African cultures." This orientation towards the Western world-view is

detrimental to MRCC as an African church because Africans enjoy having guests, and by extension, church office bearers during house visits. The orientation deprives Africans the honour of welcoming pastors, elders and deacons as guests in their homes.

2.5 Clericalism and the priesthood of all believers

Clericalism has had its helpful ecclesial role but no longer. It is for this reason that Dreyer (2009:40) suggests: "the analyses show a strong tendency to limit pastoral care to the work of the minister and to a lesser extent the elders and deacons. The members of congregations are seldom used in ministering to the sick and the poor or leading Bible studies, etc." By acknowledging that elders and deacons as well as members are also responsible for house visitation, the minister would be doing himself or herself a big favour. This will in turn be applying an important Reformed principle of the priesthood of all the believers.

The research topic is: house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ: bane or boon? How can we define 'house visitation'? Deist (1990: 117) defines a house visit as "an official visit by a pastor to the house of a member of his/her congregation." We may add that this official visit is not only expected to be done by pastors only, but according to the MRCC church order (2006:3; 20) it is also the responsibility of elders and deacons. According to Gorsuch (1999:2), "pastoral visitation is an act of ministry in which a pastor or other caregiver goes to see a member or friend of a congregation." He continues, citing Jackson: "pastoral calling and visitation often occur in response to particular needs, as an

opportunity and privilege, to offer care and nurture in the personal context of someone's home" (1999:2).

House visitation is a pastoral care strategy that forms part of the general pastoral work as opposed to the more specific or specialised pastoral counselling. "Pastoral care is about nurturing the whole church in discipleship, with the practical implication that the 'healthy' – that is, the fit, able, happily married, gainfully employed need pastoral care ... [Its] purpose is to [to] help people grow as followers, or disciples of Christ' (Warren 2009:1). House visitation is therefore undertaken as a pastoral care strategy to "help people grow in the love of God, likeness to Christ and fruitful service in the whole of life' (Warren 2009:1). The building of people's relationship with God in Jesus Christ and with one another as healthy members of Christ's body is actually the object of pastoral care that is meaningfully achieved through pastoral house visits.

The research topic is: house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ: bane or boon? Deist (1990:117) defines a house visit as "an official visit by a pastor to the house of a member of his/her congregation". We may add that this official visit is not only expected to be done by pastors only, but according to the MRCC church order (2006:3; 20), it is also the responsibility of elders and deacons. According to Gorsuch (1992:2), "pastoral visitation is an act of ministry in which a pastor or other caregiver goes to see a member or friend of a congregation". He continues, citing Jackson: "pastoral calling and visitation often occur in response to particular needs, as an opportunity and privilege, to offer care and nurture in the personal context of someone's

home" (1992:2). House visitation should, according to Gorsuch, be seen as an opportunity and privilege that is afforded the person who is prepared to do it. Such an opportunity and privilege should also be enjoyed in the MRCC.

To pastors as trained leaders or office bearers, house visitation is central to their call. Self (1990) states: "To some degree, the words we use to describe our calling determine the nature of that calling. We call ourselves ministers, so we serve our people. We call ourselves preachers, so we proclaim God's Word. If we call ourselves *pastors*, that means we will also shepherd the church flock". He continues: "People need pastoral contact... Such contacts say clearly, 'your pastor cares for you - not just about spiritual things, but about you'" (1990). The researcher believes that the same applies to other office bearers in the church: elder and deacon.

Gorsuch (1999:7) indicates that a "visitation is response to God's grace in which caregivers initiate pastoral conversation that addresses issues of faith and strengthens the web of interconnections among members, and between the congregation and its larger community." By not visiting members, the church's office bearers will be depriving themselves and their members an opportunity to respond to this God's grace.

Is house visitation in the MRCC bane? Is it something that continuously causes problems or misery? Is it something that causes ruin or a constant source of trouble or annoyance in the MRCC? Or is house visitation in the MRCC boon? Is it something that is beneficial, advantageous and helpful to the MRCC? Is it something that functions as a blessing to

the MRCC? Is house visitation useful? Does it bring great benefits or makes life in the MRCC easier?

It is not enough for a pastor and the elder(s) to meet with members on Sundays during church services. People are called to come together as community of saints, as confessed by the MRCC in the *Buka Ya Kereke* (Service Book) every Sunday (1979:12). But it is equally important as an individual, to get that personal attention from your own pastor and elder.

God deals with us as individuals and as a group, i.e. as individual members but also as part of His congregation. According to Beukes (1981:1), God chose a nation from other nations (Israel), He deals with families and then with individuals. The Apostle Paul points out in Acts 20:20: "You know that I did not hold back anything that would be of help to you as I preached and taught in public and in your homes." Meeting with members "in public", i.e. during the worship service is no substitute for meeting them in their homes during house visit.

Beukes (1981:94-95) also emphasizes the importance of house visitation, stating preaching, preaching to individuals and individual families, preaching in a discussion form, as necessitating a house visit by pastor and or elder. Visiting families gives the pastor an opportunity to deal with or handle some of the issues that he or she could not normally handle on a Sunday. There are instances where the pastor has to sit down with an individual, or an individual family, on a one-on-one visit.

Beukes poses a question on how the pastor will reach out to different situations if he or she does not do house visitation. He lists among others, members "who do not attend ordinary church services" (1981:129), "who do not attend holy communion service (1981:136), "whose contributions are not in order" (1981:149), "whose daily lives are directionless" (1981:152) and those "who were won over to sects" (1981:157). The list contains an important number of members who also need God's grace through church office bearers' visit.

Is house visitation in the MRCC a bane or boon? How does house visitation build the community? Nyomi (2008:9), the former general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches put the matter well when he wrote in the Reformed World: "When we think about the household (*oikos*) we also need to keep in mind the community (*koinonia*). The household is managed for the sake of the community." For us especially in the MRCC, being a black church in South Africa, household and community are at the centre of our continued existence as a Church. Without putting the two at the centre, growth in membership and Christian life will be very slow.

The former chief executive officer and long-time scribe of the MRCC, Manala (2000:44) observed that "the family is one of the most important pillars of church life and self-expression." Manala (2000:36) states concerning house visitation: "The pastor and elders go into the homes of members to mediate the comforting and guiding Word of God to families and individuals." According to Manala (2000:45), "the congregation should be a

community of mutual caring and sharing and that can only become reality if it can stand and be maintained successfully in the family." One may add that by visiting families, church office bearers are able to inculcate the culture of responsibility, caring and sharing through these direct contacts to members.

My observation is that the lack of house visitation alluded to may cause harm to congregations and members. There might be a reason as to why most office bearers who are supposed to do house visitation, do not. Continuous training of pastors and elders is meant to equip them to do their work without fear of being short of skills. Griffin (1995:1-2) states that "the reasons we commonly give for our reluctance to be involved in pastoral care are likely to be based on one of two things: either on our belief that caring involves skills we don't have or knowledge we don't possess or on fear that if we become involved in caring we will be taken out of the relatively comfortable world we know, and in part underrated, into the worlds of other people that are new and different and therefore threatening for us." Self (1990) states the following three misconceptions by some people against house visitation: "visitation is an inefficient use of time"; "visitation is too difficult to schedule" and "visitation is risky and scary."

There might be more such assertions in our context as pastors, elders and deacons in the MRCC. However, there are also advantages. Self (1990) says "in sports they say, 'no pain, no gain'". He continues by saying that "visitation builds better ministry" and you may ask 'how?' Self says: "Pastoral visitation gives me a handle on the questions people are asking and the issues they are facing." As a result of this advantage, an office bearer

(especially a pastor) who visits his flock will find out that his or her preaching will be enriched because he or she will be relevant to the context of the flock.

According to Self (1990) "if the pastor develops a feel for people's spiritual states the church's ministry program can be more accurately and sensitively planned." Is this not what we miss in our ministry? Office bearers who feel for people's spiritual states are an essential part in the MRCC. Self (1990) concludes: "by continual circulation, dropping in from time to time, I often can detect crisis in the making." Without visiting your flock, it is very difficult to detect problems encountered by your flock.

The importance of the pastors' role of visiting members cannot be overemphasised. Elders must visit members, but it is the primary role of the pastor to visit the members. Theron (1983:269) agrees by saying that it is interesting that most members become excited when they are visited by their minister. He further indicates that an elder's visit does not have the same effect as that of the minister.

It is of utmost importance for the minister to prepare him/herself before visiting their flock. One of the questions to ask oneself is whether the people one is visiting really need him/her to visit them. Referring to special pastorate but raising almost a similar concern, Justice (2005:14) wrote about a visitation by a minister to a sick member: "the last time you had a splitting headache, or you were so nauseated that you felt as if you were throwing up your toenails, did you want someone to visit you?" One fellow pastor once argued that sometimes a visitation to a family might result in that family's absence from

church services. He argues that most Africans do not appreciate it if other people invade their privacy. According to him, some things are safe when they remain hidden from the church (minister, elders and deacons?). The researcher's concern is that these insights may have been stated in self-defence or justification for not doing house visitation. Reasoning behind this argument is that there has never been documented proof that a research that may have helped him to arrive at such a conclusion was ever done. Laziness sometimes may lead to self-defence arguments or justification for not doing house visitation.

Are pastors and elders too busy to do what is expected of them? MRCC is a church with eighty congregations in eleven circuits. According to church records, it is very rare to have a congregation with more than two hundred members actively attending church regularly. That kind of a situation favours a minister more: it allows the pastor to even visit his or her flock frequently. It is therefore in order to quote van Staden (2007:5) when he states that in most small congregations a pastor is even able to visit the households more than once per annum.

How will a pastor be able to take care of his flock if he does not get into contact with it? It is important that there is a continuous assessment of progress in the congregation, as "a pastoral assessment will assist the pastor in making a 'correct' evaluation and understanding of an individual, or group, seeking help" (according to Smith 2001:10).

It is the researcher's opinion that failure by responsible people to plan accordingly may lead to lack of time for house visitation also being stated as the reason for failure to visit households at least once per year. Means (1993:200) correctly states that "some clergy protest that they are too busy for such in-depth relationships. The only necessary reply to this objection is that neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul was too busy to spend quality time developing meaningful relationships. Do we have more urgent responsibilities? Without relational skills and healthy relationships, pastors set themselves up for failure in ministry. Pastors must learn to build and sustain sound relationships." Being busy must never be used as an excuse for not doing house visitation. A pastor is supposed to plan his/her work and then to work his/her plan.

As already pointed out, Gorsuch (1999:2) states: "... pastoral visitation is an act of ministry in which a pastor or other caregiver goes to see a member or friend of a congregation." He continues, citing Jackson: "pastoral calling and visitation often occur in response to particular needs, as an opportunity and privilege, to offer care and nurture in the personal context of someone's home" (1999:2). It is interesting that house visitation is viewed as an opportunity and privilege to offer care and nurture. Offering care and nurture is actually the heart of the Christian ministry without which, the church forfeits its ecclesial character.

2.6 House visitation as an important pillar in the church

House visitation is a vital pillar balancing the church. A church must visit her members. By "a church" it is meant office bearers who are acting on behalf of the church, i.e. pastors, elders and deacons. Segwape (2004:56) emphasizes this by saying: "The church of today need to go back and learn from the early church in the book of Acts. When you study the book of Acts carefully you will find that the early church was a teaching (church). The early church was a sharing church; it was a church which was involved in reaching others." When writing about what he refers to as "intervention strategies" Segwape (2004:57) states: "helping people should also include step-by-step support network that will lead to a lifestyle of wholeness." It is my belief that this can only be achieved after a visitation by church office bearers.

It is important for the pastor and the elder to have healthy relationship because according to Means (1993:200) "healthy relationships precede effective ministry." Without a healthy relationship between a member and his/her office bearers, there can never be effective ministry. House visitation in the MRCC must be put at the top of the agenda.

In the next chapter, the researcher looks at the understanding of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOUSE VISITATION IN THE MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST

In this chapter, the researcher looks at the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ and house visitation. It is now proper to look at the understanding of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ.

3.1 Introduction

The researcher has in the previous chapter pointed to the following negative effects of lack of proper house visitation:

a) It deprives members of:

- i. the joy and blessing experienced when church office bearers visit one's home,
- ii. the opportunity to experience and develop the necessary intimacy with church office bearers who are church representatives and therefore representatives of the body of Christ.

b) It also leads to:

- i. lack of spiritual nurturing of families and individual members,
- ii. lack of spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation.

Lack of regular and proper house visitation therefore deprives members of spiritual, emotional and physical support which pastoral care provides through reaching out to people in their concrete life situations. Without this comprehensive support made possible through house visitation, members will not get holistic healing; will lack good guidance, sustainable Christian life and reconciliation (cf. De Jong van Arkel 1992:136-

141).

In this chapter, the researcher reflects on the understanding of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. This is done through looking closely and deeply at what has already been briefly pointed out regarding the importance of house visitation. The sub-headings addressed in this chapter are: what is house or family visitation? What is the purpose of house or family visitation? Why house visitation is important in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) and house visitation and looking at the

available statistics.

3.2 What is house or family visitation?

As previously stated, Deist (1990:117) defines house visit as "an official visit by a pastor to the house of a member of his/her congregation." We may add that this official visitation is not only expected to be done by pastors only, but according to the MRCC church order (2006:3; 20) it is also the responsibility of elders and deacons.

Fennema, (1998:32-34) defines house visitation thus:

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It is one of the official means by which the ruling elders, the 'overseers' exercise oversight, pastoral care, shepherding—in the church of Jesus Christ. Family or house visitation is when teams of two elders (or an elder and a minister) personally visit the home of a church member or family to discuss the spiritual vitality of their Christian life and the life of the church as a congregation, the body of Christ.

House visitation is according to the abovementioned definitions an important pastoral care strategy aimed at effective oversight, care, and shepherding, for enquiry into church members' holistic well-being and possible assistance or support. The driving force behind this caring task of the church is according to De Jong van Arkel (1999:115), Christ's love. De Jong van Arkel (1999) writes:

The most fundamental motive for caring action is not our own goodness or our love for our fellow human beings; we are compelled by Christ's love, which we have received in our hearts and wish to share with others. That love engenders compassion, which opens our eyes to the needs and distress of others. The Bible explicitly teaches that we have a responsibility to care for others. In Galatians 6:2 there is an injunction to "bear one another's burdens ..." (De Jong van Arkel (1999:115).

House visitation is without doubt one of the effective ways that the church has from time immemorial employed to get to people in their different life situations and to share

Christ's love with them. Through house visitation the church is exposed to people's various spiritual, emotional, and even physical needs. This is indeed the task that the church should continue, especially today when church members face serious spiritual and emotional challenges like the overt practice by some, of devil worship; issues like domestic violence and drug abuse which can confuse members and inhibit true Christian life. For this reason house visitation has a very important task and purpose which the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ is aware of and can only ignore at own peril.

3.3 What is the purpose of house or family visitation?

The words of the Apostle Paul when addressing the Ephesian elders are quite significant for this study. Paul said in Acts 20:20-21, 28-31: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house...." The Apostle Paul's words in the abovementioned passage present a threefold purpose of house visitation which is important to the MRCC and other churches' ministry. Fennema (1998:32) articulates this purpose thus:

- 1. It is intended to strengthen the spiritual lives of faith of the members of the congregation of Christ.
- 2. It is intended to challenge the worship and witness or service of the members of the body of Christ, that it may be found acceptable to the Lord.
- 3. It is intended to promote and encourage the fellowship or communion of the saints (believers) of the household of God (my brackets).

The purpose of house visitation is in this regard, an assessment mechanism for the impact of the Word of God in the lives of members. Fennema (1998:2) states it more aptly: "By this means, the office bearers called to and entrusted with the souls of God's people, are enabled to check the spiritual pulse or welfare, the condition of the body of Christ."

Sweeney (1972:8-9) states the following as purposes of what he calls pastoral visitation:

- The building up of a proper priest-people (pastor-people) relationship: one of mutual trust and open candour
- 2. The acquiring of up-to-date two-way information (not statistics): e.g. so that the priest (pastor) may be really aware of the true *status animarum* and how parochial activities and the timetable of church services may best be related to the needs and convenience of the people; and that the people may be aware of everything offered to them by the local church.
- 3. To strengthen the people's involvement in the affairs of the community.
- 4. To give guidance in any particular problems which the people may have.
- 5. To encourage religious practice, especially the frequent reception of the sacraments though this must be done tactfully without subjecting people to anything in the nature of an inquisition (my brackets).

House visitation is an important bridge building practice. Needed communication between the church and its members is effectively carried out through house visitation. It is clear from the above insights that at the heart of house visitation is the equipping and strengthening of members from their comfort zones.

3.4 Why is house visitation important for the MRCC?

One of the founding fathers of the MRCC, Rev SP Mpanza, is recorded in church documents as someone who did extensive house visitation. It is recorded that this extensive house visitation led to growth in the church. What Rev Mpanza did was and is not foreign to the MRCC as a church, since the first General Church Assembly (GCA) of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika (later renamed MRCC) in 1977 clearly outlined this aspect in the agenda: "The calling of and challenge to the Church of Christ is: the proclamation of the Word of God ... the public confession of God's Name ... the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know about it and to all people" (HKSA Agenda, 1977:3). The church was from the beginning serious about service to members and non-members. The church that emphasises preaching to members and non-members must also be serious about house visitation since it is one of the ways to reach that objective.

It is not enough for a pastor and other office bearers to meet with members on Sundays during church services. People are called to come together as the community of saints, as confessed by the MRCC according to the Apostle's Creed, as taken up in the *Buka Ya Kereke/Ibhuku le Sonto* - Service Book (1982:12) every Sunday. But it is equally important as an individual, to get that personal attention from your own pastor, elder and deacon.

Visiting families gives the pastor an opportunity to deal with or handle some of the issues that he or she could not normally handle on a Sunday. There are instances where the pastor has to sit down with an individual, or an individual family, on a one-on-one visit (Beukes 1981:94-95). The question is how will the pastor reach out to different situations if he or she does not do house visitation? Without visiting your flock, it is very difficult to detect problems encountered by your flock.

What seems to be lacking in the MRCC is the implementation of the resolution to preach to members and non-members. It seems to me that even though decisions were made and communicated through minutes and also recorded in the Church Order, no follow-ups were made to ensure that pastors and other office bearers, elders and deacons, did their work: the "how" part or step by step approach was neglected. Writing in *Montshafatsi*, the official mouthpiece of the MRCC, Matji (2005:7) said: "The most important aspect that works miracles for every organisation is the strategy. Strategy refers to the task of matching the organisation's resources to its environment. The most important aspect of strategy is the core mission or reason for existence." A step by step approach to ensure implementation of decisions is needed.

The MRCC has always been serious about the training of pastors as a way of equipping them for their work. Pastors were in turn expected to equip other office bearers, i.e. elders and deacons. Equipped elders and deacons were then expected, together with the pastor, to visit the congregants at their homes. Having resources matching with the environment would definitely enable pastors, elders and deacons to perform their task of visiting members at their homes.

Lack of growth and decline in membership in the MRCC has also been identified by the Youth Movement as a matter of great concern. They even started questioning whether it is because our pastors are not well capacitated to deal with this concern. Complaining about lack of growth in membership of the MRCC, Bopape (2006:7), former national president of the Youth Movement wrote: "Our church has highly qualified ministers but to my surprise she is among the least growing churches in the World".

The same concern was also raised by Nell (2005:3) when he wrote his last article for *Montshafatsi* titled *Meeting to part and parting to meet: Retrospect and prospect*: He wrote: "During the past sixteen years there were of course many moments of gladness and many of sadness. We saw the HKSA (MRCC) growing in numbers as hardworking ministers took up their calling. But, alas, we also saw congregations declining in numbers and in faith as ministers proved that the calling they had claimed as having received from the Lord was not on their agenda." This to me is confirmation that there is a relationship between the decline as well as lack of growth in membership in the MRCC and house visitation. House visitation in the MRCC it seems to me, is boon rather than bane to the church

Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) is a church that still needs to grow, and as a result must not only look on the "inside" but also look "outside". The Good News heard by members must also be heard by non-believers. The preamble to the MRCC church order (2006:1), reads in part: "We exalt Christ as Lord and Saviour and uphold the Holy Scripture as source and norm for faith and living. We believe that all Christians

possess talents and divine gifts towards fulfilment of God's pre-ordained works and that the Holy Spirit regenerates the believers and spur them towards the realisation of their prophetic, priestly and kingly calling. *This calling entails the witness to the gospel of salvation to believers and non-believers and the preservation and restoration of the universe*" (my emphasis).

The most practical way of witnessing to believers and non-believers, according to my observation, is by witnessing to them at their homes during house visitation. Manala (1996:1) also concurred when writing in *Montshafatsi*: "The church needs all role players in its mission of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples and building a morally healthy society. The church must organise and teach its members for the service of God and His Kingdom." According to my understanding, this comment by Manala, a member and pastor of the MRCC, emphasises the importance of house visit in the MRCC. Organising and teaching members become effective if it is done at members' homes. It is almost impossible for the church to organise and teach members for the service of God and His Kingdom, as Manala indicates above, if this is only confined to Sunday services in the church building.

The older generation of the MRCC also believed in the important role of office bearers in the church, especially the role played by pastors. During the 2nd General Church Assembly (GCA) of the then HKSA in 1980, the chairperson of the GCA, Rev A Kupa said these words when he presented Rev SP Mpanza with a medal for good, loyal and dedicated service to the church: "As minister of the HKSA, he upheld the importance of

the church as expected" (HKSA GCA Minutes, 1980:17). What is expected of a pastor in the MRCC, among other things, is to do house visitation. Rev Mpanza said in response that it was an honour to him as a servant of the Word to have served the church and he went further by saying that ministers were expected to be loyal (HKSA GCA 1980:17).

As discussed in the brief history of the MRCC in chapter 1, Rev Mpanza was a minister who was very dedicated to his work. According to Banda (1996:96) his arrival at Lufafa was a breath of fresh air since he breathed new life into the church and spurred congregations towards greater activity with a high level of competence and dedication. Rev Mpanza was dedicated to his work as a minister of religion. He was a very involved person, especially when it came to pastoral work.

Banda (1996:96) continues by saying that Rev Mpanza did extensive visitation to congregations, making rounds virtually to all outposts manned by his other colleagues and where necessary visiting the sick and serving the sacraments wherever he went. The 'extensive visitation' helped in the numerical growth of the church at Lufafa. The visitation also allowed him to know his flock to the extent that he was highly involved in dispute resolution. He attempted to resolve several quarrels in a spirit of finding peace but where stern steps were necessary he acted accordingly. Banda (1996:96) says that Rev Mpanza held and insisted on properly constituted church council meetings. He regarded their decisions as authoritative. Orderly church governance is an important pillar in the work of pastors since it creates conditions conducive to the pastor's work. The conducive environment created by the orderly church governance allowed Rev Mpanza

to do his work, including visiting the congregants at their homes. The flock needs the shepherd to visit it and Rev Mpanza showed the MRCC the way by doing house visitation. As the second pastor of the church, he would expect the MRCC pastors to emulate his actions.

On the issue of membership decline and lack of growth, Matji (2005:7) points out: "The picture of the state of affairs of our church is bleak and gives rise to grave concern. The morale within the church is at its lowest ebb. A bigger threat to the church's continued existence and survival is the alarming rate at which its membership is declining. The membership of our church is declining at a rate faster than we are able to recruit new members. Desks (pews) are virtually empty during Sunday services and this seems to be a problem that is encountered everywhere in the church. ... Whatever the true reason for the mass exodus, it is clear that most members don't feel at home in the church and are thus registering their dissatisfaction by withdrawing their membership." House visitation in the MRCC has always been at the top of the agenda, but highly neglected nonetheless. Members seem to be voting with their feet and the blame for that could be due to lack of house visitation by church office bearers.

It has already been indicated that one of the conditions set out in the MRCC church order (2006:38) for the establishment of a congregation, is membership of not less than fifty (50) confirmed members. Some congregations do not meet this condition and it is possible to find a congregation with less than fifty confirmed members. As explained earlier, it is highly impossible that the circuit assemblies, as the bodies entrusted with the

task of granting congregational status, could have granted the congregational status without establishing and verifying whether all the conditions have been met. That would mean that membership declined after the granting of congregational status, and I suspect that lack of house visitation might be one of the causes of the exodus of members from the MRCC.

In Setswana we say: "Sedikwa ke ntšwa-pedi ga se thata", and loosely translated that means that two hands are better than one. The task of house visitation is therefore so important that it should not be left in the hands of pastors, elders and deacons alone. Every member of the MRCC must be equipped to do house visitation. Visiting one another would also be beneficial to the church because all members would feel fulfilled after undertaking such an important task. The MRCC church order (MRCC 2006:51) clearly states: "All members are called to participate in the apostolate, spiritual nurturing of the youth, catechesis, service of mercy and other tasks ... The church institutes service groups in which members join hands in provision of spiritual, social, political, psychological and other services." Adhering to the church order stipulations in this regard would clearly satisfy the principle of the priesthood of all the believers. If the focus is shifted from office bearers as the only people tasked with house visitation, and shifted to all members as partners, a bigger circle of people prepared to do house visitation would be created. The MRCC would definitely benefit if all members were to participate in the apostolate, spiritual nurturing of the youth, catechesis, services of mercy and other tasks, which could be efficiently carried out by among others the house visitation as a service strategy.

Indeed, the church does not only mean office bearers who are acting on behalf of the church, that is pastors, elders and deacons; but also ordinary members. Segwape (2004:56) emphasises this by saying: "The church of today needs to go back and learn from the early church in the book of Acts. When you study the book of Acts carefully you will find that the early church was a teaching (church). The early church was a sharing church; it was a church which was involved in reaching others". Writing about what he refers to as "intervention strategies" Segwape (2004:57) states that "helping people should also include step-by-step support network that will lead to a lifestyle of wholeness". It is my belief that this could only be achieved by empowering the "whole church" as far as house visitation is concerned.

Office bearers need to have a healthy relationship with members in the congregation. This healthy relationship can only be well cemented if it does not only end with Sunday contacts, but continues even throughout the week through house visits. It is important for an office bearer to have a healthy relationship with the flock because a healthy relationship precedes effective ministry (Means 1993:200). Without a healthy relationship between a member and his or her office bearers, there can never be effective ministry. House visits in the MRCC must for the sake of the necessary relationship building process, be put high on the agenda.

My hunch is that the lack of house visits may cause harm to congregations and members.

The following negative consequences can be pointed out. It deprives members of:

- the joy and blessing experienced when church office bearers visit one's home
- the opportunity to experience and develop the necessary intimacy with church office bearers who are church representatives and therefore representatives of the body of Christ.

It also leads to:

- lack of spiritual nurturing of families and individual members
- lack of spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation

The tradition of the MRCC is that house visitation by office bearers, i.e. pastor, elder and deacon is an important task to be performed without failure. It is even stated in the church order that pastor, elder and deacon of the MRCC must visit their members.

a) Sub-article 3.2.1a)iii lists one of the functions of a minister in congregation as being to conduct visitation of all households at least once annually (MRCC 2006:3).

Leading the congregation means providing effective leadership. In the MRCC the pastor is expected to visit all households at least once in a year. That affords the pastor an opportunity to familiarise himself/herself with his/her congregation's experiential situation. Visiting them at their homes also affords the pastor an opportunity to be

introduced to relatives and friends who might be visiting his/her members at the time of the pastor's visit. By speaking to these 'non-believers' and 'non-members', the pastor might get an opportunity to invite them to church with the possibility of them becoming new members.

b) Sub-article 5.3.3 states that elders "must visit before every Holy Communion, all the families, members and office bearers in their respective wards where the Bible should be read, a prayer and pastoral conversation be conducted with members" (MRCC 2006: 20).

One of the most important responsibilities of an elder in the MRCC is governance. An elder has an important responsibility of being a leader of a ward and to provide leadership in his/her ward. This kind of responsibility is fulfilled by amongst others, visiting households within the ward. Before every Holy Communion, the elder is supposed to visit all families in the ward where he/she is expected to read the Bible, pray and have a pastoral discussion with members of the families within the ward. Just like in the case of the pastor, the visitation affords the elder an opportunity to meet friends and relatives of members in the households, and they might be invited to church. Elder's visitation before Holy Communion also affords the elder an opportunity of teaching church member about The love of Christ who sacrificed himself on our behalf.

c) It is also stated in *Sub-article 5.3.4* that elders "must visit all the families annually with the minister" (MRCC 2006: 20).

The pastor is supposed to be accompanied by the ward elder during his/her annual visitation to households. The ward elder is the most informed office bearer concerning members within his/her ward. It is therefore without doubt essential that he/she must visit the families annually with the pastor.

d) Sub-article 5.4.3 states that a deacon "visits families and members in his/her ward every month to collect offerings" (MRCC 2006:21)

The ward deacon is also a very important part of a visiting team. His/her work is even more important because he/she is expected to visit the families and members in his/her ward every month. The primary purpose is to collect monthly offerings, but also to be able to report to the ward elder if there was any family needing an urgent visitation from either the pastor or the elder. As a person who visits households monthly, the deacon is supposed to have firsthand information on the happenings in each household in his/her ward.

As already indicated, it seems as if the MRCC has deteriorated into a "Sunday church" only. Dreyer (2009:40) also raised this issue by indicating that the MRCC focuses on the Sunday service. According to him, that leads to the tendency of centralising all activities around a church building, primarily on Sundays. In such a way, many people who are working on Sundays are excluded from the church. That also inhibits the ability of the church to flow with the community. It is my belief that focusing on the Sunday service is

tantamount to neglecting servicing members on other days through house visitation. Most people today work throughout the week, including Sundays. A church that concentrates on Sunday services only, runs the risk of not taking care of these members. It is therefore important for the MRCC to service those members who are unable to attend church services regularly. House visitation is one of the ways to ensure that this is done. In that way, house visitation in the MRCC can only be boon to the church.

House visitation is indeed a vital pillar balancing the church. The church must visitation her members. The mere fact that the MRCC has throughout the years emphasised on house visitation by the church office bearers shows that the church might be facing a serious problem of relationships. Office bearers need to have a healthy relationship with members in the congregation. This healthy relationship can only be well cemented if it does not only end with Sunday contacts, but continues even throughout the week through house visitation. It is important for an office bearer to have a healthy relationship with the flock (members) because according to Means (1993:200) healthy relationships precede effective ministry. Without healthy relationship between a member and his/her office bearers, there can never be effective ministry. House visitation in the MRCC must for the sake of the necessary relationship building process, be put high on the agenda.

3.5 Looking at the available statistics

Statistics in the MRCC has always been a gauging mechanism as far as growth or decline in the church is concerned. Comparing statistics is vital in planning on how to improve service for church health and growth. According to the agenda of the first General

Church Assembly of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika (HKSA) in 1977, the church was made up of 91 congregations. There were 44 congregations in the then Transvaal, 7 and the then Orange Free State and 40 in the then Natal and Transkei (HKSA 1977:4).

Comparing that with the information in the minutes of the second General Church Assembly in 1980, in which it is reported that there were 84 congregations (HKSA Minutes 1980:20). Comparatively speaking, there is a decline in the number of congregations (7 congregations less). The researcher's observation is that the decline in the number of congregations could have been brought about by consolidation due to a decline in membership in some congregations, thus bringing the number down from 91 congregations in 1977 to 84 in 1980, and indeed, a short period of three years, for such a drastic change.

Total membership was 17 764 with a total number of 9 701 confirmed members. Those members were served by 22 pastors and 22 evangelists (HKSA Minutes 1980:25). The number of elders was recorded as 268 as compared to 236 deacons (HKSA Agenda 1980:38). The work of office bearers became more important, and it might be the reason why it was written that "the church is in need of ways to pursue its task and calling in the world" (HKSA 1980:57). The church was growing and the number of office bearers needed to balance with that growth because these members needed to be serviced. They needed to be visited in their homes.

It is important to look at statistics as the years went by and try to see if house visitation or lack thereof contributed to either growth or decline. The following statistics on confirmed members are reflected in the *HKSA Almanak en klein preekbundel* 1987:- 1977/78 – 6 655; 1979 – 7 849; 1980/81– 7 367; 1982 – 10 536; 1983/84 – 11 675; 1985/86 – 11 221. Total membership in 1983/84 was recorded as 23 642 (1987:65). A big gain was recorded between 1980/81, where it was recorded that there were 7 367 confirmed members, and 1982, where the number increased by 3 169 to 10 536. It is of importance to note that in the same issue of *Almanak en klein preekbundel*, the period 1987/88 was declared by the Commission of the General Church Assembly as the "year of church council", i.e. elders, deacons and ministers (1987:5). The main aim was to inculcate the culture of loyalty and dedication in those offices.

Comparing the statistics on confirmed members according to *HKSA Almanak* 1994, a totally different picture is painted: 1988/89 – 22 027; 1990 – 17 285; 1991 – 11 172; 1992 – 11 347; 1993 – 11 566 (1994:54). Of great concern is a steep decline in membership between 1988/89 when it was recorded that there were 22 027 confirmed members, and 1990 when it was recorded that there were 17 285 confirmed members. There was a decline of 4 742 confirmed members recorded during that period. My biggest concern is that in most cases, one confirmed member comes with at least about two unconfirmed members. Therefore, the total loss to the church, as per above argument is about 14 000 members (i.e. both confirmed and unconfirmed).

Another interesting fact is that it was during that same period that ministers of the MRCC started to be involved in tent making ministry in large numbers. The big question for me is: Was that an innocent coincidence? Did the permission for ministers to engage in tent-making ministry in the MRCC affect the work of office bearers, including house visitation, to an extent that membership declined due to neglect? That is one of the questions to be answered by the research to be undertaken but one is tempted to believe that, indeed there is a connection between the two.

When the church gave permission to her pastors to be involved in tent-making ministry, the main reason was to allow them to earn a living wage while serving the church. The Agenda of the 8th General Church Assembly in 2000 (HKSA 2000:13) painted a very sad picture concerning ministers' stipend: "The ministers are grossly underpaid and almost all of them receive remuneration which is below the poverty datum line, a disgrace to our church indeed. The remuneration that is paid to the ministers is grossly disproportionate with their training, qualifications and profession or calling". It was therefore expected of those pastors who were fortunate to find employment outside the church to plough back by serving the church with more vigour. It is unfortunate that in most cases, this was not to be.

The report of the board of presbytery tabled at the 6th General Church Assembly (GCA) in 1994 stated that the common problem was poor performance on the part of elders or that ministers were inhibiting the smooth running of church administration. It further stated that it was discovered that ministers did not make any effort to teach elders to

perform some activities in the church. The report concluded: "Regrettably, this practice is still continuing in our church" (HKSA 1994:76). How were elders expected to visit households and add value to the work of MRCC pastors if they were not trained? Pastors are the ones who are supposed to equip them with necessary skills. Well equipped elders would then be able to do effective house visitation.

The report of ministers' conference (Agenda HKSA 1997:50) listed as one of the reasons of the decline or stagnance, lack of devotion among church council members and congregants which sometimes is caused by lack of effective teaching and training by ministers. In the same Agenda the following is stated in the report of elders: "The training of elders for their service has been identified as a must for the church ... Elders must actively carry out the ministry and not sit back and expect the minister to do all work alone" (1997:63). 'Effective teaching and training' is still needed in the MRCC for church office bearers to be able to perform their duties, including house visits. This can also be seen in the fact that one of the recommendations in the Agenda of the General Church Assembly (HKSA 1994:76) was that "members of our congregations be trained without delay as 'evangelists' in their local environment." Even the Agenda of the 7th General Church Assembly continued with the issue: "Every minister and member must dedicate himself or herself to mission work, evangelising people of different communities i.e. house visitation" (HKSA 1997:19). The big question is, if the church has already identified training of members as of high importance, why is it not done? Is this not the reason why membership is declining because members feel as if the leadership does not listen to them?

3.6 The scripture and house visitation in the MRCC

I was presenting a paper during a workshop for elders, deacons and pastors in Durban, and during discussions, one lady made a dramatic revelation. The topic was: "The decline of church membership and house visits" with emphasis on house visitation in the MRCC. In my presentation I made an example of a personal experience, where my wife was very sick and I longed for a simple phone call from my pastor or anybody from my congregation. The lady then told the attendees about her personal experience. According to her, she saw herself as a dedicated member of the MRCC and was also actively involved in Maranatha Reformed Mothers' Union (MRMU) affairs.

Her husband passed away after a short illness. She said her colleagues within the circuit and in the MRMU were informed about her problems, but no one visited her, let alone a simple phone call. A simple house visitation would have satisfied her. She was grieving for her husband and all that her fellow Christians did was to replace her in all the committees that she served in. She only saw her fellow believers when they came to collect books and other records in her possession. She was on the verge of leaving the church when her pastor visited her. The idea of leaving the church to join another one still occupied her mind, even during the workshop. She confessed that she was now convinced that house visitation was the responsibility of everybody, herself included. If all members in her congregation were trained or empowered to visit one another, she would not have felt isolated because they would have visited her.

Manala is correct (2006:75-76) when he writes about the ministry of the church. He says: "The ministry of the church evolves from and is the direct result of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The ministry of the church should therefore be guided and directed by the ministry of Jesus Christ in its purpose, content and action. Like the ministry of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the church has to entail the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom of God, teaching, healing and prayer services". Jesus Christ taught us to be there for one another. In Matthew 25:25-36 it is stated: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me". How can you see that someone is hungry or thirsty if you do not go out to meet them? Christians will be able to see those who need help if they visit them in their households. Christ went on by indicating to his disciples that they must do as he did. John 13:15 states: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you". This was after He washed and wiped their feet during the Passover Feast. When He was with them, teaching and training them for His ministry, He always told them to emulate Him. He moved from house to house preaching and healing people. He taught them to be servants, to serve others.

Paul also spoke about teaching publicly and from house to house. In Acts 20:20, 28 he says: "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly from house to house... Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers". When one reflects on the realities with which the church is confronted, and as we reflect on Scripture, it becomes

clear that one of the fundamental issues for the future of the church is the priesthood of all believers. Of course, pastors should set an example by leading the flock, but the flock must also bring its side by emulating the shepherd. The pastors must lead by example and the congregants must show what they've learnt by also bringing their side. Pastors cannot only be teachers, they have to show the way, i.e. leading by example or practising what they preach. Congregants must also understand their calling and live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The pastor must be able to lead members on a spiritual journey, so that they could learn to follow Jesus Christ. Pastors, through appropriate leadership and teaching, should help members to take responsibility for ministry and service. If they fail in this, the church will remain stuck and unable to move forward.

The words of the Apostle Paul when addressing the Ephesian elders are quite significant for this discussion. Paul said in Acts 20:20-21: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house ..." He continues in Acts 20:28-31: "So keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your care ..." The Apostle Paul's words in the abovementioned passage present a threefold purpose of house visitation which is important to the MRCC and other churches' ministry.

Fennema (1998:32) articulates this purpose thus:

 It is intended to strengthen the spiritual lives of faith of the members of the congregation of Christ.

- It is intended to challenge the worship and witness or service of the members of the body of Christ, that it may be found acceptable to the Lord.
- It is intended to promote and encourage the fellowship or communion of the saints (believers) of the household of God.

The purpose of house visitation is in this regard, an assessment mechanism for the impact of the Word of God in the lives of members. Fennema (1998:2) states it more aptly: "By this means, the office bearers called to and entrusted with the souls of God's people, are enabled to check the spiritual pulse or welfare, the condition of the body of Christ."

A house visitation is an important bridge-building practice. Needed communication between the church and its members is effectively carried out through house visitation. It is clear from the above insights that at the heart of house visitation one finds the equipping and strengthening of members from their comfort zones. There is lesson for us to learn from Manala (2006:75) when he says: "The term used for ministry is *diakonia* (service) which in the gospels has reference to service at the table, but also means dedicated service. To emphasise this dedication Jesus Christ maintained throughout that he had not come to be served but to serve and to offer his life for the redemption of many people". The church is to serve as Christ did.

From here this research seeks to explore its object further by broadening its focus to house visitation as understood, articulated and practised in the Hervormde Church Family. The relevant question is how does the Hervormde Church Family understand and practise house visitation. Chapter 4 explores this and other related questions.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNDERSTANDING OF HOUSE VISITATION IN THE HERVORMDE CHURCH FAMILY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher explores the understanding of house visitation in the Hervormde Church Family (or Hervormde Kerk Family - HKF), to which both the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika belong. As already explained, the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) has been greatly influenced by the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA) in the way it functions. The reason is that the MRCC (previously called the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Africa) came into existence as a result of the assistance from the NHKA. The researcher is therefore going to explore the understanding of house visitation in the Hervormde Church Family by consulting literature related to that.

The understanding of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ has already been pointed out. As indicated in previous chapters the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ was established in 1923 by a group that broke away from the Free Church of Scotland. Their first 'home' was the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika. As a result of that the NHKA influenced the theology of the MRCC, including the understanding of house visitation.

Manala (2006:51) rightly points out that the history of the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika (i.e. MRCC) cannot be complete without consideration of the role of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika. Manala (2006:51) continues: "The Hervormde Kerk Family in South Africa consists of two Reformed churches, namely the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika and the Hervormde Kerk in Suidelike Afrika." From its establishment, the MRCC started by 'seeing things through the eyes of the NHKA'. For a young or newly-established church, it was not going to be easy to avoid the influence from the 'big brother', in this case the NHKA. This is summed up by Manala (2006:58) when he says: "The HKSA as the younger of the two churches has by virtue of this relationship, in a way taken the image of older NHKA."

Beyers (2009:100), understands this relationship thus: "The relationship between the MRCC and NHKA is a *given*. On grounds of theological and historical reasons, these two churches do not need to seek for reasons to be in a relationship. Not only is the relationship *constituted by a shared faith in Christ*, but also by a conscious choice to be family. The covenant, of which these two churches are part, is *signified by baptism* and expressed *by sharing Word and Eucharist*." The relationship between NHKA and MRCC was from the beginning going to influence the latter, especially because there was also an element of financial dependence. As a family, the 'daughter' was definitely going to be influenced by the 'mother'.

It is therefore proper to concur with Manala (2006:58) when he says: "The relationship of these two churches has, notwithstanding serious problems that were experienced in the process, produced a common theological, ecclesiastic and ministerial identity. The NHKA is the older and thus the obvious theological mentor of the HKSA. It is for this reason that most of the theological and practical theological literature used by the HKSA comes from the NHKA. The theology and the practice of the NHKA apply also in the HKSA since the former is the theological mentor of the latter. The HKSA as the younger of the two churches has by virtue of this relationship, in a way taken the image of the older NHKA." It will therefore be proper to look at house visitation in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, in order to understand why the MRCC understands house visitation the way it was explained in the previous chapter.

Therefore, in this chapter the researcher will examine the understanding of house visitation in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, as the 'mentor' to the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. That will be done by looking closely at how the NHKA understands house visitation, similarities and differences between their way of understanding house visitation and the way MRCC understands it.

The sub-headings to be looked at in this chapter are: brief explanation of the Reformation principles; a brief look at terms used to get out the meaning and function of the ministry; understanding of house visitation in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika; and influence of the NHKA in the way MRCC understands house visitation.

4.2 Brief explanation of the Reformation principles

For us to understand and bring out the full understanding of the topic at hand, we need to look at the following Reformation principles: *Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide and Sola Gratia*.

- 4.2.1 Deist (1990:239) gives the following definition for *Sola Scriptura*: "Theology and knowledge of God must be based on the *Scripture only* and not on *ecclesiastical tradition*". The Scripture must be the only thing that defines theology and knowledge of God, nothing else. Manala (2006:59) goes further: "This principle presupposes the church's continual study of and obedience to the Scripture in matters of faith and life before God".
- 4.2.2 Deist (1990:239) defines *Sola Fide* thus: "salvation is to be found by faith in Jesus Christ". It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that salvation can be found.
- 4.2.3 Deist (1990:239) gives the following explanation for *Sola Gratia*: "man is saved not by any merit of his own, but only by the grace of God". The grace of God is the only thing that can save human beings, not by his or her own merit.

In the Hervormde Church Family, it has always been the norm that the Scripture must be the only thing that defines theology and knowledge of God, nothing else. Only through faith in Jesus Christ, could a Christian be saved. Salvation could only be through faith in Christ only, and nothing else. It has always been that in the Hervormde Church Family, human beings could only be saved through the grace of God. These principles, *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia*, are the pillars that also form part of the message to be communicated during house visitation in the Hervormde Church Family.

4.3 A brief look at terms used to get out the meaning and function of the ministry

Focus is now moved to briefly looking at the Greek terms used to disentangle or get out the meaning and function of the ministry. These are *episkopein*, *parakalein*, *nouthetein*, *katartidzein* and *oikodomein*.

4.3.1 Episkopein

According to Beukes (1981:20), *episkopein* means to "keep watch over" not in the sense of "rule over" or "control" but in the sense of "visit", "care for", "having concern for." Manala goes further: "Episkopein in this sense refers to that caring act that is done out of genuine concern for and interest in the wellbeing of fellow Christians both corporately and individually" (2006:68). According to Manala (2006:69), this caring act of the service that is described as *episkopein* is quite significant because the Hervormde Kerk Family (HKF) practices it as an after care or follow-up task of the church to those to whom the gospel has been preached and who have as a result come to faith in Jesus.

4.3.2 Parakalein

According to Beukes (1981:22), *parakalein* means to comfort, to encourage, to counsel, to put forward an urgent request or appeal as well as to admonish. Manala (2006:70) continues: "*Paraclesis* is accepted in the HKF as referring to the actual call of God self through the intermediary work of Christian servants under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is the actual *paraclete*.

4.3.3 Nouthetein

Manala (2006:71) states: "It seems that *nouthetic* activity become necessary because of an emergence of a behavioural diversion and untoward conduct of a believer or church member. Sin is therefore often viewed as the origin of the problem which needs to be confronted and corrected verbally by means of the Scriptural message. He further concludes by stating that it can therefore be concluded that admonishing, comforting and strengthening have as purpose growth and fitness as well as genuine obedience in faith and conduct (2006:72).

4.3.4 Katartidzein

Manala understands *katartidzein* as to equip and make complete (2006:68). He writes: "To apply *katartidzein* to someone is to train or equip him/her to qualify him/her for the service for which he/she has been called" (2006:73). He further concludes that this training is highly regarded in the HKF.

4.3.5 Oikodomein

According to Manala (2006:74), *oikodomein* refers to the edification of the church or congregation which is the responsibility that Christians have and should display and fulfil towards each other. He concludes by saying: "All facets of the pastorate should work together towards this important goal" (2006:74).

As indicated above, and with regard to the meaning of the terms: "episkopein" – oversee or supervise, visit, care for, concern for; "parakalein" – comfort, encourage, counsel, make an appeal, solicit and admonish; "nouthetein" – warn, reprove and admonish; "sterizein" – fortify, provide resistance against; "katartizein" – equip and make complete Manala (2006:68), the terms relate to this research in that house visitation is the vehicle through which an office bearer could bring the message across to those visited. The meaning of all these terms is relevant to this research since one can supervise, comfort, warn, fortify, equip and make complete through house visitation.

4.4 Understanding of house visitation in the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA)

4.4.1 Background

The church order of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (NHKA Kerkorde 2007:21) lists as some of the duties of a pastor in a congregation "visitation of all members of the congregation according to the plan as designed by elders' meeting" and "visiting of new members" (*my translation*).

Dreyer (1981:61) defines house visitation as an annual official discussion a pastor undertakes from house to house in the congregation. He refers to house visitation as "proclamation of the Word in all its richness" (1981:60) (*my translation*). On the other hand, Beukes (1981:1) defines house visitation as the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the form of a conversation with an individual or individual family, in the exact situation where the people concerned find themselves.

Of interest is that in the same NHKA church order (NHKA Kerkorde 2007:31) there are five duties of elders linked to house visitation: 1) visiting all households, members and office bearers, 2) together with the pastor visiting all households and members, 3) visiting and supporting all households and members with problems, if necessary, with the pastor, 4) visiting new members, and 5) tracking down children in their wards and making sure that they attend services, catechism classes and other activities in the congregation.

Deacons are expected to visit households and members in their wards and to collect offerings (NHKA Kerkorde 2007:32). It is evident from the church order of the NHKA that the understanding within that church is that pastors; elders and deacons are expected to visit households.

Beukes (1981:94-95) also emphasises the importance of house visitation, stating preaching, preaching to individuals and individual families, preaching in a discussion form, as necessitating a house visitation by pastor and or elder. Visiting families gives the

pastor an opportunity to deal with or handle some of the issues that he or she could not normally handle on a Sunday. There are instances where the pastor has to sit down with an individual, or an individual family, on a one-on-one visit.

Gorsuch (1999:ix) sheds some light on loss of interest in pastoral care: "During the second half of the twentieth century, pastoral care ministry became dominated by pastoral counselling while to a great extent pastoral visitation is now considered anachronistic or unnecessary, perhaps even a nuisance, and often is simply jettisoned. What a loss! Church members lose the chance to sit down and talk with their pastors about their life of faith. Pastors lose the opportunity to get to know their parishioners intimately and increasingly meet them only through worship or group meetings in the church". Intimacy brought about by the pastor and other office bearers visiting the households, is missed by members when the opposite happens. Is it because of lack of time? Or is it because of very large congregations?

The NHKA, like the MRCC, is not a very big church and it is therefore expected that office bearers will be able to visit the household as expected. Killen (2005:3) a pastor of a small membership church, rightly said: "Most laypeople in small membership churches want to have a personal relationship with their pastors. They want to know that their pastor knows them and cares about them and can be called on to minister to them". It is evident that the NHKA has always been serious about house visitation. Their church order bears testimony to this.

Killen (2005:3) takes it further by stating: "A pastor who opts out of the ministerial function may eventually hear the people saying, 'Depart from me, you unfaithful and useless pastor, for I was in the hospital and you did not visit me; I was in grief and you did not comfort me; I was going through a bad time in my life but you did not seem to care about me." This would indeed be a serious indictment to the concerned pastor. Such would engender feelings of guilt on the part of the pastor.

4.4.2 Views of some NHKA theologians on house visitation

As already explained, the MRCC has been greatly influenced by the NHKA in the way it functions. The reason is that the MRCC came into existence as a result of the assistance from the NHKA. It will then be proper to also point out what some theologians of the NHKA say about house visitation.

4.4.2.1 Beukes

Beukes (1981) poses a question on how the pastor will reach out to different situations if he or she does not do house visitation. He lists among others, members "who do not attend ordinary church services" (1981:129), "who do not attend holy communion service (1981:136), "whose contributions are not in order" (1981:149), "whose daily lives are directionless" (1981:152) and those "who were won over to sects" (1981:157). The list contains an important number of members who also need God's grace through church office bearers' visitation.

Beukes (1993) goes further by stating: "house visitation is not in the first place intended for the members of the family, but for the whole family". According to him, house visitation is not intended in the first place to bind the family to the Church, but to Christ. He further states that it is not intended in the first place to solve problems, but to positively lead the family in the right relationship with God, with one another, with the congregation and with people of the world" (1993:3).

4.4.2.2 De Wet

De Wet (1966:38) states that a minister is supposed to do house visitation, since it is also clearly stated in his/her letter of calling that serves as a contract between the minister and the church. It has already also been stated that the church order of the NHKA confirms what De Wet means when he says: "The Church Order of the Ned. Herv. Kerk and the letter of calling, which is a contract between minister and congregation, clearly states that every minister must do house visitation." The fact that a minister signs a contract that clearly states that he or she has to do house visitation means that the minister is in contravention of the contract if house visitation is not done.

4.4.2.3 Booysen

Booysen (1990:567) confirms the fact that there are ministers who are opposed to house visitation, regardless of the fact that they are supposed to do it. He argues that "regardless of the fact that opposition to pastoral visits is mounting in the church, it remains irreplaceable. There is but no alternative for the house visitation. Attention is given to certain biblical and theological arguments in an attempt to justify the continuation of this

practice in the church. Although urbanization plays an important role it must not be regarded as a negative factor. Pastoral visitation is to be considered as one of those structures in use to proclaim the Gospel. The ward-system needs to be utilized to a much greater extent as is the case now". Booysen brings to the fore some of the reasons that ministers give to try to avoid doing house visitation. An argument is that due to urbanisation, it is not practical to do house visitation. Pastors hide behind the fact that life is very fast in the urban areas and people are very busy and therefore there would be no chance to do house visitation.

Booysen reiterates that "congregants regard it as a right to be officially visited by the church office bearers..." (1990:567). The fact that a congregation called a minister with the knowledge that they would be visited by him or her, makes it their right to complain if that is not done.

Booysen (1990:568) goes further by indicating that for the past twenty years the Commission of the General Church Assembly had *house visitation* as an agenda point in their meetings in at least eight occasions. Having it as an agenda item in at least eight occasions emphasises how the NHKA viewed house visitation as being of utmost importance in the life of a congregation.

According to Booysen (1990:572), members of the NHKA made the following comments regarding house visitation by the pastor: 'I would like to see ministers improving on their house visitation'; 'I am not happy about the fact that our pastor never visited us'; 'I feel

that the pastor must be free to visit his congregation regularly'; pastors are supposed to visit congregants at least before the Holy Communion'; 'Pastors must visit somebody who had a serious or big operation immediately thereafter'; 'There are issues that I would like to discuss with my pastor in my home'. These observations by Booysen emphasise the importance of a pastor's visitation in the NHKA, and how members feel when they are not visited by their pastor.

4.4.2.4 Joubert

A valued argument from Joubert (2011:1) is that house visitation gives a pastor an opportunity to hear about the life of the congregants. He asks: "When else except during house visitation can you really hear how congregants think, live and feel?" He argues that it is virtually impossible to expect a pastor to preach to people that he or she never visited. He puts it thus: "I don't know how someone can preach to people when you never visit their homes" (2011:1). According to Joubert, house visitation is interesting and is a privilege.

Just like Booysen argued that there are no valid reasons that a pastor can give as why doing house visitation is not important. Joubert (2011:1) further says: "someone often hears how it is said that house visitation is unnecessary and not practical". According to him, it is an opportunity for the minister to know each member - their heartache, their happiness and hear them tell about their sins (2011:1).

4.5 Influence of the NHKA in the way MRCC understands house visitation

It is very clear that the MRCC was influenced by the NHKA as far as interpretation and understanding of house visitation are concerned. This close relationship led to MRCC almost becoming a carbon copy of NHKA.

Manala (2006:58) although speaking of NHKA's influence, also thinks that there were other influences. He states: "Apart from the encounter with the Reformed traditional environment in this relationship, the HKSA had her roots in the Reformed tradition in her original missionary founder, the Free Church of Scotland. The coming over of a group of 750 members from the Bantu Reformed Church in Bloemfontein reinforced the B HK's Reformed theological tradition. Although other groups came over from the Methodist and the Full Gospel Church tradition, the Reformed tradition remained the core." Although the researcher agrees with him about the influence from the Free Church of Scotland and Bantu Reformed Church, the researcher still sees the NHKA as having greatly influenced the understanding of house visitation in the MRCC. Similarity between the two church orders' interpretation of responsibilities of office bearers bears testimony to this argument.

Sub-article 3.2.1a) iii of the MRCC church order (2006:3) lists one of the functions of a minister in congregation as being to conduct visitation of all households at least once annually (2006:3). The church order of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika (2007:21) lists as some of the duties of a pastor in a congregation "visitation of all members of the congregation according to the plan as designed by elders' meeting" and

"visiting of new members" (my translation).

Sub-article 5.3.3 of the MRCC church order (2006:20) states that elders "must visit before every Holy Communion, all the families, members and office bearers in their respective wards where the Bible should be read, a prayer and pastoral conversation be conducted with members."

It is also stated in *Sub-article 5.3.4* that elders "must visit all the families annually with the minister" (2006: 20).

On the other hand, NHKA church order (2007:31) lists five duties of elders linked to house visitation: 1) visiting all households, members and office bearers, 2) together with the pastor visiting all households and members, 3) visiting and supporting all households and members with problems, if necessary, with the pastor, 4) visiting new members, and 5) tracking down children in their wards and making sure that they attend services, catechism classes and other activities in the congregation.

Sub-article 5.4.3 of the MRCC church order (2006:21) states that a deacon "visits families and members in his/her ward every month to collect offerings." In the NHKA as well, deacons are expected to visit households and members in their wards and to collect offerings (2007:32).

It is evident from both church orders that the understanding within MRCC was highly

influenced by the NHKA in that pastors, elders and deacons are expected to visit households. In both churches, there is a serious neglect of the aspect of the priesthood of all believers. It seems as if house visitation is restricted to pastors, elders and deacons. It is this influence that is leading to the NHKA dragging the MRCC down with it in terms of decline in membership. A new ministry design is needed where ordinary members will be equipped to be priests. As a church the MRCC has neglected what Killen (2005:4) meant when he said: "There are usually some lay members in every church who just naturally gravitate toward doing the work of caring ministry. But most churches will need for their pastors to give leadership in developing these ministries. They will need for the pastor to prepare people to respond to needs by providing both training and example".

Practical Theology studies as we have been made to understand, the interaction between theory and practice. The significance and ideal of house visit as an efficient strategy for church growth and health has been established. The question is whether this is expressed also in the life and work of the church i.e. whether theory correlates with praxis. If the converse is true, what needs to be done to bring about transformation? In the next chapter the researcher proffers a presentation and critical analysis of the results of the empirical research.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the research findings and critically analyses the results of the empirical research. This research is about the impact of house visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. The respondents of the study are retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members of different age groups. The researcher is concerned about house visitation in the MRCC, which is why the respondents of the study are retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members of between 25 and 75 years of age in the Ebenezer Circuit (Pretoria and Hammanskraal area) and Shalom Circuit (Durban area). A research schedule was delivered to the respondents beforehand.

The study followed an empirical research approach through which people were interviewed in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views. The researcher prefers qualitative research over a quantitative one. According to Hoepfl (1997:3) qualitative research has an interpretive character aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them and the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher.

The researcher prefers qualitative method, since the MRCC as a church, is expected to benefit from the results of the research, and for that to happen, there must be acceptance of the method used. As Hoepfl (1997:2) rightly notes, "... qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively". A research schedule with open interview questions was sent the respondents, as according to Dreyer (2004:38), "interviewing is a very traditional and widely-used method of data generation."

Furthermore, the researcher also used other sources of data to further do a critical analysis of the results of the empirical research. As per Hoefpl (1997:6), "Another source of information that can be invaluable to qualitative researchers is analysis of documents. Such documents might include official records, letters, newspaper accounts, diaries and reports, as well as published data used in a review of literature". In chapter 1, a lot of published data was used to review literature and such information will also be used in the analysis of the results of the empirical research.

It will also be proper to briefly examine the objectives of this research that have been stated as:

 To determine if pastors and elders of the MRCC are doing house visitation as expected.

- To establish the reasons why pastors and elders seem not to do house visitation as expected.
- iii. To highlight the importance of house visitation to congregational health and well-being in the MRCC.
- iv. To establish methods that can help ensure that house visitation as an important task receives appropriate attention notwithstanding impediments. This involves recommending a ministry design that will promote house visitation albeit by members and not exclusively by office bearers.

It has already been explained in chapter 1 that the practical theological approach adopted for this research is the correlative approach. The reason for the choice was that there has to be room for interacting with the real situation in which the people to be interviewed for this research find themselves.

5.2 Identification of research participants

The study was in the form of an empirical research through schedules and interviews in order to collect qualitative information regarding their views and feelings with regard to house visit in the MRCC. The respondents of the study were retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and church members of different age groups. The choice of participants was informed by the fact that the researcher wanted to get the views of confirmed members of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. In the MRCC, a member can only be confirmed when s/he has attained the age of sixteen. But to ensure that the research did not enlist people who are considered to be vulnerable, e.g. children,

the following categories of members were approached: retired pastors, pastors in active service, elders, deacons and then ordinary members, between 25 and 75 years of age.

As the researcher promised to ensure that the rights of the respondents would be respected and protected at all times, the participants were informed that their participation must be voluntary and that their identity would be kept confidential. As Dreyer (2004:6) says, "The first guideline for ethically responsible research is that the *dignity* of participants should not be violated in any way." The respondents were therefore treated with respect at all times during the research process. The researcher made sure that the dignity of the respondents was not violated in any way.

The research was not without challenges. As stated in the earlier chapters, the researcher is employed as the Administrator of the church to which the respondents belong: Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ. Due to this fact, most members, especially pastors, were reluctant to take part in the research. The reason may have been that they could have viewed the research as a witch-hunt on the side of the researcher. Responding to some of the questions that needed to assess how pastors were doing their work in congregations, may have led to the reluctance. The fear was understandable to the researcher; hence the respondents were given an opportunity to complete the interview schedule in the privacy of their homes to ensure anonymity. Regardless of this provision, church office bearers, i.e. pastors, elders and deacons were still reluctant to take part in big numbers. Even the rest of the respondents chose to send the completed interview

schedule by post, rather than the researcher meeting them face-to-face to get their opinion.

Nonetheless, it is still the researcher's view that the results of the research, regardless of the above limitations, may still assist the MRCC as a church to critically look at the issue of house visitation; to determine if it was still relevant, after having looked at all the sides.

5.3 Interview schedule

An interview schedule with eleven (11) main questions was drafted. The research questions were formulated in such a way that they were relevant to the situation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ, especially on the topic of house visitation.

The following questions were in the interview schedule:-

- 5.3.1 Are you a member of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ?
- 5.3.2 Are you from the East of Drakensberg or West of Drakensberg?
- 5.3.3 Are you a minister, elder or deacon or ordinary member?
- 5.3.4 Are you attending church services regularly?
- 5.3.5 Does your pastor regularly visit families in your congregation?
 - If yes, how often?
 - What does s/he speak about during this visitation?
 - Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.
- 5.3.6 Does your elder visit families in your congregation regularly?

- If yes, how often?
- What does s/he speak about during this visitation?
- Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.
- 5.3.7 Does your deacon visit families in your congregation regularly?
 - If yes, how often?
 - What does s/he speak about during this visitation?
 - Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.
- 5.3.8 Do you think house visitation has any influence on church attendance? Please give reasons.
- 5.3.9 Do you ever feel neglected when your church office bearers do not visit you for a long period? How do you feel neglected and how often would you like to be visited?
- 5.3.10 As a member of the MRCC, do you think the church is serious about the issue of house visitation? Is there any room for improvement, how can the situation be improved?
- 5.3.11 What do you think are
 - Advantages of house visitation?
 - Disadvantages of house visitation?

5.4 Results of the research as per research schedule

The analyses of the results of the research schedule will be done per region: first the respondents from the East of Drakensberg Region of the MRCC, represented by Shalom Circuit (Durban area). The second analysis will be for the respondents from the West of Drakensberg Region of the MRCC, represented by Ebenezer Circuit (Pretoria and Hammanskraal area).

The researcher will first copy and write down the responses as per research schedules received from respondents. The answers/responses will be reported *verbatim*, i.e. in the exact way that the respondents put them. There will be some grammatical and tense problems, as the respondents' home language is not English. The researcher will in turn, after having given the *verbatim* report, try to interpret the responses per question, starting first with respondents from East of Drakensberg Region of the MRCC, and then proceeding to those from the West of Drakensberg Region of the MRCC.

5.4.1 Recording of data: East of Drakensberg

CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent ID #	Respondent's category
1	Pastor in active service
2	Elder
3	Deacon
4	Ordinary member
5	Ordinary member
6	Ordinary member
7	Ordinary member

RESPONSES

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
1	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Pastor in active service
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	Every one week in a month
	5.3	Speak about problems and hardships they come across as
		family and as a pastor you will give message of support. When
		I say something about hardships like poverty – unemployment
		- result poverty result sickness/diseases, prostitution because
		they need money. A pastor will open a relevant scripture like
		Jacob 5:7, tell them to persevere and strong and also
		courageous until Lord came. If we have something to do we
		can help with food parcels especially orphans resulted from
		HIV and Aids virus.
	5.4	Some families benefit: spiritually, emotionally and also
		materially because you don't need material, seen and
		touchable things to get heal/to be health. Prayer heals people
		spiritually and the word of God is the main source/remedy for

	health. Even if you don't get something tangible but through
	God's word you get hope that was lost. Especially traditional
	people – they tend to believe that if believers enter your home
	- you will be blessed. For instance the story of Jesus and
	Zakey (sic). Jesus said Zakey (sic) fall down from the tree
	because today I will sleep in your home regardless of sin,
	poverty, race, colour, etc.
6.1	No
6.2	It took months and years maybe once a year
6.3	Almost similar things that I said above because in most cases
	you reach that place/family only to listen they give you more
	problems, crying, losing hope but always a pastor has to give
	hope and support.
6.4	What I have stated above is true because each and every visit
	both sides benefits.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Twice a month.
7.3	Umnikelo – collections – tickets. If you don't have money
	how do you cope and what can be done to help that particular
	family. Because by your energy and commitment you can give
	God something because deep down from your heart you want
	to do it but there is no money.
7.4	Through help that is offered to them like building project e.g.

	gardening, baking, selling old clothes, sowing etc. those help
	people a lot at least meet them financially.
8	No because we have plans to deal with this especially on
	Thursday and Saturdays and sometimes it is held on
	afternoons.
9	Yes, because people believe that one visit can make a
	difference in one's life.
10	No response
11.	1 No response
11,3	2 No response

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
2	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Elder
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	Once or twice a year
	5.3	The word of God
	5.4	- gain spiritual revival
	6.1	Yes

6.2	At least fourth a year
6.3	The word of God
6.4	- gain spiritual revival
7.1	Yes
7.2	At least fourth a year
7.3	The word of God
7.4	- gain spiritual revival
8	- Yes, people feel they are important members of the
	church
	- Those who'd forgotten about the word of God feel
	revived again
	- Those who are having problems in their lives and at
	home are comforted through the word of God
	- It is the best way of attracting new members
9	It is a fact that we are surrounded by various challenges in our
	lives - divorce, poverty, rape, violence, suicide, etc. these
	challenges can be overcomed (sic) by preaching the word of
	God.
10	According to my own view the church is not doing enough on
	this issue hence the decline in membership is the result of the
	above.
11.1	- Recruit new membership
	- Inactive members are encouraged to be active

	- Active members are kept within the church in other words;
	there is no room of them willing to leave the church.
	- People feel they are important.
11.2	Some properly may require sound financial standing.

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
3	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Deacon
	4	Yes
	5.1	No
	5.2	No response
	5.3	No response
	5.4	No
	6.1	Yes
	6.2	Once a month
	6.3	Advise and guide them
	6.4	Yes
	7.1	No
	7.2	No response
	7.3	No response

7.4	No response
8	Yes, to encourage church members
9	No response
10	MRCC does not do house visits as required
11.1	More membership
11.2	No response

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
4	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	Twice in a year
	5.3	The word of God and the mission and vision of the church
	5.4	Yes, because we got to be motivated and see things differently
		by knowing what God wants from us.
	6.1	Yes
	6.2	Twice a year
	6.3	About the behaviour of the child of God and what God need
		from us.

6.4	Yes
7.1	Yes
7.2	Three times a year
7.3	Offerings
7.4	Yes. Because now they know that
8	Yes. In both good and bad it does encourage people because
	they can see they are being loved and important in the church.
9	No
10	No. yes.
11.1	To gain more members.
11.2	- There is no confidentiality
	- Other family get to be undermined because of the conditions
	that they are living under.

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
5	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	No
	5.2	No response

5.3	No response
5.4	No response
6.1	Yes
6.2	Twice a week
6.3	She will ask us if everything is ok in our family, should be any
	problems, she will try and help us. And she will pray for us.
	Encourage us to go to church every Sunday
6.4	Yes, we do benefit from her visitation because if we have a
	problem about something in the church, maybe regarding
	payment of membership fee, she will explain it to us and we
	will understand.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Twice a week
7.3	The importance of giving to the poor and helping those in
	need. Telling us to contribute more in our church, so we can
	help it grow.
7.4	Yes, because we learn that it is important to give to the needy
	and God will bless us in anyway.
8	Yes, because the family that you pay visit to, will see that the
	church cares for them. And that will make the family to go
	more often to church.
9	Elder and deacon do visit, so I don't have a problem with that.
10	No, it is not serious at all. Simple pastors they must start to

	visit their church members.
11.1	The family that you pay visit to will see that MRCC care, and
	will make him/her go to church regularly and he/she will tell
	his neighbour about the visitation and his/her neighbour will
	be interested and also see that and maybe follow too. Because
	he/she will see that MRCC cares for its church members.
11.2	Whoever came to visit with in the office bearer must be
	humble, be gentle when he/she speak have an understanding
	with the family. Not this coming in the house and shouting
	and asking them why they didn't go to church in a bad manner
	and telling people they must pay by force.

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
6	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	No
	5.2	No response
	5.3	No response
	5.4	No response

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ause other members believe that in order to show that
important at church must be visited.
ause it is like they don't care and they don't want to
e issues that we are facing as members in the church,
other issues need to be solved by top management and
for our church to succeed is on them because we as
s can't do everything if we are not supported by them.
aybe quarterly or twice a year (I've been a member of
for 10 years and the church bearers visited us not more
mes in 10 years).
MRCC as a whole must have a group of people at
nat will be appointed to be responsible of doing house
n, because reverend, elders and deacons got other
do and most of them are working so they don't get
do house visitation and people that will be appointed

	must be people that are honest and trustworthy so that people
	can talk easily to them.
11.1	- You know how people are leaving (because other people
	don't talk if they are needy of something).
	- You get reasons on other members why they are not coming
	to church anymore.
	- To show love, give hope and that they are important at
	church.
11.2	Other persons do it for the sake of wanting to know the
	situation of that person so that he/she will tell other members
	how she/he is (dishonesty).

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
7	1	Yes
	2	East
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	From the start of the month till the end
	5.3	Prayers, blessings, counselling
	5.4	- If the member of the family is sick after prayers she/he left

	with hope that she/he will get speed recovery.
	- If there is any death took place in family he sympathises with
	the family.
6.1	Yes
6.2	Sometimes thrice per month.
6.3	Blessings of God, if they are believing (sic) in the Son of God.
6.4	No response
7.1	No response
7.2	No response
7.3	No response
7.4	No response
8	No response
9	No response
10	No response
11.1	No response
11.2	No response

5.4.2 Recording of data: West of Drakensberg

CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent ID #	Respondent's category
1	Deacon

2	Ordinary member
3	Ordinary member
4	Ordinary member
5	Ordinary member
6	Ordinary member

RESPONSES

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
1	1	Yes
	2	West
	3	Deacon
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	No response
	5.3	Family conditions, poverty, pray for the illness, scripture reading, counselling.
	5.4	Yes, sometimes we find difficult to approach him when having problems but during visitation is easy to open up.
	6.1	Yes
	6.2	During weekdays and also Sunday
	6.3	- Family conditions

	- Collecting church monies
	- Pray for the family
6.4	Yes, we are informed about any changes during week days.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Once during the week and Sunday.
7.3	- Church programs
	- Collecting church monies
7.4	Yes, because they updated with programs and monies
8	Yes, because if your (sic) visited you can see that there are
	people who loves and care for you.
9	Yes, because sometimes I'm having a problem and I fail to
	send a message and how will they know if they don't visit
10	Yes, improvement is that it must be done by all church organs.
11.1	- Caring for members
	- Membership improvements
11.2	- When a member does not want to be visited or if something
	that is holding him/her behind does not want that to be known
	- If a member want to leave to join another church

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
2	1	Yes

2	2	West
3	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
5	5.1	No.
5	5.2	No response
5	5.3	The importance of coming to church. He gives advices with
		general matters e.g. education to the children in the family,
		how he want(s) to be buried, how he wants the church grow.
		He speaks about the Bible and religion. How to recruit and
		make members in the church (sic).
5	5.4	Yes, because during the visitation he gives advices to children
		in the family and the parents. If the minister visits the family,
		we feel loved, caring and the visibility that we are part of the
		congregation. Sometimes it is a push up because people need
		to be push(ed) to come to church. If the minister/deacon/elders
		visit, some of those who are not attending regularly, the next
		Sunday they come to church to show that they have heared
		(sic).
6	6.1	Yes
6	6.2	Some visit every Saturday, some Sunday after church
6	6.3	The importance of offering. She/he also ask some of the
		members why they don't come to church. Most of deacons and
		elders visit families when they need money.

6.4	Yes, we feel the love from the elder when he/she visited the
	family because it shows that she/he cares for the congregants.
	The(y) pray for the family as a whole, the problems and
	tribulations, etc. most of the prayers work because in the
	family we are left with hope.
7.1	Yes
7.2	No response
7.3	Most deacons when visiting the families, they just speak about
	the money, offerings, etc. But some speaks of the issentiality
	(sic) of attending church and paying and offering in the
	church.
7.4	Yes, it is important for the deacon to visit the members of the
	church. The duty of the deacons is to help the needy, so if the
	deacon visit and find that the members are in need, the deacon
	must try to change the situation of the family. The members
	can tell the deacons what bothers them. The prayer helps us,
	that the(y) left with the family (sic).
8	Yes, because when the minister visit (sic) members, he asks
	too much to those who are not attending church regularly. The
	minister convince (sic) and give guidance to such people.
	Most members honour the minister too much, when he/she
	visits, the next Sunday, people come to church in numbers
	especially those who were not coming to church. The minister

	influence people to come to church because he/she will pray
	for them (sic).
9	Yes, because the duty of the office bearers is to take care of
	the congregants. But sometimes we do not feel neglected
	because the office bearers do visit congregants regularly. The
	office bearers need to visit the congregants at least 4 times a
	month. The minister if he/she is working outside the church at
	least once a month. Yes, no matter how, you will feel
	neglected because you would think that the minister, deacons
	and elders do not care for their members of the congregation
	(sic).
10	Not really, the reason is that most churches do visitation when
	the students applied for practicals (sic). Some minister do not
	do house visit even once. If our church wants to be serious
	about that, first our leaders who are the ministers must first
	take a first step so that the deacons and elders may follow and
	be interested in their work. Our ministers must be positive.
	They should also be serious about their calling and lead the
	flock according to God's will. It will improve if the minister
	and elders and deacons do so. Also the office bearers must not
	only visit if they need money but even if they go for praying
	and caring (sic).
11.1	The advantages are that, when a minister/deacons/elders visit

	to take the message to the church. Some of the families
	receive prayers only when there is visitation of the minister. The visitation help (sic) because the minister can convince and
	encourage the congregants personally or face to face. (sic)
11.2	Some of the congregants don't want the minister to see how is
	their lifestyles (sic), e.g. violent at home, drunkard, poor (sic).
	Minister or deacons/elder visit houses without letting them
	Minister or deacons/elder visit houses without letting them
	Minister or deacons/elder visit houses without letting them know, so most of the time they find people drinking alcohol,
	Minister or deacons/elder visit houses without letting them know, so most of the time they find people drinking alcohol, some with boyfriends and girlfriends, some talking vulgar

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
3	1	Yes
	2	West
	3	Ordinary member

4	Yes
5.1	No.
5.2	No response
5.3	No response
5.4	No response
6.1	Yes
6.2	Once in a while
6.3	The Bible; family's well-being and the church
6.4	Yes, because you need to know if the church cares for its
	members. If the elders (people from the church) visit you, you
	see that you are also important in the church. It's easy to ask
	questions about things that you don't understand + (sic) find
	confusing in Christian faith.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Once in a while.
7.3	Prayer, Bible, church attendance.
7.4	Yes. Same reason as mentioned in 6.4. In most cases the
	elders and deacons come together.
8	Yes. By visiting your congregants you are encouraging to
	come to church. Even those who have back slided (sic) when
	you come to visit them they see that the church is still
	concerned about them. When you visit congregants you can
	have a one on one discussion with them and you will know

	people's problems and difficulties. You will know how to help
	congregants as a congregation especially the poor by being
	exposed with their real situations.
9	Yes. I would like to be visited regularly. If the church doesn't
	send even one person elder, deacon, minister to visit you just
	feel the church does not care esp. if you have been away from
	the church. There are many times when you feel lonely esp.
	those who don't have a family but by the house visits you
	know that the church is you family they care + love you.
10	No. in the MRCC most ministers don't do house visits reason
	being they say their congregations are still having few
	members, others complain about transports etc. The house
	visits should be encouraged in the churches. We need to care
	for one another. The deacons must visit and be concerned
	about the poor and those who are sick. The elders must
	comfort people and so is the minister. People need to be
	heared (sic) time to time. People are experiencing difficulties
	out there. They need the church.
11.1	- Encourage members
	- Help to see how people are living so that the church can
	help the poor
	- The neighbours can be attracted to the church if they see the
	church coming next door time and again they will see the love

	and care in our church
	- The church will grow spiritually because during house visits
	they can ask about the things that are confusing them in the
	church or as Christians
11.2	- The person doing house visits must be a person of good
	morality and strong believer. If not, wouldn't be able to
	answer people's questions. His actions must support him.
	- Gossiping about other Christians (church members)
	- People are not available during the day (school, work)
	- Church members are scattered the disadvantage can be
	transport
	- But there are many advantages than disadvantages.

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
4	1	Yes
	2	West
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	3 days per week
	5.3	First he conduct (sic) prayer and scripture reading, then after

	that he encourage the family to come to church. And also hear
	from the family and after that specifically pray for that
	problem e.g. sickness, unemployment, etc.
5.4	Yes. Many families benefit from the house visits because they
	problem are prayed specifically. And they have time to discuss
	the issues related to their issues. They are free to talk now in
	the private.
6.1	Yes
6.2	Same as 5.2
6.3	No response
6.4	I think yes, the family benefit from the visitation.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Same as 5.2.
7.3	They first conduct prayer and after they speak about the
	Gospel also the well-being of the members of the church, they
	also need to know about any problem in the family and after
	that they pray specifically for that problem. And also they
	collect many on debt for the church.
7.4	Yes we benefit lot from the visitation, because we have time
	to discuss about our problem and they can be prayed for.
8	House visit plays a very important role in the church
	attendance, because many members they feel blessed when the
	minister visited them. And after that they will attend church.

	Some members reflect by not attending church if the minister
	does not do house visits. So I can say visitation play important
	role for church attendance.
9	Yes. I feel neglected. We must know office bearers when we
	come to church service, they must visit the congregation as
	they work with them.
10	I think now the church is not serious about the issue of house
	visits. The ministers must start do workshop and discuss the
	matter of house visits and teach them about the house visits.
11.1	The advantage is that house visits contribute much on mission
	work. People come to church because the church has come to
	them first. So we have the advantage of people coming to
	church.
11.2	The disadvantage is that there are members who are not
	feeling good they are not free

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
5	1	Yes
	2	West
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes

5.2 No response 5.3 N/A 5.4 N/A 6.1 No 6.2 No response 6.3 N/A 6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	5.1	No
5.4 N/A 6.1 No 6.2 No response 6.3 N/A 6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	5.2	No response
6.1 No 6.2 No response 6.3 N/A 6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	5.3	N/A
6.2 No response 6.3 N/A 6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	5.4	N/A
6.3 N/A 6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	6.1	No
6.4 N/A 7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	6.2	No response
7.1 No 7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	6.3	N/A
7.2 No response 7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	6.4	N/A
7.3 N/A 7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	7.1	No
7.4 N/A 8 Yes.	7.2	No response
8 Yes.	7.3	N/A
	7.4	N/A
	8	Yes.
- Congregants feel cared for		- Congregants feel cared for
- You know them better at home		- You know them better at home
- You listen to their challenges in life		- You listen to their challenges in life
- You assist them to find ways to resolve their problem		- You assist them to find ways to resolve their problems
through simple sharing		through simple sharing
9 I don't know because I do not get visits	9	I don't know because I do not get visits
No. ministers should be paid living wages with benefits so that	10	No. ministers should be paid living wages with benefits so that
they can serve the church only - not become employed in		they can serve the church only - not become employed in
other agencies.		other agencies.
11.1 - Discuss spiritual issues of members	11.1	- Discuss spiritual issues of members

	- Share their social issues
	- Building relationships
	- Encourage member to participate in church project etc.
11.2	Other members feel that the pastor want to know more about
	them and sometimes may preach with their problems.

Respondent	Question	Response
ID#	#	
6	1	Yes
	2	West
	3	Ordinary member
	4	Yes
	5.1	Yes
	5.2	No response
	5.3	The pastor encourages people in the families to attend church
		as often as they can. And encourages them to pray all the time.
	5.4	Yes, because even those who have stopped attending they go
		back to church services on Sundays.
	6.1	Yes
	6.2	Rarely
	6.3	They talk about how to keep churches functioning.
	6.4	Yes, because they don't just go to church but they also

	contribute to what is happening and towards the functioning of
	the church like cleaning, visit the sick and other contributions.
7.1	Yes
7.2	Sometimes
7.3	No response
7.4	No response
8	Yes, it has an influence because after visitation those who
	have stopped attending, starts to attend, because the pastor ask
	them if they have any problems so that he can help them.
9	Yes, I feel neglected, as I think that they are visiting others
	other than me. They should visit at least twice a year.
10	Not sure, because in some churches we heard that no house
	visitation is done. I think the church must make a plan to
	check whether these house visitation are done.
11.1	It is helpful as it arouses the spiritual feeling to some members
	and they are being encouraged to attend to church. They feel
	they are important in the church their absence is recognised.
	And the family feel honoured to be visited by the pastor.
11.2	No response
1	

5.4.3 East of Drakensberg Region

In this section, the researcher tries to put the responses from each participant per question, and also making the responses more logical, but still as per the interview schedule inputs.

Seven (7) respondents took part in the research: one (1) pastor in active service, one (1) elder, one (1) deacon and four (4) ordinary members.

They all indicated that they were members of the MRCC and attended church services regularly. Their responses will be analysed based on their status in the congregation: pastor in active service, elder, deacon, and the four ordinary members.

5.4.3.1 Response to the question: Does your pastor visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.3.1.1 Pastor in active service:

Yes, a visitation is done monthly. The pastor speaks about problems and hardships the family comes across, poverty and unemployment, sickness, prostitution. The pastor also brings messages of support and encouragement through the reading of the relevant scriptures and messages of encouragement.

5.4.3.1.2 Elder:

Yes, a visitation is done by the pastor once or twice a year. The pastor speaks about the Word of God. The benefit from such visitation is that the family gains spiritual revival.

5.4.3.1.3 Deacon:

No visitation from the pastor has been received by the deacon.

5.4.3.1.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

Yes, the pastor does visit twice a year. The discussions are about the Word of God, the mission and vision of the church. The family benefits from the visitation because they get motivated and see things differently by knowing what God wants from them.

Member 2.

No visitation from the pastor was received by the second member interviewed.

Member 3.

No visitation from the pastor was received by the third member interviewed.

Member 4.

Yes, the member is visited by the pastor monthly. The family receives prayers, blessings and counselling from the pastor during these visits. The family benefits from this

visitation because if a member is sick, he or she is prayed for and left with a hope for a speedy recovery. The family also receives comfort from the pastor if this visitation is after a family bereavement.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that there is no frequency in the visitation by the pastor. Some members indicate that they have not received any visitation from the pastor. Concerning the issues discussed during the visitation by the pastor, it seems that members are more concerned about discussing socio-economic factors which affect their families.

5.4.3.2 Response to the question: Does your elder visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.3.2.1 Pastor in active service:

The respondent received no visitation from an elder.

5.4.3.2.2 Elder:

Yes, the respondent did receive a visitation from the elder at least four times a year. The elder speaks about the Word of God during the visitation. The family benefits from this visitation by receiving spiritual revival.

5.4.3.2.3 Deacon:

Yes, the respondent received a monthly visitation from the elder. The elder offers advices and guidance, and the family does benefit from the visitation.

5.4.3.2.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

Yes, the elder does visit twice a year. The discussions are about the behaviour of children and what God needs from the members of the family. The family does benefit from the visitation.

Member 2.

Yes, the elder does visit twice a week. The elder enquires about the wellbeing of the family, and if there are problems, tries to assist in solving them. The elder also prays for the family and encourages members to attend church services regularly. The family does benefit from the visitation because the elder explains any misunderstanding they may be having.

Member 3.

No visitation from the elder was received by the third respondent interviewed.

Member 4.

Yes, the elder does visit twice a month. The elder speaks about God's blessings, and believing in the Son of God.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that the majority of respondents received visitation from the elder. It is very clear that the elder plays an important role that has been assigned to him/her as a church office bearer. It is clear that most families benefitted from this visitation by the elder. Some members indicate that they have not received any visitation from the elder. Concerning the issues discussed during the visitation by the elder, it seems that members are benefiting since an opportunity arises where the elder is able to explain any misunderstanding that the members might be having. One respondent also alluded to the fact that the discussions are also about the behaviour of children and what God needs from the members of the family.

5.4.3.3 Response to the question: Does your deacon visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.3.3.1 Pastor in active service:

Yes, a deacon visits the respondent twice a month. The deacon speaks about offering, enquiring on how the family copes in the absence of a regular income. The visitation benefits the family because projects like gardening; baking and selling of old clothes could be initiated.

5.4.3.3.2 Elder:

Yes, a deacon visits the respondent four times a year. The deacon speaks about the Word of God and the family gains spiritual revival from such visits.

5.4.3.3.3 Deacon:

No visitation from the deacon was received by the respondent.

5.4.3.3.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

Yes, a deacon visits the respondent three times a year. The deacon speaks about offerings and the visitation is benefiting the family because they are able to learn more about offerings.

Member 2.

Yes, a deacon visits the respondent twice a week. The discussions during this visitation are about the importance of giving to the poor and helping those in need. The deacon encourages the family to contribute more to the church to help with its growth. The lesson learnt from this visitation is that it is important to give to the needy and God will bless those who give.

Member 3.

No visitation from the deacon was received by the respondent.

Member 4.

No response was received by the respondent on this question.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that there needs to be an improvement in the frequency of visitation from the deacon. The role of a deacon cannot be underestimated since the respondents indicated that this visitation gives the deacon an opportunity to encourage members to contribute their monthly offerings.

5.4.3.4 Response to the question: Do you think house visitation has any influence on church attendance? Please give reasons.

5.4.3.4.1 Pastor in active service:

The respondent does not think that house visitation has any influence on church attendance

5.4.3.4.2 Elder:

The respondent thinks that people feel very important members of the church when they are visited. Members who had forgotten about the Word of God feel revived again. Those having problems in their lives and at home are comforted through the Word of God. House visitation is also the best way of attracting new members.

5.4.3.4.3 Deacon:

The respondent thinks that house visitation influence church attendance because it encourages church members to attend services.

5.4.3.4.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

House visitation encourages people because they can see that they are being loved and are important to the church.

Member 2.

The respondent thinks that the family that is paid a visit will see that the church cares for them, thus it will make them to attend services more often.

Member 3.

According to the respondent, many members believe that for them to feel important in the church, they need to be visited.

Member 4.

No response was received from the respondent on this question.

Comments by the researcher: The respondents seem to be in agreement that house visitation does influence church attendance. Those in agreement believe that house visitation encourages them, makes them feel loved, cared for and important to the church.

5.4.3.5 Response to the question: Do you ever feel neglected when your church office bearers do not visit you for a long period? How do you feel neglected and how often would you like to be visited?

5.4.3.5.1 Pastor in active service:

The respondent agrees that one may feel neglected, because people believe that one visit can make a difference in one's life.

5.4.3.5.2 Elder:

The respondent states that it is a fact that people are surrounded by various challenges like divorce, poverty, rape, violence, suicide, and these challenges can be overcome by hearing someone preaching the Word of God in your house.

5.4.3.5.3 Deacon:

No response was received by the respondent on this question.

5.4.3.5.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent does not feel neglected when church office bearers do not visit for a long period

Member 2.

The respondent does not feel neglected because the elder and deacon visit regularly.

Member 3.

The respondent feels neglected because it is to show that they do not care about issues facing members. Without the support of office bearers through visitation, members feel neglected and not supported.

Member 4.

No response was received by the respondent on this question.

Comments by the researcher: The respondents who were not frequently visited by church office bearers do feel pastorally neglected. One respondent even commented that a feeling of being neglected is that lack of frequent visitation might be that the office bearers do not care about issues facing members. Without the support of office bearers through visitation, members feel neglected and not supported. From some responses, it is a fact that people are surrounded by various challenges like divorce, poverty, rape, violence, suicide and these challenges could be overcome by hearing someone preaching the Word of God in your own house.

5.4.3.6 Response to the question: As a member of the MRCC, do you think the church is serious about the issue of house visitation? Is there any room for improvement, how can the situation be improved?

5.4.3.6.1 Pastor in active service:

No response was received from the respondent on this question.

5.4.3.6.2 Elder:

The respondent thinks that the church is not doing enough on this issue, hence the decline in membership.

5.4.3.6.3 Deacon:

The respondent thinks that the church does not do house visitation as required.

5.4.3.6.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent thinks that the church does not do house visitation as required and that there is room for improvement.

Member 2.

The respondent thinks that the church does not do house visitation as required and that the church must start being serious about house visitation, especially by pastors.

Member 3.

The respondent thinks that the church does not do house visitation as required. The respondent thinks that the church must have a group of people responsible for doing house visitation. The respondent thinks that pastors, elders and deacons are busy doing other things and do not get enough time to do house visitation. Honest and trustworthy people must be tasked with house visitation as people will talk easily to them.

Member 4.

No response was received from the respondent on this question.

Comments by the researcher: It is evident from the responses that the congregants are not well informed with regard to the annual number of visitations to be expected from the pastor, elder and deacon. Therefore the congregational leadership should inform their members about the number of visits they should expect from their pastor, elders, and deacons. One respondent even thinks that the church must have a group of people responsible for doing house visitation. The respondent thinks that pastors, elders and deacons are busy doing other things and do not get enough time to do house visitation.

5.4.3.7 Response to the question: What do you think are

- Advantages of house visitation?
- Disadvantages of house visitation?

5.4.3.7.1 Pastor in active service:

No response was received from the respondent on this question.

5.4.3.7.2 Elder:

The respondent thinks that the advantages of house visitation are:

- The recruiting of new members
- Encouraging inactive members are encouraged to be active
- Keeping active members within the church leaving them no room to leave the church
- Causing members feel important.

The respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that for it to be done properly may require sound financial standing.

5.4.3.7.3 Deacon:

The respondent thinks that the advantage of house visitation is that it increases membership and inactive members are encouraged to be active. No disadvantage was mentioned by the respondent.

5.4.3.7.4 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent thinks that the advantage of house visitation is gaining more members.

The disadvantages mentioned are that some families feel that it is invasion of their

privacy and that some families may feel small because of their living conditions.

Member 2.

The respondent thinks that the advantage of house visitation is that the family visited will see the MRCC as a caring church and will thus attend services regularly. The respondent also thinks that the member will also inform neighbours about this caring church and thus membership will increase.

The respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that sometimes office bearers visiting may be people who shout and force people to contribute financially.

Member 3.

The respondent thinks that the advantage of house visitation is that office bearers will know reasons why people are not attending services or are leaving the church. The visitation can also be used to show love, give hope and to assure people that they are important.

The respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that some office bearers may do it with the aim of spreading news about the living conditions of other people and their family problems.

Member 4.

No response was received from the respondent on this question

Comments by the researcher: Respondents think that there are advantages and disadvantages. The advantages benefit the church with regard to improving attendance

and enhancing church growth. House visitation makes members to attend church services and enable them to take part in church activities and be active members. Another respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that some office bearers may do it with the aim of spreading news about the living conditions of other people and their family problems.

5.4.4 West of Drakensberg Region

Six (6) respondents took part in the research: one (1) deacon and five (5) ordinary members. All respondents indicated that they were members of the MRCC and attended church services regularly. Their responses will be analysed based on their status in the congregation: deacon and the five ordinary members.

5.4.4.1 Response to the question: Does your pastor visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.4.1.1 Deacon:

Yes, a visitation is done, but the respondent did not indication frequency of the visitation. The pastor speaks about family conditions and poverty. The pastor also offers counselling and praying for the sick, as well as reading of relevant Scriptures.

The family does benefit because it is easier to approach the pastor with family problems during these visitation.

5.4.4.1.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

No. The pastor speaks about the importance of coming to church. The pastor also gives advice with general matters like education to children in the family, a need for having a church funeral, and how to encourage church growth. The pastor speaks about the Bible and religion, and how to recruit new members.

The benefit received from these visits is advices to children and parents. The family feels loved, cared for and also visible as part of the congregation. Family members who did not attend services regularly start attending services after the pastor's visitation.

Member 2.

The respondent received no visitation from the pastor.

Member 3.

The respondent indicates that the pastor does visit three times per week. The pastor prays and reads the Scripture, and then encourages the family to attend church services regularly. The pastor also wants to hear from the family about problems that include sickness and unemployment.

The benefit is that the family receives prayers for specific and relevant problems. There is also time to discuss the issues related to their situation and they are free to do that in the privacy of their home.

Member 4.

The respondent received no visitation from the pastor.

Member 5.

The respondent indicates that the pastor does visit but does not specify frequency. The pastor encourages family members to attend church services as often as possible. The pastor also encourages them to pray all the time.

The benefit is that family members who have stopped attending church services receive encouragement to attend.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that three (3) members claim to have received visitation from the pastors and another three (3) indicated that they did not receive visits from the pastor. Out of these six (6) members, four (4) indicated that when a pastor visited them, he or she addressed issues which affected the family. The pastor would then pray for the sick, those who needed employment and also read relevant scriptures to the family. Some of the benefits included the fact that family members who had stopped attending church services would receive encouragement to do so. Issues discussed during the visitation by the pastor, included discussion of socio-economic factors which affect their families.

5.4.4.2 Response to the question: Does your elder visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.4.2.1 Deacon:

Yes, the respondent did receive a weekly visitation from the elder. The elder speaks about family conditions, collecting of money and praying for the family.

The family benefits from this visitation because they are informed of any changes at the church.

5.4.4.2.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

Yes, the respondent indicated that a weekly visitation was received from the elder. The elder speaks about the importance of offering in the church. The elder also enquires about poor attendance of church services.

The benefit received from these visits is that the family feels loved as it shows that they are cared for by their congregation. The elder also prays for the family as a whole and the family is left with hope.

Member 2.

Yes, the respondent did receive visitation from the elder, though it was once in a while. The discussion is about the family's wellbeing and the church in general.

The family benefits from the visitation because as a member, one needs to know if the church cares about her members. A visitation by elders brings a feeling of being important in the church. It is also easy to ask questions about things that the members do not understand and they find confusing in the Christian faith.

Member 3.

Yes, the respondent did receive visitation from the elder three times per week. The elder prays and reads the Scripture, and then encourages the family to attend church services regularly. The elder also wants to hear from the family about problems that include sickness and unemployment.

The benefit is that the family does benefit from this visitation, even though the benefits were not stated.

Member 4.

The respondent received no visitation from the elder.

Member 5.

The respondent indicates that the elder does rarely visit the family. The discussion is about how to keep the church functioning.

The benefit is that family does not only attend services, but get a chance to contribute towards the functioning of the church.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that the majority of respondents in this group received visitation from the elder and that families that were visited benefitted. One respondent indicated that a visitation by an elder brings a feeling of being important in the church. The importance of this visitation is that the members do not only attend services, but also get a chance to contribute towards the functioning of the church.

5.4.4.3 Response to the question: Does your deacon visit families in your congregation regularly? If yes, how often? What does s/he speak about during this visitation? Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons.

5.4.4.3.1 Deacon:

Yes, the respondent did receive a weekly visitation from the deacon. The deacon speaks about church programs and collecting church monies.

The family benefits from this visitation because they are updated with church programs and monies.

5.4.4.3.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

No, but ironically goes on to indicate what the deacon speaks about during visitation. The deacon speaks about money and offerings. The deacon also speaks about the importance of attending church services and offering in the church

The benefit received from this visitation is identification of the needy and trying to change their situation. Members can tell the deacon what bothers them and then the deacon will leave the family with a prayer.

Member 2.

Yes, the respondent did receive visitation from the deacon, though it was once in a while.

The discussion is about the prayer, Bible and church attendance.

The family benefits from the visitation because as a member, one needs to know if the church cares about her members. A visitation by deacons brings a feeling of being important in the church. It is also easy to ask questions about things that the members do not understand and they find confusing in the Christian faith.

Member 3.

Yes, the respondent did receive visitation from the deacon three times per week. The deacon prays and reads the Scripture, and then checks about the well-being of the family. There are also discussions about needs and problems of the family.

The benefit is that the family does benefit from this visitation because there is time to discuss and pray about the problems encountered.

Member 4.

The respondent received no visitation from the deacon.

Member 5.

The respondent received no visitation from the deacon.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher has identified that some respondents did receive visitation from their deacon. The benefit is that the visitation by the deacon makes it possible for the deacon to know members of his/her ward. A big concern is that it seems that deacons are not visiting members as they should or expected.

5.4.4.4 Response to the question: Do you think house visitation has any influence on church attendance? Please give reasons.

5.4.4.4.1 Deacon:

Yes, because a visitation from church office bearers makes members to see that they are loved and cared for by their church.

5.4.4.4.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent commented only on a visitation by the pastor/minister. When a minister visits, questions are asked about lack of attendance. This makes a member to attend church services regularly. During this visitation, the minister gives guidance to members, and this influences members to attend church services because they will need to be prayed for at the church.

Member 2.

Yes, visitation encourages members to attend church services. Even those who backslide will reconsider after a visitation. It encourages one-on-one discussion and contact with members. Members' problems and difficulties are discussed and sometimes a solution is found. Office bearers are exposed to the difficulties and real situations of members.

Member 3.

The respondent agrees that house visitation plays a very important role in church attendance, because many members feel blessed after minister's visitation. Some members react by not attending church services when they are not visited at home.

Member 4.

Yes, congregants feel cared for as this is the time to know them better at home and get a chance to listen to their challenges. They also get assistance to find ways to resolve their problems through simple sharing.

Member 5.

The respondent feels that house visitation has an influence on church attendance because after visitation, those who have stopped attending church services start to attend because of the pastor's visitation. The pastor asked them if they had any problems so that they could be helped to solve them.

Comments by the researcher: The majority of respondents in this group agree that house visitation does influence church attendance positively. According to them, it encourages members to attend church services regularly. Of interest is that there is a concern about lack of visitation by the pastor, rather than complaining about all three office bearers. It seems that the pastor's house visitation is the most sought after.

5.4.4.5 Response to the question: Do you ever feel neglected when your church office bearers do not visit you for a long period? How do you feel neglected and how often would you like to be visited?

5.4.4.5.1 Deacon:

The respondent agrees that one feels neglected, because sometimes a member may be having problems and unable to send an apology to the church. If the office bearers do not visit, how will they know about these problems? The respondent wishes to be visited at least twice a month.

5.4.4.5.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent feels neglected when office bearers do not visit because the respondent feels that it is their duty to pastorally take care of the congregation. The respondent wishes to be visited at least four times a month by elder/deacon and once monthly by the pastor.

Member 2.

The respondent would like to be visited regularly. If the church does not do house visitation, it means that it does not care about members. A visitation is especially important for members who stay alone.

Member 3.

The respondent feels neglected as office bearers must not only be met at church, but also at the member's home.

Member 4.

The respondent does not know as the office bearers never visited.

Member 5.

The respondent feels neglected. If the office bearers do not visit the respondent, it is thought that they are not visiting because they are busy visiting other members. The respondent wishes to be visited at least twice a year.

Comments by the researcher: The majority of the respondents feel neglected and that they feel as if they are not important to the church. These members want to be visited every now and then to feel that they were important to the church and loved and cared for by their church.

5.4.4.6 Response to the question: As a member of the MRCC, do you think the church is serious about the issue of house visitation? Is there any room for improvement, how can the situation be improved?

5.4.2.6.1 Deacon:

The respondent feels that for there to be an improvement, house visitation should be done by all church organs.

5.4.4.6.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

According to the respondent, the church is not serious about the issue of house visitation. The respondent observed that house visitation is only done by students doing practical work in congregations. Pastors are to take the lead and other office bearers will follow.

Visitation must not only be done when there is money needed, but also to bring much needed prayers and caring.

Member 2.

The respondent feels that the church is not serious about the issue of house visitation. The deacons must visit and be concerned about the poor and the sick. Pastors and elders must comfort people. Members are experiencing difficulties and need to be visited and heard from time to time.

Member 3.

The respondent says that the church is not serious about the issue of house visitation. The pastors must be work-shopped about house visitation.

Member 4.

The respondent feels that the church is not serious about the issue of house visitation. The respondent suggests that pastors should not be involved in tent making ministry for them to be dedicated to their work. That will only be achieved if they receive a living wage.

Member 5.

The respondent says that it has been reported that at some congregations, no house visitation had been done and that the church should closely monitor house visitation to ensure that it is done by office bearers.

Comments by the researcher: The researcher's observation is that the majority of members think that the church is not serious about house visitation. A suggestion that is put forward by the respondents is that organs of support should also be allowed to be

involved in house visitation. It is also suggested that regular visitation should be done, and not only when students are doing practical work or when the church needs money.

5.4.4.7 Response to the question: What do you think are

- Advantages of house visitation?
- Disadvantages of house visitation?

5.4.4.7.1 Deacon:

The respondent thinks that the advantages of house visitation are that it encourages caring of members and improves membership.

The respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that sometimes a member does not want to be visited because of some things that are not to be known to church office bearers.

5.4.4.7.2 Ordinary members:

Member 1.

The respondent thinks that the advantages of house visitation are that office bearers are able to hear what the congregants want and do not want. The pastor is also able to help those in need after hearing about their problems. Some members do not say what bothers them in public, but are able to convey the message during visitation. It is also an opportunity to pray for the family and for the pastor to convince and encourage members face-to-face.

The respondent thinks the disadvantage of house visitation is that sometimes a member does not want to be visited because of some things that are hidden from church office bearers, like violence, drinking or poor background. Members also sometimes lie by promising to attend the church service just because they are visited at home.

Member 2.

According to the respondent, the advantage of house visitation is that it helps in seeing how people are living so that the church could help the poor. Neighbours can also be attracted to the church if they see the church coming next door time and again. It shows love and care in the church. The church grows spiritually because during house visits members could be asked about things that are confusing them as Christians.

The disadvantages of house visitation is that if an office bearer visiting is not a person of good morality and a believer, the person could not answer questions from members visited. Some may use house visitation to gossip about other Christians.

Member 3.

The respondent lists as an advantage, the fact that house visitation contribute to mission work. People will come to church because the church came to their houses.

Disadvantage is that some members may not feel comfortable when visited by office bearers.

Member 4.

The advantage of house visitation, according to the respondent, is that spiritual issues are discussed and they do share social issues and relationships. Members could also be encouraged to participate in church projects.

A disadvantage is that a member may feel that the pastor wants to know more about them and then preach about their problems.

Member 5.

The respondent finds house visitation helpful because it arouses the spiritual feeling to some members and they are encouraged to attend church services. Members feel important in the church as their absence is recognised. The family feels honoured to be visited by the pastor.

Comments by the researcher: Respondents think that advantages are that house visitation helps the congregation to grow spiritually and encourages members to attend church services regularly. It also helps in attracting new members to the church. A disadvantage is that some pastors might preach about members' problems and that might be the reason why some members are trying to hide their background by not wanting to be visited by church office bearers.

Themes that emerged from this research are:

- House visitation is a recruitment tool
- It is an energizing tool
- It brings about membership stability
- It is also a motivational or revival tool
- It is a Christian faith explanation opportunity.

Fruits to be harvested as a result of house visitation are:

- Expression of love and care
- Inspiration for hope to members
- Prayerful occasion
- Provides an opportunity for discussion of members' private matters
- Revival.

The importance of house visitation in the life and work of a congregation is clearly stated in the above themes and identified fruit. In the next chapter the researcher looks at recommendations and conclusion.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

House visitation is an official visit by a pastor to the house of a member of his/her congregation (Deist 1984: 17). According to the MRCC church order, this official visitation is not only expected to be carried out by pastors only, but also by elders and deacons.

House visitation is an important pastoral care strategy aimed at effective care and shepherding of the flock to ensure its holistic well-being. This research has proved beyond any reasonable doubt that house visitation is indeed an effective way to share Christ's love with people in their unique, concrete situations. House visitation brings the church into contact with the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of the congregants. Visiting congregants' homes will always remain an important pastoral activity. These days, people are faced with serious spiritual and emotional challenges such as devil worship, domestic violence, drug abuse and so forth. The Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ (MRCC) cannot leave the congregants alone with their problems. She will have to assist them deal with these and other existential problems.

In order to be able to help resolve congregants' challenges, the MRCC needs to intensify house visitation. As this is a huge task, it cannot be left to pastors alone. Elders and deacons will have to play a bigger role in this regard. Congregants are also to be given a role to play, as this important task cannot be left to be handled by office bearers only. The congregation as a whole must learn the importance of house visits.

6.2 Recommendations: Time for a new ministry design for the MRCC

It is now relevant and proper to come up with possible solutions to the problems raised during this research. I think that the time has arrived for the MRCC to come up with a new ministry design under the sub-titles: The need for an active role of the congregants; equipping ordinary members to do house visits; minimising emphasis on formal structures; extending responsibilities from the pastor to other office bearers and congregants; no concentration on Sunday services alone; becoming a real community of believers; becoming a church of closely-knit family units and training and development.

6.2.1 The need for an active role of the congregants

The MRCC is a Reformed church and Dreyer (2010:32) had this to say about Reformed churches: "For five centuries, Reformed churches understood their nature and purpose in terms of the *notae ecclesiae* we find in the Belgic Confession. These are 1) the pure preaching of the Word, 2) the correct ministering of sacraments and 3) the application of discipline. These *notae ecclesiae* stood unchallenged for centuries but are no longer sufficient in addressing the issues churches are facing today." These *notae ecclesiae* presuppose that the church's office bearers are exclusively responsible for the whole pastoral ministry. This can indeed not be an efficient way of service provision. The

priesthood of all believers should now receive the necessary attention. There is a role to be played by congregants and it is my belief that their involvement will assist in revitalising the MRCC and bring it to its former glory.

6.2.2 Equipping ordinary members to do house visits

The MRCC has a ministry design informing pastors on what to do, but I strongly believe that there is a great need to come up with a ministry design that will promote house visitation by members and not exclusively by office bearers. Congregants must be trained to support or strengthen the pastor's efforts. House visitation must not only be seen as the sole responsibility of ministers, elders and deacons; but it must also be the responsibility of all church members. It is time for the flock to be equipped to look after one another. It is time for the MRCC to stop seeing church members as people to be ministered to, but as the primary work force of the congregation.

6.2.3 Minimising emphasis on formal structures

The MRCC is a traditional Reformed church, and as a result it tends to find solutions in optimising structures. It is commonly known that Reformed churches, through the centuries, built on the Presbyterian synodal system of church governance. This is a system of governance where there is a non-hierarchical approach, but in most cases you find that most responsibilities are centred on office bearers, rather than also involving the ground level, i.e. the congregation. This lends itself to a formal structure of official meetings, strong leadership and little scope for innovative thinking and quick adaptation to circumstances (Dreyer 2009:40). Clearly these formal structures of

official meetings do a disservice to the MRCC since ordinary members are deprived of an opportunity to get involved as the focus is on meetings and formulation of policies that are rarely successfully implemented.

6.2.4 Extending responsibilities from the pastor to other office bearers and congregants

When the MRCC gave permission to her pastors to be involved in tent-making ministry, the main reason was to allow them to earn a living wage while serving the church. The Agenda of the 8th General Church Assembly of the HKSA (*MRCC*) in 2000, painted a very sad picture concerning ministers' stipends: "The ministers are grossly underpaid and almost all of them receive remuneration which is below the poverty datum line, a disgrace to our church indeed. The remuneration that is paid to the ministers is grossly disproportionate with their training, qualifications and profession or calling" (HKSA 2000:13). It was therefore expected of those pastors who were fortunate to find employment outside the church to plough back by serving the church with more vigour. This should have included training of members to be able to perform duties that the pastor would not be able to perform because of his/her absence due to tent-making. It is unfortunate that in most cases, training of the laity was not done.

There is a strong tendency to limit pastoral care to the work of the minister and to a lesser extent the elders and deacons. The members of congregations are seldom used in ministering to the sick and the poor or leading Bible studies, etc. (Dreyer 2009:40). By

acknowledging that elders and deacons are also responsible for house visits, the minister would be doing himself or herself a big favour.

In Setswana we say: "Sedikwa ke ntšwa-pedi ga se thata", meaning that two hands are better than one. The task of house visitation is therefore so important that it should not be left in the hands of pastors, elders and deacons alone. Every member of the MRCC must be equipped to do house visitation. Visiting one another would also be beneficial to the church because all members would feel fulfilled after undertaking such an important task.

Article 9 of the MRCC Church Order clearly states: "All members are called to participate in the apostolate, spiritual nurturing of the youth, catechesis, service of mercy and other tasks ... The church institutes service groups in which members join hands in provision of spiritual, social, political, psychological and other services." This will clearly satisfy the principle of the priesthood of all the believers. This will also be in line with the scriptural message contained in Ephesians 4:11-16.

If the focus is shifted from office bearers as the only people tasked with house visitation, and shifted to all members as partners, a bigger circle of people prepared to do house visitation will be created. The MRCC will definitely benefit if all members were to participate in the apostolate, spiritual nurturing of the youth, catechesis, services of mercy and other tasks. That could be efficiently carried out by among others the house visitation as a service strategy.

6.2.5 No concentration on Sunday services alone

In most areas, if not all, the MRCC has deteriorated into a "Sunday church" only. Dreyer (2009:40) also raised this issue by indicating that the MRCC focuses on the Sunday service. According to him, this leads to the tendency of centralising all activities around a church building, primarily on Sundays. In such a way, many people who are working on Sundays are excluded from the church. It also inhibits the ability of the church to flow with the community. It is my belief that focusing on the Sunday service is tantamount to neglecting servicing members on other days through house visitation. Most people today work throughout the week, including Sundays. A church that concentrates on Sunday services only, runs the risk of not taking care of these members. It is therefore important for the MRCC to service those members who are unable to attend church services regularly. House visitation is one of the ways to ensure that this is done. In that way, house visitation in the MRCC can only be boon to the church.

6.2.6 Becoming a real community of believers

It is important to understand that the community of believers is something much more than just a few individuals loosely grouped together. In such a community we barely know each other's name, and seldom visit each other. Real community implies: shared pain and suffering, shared history, shared vision of the future, sharing whatever resources are available, praying together (Dreyer 2009:40).

What was said by Manala (1996:1) is that the church needed all role players in its mission of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples and building a morally healthy society and it

is becoming more and more relevant. It is now obvious that the church needs to organise and teach its members for the service of God and His Kingdom. If the MRCC does not succeed, she will remain a consumerist church where church members only use the church when they need it (e.g. for baptism, marriage and funerals).

The model presently used in the MRCC where church members become objects of ministry, where they are targeted for service by church office bearers only and are not given a platform to be actively involved in servicing others, creates a lazy church which does not function properly. The MRCC must be careful not to utilise house visitation in such a way that it entrenches the passivity of church members, thinking that it is only the ministers' job (which he/she is paid for) to do. The MRCC needs a new approach towards house visitation.

6.2.7 Becoming a church of closely-knit family units

The Agenda of the 7th General Church Assembly under the article: Priesthood of Believers states: "This article talks about the responsibilities of fellow Christians to one another and to God". The article goes further: "In this period where ministers are so demotivated and demoralised to lead their churches, it is becoming more important that we take a relook at this situation in our church. It is the time now (sic) that the HKSA (MRCC), specifically, provides this opportunity to the other members as well" (HKSA 1997:93). The same Agenda goes further: "Each ward be developed into a closely knit family unit, in which members are in continual interaction with each other in occasions of ward prayer meetings, Bible study sessions, during times of birthdays, bereavement and

ward group visits to the sick in homes and at hospitals" (HKSA 1997:27). The main aim of refreshing to this agenda point is to emphasise the fact that the problem has long been identified with possible solutions, but there seems to be some reluctance on the part of pastors to implement the decisions taken.

6.2.8 Training and development

Jesus Christ used ordinary laypeople to found the church. Why must the MRCC 're-invent the wheel' whilst it is already there? It is time to improve on the wheel for it to fit our context. This can be achieved by training ordinary members to be able to do house visitation and make them to see that as part of their responsibilities too.

It is important for the MRCC to start with an intensive training program for ordinary members. Matji (2005:8) rightly notes: "The single most important asset to any organisation is its human resources. The second port of call will therefore be the equipment or empowerment of the church's human resources... no one is born with the knowledge and skill for any particular job; they have to be acquired through the process of learning." Fortunately for the MRCC there is a National Training and Development Coordinator's office, and it must be functional. There is need for training to equip members concerning house visitation and the priesthood of all the believers.

6.2.9 Making use of technology

Today our lives are highly influenced by technology. Whereas in the past pastors relied on land line telephone for communication, technology has developed in a way that it is very easy to communicate. A cell-phone is a vital tool in the hands of a pastor. One is able to access short message services, email, voice and video calls as well as joining social networks through a cell-phone.

A pastor should be able to communicate without any hindrance with the flock. The church council or even a bigger group tasked with house visitation would be able to open up a chat group through one of the social networks. A chat group allows two way communications, i.e. when one sends a message or request, other members of the chat group are able to respond immediately. That could be a very useful mechanism of ensuring that where members are unable to meet physically to discuss an issue, they could easily discuss it through the chat group.

Pastors would have no excuse of lack of communication due to time constraints as communication could easily be done through a cell-phone. Another recommendation would therefore be utilisation of modern communication tools like cell-phones. A cell-phone offers the pastor an opportunity to engage with members of the congregation, regardless of the distance between them.

6.3 Conclusion

A Reformed church should always reform again (*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*). Dreyer (2010:32) wrote: "Churches in Southern Africa will need to find forms and ways of being church in the 21st century in Africa. … It will require theologians who are not afraid to pose critical questions and who are prepared to navigate uncharted and rough seas … Even more so, it will require a fundamental reformation of the church, true to the old adage that a reformed Church should always reform again".

The motto of the MRCC, according to her Church Order (2006:1) is "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!" My question, however, is: Does the MRCC invite Jesus Christ to empty church buildings? Does the MRCC invite Him whilst the church does not know how she will answer Him when He poses the question: "Where are my people?"

There is a way out, and to my mind based on the results of this research, it is the revival of a culture of house visitation in the MRCC. It is time for the MRCC to change her perception of what a church member is and should be. It is time for a new ministry design where all members and not only office bearers are active participants and not only subjects to be served by office bearers. House visitation in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ will indeed become boon rather than bane.

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APPENDICES A

RESEARCH SCHEDULE

TOPIC: HOUSE VISITATION IN THE MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST: BANE OR BOON?

INTERVIEWS WILL BE CONDUCTED WITH RETIRED PASTORS, PASTORS IN
ACTIVE SERVICE, ELDERS, DEACONS AND CHURCH MEMBERS OF
BETWEEN 25 AND 75 YEARS OF AGE IN THE EBENEZER CIRCUIT (PRETORIA
AND HAMMANSKRAAL AREA) AND SHALOM CIRCUIT (DURBAN AREA).

A QUALITATIVE DESIGN

You are humbly requested to answer the following questions. Please give honest answers and answer all the questions unless indicated otherwise.

QUESTION 1

Are you a member of the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ? Yes / No

QUESTION 2

Are you from East of Drakensberg or West of Drakensberg? East / West

QUESTION 3

Are you a minister, elder or deacon or ordinary member?			
Retired pastor Pastor in active service Elder Deacon Ordinary member			
QUESTION 4 Are you attending church services regularly? Yes / No			
QUESTION 5			
5.1 Does your pastor visit families in your congregation regularly? Yes No			
5.2 If yes, how often?			
5.3 What does s/he speak about during this visitation?			
5.4 Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons for			
your answer.			

QUE	ESTION 6
6.1	Does your elder visit families in your congregation regularly? Yes No
6.2	If yes, how often?
6.3	What does s/he speak about during this visitation?
•••••	
•••••	
•••••	
6.4	Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons for
your	answer.

QUE	STION 7
7.1	Does your deacon visit families in your congregation regularly? Yes No
7.2	If yes, how often?
7.3	What does s/he speak about during this visitation?
7.4	Do you or does your family benefit from this visitation? Please give reasons for
your a	answer.

QUESTION 8
Do you think house visitation has any influence on church attendance? Please give
bo you think house visitation has any infractice on charch attendance: I lease give
reasons for your answer.

QUESTION 9

Do you ever feel neglected when your church office bearers do not visit you for a long		
period? How do you feel neglected and how often would you like to be visited?		

QUESTION 10

As a member of the MRCC, do you think the church is serious about the issue of house visitation? Is there any room for improvement, how can the situation be improved?

QUEST	TION 11	
11.1	What do you think are advantages of house	visitation?

11.2	What do you think are disadvantages of house visitation?
•••••	

APPENDIX B

Rev JM Motloba

PO Box 12162 THE TRAMSHED 0126

Cell: 072 519 2677 E-mail: <u>mrcc@nhk.co.za</u>

13 July 2012

Dear research participant

I am presently busy researching about the relationship between the decline in membership in the MRCC and house visitations. My research topic is: **House visitations** in the Maranatha Reformed Church of Christ: bane or boon?

The aims of this research are:

- To *determine* if pastors and elders of the MRCC are doing house visitation as they are expected to do.
- To *establish* the reasons why pastors and elders are not doing house visitation as they are expected to do.
- To *highlight* the importance of house visitation to congregational health and wellbeing in the MRCC.
- To *establish* methods that can help ensure that house visitation as an important task receives appropriate attention notwithstanding impediments. This involves *proposing* a ministry design that will promote house visitation albeit by members and not exclusively by office bearers.

May you kindly assist by completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to me as soon as possible?

Thanking you in advance Yours faithfully	
JM Motloba (Rev) (Researcher)	

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

CONFIDENTIAL

HOUSE VISITATIONS IN THE MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST: BANE OR BOON?

Joseph Modisaotsile Motloba

 I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw consent at any time, without giving a reason, without my legal rights being affected. I understand that data collected may be looked at by responsible representatives from UNISA for the purpose of monitoring and ensuring that the study is being conducted properly. I give permission for these individuals to have access to relevant information. 				
4. I understand that I will not benefit financially in this study				
Name of participant (Print)	Signature of participant	———— Date		
Name of Researcher (Print)	Signature of researcher	———— Date		