

HEARING ALL THE DRUMS:

TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION

by

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Abstract

HEARING ALL THE DRUMS: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION is about increasing the participation of women in positions of both leadership and church ministry praxis within the Seventh Day Adventist church in South Africa. Women have been excluded in the office of elder, and have been generally excluded from preaching during the worship hour.

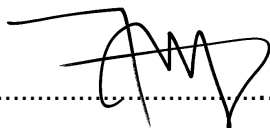
The research process followed a participatory way of doing research, while using theories on social construction and post-modernist epistemological approach. The theologies that inform this work are contextual in nature and include African and Feminist theologies. In the pursuit for change, however, care is maintained to use inclusive practices that attempt to avoid polarising the congregation and their concomitant theologies.

KEY TERMS

Inclusiveness
Social Construction
Pastoral care
Evangelical theology
Contextual theology
Feminist theology
Participatory ethic
African theology
Postmodernism
Seventh-day Adventist Church

DECLARATION

I declare that HEARING ALL THE DRUMS: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and strokes, positioned above a horizontal dotted line.

Signature

March 15, 2007

Date

Acknowledgements

My appreciation goes to Nnditsheni, my wife for support and encouragement over the long time that it took to complete this work. Akani, Mbhoni and Jay Jay, my children, for their understanding when quite often I was so near and yet so far while seeking to finish the task. Bridgid Hess, my ITD supervisor, for the time given to ascertain that I completed the work when sometimes it felt undoable. I also treasure the participation of my consultants and conversation partners during the research: Papi, Kay, Kuki, Themba, and Vusi.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	.....	7
	TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION.....	7
1.1	INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH.....	7
1.2	THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	10
1.3	MY WISHES, HOPES AND CONCERN.....	11
1.4	THEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE: FEMINIST AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY; AND A PARTICIPATORY ETHIC.....	11
1.5	THEORIES INFORMING THIS RESEARCH: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND KNOWLEDGE.....	13
1.6.	ISSUES ANTICIPATED IN THE PROCESS.....	15
1.6.1	Power.....	15
1.6.2	Gender.....	16
1.7	HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED.....	17
1.7.1	The participants: Dube group.....	17
1.7.2	Including church structures towards finding multiple voices.....	21
1.7.3	Hearing the voice of patriarchy: Challenging my own assumptions.....	21
1.8	RESEARCH METHOD.....	22
1.9.	A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS AHEAD.....	23
Chapter 2	.....	24
	Theoretical basis guiding this research.....	24
2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	24
2.2	A POWER DYNAMIC IN BRINGING JUSTICE AND MORE EQUALITY OF VOICE.....	24
2.3	SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION.....	26
2.3.1	Social construction, knowledge, postmodernism and the church.....	26
2.3.2	Social construction and language.....	28
2.4	CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY.....	30
2.5	FEMINIST THEOLOGY.....	33
2.6	EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY.....	35
2.7	AFRICAN AND BLACK THEOLOGIES.....	38
2.8	PATRIARCHY.....	40
2.9	PASTORAL CARE.....	42
Chapter 3	.....	45
	Hearing some voices in Dube.....	45
3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	45
3.2	ABOUT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THIS RESEARCH IS TAKING PLACE.....	46
3.4	KUKI: A WOMAN'S VOICE.....	47
3.6	THE THREE MEN (PAPI, VUSI AND THEMBA).....	61
3.6.1	God's order.....	63
3.6.2.	Biblical principles.....	64
3.6.3	Sociological factors.....	64

3.6.4	On leadership.....	66
3.6.5	Currently at Dube:	66
3.7	DUBE TASK-TEAM.....	69
3.7.1	The Task-Team deliberations : The Mandate.....	70
3.7.2	Preliminary observations.....	71
3.7.3	Women Preachers.....	73
3.7.4	Women Elders.....	74
3.7.5	Adventists and Women Ordination	74
3.7.6	On Women Preachers	75
3.7.7	On Women Elders	75
3.8	LOOKING FORWARD	77
Chapter 4	.....	78
Reflecting on the research journey	.....	78
4.1	IN THE BEGINNING WAS... ..	78
2.2	THE JOURNEY TO NORTH	79
4.3	MY CONVERSATION WITH KUKI: SOME DRUMS' SOUNDS ARE SMOTHERED: A SENSE OF BEING SILENCED.....	80
4.5	ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP	85
4.8	THE THREE MEN AND SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION	92
4.9	THE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH: CONVERSATIONS WITH NDHUNA MAGEZA AND KHENSANI; CULTURE AND PARADIGM SHIFTS.....	93
4.11	THE TASK-TEAM AND THE DUBE CHURCH.....	96
Chapter 5	.....	99
Looking at now and beyond	.....	99
5.1	LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE	99
5.2	POSSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD	100
5.3	INCONSISTENCIES IN THE PRACTICES IN THE CHURCH	102
5.4	SEARCHING FOR POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE	104
5.5	RECOGNISING AND CELEBRATING WHAT IS IN THE BAG.	106
Conclusion	.....	107
Sources Consulted	.....	110
Appendix A	.....	117
	MINUTES OF THE PRESIDENTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE SAU BOARDROOM OF THE NORTH BUILDING ON 26 NOVEMBER 1992 AT 08H30 117	
Appendix B	.....	118
	(AN INFORMATION LETTER TO AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER IN THE DUBE SDA)	118
Appendix C	.....	120
	SIGN CONSENT FORMS	120

Chapter 1

HEARING ALL THE DRUMS: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE CONGREGATION

1.1 Introduction: Background of the research

I am a minister in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The beginning of the nineties saw a big surge in the debates regarding the role of women in the ministries in our church. In 1990, this subject was an agenda item in the church's quinquennial business sessions (world-wide constituency meetings) as well as its annual world councils. Sahlin (1995) records that in 1995, in its 56th business session the world church in Utrecht, put forward the motion to ordain woman ministers into the ministry. That motion was defeated by 69% that voted against, whereas in 1990 70% voted against gender-inclusive ordination of the church clergy. Initial formal discussions on the subject started in 1881, then 1968, 1971 and 1984. In 1990, the church voted to "permit women to serve as Commissioned Ministers". "Commissioned Ministers" is not equivalent to "Ordained Ministers" as Commissioned Ministers do not get ordained.

There have been intense debates on the role of women in the ministries in general but also specific issues surrounding their ordination in particular. It is my opinion that the question of ordination is one of the good indicators of the extent of the church's willingness to include women in participating in church-life. With this in the background, I was interested to research this topic. The subject of this research is of interest to me because in the several congregations under my supervision (fifty-four and fourteen that I pastor directly) I often experience the effects of patriarchy. Although each of these congregations is different in many ways, I have noticed familiar themes concerning patriarchal discourses. By patriarchal discourses I am referring to how women are marginalized within these congregations in the ways in which they participate in church business. There appears to be a variance however from congregation to congregation. In a few of the congregations, there are

apparently very little deliberate limitations; women seem to have the platform to participate as they wish. In the majority of the congregations, however, there seem to be structural limitations to participation by women. In a few congregations, one would find what I would call an extreme positioning against any meaningful participation by women in the essential matters of the church. What I find particularly interesting is that scripture is used and cited to give credence to the congregation's position concerning when women can and cannot speak. Ackermann (1998: 353) quotes Fiorenza on this who says: "...the Bible is the source for women's religious power as well as for their religious oppression throughout the history of Christianity to the present". It becomes necessary for me as a pastor/preacher who uses the Bible as a tool to do my work, to be constantly vigilant regarding the meanings one attaches to passages and the application of interpretations to the life of the church

In my work as a pastor, I often have to see married couples who come to consult with me for difficulties in their relationships. Lately, I am also kept busy with premarital counselling as engaged young people prepare for marriage. The issues that are dominant in the counselling sessions often seem to be influenced by what appears to be related to the patriarchal discourses that are prevalent in our society. Here, by patriarchal discourses I mean the privileges men have to the disadvantage of women. These discourses are not always obvious; they work more in the fabric of our belief systems and in the veins of society. In this way, often without realizing it, the church has bought into them. Neuger and Poling (1997: 25) quote Chopp this way: "Patriarchy is revealed not simply as a social arrangement nor as individual acts of cruelty toward women on the part of men but rather as a deep spiritual ordering that invades and spreads across the social order – through the individual identity, to social practices, to lines of authority in institutions, to cultural images and representations".

It is my view that those who are in power are the ones who benefit from these discourses. My concern is that we have taken the discourses for granted and the disadvantaged might never be heard if these discourses are not challenged. It would seem that in my church it is taken for granted that men only are to be appointed to positions of power, women are generally excluded from those positions. Women are

excluded from ordination into any office in many local congregations, although the Southern Africa Church of the Seventh-day Adventists adopted a World Church decision that allows for women's ordination into eldership in 1993. Ordination goes with power; church officers may only perform certain functions and preside over certain services if they have been ordained. Therefore, in the congregations that resist women ordination, women are automatically excluded from playing those roles. Examples in our church would include presiding over the Holy Communion, disciplinary committees, conducting baptisms, children-dedication services, or chairing a board meeting. In some congregations, there seem to be some unwritten policies that forbid women from leading worship services (preaching) or even just standing in front of the congregation to address the church or say prayers during the worship service. Certain leadership positions in the church seem to be reserved for men.

Those who hold more powerful positions will also have their views more privileged when it comes to decision making for the church. The less powerful people would have their knowledges subjugated and they are thus less influential in decision making (Foucault 1980:82). The outcome of this is that women play a less influential role on issues that affect them. The primary merit or demerit in deciding who can be considered for a position is gender – women cannot be considered for position of senior minister because such a position requires that the incumbent be ordained, and currently women in the church may not be ordained.

I have sought to position myself to find a platform for the excluded voices to be heard, attempting to find a way to do my work as a minister in the church in an ethical way, amidst the many voices present in the church. In doing so, I sought active participation by women and men. My reason for including men is because I believe that the process need not end in the silencing of men's voices. It would be necessary for the process not to create an impression among men that if women get their voices it would be at their expense. I have not limited myself to the question of ordination of women into the clergy, but focused more on the silenced voices of women in local church-ministries and activities.

1.2 The research question

In the light of the above thoughts regarding exclusive practices in my church, I am concerned. I have become aware of the attempts of other voices (of women) that are begging to be heard in some of these congregations, voices that are attempting to break their silencing. I find it increasingly difficult to be able to continue as if all is well when I am aware that there are voices that are more privileged in the church than others are. The dilemma for me has been that while I wished to do something about the situation, I was concerned that whatever is done, the process and the approach in challenging the abuses of patriarchal power should not compromise the stability in the congregation. I recognise too that in the African settings that I have been exposed to, patriarchal structures seem to provide some stability in society (albeit problematic as well). Challenging patriarchal practices could possibly result in destabilising the system. I wanted to find a way to do my pastoral work in a way that is ethical while working in a church with multiple voices. In pursuing this research I have chosen the Dube Central church as a place to learn from and learn with. The question guiding this research was:

What role might I, as a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, play in challenging the abuse of power within the discourse of patriarchy that is inclusive of the multiple voices that seem to be present in the Dube Central congregation? How can I play such a role while avoiding polarization of members in the church?

Patriarchy has been playing a big role both in the church and in our society. What good and/or harm has been experienced from patriarchy in the church, and also what modification or changes would participating women and men suggest? It has not been my intention to do away with patriarchy, but only to challenge what I perceive to be abuses of its power. How do I challenge oppressive practices within the discourses of patriarchy in a way that is inclusive of the multiple voices of men and women? And doing this without polarizing the church.

1.3 My wishes, hopes and concern

By paying closer attention to the gender issues in the church I sought to get a clearer understanding of the voices that are present within the church that are different and sometimes contradictory to each other. There will always be a certain amount of contradiction in voices as language is so unstable depending on the supplements or meanings we attach to words and actions. I was interested in working for change in the way I position myself to do ministry and pastoral work within the church community and by doing that hoped to contribute towards change in the way the church cares for its own members. It was my wish and hope that my journey with the participants in the research work would contribute towards the reversal of the apparent marginalization of women, and the creation of a congregation that is more inclusive.

Of concern to me, during the research, was the possibility of the process resulting in the polarisation of the congregations that were participating. The Seventh-day Adventist church embraces to a large extent a Confessional/Evangelical Theology (reference in more detail will be made on this theology later in chapter two) and it prides itself in being a Bible-based church. Any challenging of the traditional interpretation of the problem scriptures could be seen as a departure from Bible-doctrine. I needed to strive to ascertain that the church remains stable in the process. I needed to find a way to raise questions on the Confessional/Evangelical interpretations of problem scriptures on the subject under consideration, and to do this without causing distability in the church.

1.4 Theological Influence: Feminist and contextual theology; and a participatory ethic

For the purpose of this research, I was heavily influenced by contextual theology in general and feminist theology (which is contextual in nature) in particular and guided by a participatory ethic.

By attempting to pursue the possibility of a more just congregation as referred to above, this would be in keeping with the ideals of feminism: "...one of the major aims (of feminist theology) is not to 'feminize' the world, but to make it more human and hence more just" (Keane 1998:122). The views of feminist theology make it possible to challenge theological interpretations of the scriptures that are used to perpetuate the marginalisation of women in the church, and perhaps in society at large by religious males. Because of the way patriarchy has entrenched itself in the life of the church, and that scriptures have been used to justify the practice, it was necessary, to bring about the desired changes within the church and congregational systems, to challenge the scriptural interpretations by going back to the scriptures to search for alternative (and more life-giving) meanings of the same scriptures. This needed to be done, without attempting to feminise the church, but simply to make it more just a community (Keane 1998: 122). Keane goes on to say: "The task of feminist theologians today, therefore, is to criticise abuses in the church which seriously affect them" (122-123). Kotzé and Kotzé (2001: 5-6) further argue that the "...commitment to a just society necessitates redressing the position of women and children and their marginalisation by patriarchal cultures in most religious traditions".

Feminist theology exposes the harmful effects of a hierarchical model in religions, while enhancing an egalitarian model by using certain strategies. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:87) sites strategies like researching women's history and contributions; reflecting on theology in the context of women's lives, giving voices to the voiceless; introducing new values; dismantling sexist command structures of churches and questioning assumptions on the role of women held by societies and churches (religions) while discovering how the old distancing mechanism used by churches harmed women. They suggest that it can also be done by uncovering prejudice and acting on new insights in the creation of liturgies, rituals in training and research to promote transformation of church culture".

I remained aware that this was likely to be a long uphill journey. However, any one step towards the desired direction was worthwhile for me. I wish to align myself with the view that God has chosen to compassionately side with the oppressed people. By

just looking at the social class into which Christ was born, it would appear that God was taking sides – taking the side of the disadvantaged. Maimela (1998:118) refers to a “...thoroughly biased God who was forever taking the side of the oppressed, of the weak, of the exploited, of the hungry, homeless and of the scum of society”. As a gospel worker, I would consider it a privilege and an honour to actively seek relief for the oppressed, like God would seem to be doing throughout history. I see God as not taking a position against the privileged people, but definitely taking a position against injustices. I want to try to do that. Chapter two includes a more detailed discussion of the theologies that influenced this research.

In going about doing this project, I was further guided by what Kotzé (2002: 18) has referred to as participatory ethics. “What I mean is ethics located *in* discourse and praxis *with* the disempowered and the marginalised – those who seldom benefit from the ethics of discourses created and entertained by the powerful or the knowledgeable. *Participation by all is a primary commitment if in any way we aspire to be being ethical*” (emphasis his)

1.5 Theories informing this research: Social Constructionism and knowledge

This research journey was informed by certain beliefs which include an understanding that we make sense of our world not in any objective way but through social constructions. One of my main aims was to deconstruct the discourses that influence the status quo. I use the concept of “deconstruction” in line with Morgan’s usage (2000: 45) where she refers to it as “‘taking apart’ (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which a person lives that are assisting the problem and the problem story”. I aimed to help expose alternative views on the way of doing church where all voices can be heard.

As alluded to above, the philosophical framework of this research is embedded in and influenced by ideas consistent with social constructionism. When it comes to knowing and knowledge, social constructionism challenges one to wonder about knowledge

itself. Empiricism would put emphasis on '...knowledge as an internal representation of the state of nature ...attempt(s) to establish scientific knowledge through the process of empirical verification and falsification' (Gergen 1985:271). Whereas the era of modernism would have postulated that knowledge can be acquired by objectively observing objects, that we can make these observation without bias, and get to know the truth of the reality we are observing (Burr 1995:3), social constructionism would challenge this very notion of going about knowing. It rejects the notion that our knowledge is a reflection or even a map of reality out there. It views knowledge as an 'artefact of communal interchange' (Gergen 1985:266).

Draper (2001: 150) says: "Words do not mean in and of themselves. They mean in relation to other words and to the guesses (usually well-founded) we make about how they relate to each other and we take to be happening. We can only understand what is meant in a speech or writing when we know what is going on socially. There is no abstract meaning". Social constructionism asserts that reality and knowledge are not discovered but a product of our interpretive construction (Anderson 1997:23) as we interact with each other. It thus worries itself with a '...communal basis of knowledge, process of interpretation, and concerns with the evaluational underpinnings of scientific accounts...' (Gergen 1985:272). It 'disclaims a tangible, external reality that can be known or described. It disputes the tradition that knowledge is representative and reflects the true and real world, and it asserts that external objective reality cannot be known' (Anderson 1997:23). It thus becomes imperative for us to change even our very framework of understanding, and understanding itself, of social and psychological life (Burr 1995:17).

With this background in mind, the research sought to question the basis of the dogma and cultural positions that I think underlies the marginalization of women in the church. In starting with the selected participants in the church, I hoped for an opportunity to present itself (or we seek for it) to finally let the whole congregation be taken through the process at a later stage. There is another point in social constructionism that was useful in the approach to this research. This is about the role of language in the formulation of meanings and in the sharing and

communication of experience and knowledge. For the purpose of this chapter and until in the following chapters, it should suffice to mention that the usage of language for communication purposes, and as a vehicle to transport meaning, has also resulted in restriction of understanding and the creation/sustaining of oppressive and marginalising practices.

1.6. Issues anticipated in the process

1.6.1 Power

I entered this research with my office as pastor. This office represents among others, an institution of theological knowledge, and this would wield a lot of power within the church with regards to theological matters. Pastors are viewed as authorities on scriptural matters and on church politics/governance. I suppose in one sense, this power is accorded this office because of the view that pastors know more than church members/laity may ever know in both scriptures and church governance (I do think also the view of ministers as "men of God; God's servants, Reverends, Father, Baba Mfundisi (Father-Teacher) and have a special connection with God that laity is not privileged to, is partly responsible for this power). Of interest to me is the connection between knowledge and power. Baba-Mfundisi, suggest a hierarchical relationship with knowledge issues implied. There is a relationship between knowledge and power (Kotzé 2002:6). The inherent power also serves to privilege my "truth" over ideas of other church members. The privileged truth enjoys that privilege at the expense of other knowledges/possibilities/realities that become subjugated, that of those in the lower rung of the power relations. I am using the idea of subjugation more in the light in which Foucault (1980:82) did: "...knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity". Put differently, Foucault maintained that "the might of 'might makes right' may not be all that different from the power in 'knowledge is power'. In the one case physical force, in the other mental force, is exerted by a powerful minority who are thus able to impose their idea of the right, or the true, on the majority" (Fillingham 1993: 6).

I have indicated that I am aware that there are power issues at play as I interact with participants (and do my work in the church). It would not be correct to conclude that power resides only in me. It would be truer to think of me as entering into a power relation or a power dynamic. The participants in the research work and the members of the Dube congregation can at anytime relate to 'my' power in a form of resistance. Resistance (or the possibility thereof) is always co-present with power (and an expression of power) (House 1994: 106, 108-109). The effects of the power with which I enter the interaction with the people are always limited by the leeway given by the participants. The possible outcome of this could be that we could co-produce the end-product of the process.

Continuing on the subject of the power-dynamic, the impact of this power may manifest itself in different ways during the research process. It might seek to subjugate other knowledges that may be present with the participants. Such knowledges may be unduly sidelined, and could be suppressed as people seek to tell me what I might be seen to be wanting to hear. This would render the research exercise limited in value. I do not see how I can divorce myself from this power relationship, but I do commit myself to striving to remain wary of the effects of this in my own position that power affords me. I need to maximise my own transparency and accountability to the people I work with. As much as I want to challenge the taken for granted "truth" I expect to come across, I must endeavour to avail myself to similar challenges from the participants of my own prejudice in what I expect to find. To guide the process, I had to constantly apply Kotzé's (2002:8) pertinent questions: *"Whose knowledges are these? For whose purpose? To whose benefit are these knowledges? Who is silenced or marginalised by these knowledges? Who suffers as a result of these knowledges?"*

1.6.2 Gender

I also entered this research with an inherent handicap because I am a man. I was raising issues that primarily affect women and I could ask: What could I know or

understand about these issues that affect women and how women may be experiencing them, seeing I am not a woman. However, I feel that as a man I have a role to speak with them, particularly as a man with authority in the church where my role is respected. But also in another way I am at an advantage as I might not be such a threat to men and already have a platform of accepted authority. In this way I sought to use my power to promote all of our voices. It was my desire to negotiate with women and have them beside me as we together negotiate for a voice for them. I'd rather co-travel the journey with them, as opposed to attempting to bring solutions to them and be their liberator. And in this way it moves beyond a theology of liberation towards a participatory theology. It will be important that they inform me of their preferred destination, and that the means to get there be thoroughly negotiated. Men would be affected by any change that this project might result in. It is important that they be part of the people that help in finding a way that I can in an ethical way provide a just ministry to all in the church that has and cherish multiple voices. I entered this research tightly clinging to the ideas of Nyambura Njoroge, (2001:80) a feminist theologian who says: "A spirituality of resistance and transformation demands that we share the good news of a possibility of new life in the presence of death here and now. It is a spirituality that invokes a passion that believes positive change is possible".

1.7 How the research was conducted

1.7.1 The participants: Dube group

My primary focus was the Dube Central congregation. My choice of Dube was influenced by, first, their demographics. It has rich and poor, graduates and people with no formal education, many young people and several elderly people. It has people involved in secular politics as well. I have experienced the members as generally willing to engage with issues. Secondly, I have previously engaged the congregation in a subject related to this project (exploring the stories of women abuse in the scriptures). Thirdly, it is here also where I heard the attempts of women to seek for a platform to be heard. The Dube church has had discussions as to

whether women could be elected as church elders and whether they could preach during the worship service. This started before I took the position of the pastor in the Dube church. This matter was not settled conclusively. It was during some of these discussions that it had become clear among the members that the matter is a sensitive one. It was very important to me that as we venture into the subject, care be taken that the church does not get polarized as a result of how the process takes place. I did want to work towards the giving of voice to those who have up to now been marginalised, but that should not happen at the expense of others being left out in the cold. I had been aware that it would not be an easy task. I needed to know how I could do my work in the midst of these voices. I believed that there would be a mutual benefit between me and the congregation if we continued to work together on these issues. "Co-searching", or participatory research, is important to me as it seeks to remain committed to ethical ways of researching (Kotzé: 2002:25, 26).

I looked for individuals who I thought have strong feelings about these issues to request for their participation. I also, with the help of elders of the church, made public my interest on the subject and invited interested people to indicate so. I initially planned to meet with the six people as individuals first, and then meet the individuals twice each. This, however, changed as the research progressed because of some developments within the congregation regarding women participation. I eventually met five people. I had two meetings with a group of three men (they insisted on coming together the three of them). I also had meetings with two women individually, Kay and Kuki (more is said to the reason for the inclusion of these two in chapter three). The first meeting with the three men and the two women included the explanation of the process and for them to ask questions relating to the topic. During this time I asked the participants to sign a document agreeing to participate in this research. During my conversations with the three men, some of their comments made me feel the need to seek to meet with a traditional community leader (Ndhuna) and a woman officer at the chief's office in the ka-N'wamitwa community. These were to become my consultants on the process and their voices are heard in chapter four. Their experiences and participation in community affairs would serve to check our (me and the Three Men) assumptions and what we have come to regard as facts. It

would be of interest to learn also of any developments in society with regards to women participation, with possible lessons to be learned by the church. If there is progress in society, there could be some hope that some day the church might catch up.

In the meantime, as mentioned above, there were some developments that occurred in the Dube church that altered my approach to the process. During the process of electing church office bearers, the nominating-committee decided to consider electing two women to serve as church elders. These elders would serve together with three male elders. When they consulted with me on the idea, I suggested that before they could name the women, they should first seek clearance for the idea from the church. I suggested this to avoid shocking and overwhelming the church with the move. After a vigorous and emotive debate, the church decided that instead of proceeding with the election of women elders, a committee of seven members be appointed to investigate the idea of women elders. This committee was to study the world church's position on this, and also further study the church's position on the matter of women preaching during worship. The later was an outstanding issue with the church; the church had decided in principle on this approach five years earlier, I was informed. No concrete action had been taken so far.

I decided to approach this committee to ask for permission to use the process they were engaging in for the purpose of this research. Permission was granted. The Task-Team, as it was named, met for consultation on the approach to be used. It agreed that members would research from the world church web-site and other official documents on the church's position on the two issues and report back. The findings will be summarised for the Dube congregation to consider and perhaps take a decision on the subjects. Two members of the Task-Team coincidentally, are individuals that I was already involved with in the research. At the time of their appointment into the Task-Team by the church, I had already had two conversations with one and one conversation with the other.

The summaries of the Task-Team were presented to the church board for the board's reflection. In this instance, the church board served as a 'reflecting team'. The summaries had been agreed upon with the individuals and were submitted in writing to the board. Reflections on the summaries started from these notes and proceeded to include verbal sharing of ideas. There is a practice adopted in narrative therapy, where our conversations take on a performative stance. It is what Andersen (1991: 39) calls a reflecting team. The importance of the reflecting team is that it "offers the possibility for those who consult us, as they listen to the team, to ask themselves new questions, thereby drawing new distinctions" (Andersen 1991: 39). The importance of the reflecting team is that it "offers the possibility for those who consult us, as they listen to the team, to ask themselves new questions, thereby drawing new distinctions" (Andersen 1991: 39).

I used a voice recorder during the conversations. This was for the purpose of the person in conversation to be able to take this recording away, listen to it and to return the following week with their own rendering of what they consider important in the conversation. This challenges methodologies where the researcher privileges their own interpretation over those with whom they are working. This contributes in maximising their voices in making decisions regarding what of their input is important and what should be included in the research. This would be very participatory and in line with hearing the voices. This form of research is in line with a participatory action research methodology. This approach would begin "with a general idea that some kind of improvement or change is desirable. In deciding just where to begin in making the improvements, a group identifies an area where members perceive a cluster of problems of mutual concern and consequence. The group decides to work together on a thematic concern" (McTaggart 1997:27). By embracing this approach, and remaining authentic, it would mean "sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practiced, and brought to bear on the life-world. It means ownership, that is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice" (McTaggart 1997:28).

1.7.2 Including church structures towards finding multiple voices

For the past twenty one years that I have pastored various congregations, I have observed that church boards tends to wield a lot of influence on the life of the church and how church is done. In working within the Dube congregation I needed the church board's permission to work with the church members. It was also necessary to report to it all the possible critical developments during the research, including the experiences and findings. I suppose that the board needs to experience the transparency of the processes so that we try to minimise the possibility of it feeling alienated.

I involved persons from the various sectors of the Dube church, those in and outside the Dube church board. By sectors I mean people from different backgrounds like jobs, age and academic. The guiding rule here is that I did it by invitation. I was aware that there are women and men who position themselves against the marginalisation (and those who seem to accept this sidelining). I wanted to find out more about their resistance and how they do it in the face of traditional beliefs and patriarchy. I did this by listening to their stories and views during the interviews and participating together with them as we get their voices to be heard in leading structures of the church.

1.7.3 Hearing the voice of patriarchy: Challenging my own assumptions

A hermeneutic of suspicion is an idea developed within a contextual framework of theology, where we reflexively challenge our own assumptions while challenging those ideas that may be cherished by society. This is in line with Cochrane et al's (1991: 22) ideas about the hermeneutics of suspicion. "If we have any critical discernment, we no longer simply accept as true that which we have received on authority as having been handed down to us, even if this happens to be an interpretation of scripture" (ibid). One reason for this, Cochrane argues further, is that "(t)raditions have a habit of distorting the original event or message, or overlaying it

with accretions which may fundamentally change their meaning (ibid.). It is because of this that I have to put even my assumptions concerning patriarchy under check. To do this I talked with individuals from Dube who hold views that I would perceive as patriarchal. I needed to shed light in their own words on how they understand the practices to be necessary in the doing of church life in Dube.

I expected to learn directly from all the participants what they saw as the "real" issues, and learn from the process as well. It was important for me to learn from the research process and from my participants as I will need those lessons to position myself for a more meaningful, effective and informed way of doing pastoral work both in the particular congregation (Dube Central Seventh-day Adventist church) and the other congregations in my care. I might also have an opportunity to share the learnt wisdoms with colleagues, thereby contributing to change at a bigger scale, though indirectly.

1.8 Research Method

I have given preference to a participatory action research. By participatory I mean that I undertook to remain conscious of the power/advantage relations between myself as a researcher and the participants and to work at finding ways to negotiate possible change towards a more mutually (between the men of Dube, including myself, and the women) desired way of doing church life in Dube, a way that could be more inclusive. It is by this negotiation and working together for possible change, and the acknowledgement and consciousness of the power issues as alluded to above, that we could name this "participatory action research" (McTaggart 1997: 1, 2). Participatory action research has moveable targets and is not predictable in its methodology, I had to let go of control over process. In other words I began with an idea but were guided by the people of Dube that I was engaged with. This changed the process and brought in a richness of process that might otherwise have been excluded in a more structured methodology. An example of this is the decision of the nominating committee to attempt to include women as elders during the annual election of church leaders. Although I suspect that the presence of individuals in the

nominating committee that I had worked with during the research interviews influenced this decision having gained the confidence from knowing that their pastor stood for inclusive practices, I could not have known from the beginning of the process that I will end up working with a Task-Team appointed by the church in its formal business-meeting to look into the matter of including women as elders and preachers in the church

Finally, information sheets concerning the details of the purpose of the research work, the rights of the participants, the confidentiality clause and other information were prepared and given to all participants for their records and mine. These were read, discussed and signed by all participants.

1.9. A brief outline of the chapters ahead

The chapters that will form the rest of the work will be as follows:

The next chapter, Chapter 2, will seek to cover the subject of practical theology (contextual theology) relating it with ideas in social construction and gender issues. Chapter 3 forms the heart of the research where we document our work together with the participants. Chapter 4 comments on this and weaves our voices into the theory of the text. Chapter 5 talks about a possible way forward and how our action together might lead to further action within the church structures.

Chapter 2

Theoretical basis guiding this research

2.1 Introduction

As already introduced briefly in chapter one, this chapter will discuss the theoretical foundation in a more detailed way that guided the research process. In doing so, epistemological theories of social construction, together with selected relevant theologies will be discussed. Finally, a brief look at the subject of pastoral care will be included.

This work is an attempt to move towards a more just and inclusive congregation in my pastoral work area, to bring about a congregational practice that allows for more equal voices between the women and men who are members in the church. However, more importantly, the main goal of the project will only be realised when I as a pastor in the Dube church shall have become more aware of the voices that are there in Dube seeking to be heard concerning the role of women in the church. Whatever the outcomes of the research process I remain with a felt-duty, as a church pastor, to find a way to pastor in an ethical and just way in the presence of multiple voices. How I use and relate to the power inherent in my office as a pastor, both in my doing of my work and during the process of this research will determine largely if my ethical concerns are going to make a difference (I comment further on this below). I need to find a position that I can take within the opportunities that exist to participate in a meaningful and life-giving way in the dialogues of the church on the issues of the marginalised voices and the concerns of the church members regarding the doing of church.

2.2 A power dynamic in bringing justice and more equality of voice

In chapter one I made a brief reference to the power-dynamic at play during the research process and during the execution of my pastoral work at Dube. In pursuit for

justice in my pastoral work, I am aware of and subscribe to the Foucauldian idea that there will always be power involved in my relationship with my congregants (Foucault 1980: 141). This power relationship is fuelled by the assumption of the office of the pastor as the custodian of theological knowledge. Within this power relationship, it is expected that there will also be resistance. For me, it suffices if I can remain aware of the presence of power in my practice, and remain largely conscious of its effects on me and those around me. I need to hold myself accountable for the effects of power in my pastoral care and practice (Kotzé 2002: 8). This is what I am talking about in comments on ethical considerations in doing my work above. Ideas about pastoral care are further discussed at the end section of this chapter.

As I mentioned in chapter one, within the church where I do my pastoral work, Scriptures play a powerful (authoritative) and central role in the discourse that guides congregational behaviour and practice as the church is heavily influenced by reformed evangelical traditions (this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). My work involves preaching, teaching and providing pastoral care to the members of the church (and occasionally to the community in general). I am expected to preach Bible-based sermons and lessons. I am conscious that the usage of scriptures involves interpretation, and that what my church would refer to as "truth" is also an outcome of interpretation of the scriptures. It is in these scriptural interpretations where we find entrenched patriarchal discourses that subjugate women. These are seen as biblical injunctions upon the lives of the faithful. These discourses are very powerful. While the opportunity of preaching and teaching present in the office of the pastor may present an opportunity to re-look at the textual interpretations that result in the marginalisation of some members of the church, there is also an inherent dilemma: There are established ways of understanding these texts and an introduction of alternative interpretation might simply be dismissed as unbiblical and heretical. The established way of giving meaning to these texts seem to tip in favour of patriarchal views – patriarchal interpretations are given privilege over and at the expense of other views, some of which could be more life-giving. This view embraces the idea that knowledge and power go together. More privilege is given to ideas of the powerful, while knowledges from the less powerful tend to be sidelined and their voices

silenced. The marginalised and silenced people can always respond with their own resistance to the subjugation. The challenge for me is how we could do our Bible-based work in a way that it will be more life-giving to the people that are in the congregations that we serve. I believe that Scriptures should be used in a liberating way. It is because of this position I take that I find the theories of social construction and contextual theology to be fundamental in my doing this research work and my pastoral work. The next pages of this chapter will be dedicated to the discussion in more detail of these theories. As mentioned earlier, the subject has already been introduced in chapter one.

2.3 Social Construction

2.3.1 Social construction, knowledge, postmodernism and the church

Social constructionism is situated in a post-modern epistemology. Postmodernism challenges the notion of absolute truth or objective reality, while it embraces the ideas of multiple/plural realities (Brueggemann 1993: 9). It takes the position that human beings are interpreters and 'truth' is a result of our interpretations. This would include both religious truth and scientific 'facts' (Kotzé 2002: 15). The dogmatic approach that is used to silence the voices of women in church life needs to be left open for further discussion and possible challenge seeing that the supposed truth that forms the bases for this practice is an interpretation of some scriptures and there will remain a possibility that there are other possible alternative interpretations which need consideration and evaluation, which could result in a more inclusive practice. Examples of such alternative interpretations would include those of Feminist theologians like Denise Ackerman (1998), Rosemary Chinnici (1992) and E Schüssler Fiorenza (who is regarded as a leading feminist theologian

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Schussler_Fiorenza (2007)).

In chapter one (1) I argued that, scriptures can be used to silence the voices of women in churches and to silence alternate interpretations and meanings that could be more life giving to women in the church. When we realise that quite often these interpretations are done by men, and that they largely appear to benefit men to

maintain their positions of power and privilege in the church (Roberts 1999:16), it becomes necessary to challenge this position of power (Hogan 1995: 9). Postmodernist theological thinking would then question the prescriptive modernist and pre-modernist way of interpreting scriptures. It sets the stage for previously silenced and marginalised voices to have their say; and this is achieved by accepting our limited knowledge of God and truth, and that we can only move towards truth and shift our paradigms in so doing (Herholdt 1998:228). Using these ideas, one can be more able to challenge some of the discourses in the church (Burr 1995: 3-5) by maintaining a critical stance towards the taken for granted knowledges, thereby positioning oneself directly against the empirical approach that embraces objectivism. It becomes necessary for us to consciously and constantly revisit the biblical truths that we have embraced as facts over the years. We have to question our own interpretations, and the messages that seem to be communicated by the texts. The texts that we read and interpret are historically and culturally situated (Klein 1998: 320, Kiogora 1998: 337). The reality of today in a particular culture may be revised tomorrow and a different meaning of reality may be embraced. No culture is necessarily closer to truth than another is. In the doing of theology, I would then appreciate that contextual theology in particular, "is fully aware right from the start that it is being thought out in and from a particular context, a particular life-situation" (Kaufmann 2001: 25). Our ability and willingness to take into consideration the context of the scriptures then and the context in which we make the application today will determine the extent of the capacity for the scriptures to be life-giving.

This research also explores discourses around patriarchy as is practiced in the church. The patriarchal practices are embedded in certain ideas that are considered as truths and knowledges and have become church dogma at times. But we must appreciate how we come to have what we consider to be knowledge. Knowledge is constructed and sustained by social processes. The prevailing patriarchal way of interpreting scriptures in a way that women are subjugated is an example. Texts are selectively used to create an understanding that gets privileged over other interpretations – and patriarchy has become a powerful understanding that remains largely taken for granted. If knowledge of truth is a product of society's indirectly negotiated end that

we agree on together – then we can re-negotiate it. If this could be realised in the process of this research work, the possible outcomes would include a reconstituted way of doing church life that would be more inclusive, and this could be done without violating the spirit of the scriptures.

Knowledge and social action go together (Burr (1995:3-5): How we understand reality will influence our reaction to it. Reality and knowledge are not discovered nor a reflection of a tangible describable external reality; rather it is a product of our interpretive construction as we interact with each other (Anderson 1997:23, Gergen 1985:272). We must constantly be willing to re-examine our positions and our often taken for granted truths, and allow for multiples of truth and reality. A question can be asked as to whether there is a possibility of an alternative interpretation of the same scriptures that are used to exclude women in some aspects of the life of the church, which could result in the giving of a more effective voice for women? We could for example use the ideas of contextual approach to theology to re-examine the scriptures and look for a possibility of moving towards more just practices within the church community; where for an example, women are freed from domination by men. The possible result of this would be a paradigm shift – a new way of looking at things may happen. Shifts happen when certain constructions no longer work for us as they used to (Kotzé 2002: 9). If a shift in ways of interpreting a woman's role within a church community is brought about, how could it happen in a life giving way rather than a destructive way? What would be our fears and concerns if such an interpretation would be given a platform? Who will benefit? Men or women, or both?

The role of language in the sharing and communication of experience and knowledge cannot be overestimated. This role will now be discussed further below.

2.3.2 Social construction and language

It has already been remarked that knowledge is socially constructed. Language serves as an important tool for social interaction. It is an instrument of thought and communication and provides structure for our experience of both ourselves and the

world around us. It makes possible the formulation of concepts, and concepts are fundamental in the sharing of experiences and knowledges (Burr 1995:33-34). Both words and concepts are arbitrary ways of categorising human experience of self and environment (1995:37), and bearing in mind that these words, though helpful, are inaccurate in the attempt to 'reflect' reality (Kotzē 1994:37), language is then limited in the propagation of knowledge and does not represent reality. We construct reality through language – which is important in this research particularly with the power of the Word in scripture. Those in power (male theologians) hold language and its interpretation as a privileged way of knowing, leaving those who are disempowered (in this instance women) often without language; and without language their reality does not appear to exist. Language will have a way of channelling understanding of truth into ways already adopted by society. "...language is much more than a simple reflection of reality ...it is constitutive of social reality" (Phillips & Hardy 2002: 12). The implications for this in the doing of theology is that the usage of language both in the writings and in the interpretations of the scriptures will both be enabled and be limited/channelled by language. And what is more is that the language used to refer to God and in the interpretations of his revelation of himself plays a central role in the way we are going to experience God. It actively shapes our consciousness (Graham 1998:146). Feminist theologians express discomfort in some of the ways language is used to refer to God, such as the dominant reference to Him as male. They find that as limiting and excluding to them and their experience of God (Hogan 1995: 156). Words are powerful. Even as a black South African, I can still recall my childhood experience of the word "terrorist". The word, as it blasted from the SABC radio those days and often made headline news, evoked fear of and perhaps hate of those who, it turned out, were fighting for my freedom. When it was freedom fighters resorting to violent means to get heard, it was called terrorism. When it was state orchestrated violence upon helpless school going children in Soweto, it was called "Law and Order". As we attempt to communicate our thoughts and experiences about God, it has become convenient to use metaphors that bring something about God that we are able to relate to in our experiences as humans. It is important for us to constantly remind ourselves that these are metaphors serving this purpose and not accurate and adequate descriptions of God, because we cannot truly and fully know God. Metaphors

only give us some ideas concerning God. "A metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament or an artistic device. Rather, it is a way of entering the relatively unknown and mysterious" (Yob 1995: 4). When we use the metaphor 'Father' to refer to God, we should therefore be conscious that He did not beget us through procreation, but it is a metaphor used by human beings within their contextual experiences of God and their environments to communicate aspects of their experiences. God is more than a father – God is different from a father. Our Father-God is protective in a mother-like way (Deut 32:18, Job 38:28,29 Isa. 49:15 , 66:10-13, Hos. 11: 1-4). Jesus is both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God - but He is certainly more than and different from these. A more responsible and accountable way of using metaphors in language will avoid bias that limits and channel the understanding of God; will refrain from accentuating one view at the expense of the other through the use of language. In other words even the dominant metaphors of the Bible and dominant interpretations are inherently unstable in that other readings are embedded within the assumptions of the text.

2.4 Contextual theology

The aim of this research work was to explore the possibility of transformation, and as suggested by the title, move towards a more inclusive congregation where all members of the church have access to life-giving ministries of the church, and are able to participate without undue hindrance, and a pastoral practice that is conscious of the prevailing discourses. Contextual theology (as well as feminist theology) lends itself as the most suitable approach to this desired end. It is within these theologies that multiple theological realities can be cherished, including the ones that will have liberating outcomes and nourish an inclusive approach to doing church. This would be in line with the views upheld by postmodernism and social constructionism. Both theologies (Contextual and Feminist) position themselves for critical view of the status quo and for movement towards transformation.

Because knowledge is historically and culturally specific, and because meaning in language is not static, the question of context of both the texts that we work with and

where we are in life is significant when we attempt to make sense of religious texts that we want to apply in our lives. For me this is well illustrated by Kirk's (1990: 16) record of what he calls a Peasant Creed from Nicaragua:

"I believe in You; the labourer Christ – light of light,
 And truly the first-born Son of God,
 Who to save the world, took human flesh
 In the pure and humble womb of Mary.
 I believe that you were scourged, mocked and tortured,
 Martyred on the cross by...Pilate
 That imperialist Roman, merciless and cruel...
 I believe in You, who walk with me by the way –
 The human Christ, the worker-Christ,
 Who conquered death.
 Your tremendous sacrifice gave birth to a new human being
 And began his liberation..."

One has to be standing in a particular station of life to see and appreciate the possibility of the reality of a Christ such as is seen in this creed (What would be the effect of this creed; if for instance, we were to substitute 'labourer Christ' with 'Mother Christ'? 'First-born Son' with 'our Sister, Daughter of God'?). Only certain contexts can inform this type of Christology. "How true is it that only those who are poor are able to recognize that Jesus Christ is the liberator whom God has sent?" (ibid). Put differently, "What one knows and sees, depends upon where one stands or sits" (Brueggemann 1993:8). Contextual theology remains "fully aware from the start that it is being thought out in and from a particular context, a particular life-situation" (p.25). It would seem to me that it is not a question of whether theology is contextual or not, but whether theologians want to be conscious or not of this actuality. We need to make choices and decisions as to whether we want to take the context (of both the scriptures and our time and locality) into consideration; whether we appreciate the historical and cultural specificity of reality.

Western theology has been seen by contextual theologians as having failed in many respects because of its orientation (Kirk 1990: 1-2): It has separated the "search for the contemporary meaning of the Gospel from political and social struggles of the common person". Its theological research tends to slant more towards missiological irrelevance, and also tends to remain at intellectual level in its debates. It also often

embraces the modernistic approach to truth. (African traditional churches show elements of resistance to this. While they accept the Christian religion, they have embraced those practices and applications that the irrelevancy of western religion left out or even rejected as heathen. They have allowed the Christian faith to speak to their situation, including what some would label as superstition).

Contextual theology locates itself with the poor and the marginalised or oppressed (Bosch 1991:423) and listens from there to what the scriptures are saying to the situation or the context. It positions itself to work for change and transformation of the experiences of the victims of poverty and marginalization. This only becomes possible when practitioners are willing to critically reflect on the life experiences of the victims of oppression and the systems operative in society that result in the marginalization of people. In working with women as victims of a patriarchal theology, it is important that together with them, we engage in this critical appraisal of their experiences with regards to church life.

We could consider the South African scenario from the concept of margins. There are those who were at the centre of the circle, what Lee (1995:29-41) refers to as the pond: the white male. Roughly put, immediately around the white male would be the white woman, then in the periphery would be the black male, while at the outermost margin, the margin of margins, would be a poor black woman. Those who were at the centre of the oppressive apartheid system benefited from it while those at the margins experienced oppression and exclusion. Black women have been in the margin of margins and have suffered triple marginalisation: gender, race and for those who are also poor, social status (Keane 1998: 131). The situation is changing. But not enough in the church. The challenge for contextual theology is to place itself in the position of even those in the margin of margins, and from there look for the good news or the gospel from the scriptures. For the marginalised, and this research concerns itself with the marginalised, the gospel or the good news may emanate from the answers to these questions: Is God not able to situate himself at the margins? Indeed, is he not also the God of the margins?

It is not likely that perspectives from the central group will be life-giving to those in the margins of margins, history and current experiences do not reflect so. A question becomes what happens then when those at the margins become centred? Does this push others to the margins (within what I earlier referred to as a power relationship)? I would think of the ideal state not being about the switching of positions between the margins and the centre, but where the metaphor of the margins would no longer be useful to describe social reality and church practice. The challenge need not be to replace patriarchy with matriarchy, but to create a society that is more inclusive in the way it does its life. A church where participation by all is the norm.

The church needs to actively take its place in society and make the difference. "Theology, if it is true, is lived. It is lived in the life of the church...More over; it is lived in the midst of the world, not in isolation from it" (Lints 1993:57). But then the church has to be just in doing or living its theology. Living a theology that is not life-giving is of no godly consequence either. Starting from within the church itself, we need to find ways of moving towards more just practices; practices that are inclusive and participatory. We need to move further and further away from those practices that in this case marginalize women. What is the gospel to women in the margins of church life? Where is God in relation to their location in the margins? We need to look at the gospel also from the context of those that have been marginalised by our previous ways of doing theology as a church.

2.5 Feminist theology

Feminist theology is another way of doing contextual theology. The struggle to ask what the gospel has to say to and about the victims of political oppression, stretches to what the gospel has to say to and about the women who are marginalised and silenced in churches. What is the gospel in the context of oppressed and silenced women? Ackermann (1990: 23) argues: "Feminist theology is contextual. It recognizes that all theology is historically and culturally conditioned and that theologians both act from within specific context as well as react to it". Perhaps Watson's (2003:2) definition of feminist theology captures the nature of feminist theology more

sufficiently albeit succinctly: "Feminist theology is the critical, contextual, constructive, and creative re-reading and re-writing of Christian theology. It regards women – their bodies, perspectives, and experiences – as relevant to the agenda of Christian theologians and advocates them as subjects of theological discourses and as full citizens of the church".

Isherwood and McEwan (1993: 61-62) further suggest that feminist theology must advance a radical critique of religious and theological thinking that is steeped in patriarchal views. They further suggest several tasks that feminist theologians should pick up. As part of the task, the theologians should identify oppressive practices to women and men in theology and its interpretation. An example of oppressive practice in my church would be the tendency to exclude women in key leadership roles in the church and the discriminatory scheduling of weekly preachers. They should encourage self-reliant, local and endogenous interpretations to provide spiritual sustenance that women and men need from religion. They should also share a vision of a just and participatory system that responds to local needs. If an environment was to be created where women in the church had a fair access to the instruments of religious expression, and women were equal participants with men, the output of the church would be richer and participants would most likely be more fulfilled religiously. Both women and men become agents in the creation of a more just society. It then does not rest the responsibility on one or the other. Then progress of and benefits from the process will not be at the expense of anyone else. It would be counterproductive to try to replace patriarchy with matriarchy, or to advance the course of women at the expense of men.

I place myself, though a man, in line with Feminist theology (Grey 1999:15) in "...critical empathy for the other, the self-in-relation, the connected self, rationality as a category replacing ethics of dominance – submission with respect for the integrity of the other, working with categories of empowerment, interdependence, the praxis of solidarity, and a concept of flourishing where self and other are mutually bound in a shared struggle for justice". As a man in our church, I stand privileged in many ways, unlike women. Ackermann's assertion (1998:83), is helpful for me here in my attempts

at negotiating power and healing for and with women: "It can come from those who have privilege and power, provided they too understand its genesis in the hope for a restored creation and are willing to hear pain and the suffering of 'the others' and to act in response".

In concluding this section, I want to reflect a little on the position of the Seventh-day Adventist church, which is the church wherein this research is taking place. The church states the following as its position regarding what it calls the Women Issues:

Seventh-day Adventists believe that all people, male and female, are created equal, in the image of a loving God. We believe that both men and women are called to fill a significant role in accomplishing the primary mission of the Adventist Church: working together for the benefit of humanity. Yet we are painfully aware that throughout the world, in developing and developed nations, adverse societal conditions often inhibit women from fulfilling their God-given potential.
http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat28.html (2006)

In trying to reflect on this statement, a question can be asked if the church's own position that currently forbids ordination of women into the ministry might not be inhibiting 'women from fulfilling their God-given potential'. In its congregations where women are even restricted from using the pulpit for gospel proclamation, is practice not contradicting the beautiful statement above? Is the church perhaps guided by patriarchal and other discourses, discourses that might be hidden within assumed meanings – rarely talked about; which would make them difficult to access and challenge, where people will experience them but not necessarily have language for them?

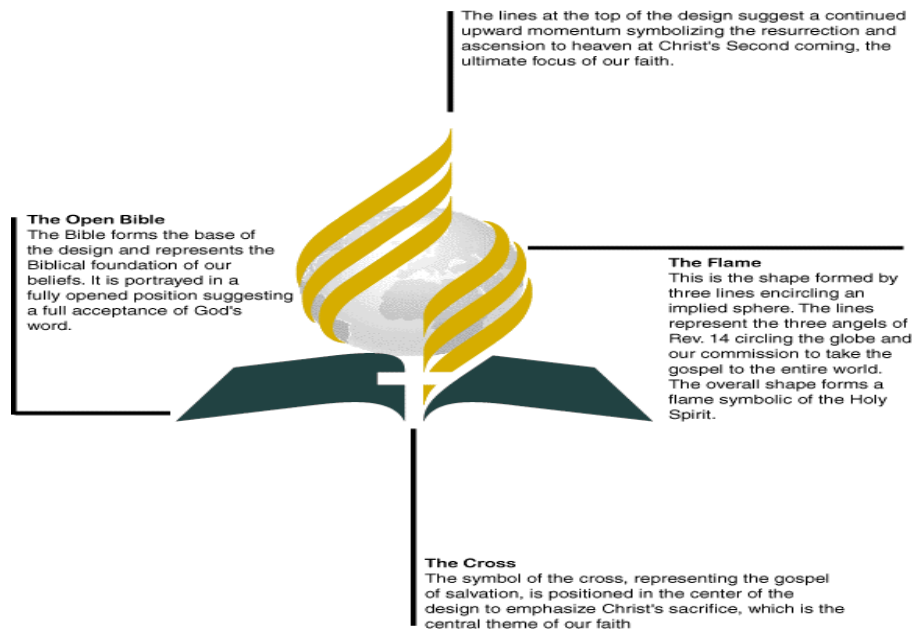
2.6 Evangelical Theology

It is my view that the Seventh-day Adventist church is to a large extent guided by evangelical theology. "The theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church largely resembles that of mainstream Protestant Christianity, and in particular evangelicalism" (http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-day_Adventist_theology (2007)). We will discuss this theology briefly here since I believe it informs the practice of the church

on the subject being considered in this document. It also informs the role of the pastor as a preacher and the expectations of the congregations regarding the preaching of the gospel in the church. Currently it remains difficult to use the word "Evangelical" without qualifying it because of the many varied groupings within the Evangelicals (König 1998: 93). Webster (2001: 69) however, ventures to explain: "An evangelical theology is one which is evoked, governed and judged by the gospel...it is determined by and responsible to the good news of Jesus Christ". There have been divisions within the Evangelical movement resulting from what Olson referred to as 'Convulsions' (Olson 2003: 79-81). These Convulsions or disagreements have been around fundamentalism, biblical inerrancy, the Bible, women in leadership, eschatology, the Social Gospel (Olson 2003: 79-81, König 1998: 87-102).

There are areas of reasonable unity in Evangelical Theology (de Jongh van Arkel 2003: 137, König 1998: 91-96): There is unity on the subject of salvation by grace through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. This is the gospel. It is the hope for humanity fallen state. Salvation is made available through the work of the triune God. The eschatological hope in the renewal of all that has gone wrong in the world at the second advent of Jesus Christ is another area of agreement. Also the imago-dei view of human beings, the love and sovereignty of God, the divine authority of the inspired Scriptures and that Scriptures form a normative base for Christian practice of faith

As mentioned earlier, the Seventh-day Adventist church is mainly evangelical in its theology. The figure below, which is the official logo of the church, pictures the Bible as the foundation of the church's dogma and the flame as symbolizing evangelism/gospel proclamation as its commission.



The church has formulated twenty-eight statements of faith called 'The fundamental beliefs'. The introductory statement and the first belief are here quoted verbatim

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word. The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html> (2007)

It is pertinent to comment here on the different views regarding the role of women in the Church. There would be a view that women were cursed since the fall of humanity in the Garden, and that there is no chance of them experiencing relief from the

subordination curse, as there will never be a total victory over sin in this life. There is another view that would argue that given the merits of grace, women have a role to play in the church based on the framework of equality of all humanity (König 1998: 99). The view one holds with regards to the subordination of woman to man in the light of the gospel will influence one's view on the ordination of women, for instance. When one fails to accept that one's views on this matter is as a result of one's interpretation, and not an absolute truth, then one is likely to be unwilling to allow for other possible meanings. My concern is how it may be possible for me to challenge established (evangelical) discourses within the church that I see as disempowering to some members. Is there a chance for change in paradigms?

For our times, Evangelical theology, like other theologies, gets confronted by the dawn of postmodernity. There is a post-modernist view that evangelicals need to accept that it is not like there is some absolute truth waiting to be discovered between the Bible pages (Mohler 1995:78, 81). All claims made by Evangelicals on the truth and dogma that becomes normative in the lives of adherents may be subject also to critical scrutiny and therefore revision or rejection (Franke 2003: 291), a process that will reasonably be accompanied by pain sometimes. This can be done among other ways, by bringing the texts to the people's context. We can, even as Evangelicals go back to the Scriptures and ask for a life-giving message to the marginalised peoples. This would not need us to abandon scriptures as normative and authoritative, but we would only be seeking to hear what the 'Spirit says to the churches' in our times.

2.7 African and Black Theologies

In the light of contextual theology and conscious of the ideas of social construction's view of multiple truths, doing theology in South Africa necessitate a discussion of African and Black theology. African Theology is not necessarily synonymous with Black Theology though they have a lot in common. I choose to include them in the discussion purely because of their relatedness with contextual theology and because of their significance in the South African context. I will do so very briefly.

Both African and Black Theologies position themselves as resistant to the Western theologies, putting themselves in the context of the culturally and politically marginalised (Practitioners of African theology, though, may also be found in what Mbiti refers to as "imported" churches (Mbiti 1998: 141)). Western theology could not provide for a challenge to the evils of colonialism. African and Black Theology, while embracing the Christian Faith, they also seek to appreciate the gospel from the African angle and that of the marginalised blacks (Bujo 1992: 63).

Pan-Africanism, a movement to unite, empower and liberate Africans by Africans, readily found acceptance in African Theology, where it found expression (Martey 1993: 9). Resistance to domination could only be successful if the people embraced their culture, even in their practice of the Christian faith. That is to say, if the people saw the Christian faith in the light of their African context, so that Christianity does not replace their culture. Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement supported theological movement that emphasized the validity and the authenticity of African culture and religion (ibid. 24-25). Black Theology of South Africa, like its counterpart in the United States of America, positioned itself to denounce racial discrimination and advocate for Christian practice that is contextual to its location (Bujo 1998: 15). In both countries, black people found themselves dominated, exploited and oppressed by people of European descent. Colonialists used the Christian faith to subjugate their victims. Theology in Africa, if it has to be meaningful to Africans, has to be Africanized. When it is Africanized, when it is Incarnational, it cannot help but be liberating as well.

The position of Black Theology is that God is not neutral in the conflict of humans where the powerful oppress and exploit the powerless. Using the Bible as its tool, the stories of God's intervention in biblical history are seen as God taking sides. That God intervened in the case of the Hebrew slaves and set them free, He took sides with the poor and the oppressed in Egypt. This was not a once off, but a revelation of the nature of God and how He gets involved in cases of injustice. God takes sides (Martey 1993: 97).

Now with the political liberation from the oppressive white minority having been achieved, the question still remains as to the path that lie ahead concerning economic liberation and the liberation of the marginalised groups (women) in the church itself. We should now ask questions as to the place of a woman both in an African family and in the church in Africa. Women have not enjoyed many freedoms within the church, and this would call for attention, certainly (Mbiti 1998: 153). African theology needs to open itself up and look for ways of doing its theology in a way that does not result in the silencing and marginalizing of some of its members. Its liberative and contextual nature should place within its reach tools to re-evaluate its theological position with regards to the role of women in the church.

Perhaps the message to Liberation Theologies in South Africa would be: *Aluta Continua*. Continue using the courage, resolve and skills of contextual thinking to change paradigms and bring about inclusive and participatory church practices, practices that will not leave women in the margins and silence their voices.

2.8 Patriarchy

Earlier in this chapter, under Social Constructionism, I discussed how Postmodernism challenges the notion of absolute truth or objective reality, while it embraces the ideas of multiple realities. I mentioned there how it takes the position that human beings are interpreters and that 'truth' is a result of our interpretations. This is applicable also in the way we handle Scriptures. The dogmatic approach that is used to silence the voices of women in the church's patriarchal practice needs to be left open for further discussion and possible challenge seeing that the supposed truth that forms the bases for this practice is an interpretation of some scriptures. It would be helpful to espouse here post-modernist approach to theology by interrogating the social context of the scriptural passages under scrutiny, also taking into consideration the theologians context (Herholdt 1998: 215). It is critical to approach the texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion, looking for even minute clues of all what is involved in the formulation of the text (Ackerman 1998: 353, 354). I now want to look at Patriarchy in the light of this.

Patriarchy is evident from very early in scriptural records. It is very clear that the Bible is contextual; it comes to us from specific times and environments. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament come from an era where women were not regarded highly. Not only were they properties of men, they also did not rank first in that property list (Exodus 20:17) (Tribble 1984). "...this contextuality of the gospel also creates problems. It is not easy to distinguish between the gospel and the culture or the world-view in which it comes to us" (König 1998: 22-23). Patriarchy's power and influence are still evident and in operation now, both in our societies and in the religious communities. "The patriarchal ideology has easily been maintained because many women, as well as men, fear that, in questioning the church they may be questioning God...The church has always been, and is still, controlled by men; the scriptures were written by men, Christianity has been interpreted for women through the eyes and value systems of men" (Venables 1998: 18).

Discursive practice around gender have afforded men enormous privileges, while women are oppressed and stripped of power simply because they are women, and for no other reason. This remains a gender issue. ""Sex" describes the biological existence of human beings as men and women, while "gender" refers to the denotations made to each of these biological categories by culture and/or theology. These denotations affect not only the situation of each individual, male or female, but also all concepts of human relationships and power structures, in fact all aspects of both individual and corporate life" (Watson 2003: 25).

It is this life-taking reality in our church that makes it imperative for us to question the status-quo in the interest of an alternative that will be more inclusive and more life-giving to all in the church. I need to be quick to mention that as a man, and a male pastor at that, I personally benefit from patriarchal privileges reserved for men in the church and in society, as well as from the power that goes with the office of the pastor, an office which is still largely reserved for men. Although this is the case, I must bear a burden to look for ways to challenge the status quo and look for alternative ways of doing church. Isherwood and McEwan (1993: 33) share the same burden as they say that "Patriarchal theology stands in need of critical reassessment

so as to make visible the richness of scriptures, the all-inclusiveness of teaching and the all-embracing vision of participation by everybody". The atrocious records in the scriptures that seem to condone abuse and oppression of women need to be revisited. I join Tribble (1984:3) in her feminist approach which seeks to "...interpret stories of outrage on behalf of their female victims in order to recover neglected history, to remember a past the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again. In telling the sad stories, feminist hermeneutic seeks to redeem time."

We can take comfort in the observation by Isherwood and McEwan (1993:89) that the question as to whether the oppressive texts are divine absolutes is reviewed by feminist theologians through research to now assert that these are not divine absolutes but rather faith responses, not archetype but prototype. In reflecting on Jesus' ministry among women, they continue to say (1993:42):

"The actions of Jesus gave new hope to women. Jesus grasped God's commitment to compassion and his treatment of women was not acceptable for his day. He cured women, even when they were considered ritually unclean (Mathew. 9.18-23), he spoke with women, even when they were from a despised race (John. 4.5-26) and he offered women forgiveness, even if that meant challenging the law (John. 9.1-11). Further, he defended women against criticism (John. 12.1-9) and had them as close friends (John. 11. 1-4). The Christ was born to a woman (Luke. 2.1-8) and made his first resurrection appearance to a woman (John.20), who, significantly, has in tradition been called a whore. Jesus' actions towards women do not suggest that he viewed them as insignificant".

2.9 Pastoral Care

The work towards possible transformation within my church takes place within the context of my pastoral care. By venturing to address the subject of the marginalization of women in our congregation and working towards transformation I would be

fulfilling my pastoral care responsibility. I will be consistent with my pastoral duties when I ask the question, in the reality of the presence of multiple voices in my congregation: How can I position my pastoral work in a way that the needs of all people (including women) for pastoral care and leadership in my congregation are met. I see pastoral care as that activity in my work where I work with the recipients of my ministry to bring relief from the effects of sin and from and the experience of sorrow, working towards the eradication of the causes thereof (Pattison 1988: 13). This can be achieved by (1) going beyond the generalities and moving into specific issues in the believers' lives, (2) expressing some mission towards the neglected, marginalized and overlooked, (3) and by fostering a group (congregational) experience of the issues (de Jongh van Arkel 2000:39).

de Jongh van Arkel (2000: 43-44) sites Stone's ten theses for the new shape of pastoral care. "Pastoral care is not morally or theologically neutral" is one of the theses. This research draws for its issues from the religious and biblical moral values concerning the dignity of all humanity and each believer's duty towards others. It seeks to sensitize participants towards the dangers of failing to hear what is not said in the scriptures, but also drawing from what is said. The need to learn from the horror stories lessons that will help us not become guilty again of commission of either the act or the silence. By sensitizing (and hopefully mobilizing) the church community on the issues, one is doing the pastoral duty by reaching out for change, by creating an "awareness of the need for social ethical action in specific actions" (44). Theses eight argues that "(P)astoral care takes seriously the pastor's task and opportunity for initiation. It does not stand by waiting for people to request a counselling session." By addressing these issues, even though addressing the congregation and not one individual, the pastor is saying to the women and the less powerful that the church cares and has to care. As men, we are being challenged to be never guilty again and to participate in caring. Effective caring would start by introspection, which the research seeks to foster. I believe that both the oppressed and marginalised and the men will be reached and challenged by this research work.

One might expect pastoral care to be more oriented to individual care, maybe using counselling as its medium. This research has taken another angle: By participating with many members of the congregation, it is hoped that eventually everyone in the congregation will get to know that issues of marginalisation are matters that concern the church and the church pastor. The effect of this will not only be the realization that the Church cares about such matters, but that the pastor cares as well. The outcome of this would be the creation of opportunities for affected members to seek pastoral counselling and guidance on other related matters. In this way it might work its way into counselling through the pastor finding a platform and language for this marginalisation. It could also work its way in pastorally engaging in consciousness raising as well as holding a collective awareness which challenges any oppressive practice.

I expect that there might be movement towards change and transformation. If knowledge and social action go together, and how we understand reality will influence how we react to it, it goes without saying that the meanings that are channelled to individuals by society tend to have a deterministic effect on social action. If these 'facts' will continue to perpetuate injustices, it is incumbent upon individuals (pastors and therapists in particular) to challenge these taken for granted 'facts' (that women are cursed into subservience to man, that they are inherently morally weaker than men, etc.). These need to be confronted with alternatives that will reveal other meanings and understandings that are obscured by society's preferred understandings. Even when not directly acknowledged, they are part of the deep ordering of assumption.

In the ensuing chapter, chapter 3, I am now going to reflect the conversations that I had with various individuals and the process followed by the Task Team that the Dube church appointed to facilitate decision making on the question of a possible involvement of women in the preaching and leadership of the Dube church.

Chapter 3

Hearing some voices in Dube

3.1 Introduction

My research journey took me through several experiences, most of which had turns and curves that I largely could not have anticipated fully; which is in line with a participatory action research journey. I even came across some cul de sacs. I will reflect more on these in the next chapter, chapter four. The conversations that I had with Kuki and Kay (these follow below) seemed to represent the voices of those women who continue to look for an opportunity for women voices to be heard more in Dube. I have listened to some other women echo their voices in the Task Team deliberations and in the church business meetings where the subject was discussed. I reflect upon these towards the end of the chapter and in chapter four, including the experience hearing some women speak in advocacy for the status quo to be maintained, citing the need for the church to keep to what they referred to as biblical instruction. I will also reflect more on this in the next chapter. The Three Men (Papi, Themba and Vusi) spoke strongly and with apparent conviction for women to take the backseat in leadership and preaching ministries in the church. I had an opportunity to listen to Papi's (and another man outspoken on the subject) ideas in the context of the Task Team sitting where on the other hand was Kay. I will reflect on all these experiences in this chapter and chapter four.

In this chapter I am going to include the actual voices of different people from the Dube congregation on their ideas concerning the role of women in the various aspects of church life. In chapter two I spoke of the importance of listening to the voices of those who do not get heard. Contextual theology allows me to hear voices of the marginalized as they speak from where they are (Brueggemann 1993: 8, Bosch 1991: 423). In this chapter I will seek to listen to both women and men who hold different ideas on the subject. The process will also enable me to reflect together with the participants on the ideas they have. This will be covered in this chapter and this will

lead into my own reflection on the process in chapter four. While listening to participants I was on a look out for possible shifts in paradigms, movements in paradigms resulting perhaps from the realization by people that positions held earlier no longer works to the benefit of people now (Kotzé 2002: 9)

3.2 About the context in which this research is taking place.

As mentioned in chapter 1.1, this research takes place within one of the Seventh-day Adventist church congregations. In Chapter 2 I mentioned that the Seventh-day Adventist church is mainly evangelical in its theology.

I again here take an interest in the church's well articulated statement, http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main_stat28.html (2007) regarding what it refers to as 'Women's Issues' as already mentioned in chapter two. The church commits to a vision where women must play 'a significant role' in fulfilling the primary mission of the church. Women would play this role together with men as equals from creation: Women, the church says, are entitled "*to decision making, and to freedom from mental, physical, or sexual abuse. We also maintain that women should play an increased role in the leadership and decision-making bodies of both church and society. Ultimately, we believe that the church will fulfil its mission only when women are empowered to achieve their full potential.*

In 1992 the Southern Union Conference (a regional Head Quarters of the SDA Church) voted to adopt General Conference Action (GC 75-153) in which the guidelines for the ordination of lady elders have been outlined) on the Guidelines on Ordination of Lady Elders (see appendix A). The SAU then recommended that local church boards may apply themselves to how they may comply with the said action. The church has ruled that women church members are eligible for election into the office of church elder, like they may be employed as church pastors. The question remaining was ordination. At this stage, the church holds the position that women may not be ordained into pastoral ministry, but may be ordained as church elders. It is this ordination into eldership that would be of immediate interest for the Dube situation and other congregations in our area (Southern Africa). Implied here, is that according to the world church, women may

serve as elders in Adventist congregations, they may even be ordained. What chances do we have in Dube to open up, for example, the office of church elder to include women elders as well? Even if in the beginning we did not ordain them.

Reflecting on the position of the church regarding its commitment to women taking up positions of leadership within the church I was curious as I talked with the participants during the research interviews – what are the views of members in the local church concerning women participation in leadership and preaching in the congregation. I included two women in the group of participants that I worked with.

3.3 Why I invited Kuki and Kay to participate

In Dube, like it is the case in the rest of the congregations that I serve, women in general are in the margins when it comes to church leadership and leading the worship in church in a form of preaching. I have observed that whereas the majority of the Dube women seem to be reluctant to urge the church to be conscious of the presence of women members and to treat them with the respect and honour that is given the male members, Kuki and Kay have in many occasions done their bit in attempting to be the voice of the silenced women. There are only a few women who have been willing to stick their necks out to specifically attempt to speak for women issues. Whereas it might appear that the few that speak out do get heard, the experience seems to suggest that even the 'vocal' women do not really get heard. On several instances this vocality has led to targeted marginalisation. I have chosen to invite Kuki and Kay to participate as voices representing the silent. As it shows in my conversations with them, they themselves are heard in their own spheres in life, but very much less heard in the church. They have responded with enthusiasm to participate, apparently having waited long for an opportunity to speak and be heard

3.4 Kuki: a woman's voice

As mentioned in chapter one, I had one conversation with Kuki (and further contacted her by letter) which was tape recorded. This conversation lasted for seventy minutes. We held the conversation in the board-room of her place of work as she is a very busy person. She could only

afford me her lunch break to hold the conversation. I wrote a letter to Kuki (this is her preferred name; a nickname she told me, that is used by her peers) and attached the transcript of the conversation asking her to highlight in the transcript what she considered to be salient points to be included in the research report, and if there was some things she would have preferred changed or removed. Her response was that she was "satisfied and impressed with the way you captured the conversation we had", and went on to express her wish that I be promoted to serve as a President of the church, so because "Change to make a difference is one of your strong attributes and you can apply it effectively by empowering people like us - that do not matter to the many." It was after this response that I captured the conversation the way I have.

Kuki is a member in the Dube congregation and works as a Personal Assistant (PA) at the regional head-quarters of the Seventh-day Adventist church. She has been involved in women's issues in and outside the church. She has been a member of the National Council of African Women (NCAW) for twenty four years. This organization was established around 1937. She says she joined the organization as a response to some abuse that women suffered, and she saw an opportunity to do something in the NCAW. "*I saw an opportunity to be empowered*" she says.

She further says: "*Apart from being a member, I have served in the organization in various capacities. From 1993 I served as Provincial President of the then Transvaal. From 2000 I served as a National General Secretary*".

Kuki was also a delegate to the Beijing Conference on women issues. Born to Seventh-day Adventist parents, she grew to be actively involved in the church, and participating in activities that church women were participating in, including in the Adventist Women's Ministries. She has been outspoken at Dube concerning the need for women to participate more in all the activities of the church. I had become aware of her position on women matters both from herself in various church governance meetings and from people who shared their knowledge of her involvement on these

issues in the church and outside. It was this that led me to invite her in to participate in this research.

Kuki described the church as limiting to her as a woman. It was because of this that she felt the need to do both church and NCAW:

"You see the church didn't give us the platform. ... Social issues made me decide to be involved. And in NCAW I found the platform, empowerment and growth. I felt the church was stifling. It was not what I wanted for myself. Also your fathers, our husbands, the type of school they came from; they preferred the women to take a background position, never coming to the fore, not becoming prominent, women were excluded from certain roles. So you would experience the pressure starting at home, you know.... At home you have this pressure from husband, and then from men in general in the church"

As Kuki spoke, and as I pondered on her ideas later, I wondered about change and how it happens, both in the church and society as well as through individuals. If change in this regard is to come, where could it start? Should it start in society or in the church – or would church and society resist working for change? Or would it take initiatives by individuals for it to progress? It got me thinking about her ability to both resist dominant patriarchal forces as well as find a voice within what she describes as stifling and silencing. These competing thoughts made me curious about women both in the fore-ground as well as background in society. This led me to asking her:

Justice: ... sometimes we would use the term 'patriarchy' to refer to this practice of silencing the voices of women while advancing the voices of men. Is it OK if we used that word?

Kuki: (She laughs) Yah! Like I heard you talk of matriarchs and patriarchs that we have in our church the other day? Yah, lets use that word. At home you have this pressure from husband, and then from men in general in the church. (But) in the NCAW we took a position to be not feminists.

The women in NCAW took a position 'to be not feminists'. Although I did not ask Kuki why, I wonder as to why they found it necessary to take that position. Pinnock (1986:51) says:

"Feminism is an advocacy of the rights of women based on the theory of the equality of the sexes. It is a belief in social role interchangeability, especially in regard to leadership role in church and

society. Feminism holds that it is bad that males dominate leadership roles in church and in society, and biblical feminists deny that the Bible justifies such a situation.”

Could it be that by taking that position it would give their voices expression without provoking resistance from men and those people opposed to feminism?

The church operates ministries through various specialized departments. Two of these departments, Adventist Women’s Ministries (AWM) and Dorcas/Welfare Ministries, are traditionally led by women at all times. Once or twice a year a day is allocated for departmental emphasis on its ministries. When I asked Kuki,

“What is your observation with regards to the way we are doing church; in particular with regards to the role of women in the church, say at congregational level?”

Kuki’s response reflected the church’s attempts to hear women out! She said:

“Well, talking about what I see in Dube, because that’s where I am, and I assume it is the same in other congregations: I would say the church is growing you know! For the simple reason that when it comes to Women Ministries, there is no attitude. When it is women’s day, the modus operandi is for the church to let women do it on their own. There is no stereotypic attitude. Women are left to plan, organize and do it for themselves. This is good. And these days the leaders of AWM¹ are more bold and more confident. They’re more educated. They can vent, and there is sisterhood. They reach out to those less empowered”.

However, her response made me wonder about some of the convenient ways of keeping women quiet through offering them one Saturday in fifty two that are in a calendar year. Are we not limiting the participation of women to such departments while other departments and ministries are no-go areas? When we limit their involvement in leading worship to women’s days, it might still be an expression of control and domination. Although she doesn’t say it – what is it that is assumed and not worth talking about? What might also inhibit her from talking with me as a minister and a man?

¹ Adventist Women’s Ministries

In concluding her remarks above Kuki further said:

"... And these days the leaders of AWM² are more bold and more confident. They're more educated. They can vent, and there is sisterhood. They reach out to those less empowered".

I began to think about the context and conditions that give rise to greater voice for women. What might have contributed to Kuki finding a platform as a woman and how these organizations such as Dorcas and AWM might, be utilized to a greater extent in the church at Dube as well as the role of education.

It would seem that some women in Dube would like to, actively or passively, resist the apparent domination in some various ways. Kuki also said:

We have realised that women are getting more educated. And it is working. Out there we are promoting the 'girl-child'. I notice that here in our church, more women than men, even young women, they read more and their contribution in the Bible studies are more informed than those of men and boys. They contribute with a lot of insight. They're empowering themselves. And I think they are getting that recognition. Also as you are preaching on equality of believers before the Lord, it is helping... In the past we had some very conservative men like Mr. X. He felt women should never be allowed to preach in church. He requested to be notified ahead of time if a woman was to be scheduled to preach so that he would go and worship somewhere else. Such stances were very discouraging... But our grannies were satisfied to do it (resistance) the passive way. You know. Because they used to do house to house. They would visit homes to offer Bible-based counselling and family support. Only women did this, no men were involved in the house to house. They (the grannies) mentored us....

Her talk about resistance in the past perhaps shows how women have been in a power relationship with the church systems, with resistance in ways that worked for them. This would be in keeping with the Foucauldian idea of the presence of resistance in the face of power (House 1994: 108). Resistance determines to what extent this power relationship with patriarchy can control. In the first chapter I made reference to Chopp (Neuger and Poling (1997: 25) and the 'deep ordering', which concurs with it not being deliberate but just taken-for granted ways of doing church.

This power is also in relation to resistance and sometimes it seems as if women have clever ways of resisting in passive as well as pro-active positions – in this way using power to work for them in subversive ways. This might challenge a more western individualist approach where passive resistance might be seen as not being assertive. Using evangelical bible based theology was a way of finding voice and yet I am hearing that Kuki seem now to find alternative and more open ways of resisting this relationship, thus bringing about what has been called a paradigm shift (Kotzé 2002: 8). Kuki remarks about the women who are getting more educated, and how education affects the way women do their church life. Can more education for men contribute in changing their views about women participation? Recently, I was sitting in a nominating committee to elect leaders for 1997 in the church. It was a man (originally from Dube) who tabled a proposal that we include women to serve as elders at Kelvin. The Kelvin church approved the proposal unanimously. The Kelvin church members are mainly educated young adults.

I sensed that Kuki would find it more helpful if women in Dube had more access to instruments of expression of their spirituality, ministry and leadership. An opportunity to lead in worship and to lead the church as elders. I think that that is what she is expressing when she says:

" I have been involved in the executive committee and nominating committees for a long time. And we would always request that at least we elect one woman as one of the elders. And you would realise that a women elder would really help meet certain needs, like mentoring and so on. And when she says: "In fact they decided that may be the pulpit was not important anyway! They thought so but we thought we needed access to the pulpit, but we did not get any access. Then we later realised that the essence was not on fighting for the pulpit. Not really".

3.5 Kay – a woman's voice

At the beginning of my interaction with Kay (she preferred that we use this name, which is a nickname used by her friends) in this research journey she attended church at Dube. I had come to notice her interest in the subject of women participation in Dube in church discussions on related matters. She seemed to always wish for her

² Adventist Women's Ministries

thoughts to be heard on the matter. I approached her to invite her into the research journey. I wanted to hear more of her thoughts and ideas concerning the subject. In her busy schedule, she agreed to hold conversations with me. We met in her office on one occasion when she managed to 'squeeze' me in. This was during a very hectic moment in her life.

She had just changed jobs, from practicing as a medical doctor in her own rooms to working for the United Nations health offices in Pretoria. This job requires her to travel a lot. She also, during this period, had to move from Johannesburg to Pretoria. In the meantime there were also drastic changes in her personal life. I was grateful that in spite of this hectic season in her life she was willing to make some time to speak with me. Our conversation lasted for an hour and was recorded electronically with her permission. I made a transcript of the conversation and submitted it to her for review. She told me that she found it to be an accurate transcript of the conversation.

With Kay's life having experienced the changes that happened around the time of our commencement of the research process, and her having become more unavailable, I resorted to making a follow-up on this conversation through a letter. It was a brief reflective letter revisiting our conversation. I also requested her to make any amendments she may wish to make on the conversation, to add or delete her ideas as she might wish. Her response was that she preferred that it be captured the way it has been. I have decided to include the full transcript as an appendix, but reflect below on some of the ideas she shared with me.

Shortly after our conversation started Kay told me of how she observed in her travels that in Europe and America women are more involved than they are in Africa. She said:

In America, I have noticed a lot more women participating in the church. And I am inclined to think that it is a cultural thing. A woman being in the forefront of things in Africa, it is an issue. This could be a hurdle they have gotten over in Europe and America. I have visited over there congregations where women are involved, not in equal proportions but they are involved in larger numbers in leadership and other activities in the church. I am inclined to think that it is a cultural

thing about the role of women. I don't think the church is doing it deliberately. The church is open about it. But the leadership in various places determine the role of women in their locality, irrespective of what the global church may say.

It does seem to me that Kay's idea of how culture plays a role in our doing of church can be linked with how human beings are interpreters of reality or experiences, including the texts that are used to advance patriarchy (Brueggemann 1993: 9, Kotzé 2002: 15). To begin with, the "... Bible does reflect the conditions of patriarchal societies, and is addressed to people who lived in those societies...some passages may seem to favour traditionalism. They describe patriarchal circumstances and at times even the instructions have patriarchal overtones" (Gundry 1986:61, 62). As mentioned in chapter two the texts that we read and interpret are historically and culturally situated (Klein 1998: 320, Kiogora 1998: 337, Kaufmann 2001: 25). What could happen if we could ask the same texts to speak to us where we are today?

Kay spent some of her growing years in Zambia, her home country. She was there until she finished her training in medical school. I wanted to know some of her experiences there (I assumed that past experiences sometimes shape the way we look at things):

Justice: What are your experiences at home where you grew up? What was the configuration of things there?

Kay: Lots of women in the church but men in leadership. Men's ideas are portrayed a lot. There were a few women who held position in the church, but basically it was the men's decisions that actually carried. Women had a very small voice. And someone like me who is very vocal, I always got on the wrong end of things. Because over the years I have learnt not just to take everything just because they have been said. I would think things out, read around the issues and question. With this thing of questioning things, with time I have found myself on the other end of exchange about issues. If you are in a discussion about things for instance, men would put across an idea. And I would then say NO WAY, that does not hold. And I would make my point why I think it is not so. But you see men would like water it down because you are a female, they won't take your idea. But you know I have come to see that they want to have the last say in things. They want to feel they have said it, they know better. Yes they know better because they are men. That's the big thing. They have read it somewhere,

they've seen it somewhere. They have been given the authority by God. Women can be listened to but what they are saying is not it.

When Kay mentioned how her own attempts at making her own voice be heard often got her into some difficulties, I felt that perhaps life is a bit uphill for those who feel sidelined and silenced, that perhaps it is more strenuous to carry on with struggling to be heard than it would be for those whose voices readily get heard. How sustainable is it to have to struggle to be heard?

I got curious as to where Kay's own resources came from that enabled her to try and make her voice heard. I asked her the following question (and a follow-up one after her initial answer):

You are saying that you have been able to challenge some of men's ideas. Where did that come from, where did you get what it takes to do that?

Kay: I grew up in a home where my parents encouraged us to study, to question and to ask. Not to take anything that is being said. And my dad, my dad. Yah, I got that from him. Not to take anything lying down. When you hear a thing read about it, think about it. Then open your mouth and speak your mind. When you say something it must have been researched upon and thought out. I think I got that from my dad

Justice: Was he able to take a challenge from a woman?

Kay: Yes. My dad and mom had a very nice relationship. I learnt a lot from my parents. And I think that I have strength to talk about these things because in my own home it wasn't I am the man and that is it. It was: We are a team. That was the way that things were done. That was the situation where I grew in.

It was so amazing to me to hear Kay bring forth her dad as being the one that encouraged his children to question ideas put forth in life. This resistance to dominant discourses on patriarchy was happening not only among women but with men as well. It makes me think about these important stories that get leached out of dominant narratives. What was amazing for me was for him, her dad, to also include the girl-children in this approach to life. Listening to Kay's narration of how her father inculcated in them as children the value of not taking discourse for granted, and how her father related with his wife, I wonder if we could correctly refer to that family

arrangement as patriarchal. Kay did not experience her father as appealing to his maleness as the basis for him to be heard; he did not dominate his family. He seems to be relating to his wife with respect. Apparently there are no hierarchical relationships between him and his wife. What type of a family arrangement might he have come from? Was he brought up in a family with the values that he appears to be instilling in his children? I wish I met this man to learn more from him. If he chose to break with tradition and start a new way of doing life with family, what goes with this change? What could be the impact of several men and several families in a community who would choose to do life the way that Kay's father and family did? Is this how communities experience a paradigm shift?

Kay also spoke about how the understanding that men have a God-given position of authority reflects itself within the church. She then explained that:

It should be different here because we know that we are all God's children. Even if it was not the women-men thing, we should treat each other as brethren and sisters.

Justice: What would be the implications of that? If we did treat each other like that, how would it make a difference in the way we do things?

Kay: My understanding is that the role of the church is to spread the gospel. And for the work to go forward the church has workers. And the workers are male and female. And a person suited to do the work must do the work. I am not of the opinion that just because you are a man you are gifted. Not every man is gifted to preach. Women are also gifted. But because they are women they are sidelined. Then come Sabbath, you have a man preaching – and there is no message. And you have a church full, and people go back home hungry. Yet if you had placed a gifted woman, things would have been different. What makes me sad is that as a church we are forgetting our purpose- to do the work. We are not focusing on the purpose; we are focusing on who must do the work.

Justice: Does that limit the output of the church in anyway?

Kay: I think so, because women bring to the table completely different perspectives. Where one man can do something, a woman can do much more. For instance, let's talk about the ministry of reaching out to poor and family visitation. A man can go there. It would be good. But when a woman goes there she will do prayer but also take a look

around the house and see other needs. And that is a gift. Women have been gifted on the softer things of life. They are sensitive. It is a gift that men were given not in the same measure that women were given. They are more sensitive to the environment and the surroundings. So if you have workers both male and females going out there to work together, my understanding is that more work would be done because spreading the gospel is not just about telling people what the good book says but it is about doing, showing them what Christianity is all about in practical terms – practical Christianity.

In chapter one and two I stated my own aspirations to see a congregation where all believers are included in the doing of church. Kay's observations and ideas resonate with mine, the idea that the church would benefit more as a body if it moved more towards more inclusive practices. Women constitute the majority of the church membership, and if they were full participants, wouldn't the church benefit more and be more productive? When Kay spoke of women as possessing a gift of being sensitive and being more gifted on the softer things of life than men are, it reminded me of a day when I listened to Tshidi, a woman in Dube, urging the church during her presentation to be mindful of the wounded members within our congregations. She spoke of how many of the wounded were women. This makes me think that if women with this gift that Kay was talking about had a platform to reach out to the church, they would have the wisdom of reaching these wounded members in a healing and life-giving way. Kay's views about women's unique giftedness and inclination seem to resonate with those of Neall (1995: 30) who says: "The woman as intuitive, nurturing, and person-oriented makes a unique contribution to the cultivation and preservation of harmonious relationships."

It would seem that Kay felt very strongly that the church is really missing out by not having women participate in more significant ways. I had asked Kay the following question:

Justice: I get the impression that even before I came to Dube, discussions have been there to say whether women should not be given more participation in leadership and other activities in the church, including preaching. What have you seen as helping or not helping in that process? Were there strides that were made?

Kay: Well, the discussions come up every year when there are nominations for leadership...I honestly think that it is disheartening to think that women are just good enough to tell children's story during the Sabbath school, to be secretaries in the church. What about in the leadership of the church – the church has a lot of women. Why women are not made elders for instance? There are women with problems and they wish they could tell an elder who is a female. And there are many things that women would not tell a male because of this cultural thing where you feel more comfortable to talk to another woman about your problems than a man. And they feel that they are just not being heard. Even if they could bring themselves to go and tell the men about their problems, the men would most likely just dismiss it as a minor issue. They would down play it as a minor issue.

Kay's response did not focus on the specific question I had asked concerning progress that the Dube church could/might have made since they first raised the question of women participation before I joined them. She spoke rather about how the lack of progress and the minimal participation of women seem to be short-changing women and the church at large. Is it because this is what she saw as more important to talk about? I also wondered how it was like for her to be talking to me as a male about such things. How is it like for women to come to church but have no elder to talk to about things that are part of their lives?

As outlined in chapter one as my research aim, I align myself with Kay's description of her preferred church. She responded to my question below in the following manner:

Justice: So if things were up to you what would you do?

Kay: If things were up to me; if say we had eight elders for the church, four of them would be females. I would encourage that four of the eight be women. Encourage that, not force it but encourage it. It would be women who meet the standards. I would encourage more participation of the women in the activities of the church. Not just taking out the glasses and pouring out of the wine by deaconesses during the Communion service. And pouring the water in the dishes and holding towels. I would encourage that they play a more active role in the church. If I had my way I would have more women preaching every now and then. Look out for suitable people who can deliver the message, but make sure that a woman preaches at least once a month. I would involve women in a lot of programmes, but also vice-versa. For instance I would involve men in as well in children's ministries. It is always women who minister to these children. The

children never get to see men involved with them. Some children do not have fathers in their homes and they do not have opportunities to interact with these men. The men should also learn to be involved with children, tell them Bible stories and do some things. I think that there would be a double benefit. The children would benefit, they would feel that the men care for them. These are our daddies. The men would say gee! This is what my wife does! It means I can be more helpful. The women would feel that the men are being helpful, and everyone would feel better. I feel it would benefit the church more.

I wrote a letter to Kay to reflect on our conversation. The writing of reflective letters is in keeping with practices of narrative approach to therapy practice (Morgan 2000: 101-110). It is also my way of attempting to remain transparent to participants of how my interactions with them affect me, how I am experiencing their voices. The letter also summarises some of the ideas Kay shared with me. This is the letter in full:

Hi Kay!

You know when I use that name that it is about our conversation regarding women and their participation at the Dube church. Thank you again for making time for that conversation. I am aware that you made that time at the most hectic time of your life. I again went through the transcript of our conversation after you wrote to say that you were happy with it and its contents. I revisited it to reflect on some of the ideas and thoughts that you shared with me. I would like to share with you some of my reflections in this letter. I will try to keep it short, knowing that you have your hands full with your work schedules and of course the lovely children that are only too happy to keep your attention on their interests!

You spoke of how in your travels in the West and Africa has led to your observation that while there are more women involved in the doing of church in the western church, in Africa women are still more on the fringes of the church life. You then said of the African scenario: "And I am inclined to think that it is a cultural thing. A woman being in the forefront of things in Africa, it is an issue". You also said: "I am inclined to think that it is a cultural thing about the role of women. I don't think the church is doing it deliberately. The church (world church) is open about it. But the leadership in various places determine the role of women in their locality, irrespective of what the global church may say". Thinking about the church in Dube, this makes me wonder as to what it is that can be done to work towards change, change towards a situation where even the Dube church can embrace the position of the world church regarding unhindered participation of women in the church. For people who hold cultural practices in high esteem, how do we get a buy-in from them without alienating them? Does culture influence their worldview and scriptural interpretation? If so, would change take place easily and quickly or is it likely to take a long time of, to use your words: 'workshopping', and 'educating'? I suppose the journey to where

women and men 'work as a team. Because we cannot be a team with people who are competing with you' will call for not only commitment but also patience and gentleness as well on the part of those who work for this change. You said we need: Workshopping the church, talking about it. You said: Not arguing, talking about it. We need to move away from fighting about things to talking about issues. That is the only way we will grow. Because we are now at a point where we are arguing about it. We must have discussions, studies done by the leadership and the pastor as well, I think so. We talk about the role of women, say in a series of workshops.

Kay, you also spoke about getting men to participate in what up to now they have not been participating in. You wanted to see them involved in the children's ministries activities. You said: 'I think that there would be a double benefit. The children would benefit, they would feel that the men care for them. These are our daddies. The men would say gee! This is what my wife does! It means I can be more helpful. The women would feel that the men are being helpful, and everyone would feel better. I feel it would benefit the church more. I was just thinking of whether this could also serve to foster the idea you spoke of; that of working as a team. I also wonder if the idea of inviting men to participate here could also help make them more open to be willing to invite women to participate in other areas of church life! I suppose we could then attempt to replace the 'culture' of exclusion with that of inclusion.

When you spoke of how it is like for you when you make your voice heard; you said: And someone like me who is very vocal, I always got on the wrong end of things. Because over the years I have learnt not just to take everything just because they have been said. I would think things out, read around the issues and question. With this thing of questioning things, with time I have found myself on the other end of exchange about issues. Kay, what does it take to carry on this way – I mean carrying on even though you sometimes get on the wrong side of things? Does it require some resilience or it comes very easy for you? I was just thinking of how beautiful it would be if no one had to strain to be heard! If we created an environment where everyone is both seen and heard!

You also spoke of how you 'grew up in a home where my parents encouraged us to study, to question and to ask. Not to take anything that is being said. And my dad, my dad. Yah, I got that from him. Not to take anything lying down. When you hear a thing read about it, think about it. Then open your mouth and speak your mind. When you say something it must have been researched upon and thought out. I think I got that from my dad'. You said: 'My dad and mom had a very nice relationship. I learnt a lot from my parents. And I think that I have strength to talk about these things because in my own home it wasn't I am the man and that is it. It was: We are a team'. When I picture this type of a family, it just so much resonate with my own dream for the Dube Church family, and other church congregations as well. A Church Family where we work as a team and everyone's ability to contribute is given a chance. Would it need to start with the individual families being like that in their homes? I want to take this possibility I see in your family with me as a source of encouragement as I work for something akin to it in Dube.

As I conclude, may I just mention that the Task Team (you are a member) has since submitted its report to the church on the question of women preaching and serving as elders in Dube. The church has voted to approve the preaching of

women and 'reserved judgement' on women serving as elders. I hope that the journey continues towards a happy ending. Thank you for participating in the Task Team.

I wish you well, together with the children. Thank you again for making time to talk with me.

Regards

J Mongwe

3.6 The Three Men (Papi, Vusi and Themba)

Papi, Vusi and Themba are men in their forties and are very enthusiastic church members. They are actively involved in church activities and have been involved in various leadership positions of the church. They are all avid readers of the Bible and other religious books published by the church. They are all married and have children. When I approached Papi to participate in this research, he listened carefully as I explained the preferred subject of inquiry and immediately expressed interest. I approached Papi because I was interested in his ideas regarding why he believes women in the church should not be elected to be elders and should not be allowed to preach. He has on several occasions publicly stated his position on the matter. On follow-up discussions to firm up the arrangements, Papi insisted that he would participate if he could do so together with Vusi and Themba. I accepted his request for the two to join us. I thought to myself that this, although bringing an unexpected twist in the approach to doing this work, it was a welcome one that could bring interesting insights. I was curious as to what his reasons were for bringing the two men into the discussions, but I decided not to enquire. It crossed my mind that Papi might be concerned that he might be overwhelmed by my knowledge of scripture as a pastor or theologian, and that he might have felt a need to assemble a 're-enforcement' to be able to stand up to my power and resist it (I discussed this possibility of power and resistance in anticipation in chapter one). Although he was to discover for himself that we were not going to have a theological debate on the subject, it remained important for me to let him participate in his terms. We met twice at Papi's home, his expressed preferred venue. Both meetings lasted for about ninety minutes each. I noticed at our

first meeting that they all brought their Bibles and had prepared notes. I got a little apprehensive as to whether their preparedness might derail the purpose of our meeting. In our first meeting I first explained to Vusi and Themba what I was doing with the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) and how they were now participating in my research work. After they signed the relevant documentation that I gave them, we started with the conversation. We discussed at length their various ideas regarding the participation of women in the Dube church. We looked at women's participation in worship activities and in the leadership of the church. When we wrapped up the meeting, we agreed that I would transcribe the voice recordings of the discussion and e-mail the transcripts to them for review. They would highlight areas they consider to be important for inclusion in the final document. We then needed to have another meeting where we would reorder the discussion into themes. My initial apprehension proved to be baseless. The men seemed to be interested in sharing their serious concerns regarding the church's apparent departure from the scriptural guidelines on the role of women or their lack of role in the church. I needed to listen and be informed of these concerns.

During our second meeting, Papi's opening remarks echoed my concerns regarding the role of patriarchy, the threat that women might be seen to bring if their participation were to be increased, the research process and my pastoral leadership at Dube where there are different ideas concerning the participation of women in the church. Papi said:

Well there is a problem here, the way I see the people of Dube they are very liberal. And they prefer things to be done in a businesslike way. Dube is more like a business than it is like a church. They want to feel involved. If they feel left out, it is very difficult for them to be supportive. ...Well, I would suggest that you start with an informal bigger forum with the people that you have met. Let them discuss their ideas together and after that you can then take it to the business meeting. Because at the end of the day we must have one mind. We are not here to see who is better. We need to have one mind and give the church some direction. What worries me is that most of the churches that have problems of women are falling apart. They are divided. That worries me. If we are not careful, and we want to implement the same, then we will fall into the same trap. May be people are serving their own interest not what God want. May be they

know the truth but they don't want to follow the truth. Afraid of other people. That is why I worry about the way forward and the results of these discussions. This issue is very sensitive. This issue can divide the church. And immediately the church is divided there is confusion, and God is not a God of confusion.

Papi's concerns are also informed by previous incidents in the Dube church concerning attempts to discuss women's participation I have already referred to the church's discussions on the subject in chapter one. I was interested in what it might mean to speak with one accord. Whose voice would be centralized and whose might be sacrificed to silence. Papi referred to the 'truth' that people in Dube know. Like it was discussed in chapter two, truth is a social construction, bringing about a social reality and language, context, culture and experience interactively play a role (Philips & Hardy 2002: 2 -4). While previous discourses in Dube and elsewhere might be forming the context for Papi's concerns and observations during our conversation, I wonder if the African value of ubuntu (where a communal approach to life plays a vital role in shaping views and praxis) might not also be at play. It seemed so important to Papi that the church is left in the one mind of the 'truth' that he saw as prevailing at Dube. The 'seeing' and 'doing' together or with the cognisance of the other among Africans is very different from individual forms of theology and practice elsewhere. It would not help the process for me to work in opposition to but with the power invested in them. Although the Three Men seem to talk diplomatically I was picking up something that does not want to challenge the status quo, perhaps they even wanted to maintain it. Their position was that according to the Bible, women should not be elected into leadership positions and that they should not preach during worship. They ordered their reasoning according to their understanding of biblical principles and sociological factors. They preferred that their views be ordered. To do this, we agreed to list them on a flip-chart in their preferred thematic grouping and order. The outcome was as follows:

3.6.1 God's order

God has ordered life in a way that is self-evident that men should lead: In the animal world, males are leaders and protectors and in society men are leaders and providers.

3.6.2. Biblical principles

The Bible says men are heads of families. In the Scriptures, men are priests; no woman is ordained into priesthood. Man was created first; the woman was created last as a helper. God has always held heads of families as responsible for family decisions. Leadership is reserved for men: "This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach" I Timothy 3:1-2. Women are supposed to be submissive. The desire of a woman shall be that of her husband.

3.6.3 Sociological factors

The Beijing gender issues are influencing the current feminist movements that are evident in the church as well. The growth in socio-economic advantage of women in RSA has also increased the level of women's power and influence, even in the church. Men and women work as peers in the cooperate world, and for those with that background, it is easier for them to want to see that in the church. Men are often absent, either physically or in influence, both in families and in the church. This leads to women having to take leadership roles.

As we continued with the conversation, I felt that the men had taken a position that looked like an insurmountable mountain. While it was not important for me to 'convince' them in any particular way, I sensed that it took more energy on my part to listen on with a genuine purpose to understand them than to find fault. I had to remind myself that the process was not about me but them as a church.

I noticed that some of the ideas that the Three Men advanced linked up with those shared by Kuki. For instance, the apparent connection between education and increased voices of women. Also Kuki also mentioned how her having attended the Women's Conference in Beijing contributed to men resisting her attempts to be heard. The Three Men see the women in seeking to be heard in Dube as under the influence of the Beijing movement. What is it about that Conference that seems to make it so readily lends itself as a basis for men to resist women voices? What can be done within the move towards increasing the inclusion of women to minimise the resistance that come by simply dismissing it as a 'secular and worldly' Beijing influence?

I was curious to know how the Three Men experienced the current practices in the Dube church. I wanted to know how things were ordered with regards to women's participation in the church activities from their point of view:

They noted that there was an agreement in the past that women will be used at the discretion of elders to preach during the worship hour. This was to be done on a trial basis. Then the matter of women preachers would be brought back to the church for review.

They also noted that currently women are involved in church public speaking in the Sabbath School programmes, the teaching of Sabbath School lesson, Youth Ministries, teaching of children, Bible studies, Divine service support role and during prayer meetings. There is participation by women in both the teaching and the preaching ministries of the church.

The above is happening because of the shortage of "manpower".

The Three Men believe that the reason for what they see as liberal practice of letting women be involved in the preaching and leading roles are an outcome of "Liberal" men and women who serve in corporate institutions where men and women serve together in boards and management. These are more at ease with regards to the participation of women in the church activities. They would prefer the current scenario. They state that the tendency towards more participation by women on preaching and teaching activities is influenced by social-class and educational level. The more educated and wealthy people are the more likely are they to influence the church towards more participation of women.

I asked as to how women have fared where they have had to rise to the occasion (of leadership and preaching)? The Three Men remarked as follows:

Women have generally performed well. They have sometimes caused some problems, because of weakness, they said, but also remarked that it was good to remember that Timothy was groomed by women. Interestingly, they mentioned that women have proved that they are not

inferior; it is just that God ordained men. They said that there is a difference between a God-fearing woman and those who are not.

It appeared to me that women seem to be under the scrutiny of 'excellence'; say when preaching; where men are not critiqued in this way. This might be one of the costs of making this paradigm shift and it might not be avoided though it can be languaged.

3.6.4 On leadership

Women can take up leadership positions in the absence of men (physical absence and absence of competent men). The point above can be seen in the light of "If these hold their peace, then the rocks will cry out." (*Apparently referring to Christ's statement at the 'Triumphal Entry' – to mean women may legitimately speak and lead where men have failed*). Women can then hold on to leadership until there are competent God-fearing men.

3.6.5 Currently at Dube:

We do not have a woman elder. We have women leading in the following departments: Youth ministries, Personal ministries (secretariat), Sabbath-school departments (Superintendents and class teachers), Adventist women ministries, Treasury and Dorcas department

I wanted to know if it was acceptable to the Three Men to have women as departmental leaders in the church. They answered that:

It is Ok but not ideal. Ideally all departments except for Dorcas should be lead by men. Dorcas can be lead by a woman because women are more sympathetic and caring than men are. Also women are more available than men are to do community work during the weekdays.

I wondered if the social construction of women and their assumed roles were not influencing the position that was being put forth. That led me to ask if the church then should remove all women from the other leadership positions and leave only Dorcas (This was my way of trying to gently challenge their ideas and see if they would like to be aligned with the logical direction of the thought):

No. It would then look like we are chauvinists. Since this situation is here, let's leave it unchanged. We must be wise as serpents and be harmless as doves. Read the times. Do not change the status quo. But elders must always be men.

Reflecting on the practices in the Adventist congregations, I have always wondered how it is easier to accept women to lead in departmental positions of authority, but difficult to elect them to the position of elder. I have not experienced any complaint from any quarter when women are elected to these departments as leaders. Similarly, women can easily address the church and lead out in religious discussions or presentations (very similar in structure to what we call a sermon), but we have difficulty when they need to lead in preaching during the worship time Sabbath morning.

After the two conversations that I had with the Three Men, I wrote them a reflective letter, which also served as a summary of the second conversation. The letter went like this:

Dear Papi, Vusi & Themba

Greetings! Thank you again for your continued participation in the conversations that we have had together regarding the participation of women in the doing of church life at Dube. Please let me share with you some of my reflections on the conversations.

When we met for the second time, Papi started by inquiring: Before we begin, please explain how this thing that we are doing will benefit the church. I have been thinking on that question further beyond our past conversation. I think that it is a pertinent question indeed. The impact of our activities and doings on the church at large should make us mindful of what we do and how we do it. I felt that Papi's question is helping me to remember to be accountable and responsible when working with the church of God. Like I indicated in the conversations, one burden would be to make sure that whatever we do with the question of women involvement, it should give more life to the church, not polarize, or destabilise it. I am curious now as to what contributions towards working for this goal could come from men like yourselves and me. How can we lead the church, through both direct leadership and through influence, towards stable unity but also include practices that are inclusive and participatory in character. Explaining this common care, you further said: What worries me is that most of the churches that have problems of women are falling apart. They are divided. That worries me. If we are not careful, and we want to implement the same, then we will fall into the same trap.

I think also on these remarks made by Papi and Vusi:

Papi: Yah! And if you read this document (the transcript of the previous discussion) it is too emotional. It is too emotional. It is too radical. Vusi what do you think?

Vusi: Yes, I think there were a lot of emotions involved. But I what I liked also is that there were a lot of serious things that we discussed.

Where did those emotions come from, and what do they tell us about the four men (including myself) who were in that meeting? Did the emotions reflect our commitment to the Word, the welfare of the church? What made us feel so strongly about what we were talking about? It is also clear, like Vusi says; we were able to raise some valuable ideas as well; in that meeting that you felt was also emotive. Great! I think that we could both feel and think!

In keeping with the agreement that we made in our first conversation, we proceeded to arrange the ideas from the previous meeting and those that came in the second meeting in a thematic arrangement. Under the theme 'God's order', you felt that God has ordered life in a way that is 'self-evident' that men should lead; observing that male animals provide both leadership and protection to their 'families'. You said this can also be seen in society that has men as leaders and providers. I have been thinking on these ideas, wondering if all animals have only the males as the hunters, providers and protectors. If there are exceptions, what implications would that have? I wonder also as to the implications of the many human families that are led and provided for by not only adult women but even headed and provided for by girl-children in our world today! What is God's position in these situations that has become perhaps a tough reality?

Under the theme 'Biblical principles' you spoke of how the Bible says men should head the families and the church, and women having to take a submissive position in both family and church. How has the leadership of men in these institutions? How does our track record look like? Have we managed to lead in truth and in love? I am thinking of how we could hold ourselves responsible and accountable of our leadership. Of ways to acknowledge the role played by women in providing leadership in families led by women where men have left (because of death, divorce and ineffective presence). I think of the role played by women in our church in assisting to lead in departments, in the song and praise services and in caring for our children during the church services. Thinking of these roles, what are our thoughts concerning their participation in song and children's stories during the weekly Sabbath divine service? Is it OK for women to fill the gaps created by men who are either absent or unfit to lead the church? How would we relate this to our understanding of the scriptural guidelines on women's role in church and worship?

You also remarked on how currently women are involved in some departmental leadership in Dube, remarking that generally they have performed their duties satisfactorily. Does God approve of their input in the life of the church – I mean this satisfactory performance?

We then concluded the conversation on the role the pastor could play in the Dube church where there are multiple ideas and voices on the subject of women participation. You said the pastor should provide scriptural guidance, clearly

stating God's will on the matter and lead the congregation through its business meeting to bring the then pending matter of women's role in church leadership and preaching to a finality. I take the challenge. I think it is a tall order for me but I am willing. I am aware that a lot will also depend on the willingness of members to be led, to be open-minded and to enthusiastically but caringly proceed with the task of bringing the matter to a close. I will need your continued prayers on the tricky yet necessary journey. Papi, thank you for your direct participation in the Task Team on this suggested process, which culminated in that business meeting on August 13th 2006.

Thank you, Themba, Vusi and Papi for participating in the conversations. Thank you for coming as Three Men. That brought a very interesting twist on the journey. I truly treasure your involvement.

God bless.

J M Mongwe

I continue to reflect on the three conversations above in chapter four.

3.7 Dube Task-Team

As mentioned in chapter one, during the course of the research process, there was a twist in the congregation's attempt to deal with the increasing call for women to be given more voice within the church. During the sitting of the nominating committee that was appointed to elect leaders for the ensuing year (2006), the committee felt the need to appoint two women elders out of the five it wished to appoint. I was then invited to join the committee to give advice on the matter. I expressed my support for the idea, but cautioned that seeing that this would be the first, and that we had reasonable grounds to expect fierce resistance from some quarters of the church, it might be necessary for us to first share the idea with the congregation and seek for its approval in principle.

I joined the chairlady of the nominating committee to present the proposal of the nominating committee on the matter. It was felt that it was necessary for me to literally stand with her as it was anticipated that it would be a gruelling experience to table the matter for deliberation by the congregation. Like we expected, what could

have taken no more than ten minutes for the church to make an input and settle with a vote, actually took forty minutes of heated and sometimes very emotive debate. It felt very uncomfortable for me to be on the receiving end of the congregation's emotions. I naturally would be more comfortable to be in front of the congregation receiving accolades and affirmation. Finally, the church decided that a Task-Team be put together to study the matter and bring its findings to the church for possible adoption of a position on the matter. The congregation insisted that the terms of reference should include the long outstanding matter of women preaching in the church. A group of seven women and men was appointed by the church (Kay and Papi were among these). Church members felt that there need to be a mix of those who are known to be in favour of the proposal and those who are known to be against the proposal. I joined the Task-Team at its first sitting. I explained the dual reasons for my presence: As the church pastor but also as a researcher. They expressed their approval of my presence and for me to use the process material for my school work. They also approved the use of a voice recorder during the sittings.

3.7.1 The Task-Team deliberations : The Mandate

The Task-Team discussed what it understood to be the mandate given to it and shared the ideas about the preferred approach to the task. They shared their concerns and preliminary findings. It was the Task-Team's understanding that they were tasked to find the church's position on the question of women preaching in church, and whether or not women could be elected as elders of the church. In going about doing this, the members of the team would look at all available sources on the subject, both from official Adventist sources and Adventist but unofficial sources. Arguments for and against needed to be checked. The members were to go beyond looking at the official position of the church and also look at practices in the church in various places. I intentionally positioned myself as a member of the Task-Team rather than be its chair-person, thereby empowering the chair-person and members to freely apply themselves to the task as they saw fit. While they from time to time asked for my comments and advice, they were in total control of the process. This, I believed,

would escalate the value of the participatory ethic that I wished for in guiding the research.

3.7.2 Preliminary observations

The chair-person and the members of the Task Team agreed and noted that while the church formally rejected ordination of women into ministry, starting in 1995 at Utrecht, the world church has no problem with women serving as elders. The proviso in its policy document on the subject caters for local needs to be taken into consideration when a decision needs to be taken regarding the ordination of women elders. Further, that the church has no issues with women preaching in the congregations at any time. He remarked that Ellen White (a founding member of the church) wrote extensively advocating for women inclusion in the ministries of the church. It was also agreed that culture does influence our interpretation of the scriptures, like it did those who wrote the scriptures. We need to try to be conscious of this influence.

The Task-Team adjourned the meeting with the understanding that each member would submit their findings in writing of no more than two pages (excluding annexure) for the group to discuss and consolidate. The Task Team members did their research individually, looking mainly at the theological debates on the ordination of women ministers in the Adventist church. To do this, they accessed the archives of the church on its website (www.adventist.org). Some also looked in some of the available books on the subject. The findings were exchanged among the members via email, with all members required to submit to Malusi Buthelezi, who was requested to compile the submissions and make a document to be used during the next sitting of the Task Team. It was at this time that I wrote a follow-up letter to the chairperson as an attempt to help the group to focus:

18 May 2006

The Chair-person

Task-Team: Women Elders and Women Preaching

Brothers Nyama and Buthelezi

Thank you very much for the document that I received yesterday on the subject of the possible election of women into eldership and the question of women preaching in the Dube Central congregation. The document summarizes the work of the Task-Team in readiness for the presentation to church leadership and the congregation. It is very clear that the Task-Team has really exerted itself on the task. I truly appreciate the hard work that you are doing for the church in Dube. As I perused through the document and reflected there upon, the following thoughts came to mind:

1.2 The document ponders extensively on the SDA Church discussions and developments on the question of the ordination of women into pastoral/ministerial work. Both arguments supporting the ordination of women ministerial workers and those against are well summarized in the document.

2.2 I feel that the Task-Team could consider doing more work that zeros into the two areas of concern as expressed by the church: What is the position of the church on the question of electing women into eldership? And whether women can be used as preachers in the Dube church. The latter question has been on the table of the church for several years (when I came to Dube four years ago, the question was already under discussion for a couple of years).

3.2 I think we could look for more material on the subject and organize the material to address the two questions. Let me mention here that in various situations in the SDA church we have elected church/company leaders and not ordained them, both male and female. Would it matter if we elected women elders in Dube, if we did not ordain them? In what ways can we help settle the question of women preaching in Dube Central? I get the sense that the church wants to have a position on the matter. On the day of the establishment of the Task-Team, the church charged leadership of dragging its feet on bringing this question to settlement. They tasked the Team to do the work, and I think we have an opportunity to contribute here. Is it possible to look for material here and also to bring some recommendations to the church?

Thank you for the hard work you have already put into this task. I can hardly wait to see the rest of the process. God bless.

Justice Mongwe

When they met to review the submissions it became apparent that the material was not covering the mandate given to them to make finding on whether women may preach in the Adventist church or not, and whether women may be elected as church-

elders. It was then resolved that members should go and find materials on the subject, and that the information gathered on the ordination of women ministers be filed to be made available to interested church members but not be used for the purpose of reporting to the church. Three weeks were allocated for this process, after which the Team met to compile its findings into a report to table to the church in a church business meeting arranged to consider the report solely (no other agenda items were to be included, to provide sufficient time for discussions on the report). Prior to submitting the report to the church, the elders of the church were briefed and given a summary of the report. The church-board was also subsequently briefed and the summary given to its chairperson. The report was then taken to a scheduled meeting of the church on Sunday 13th August 2006. After the opening preliminaries, I introduced the Task Team and called on the Chairperson to lead the report. I also encouraged all members present to participate in the discussion of the report so that their ideas may be heard for the church to arrive at an informed and inclusive conclusion on the matters.

The Chair-person (Makup Nyama) briefed the church on the mandate the church had given the Task-Team, and their experiences on the process, and then made a PowerPoint presentation of the following report:

3.7.3 Women Preachers

The chair-person remarked about what he referred to as a 'Squabble in Malawi' which they sourced from an article by Jammie Arnall (2000) from the church's online news magazine (<http://www.adventistreview.org/2000-1539/news.html>)

"The Church's position regarding the matter of women preaching from the pulpit is clear," says Pardon Mwansa, president of the Eastern Africa Division (EAD³) of the Church with headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe. *"Women are as free to share the*

³ East Africa Division of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church Head-Quarters

gospel from the pulpit as are their male counterparts," he added. The Malawi Adventist Church is part of the EAD territory.

He went on to explain that the world church allows women to preach at any SDA church meeting any time. Prohibiting women from pulpit preaching has been largely prevalent in Africa. SID⁴ approved women participation in the various levels of church organs. The SAU⁵ and TOC⁶ (Head-quarters for Mpumalanga, Gauteng, North-West, Free-State and Northern Cape provinces) also endorsed the Decision.

3.7.4 Women Elders

On the matter of women elders, he remarked on how more than a decade ago, the General Conference (GC) in Annual Council voted to ordain women elders. In 1984 the General Conference voted that – in Divisions where it was acceptable – women could be ordained as local elders and further voted to advise each Division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local elders. (1984 Annual Council Committee minutes, page 48). The 1990 edition of the Church Manual includes amendments made to reflect the 1984 decision of the GC annual council, with the removal of the word "He" when referring to the local elder, replacing it with "the elder" or the local elder". On the 7th November 1993, SAUC Council approved the ordination of women as elders. The TOC Being a Subsidiary of the SAUC has ordained a number of women elders.

3.7.5 Adventists and Women Ordination

As he continued to report, he highlighted how in 1972 there was the first ordination of a woman as local elder, Josephine Benton by a conference president. In 1988 a study by Andrews University found nearly 1000 women elders serving in North America. In 1975 the Spring Council meeting approved ordination of women as deaconesses, and

⁴ Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

⁵ Southern Africa Union Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church

⁶ Trans-Orange Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church

as elders only “with discretion and caution”. Women may become assistant pastors but with missionary licenses, not ministerial licenses or certificates.

3.7.6 On Women Preachers

Since the GC endorsed the practice, the SID has adopted and endorsed it. SAUC and the TOC have since adopted and endorsed the practice as well.

3.7.7 On Women Elders

The chair-person explained that the GC has *voted against the ordination of women Pastors* (emphasis his), however the ordination of women elders has been adopted and endorsed. Since then Southern Africa- Indian Ocean Division, SAU and TOC followed suit.

Mr Nyama explained how the President of the then East Africa Division of the Adventist Church (a regional headquarters of the Adventist church) intervened where a local congregation refused a woman to preach on the basis of her gender, mentioning this to illustrate how the Adventist church has a position that no member may be barred from preaching on the basis of gender only. The official Adventist position on this is that women may preach in our congregations. This is further evidenced by the appointment of women ministers who serve as pastors/preachers. There has been resistance in certain parts of the world (like Malawi) against women preaching during the Devine worship service, but this has apparently been cultural considerations. He then summed it up by saying with regards to women preaching within Adventist congregations; the World Church position on the matter is that they may preach.

Mr Nyama then went on to present their findings on whether women may serve as church-elders in the Adventist church. He referred to a decision taken in 1984 during the World-Church Annual Council meeting to ordain women elders in local congregations. This decision signified the Church’s position on this question is that women may serve as local-elders in Adventist congregations. This decision, he

reported, was also further ratified and adopted by our local regional church structures: The Southern African Union Conference (SAU) in 1993 November 7th. A number of women elders have been ordained in the congregations of the Trans-Orange Conference, which is the subsidiary of the SAU (The Dube congregation is administered by the Trans-Orange Conference).

After Mr Nyama finished presenting the report, the congregation asked questions of clarity and also engaged in a discussion and reflections on the report. There were expressions by some members to carefully weigh the position of the World Church on the matters against the biblical teachings on the same. Others encouraged the congregation to adopt its own position on the subject and bring the question to finality. When there were indications that all who wished to speak on the report have spoken, Mr Nyama requested the Head Elder and the church pastor to now lead the congregation to take a decision on its preferred way forward on the question of whether women may preach and also serve also as elders in Dube. The two matters were considered separately, starting on whether women may preach in Dube. I asked the congregation to bear in mind that although there are voices that come out strongly against women preaching during the Divine worship service, the same voice do not seem to object when women preach at other times during Dube church meetings. I attempted to create a paradox by saying to the church: "It seems to me that the voices that speak against women preaching only object to women preaching during the divine service, not against women preaching in church per se". With this in mind, the Elder and I urged the church to settle the matter with a vote. The church then voted to approve the inclusion of women preachers in the preaching roster for all its services, using the same criteria as is used with male preachers.

We then discussed the way forward regarding the subject of women elders. The congregation expressed its un-readiness to take a final decision on the matter, expressing concern for possible division of the congregation on the matter. The church then resolved to request the elders to keep the subject on the church agenda for further study and discussion in the future, and that when the church's readiness to

take a decision to settle the matter is sensed, the elders should bring the matter through for a resolution to be taken.

3.8 Looking forward

With the Dube church having taken a resolution to be intentionally inclusive of women in the preaching ministries of the church, I now look up to the church leadership to implement the resolution, trusting that the male-dominated leadership structure will find it possible to do so without hindrance and reluctance. I will provide the necessary support and encouragement. The decision by the church to delay making a resolution on whether women may be elected as elders in the Dube church leaves the matter open for further discussion and consideration. I would have wished for a resolution on this matter as well. I do, however, appreciate that the matter is not closed and will continue to be explored further into the future.

Chapter 4

Reflecting on the research journey

Chapter one introduced us to what this research journey was about while chapter two discussed the epistemological theories and theology that guided this research. In chapter three I presented the actual research journey by way of documenting the conversations I had with the research participants and the Task Team appointed by the Dube church to look into the subject of women inclusion in the church's preaching ministries and church leadership. The church's resolutions on the matter were captured there as well. In this chapter, I will revisit my search journey and reflect on the experiences and some ideas that came to mind. I will again include some selected portions of the conversations I had with the participants for the convenience of the reader as I reflect on the conversations. This will also let the voices of the participants to be continuously heard alongside mine.

4.1 In the beginning was...

My journey begun with some sense of certainty of what I wanted and where I would find it. I thought I knew how I was going to be helpful to the Dube church: to be part of a voice for the marginalised women and that many would quickly 'come to the party'. I had viewed Dube as somewhat more on the 'liberal' side of things in many ways. I had chosen to do work with Dube on the participation of women and the inclusion of their voices in the doing of church life primarily because I had imagined that it was a doable project. I had even thought that the ideas of increasing the voice of women members there will find so much support that I might never find any challenge to my views about how patriarchy is oppressive – and that is why I had initially decided that for that, I would have needed to go to another congregation (Orlando West) to get it.

As things started to unfold and as I held conversations with the various participants in the research, I became aware that it was not going to be how I had imagined things would go. It even became much clearer that I had not read the situation well when

per chance the church had to discuss the nominating committee's recommendation that women be considered for eldership. My conversations with the various participants, particularly the Three Men, led me to feel the need to even consult more diversely.

2.2 The journey to north

The Three Men argued that one evidence of God's order of things is seen in the way the African and other communities run their affairs. Women are not involved in community decision-making structures, they said. They even said, as a matter of fact: "Even culturally. Take the imbizo's for instance. They have always been for men only. And I do not think that it is because women are the "weaker sex"." That left me thinking about the need to check what is currently happening in some of the rural African settings. I decided to travel to the North, to the ward of Ka-Mandlakazi where I grew up, and to visit the chief's kraal, the tribal authority's administration offices at Ka-N'wamitwa. The Mandlakazi ward is under the Ka-N'wamitwa tribal authority. It is led by Ndhuna Mageza, a man in his late seventies. Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, ward councillors have been elected in the villages to serve besides and together with the traditional leadership. The Ndhuna represents the traditional leadership. I approached him at his home to invite him to share with me how the traditional system is currently working, with specific reference to the involvement of women in the structures. He was willing to participate. I also spoke to Khensani Ngobeni, who is the secretary of the Ka-N'wamitwa tribal authority. These were once off meetings and both conversations were conducted in the Shangaan language. The transcripts reflect my translation into English. The purpose of these interviews was to find out whether women do actually participate in the community structures in that rural setting at this stage. Khensani and Ndhuna Mageza served as consultants in providing experiences and positions that would possibly challenge those held by me and the Three Men regarding societal practices regarding women participation. Since I did not originally plan to include these participants in the research process, and since they are not in any way connected to the Adventist church and the Dube congregation, I decided not to include the transcripts in chapter three, but here in this

chapter where they serve to assist in giving perspective in the reflections on the conversations with the participants from Dube.

I now want to revisit the landscapes that I encountered on the way. I will do this by selecting various ideas as shared by the participants, looking for relationships and commonalities, and where applicable, opposing views.

4.3 My Conversation with Kuki: Some drums' sounds are smothered: A sense of being silenced.

Kuki spoke with an apparent burning desire to see change in Dube, change towards an increased participation of women in the church. As she spoke during the conversation I felt myself privileged to be allowed into her own journey and struggles. I felt like I could try and be part of the meandering path she seemed to be in. At some stage she said:

"You see the church didn't give us the platform... Also your fathers, our husbands, the type of school they came from; they preferred the women to take a background position, never coming to the fore, not becoming prominent, women were excluded from certain roles. So you would experience the pressure starting at home, you know.... At home you have this pressure from husband, and then from men in general in the church"

Kuki's experience of being pushed to silence, that of men's voices being privileged at the expense of those of women, seem to be echoed by that of Kay when Kay said:

I am inclined to think that it is a cultural thing about the role of women. I don't think the church is doing it deliberately. The church is open about it. But the leadership in various places determine the role of women in their locality, irrespective of what the global church may say.

In the face of these views and experiences of Kuki and Kay (and other women), the Three Men describe to what extent some men would go to demonstrate their resistance to any attempt by the church to include women in worship participation:

So they let women preach, and we who do not like women just get out when they preach. Because my biggest problem now is that we are no longer as a church the salt of the world, now the world is the salt of the

church. Whatever happens in the world is influencing the decisions in the church. People now treat the things of God the way they do at work. Because they sit with women in the boardrooms place they think they can do the same in the church. My biggest worry is that all along there was no problem with women until after Beijing – so we are directly influenced by the world. There is nowhere in the Bible where it says that women are equal to men. If they can say women are equal to men, where will they say they get it in the Bible.

The apparent positioning by men to keep women in the background of the church life, as referred to by both Kay and Kuki, although not always overtly calculated on the side of men, has an effect of making women some form of second-class members, less privileged and less heard. As will be commented upon later, there is an attempt to let women feature during the divine service of worship in the church, albeit this only seem to be the case on special days like Women's Day. This is a step in the right direction. It just leaves one wondering as to how long it will take before we will arrive at practices that are non-discriminatory and inclusive. It is the strong positioning by some men, like the walk-outs in protest by the Three-Men, that may frustrate and stifle progress. I remain curious as to how it must be like for women in the podium and women in general to experience a demonstrated rejection symbolised by the walk-outs.

When I hear the Three Men bemoan the influences of 'the world' and 'Beijing', I suspect that these and other men might very sincerely be experiencing changes and progress in women participation in the circular world as threatening to them and their religious and cultural practices and values. A question may be asked as to how these changes and progress could be embraced without destabilising the church life and making men feel expensed by the inclusion of women. How do we shift paradigms without threatening the congregation's faith and sense of being Bible-centred? The Three Men clearly see themselves as the Bible-loyal people.

When Kuki expressed how she found the church to be depriving women of expression; and she proceeding to refer to 'your fathers, our husbands' who preferred that women should be in the background and not the foreground, this came across to me as the church and society clubbing together to silence the voices of women. It reminded me

of the Foucauldian ideas and his work on power and discourse as discussed in the past three chapters. Is it that discourse disappears into the veins of society everywhere to be experienced but no-where to be talked about? I wondered how the silencing that she experienced felt. Having grown up within a Seventh-day Adventist church family, I felt like Kuki was expressing how the church home had failed her and other women such that she had no choice but to go 'out there' to find a home for expression. If change in this regard is to come, where could it start? Should it start in society or in the church – or could church and society again club together to work for change? Or would it take initiatives by individuals for it to progress? How does find language for that which is taken-for-granted as truth and not worthy of spitting out in words?

As alluded to above, Kuki notices and acknowledges some changes in the church that gives some form of voice for women, although this is still limited. Her reading of and celebration of what she observes contrasts sharply with the observation and reaction of the Three Men. She says of the Dube congregation:

"Well, talking about what I see in Dube, because that's where I am, and I assume it is the same in other congregations: I would say the church is growing you know! For the simple reason that when it comes to Women Ministries, there is no attitude. When it is women's day, the modus operandi is for the church to let women do it on their own. There is no stereotypic attitude. Women are left to plan, organize and do it for themselves. This is good. And these days the leaders of AWM (Adventist Women Ministries) are more bold and more confident. They're more educated. They can vent, and there is sisterhood. They reach out to those less empowered".

As I pondered on Kuki's comment concerning women's day, I realised that in contrast it is in such occasions that the Three Men would protest against what they perceive as the church lowering the biblical standards. Looking at the same scenario that Kuki finds reason to celebrate about, the Three Men would find cause for protest. They say:

Since the introduction of Adventist Women's Ministries programme in the church the Dorcas department has declined. Dorcas is now for middle-class to lower class women. This is now a class issue. AWM women sleep in five star hotels when they conduct their conferences... We have women who are very influential in the church. Men no longer have any effective say over women in the church. This shows itself in the dress code, music and church order. It is because women are now

exerting an economic influence in the church. It is because they are educated. Male preachers are now soft. They are afraid to challenge women.

Usually Women's Day in the church only comes once in a calendar year, around the time of the Women's Day holiday in the calendar. This has been my observation too, that when it comes to women's participation in the church worship, women only have prominence when it is 'their day'. Credit needs to be given to the church for having come to establish a department (Adventist Women's Ministries) that looks at the interests and needs of women in the church. However, I am concerned that if we limit the participation of women to such departments while others are no go areas, and while we limit their involvement in leading worship to women's days, it might still be an expression of control and domination. It becomes another form of window dressing; without being integrated into the full life of the church.

4.4 Different tunes about resistance.

Kuki also spoke of how women, earlier in the history of the Dube church, used to resort to what she called passive resistance to men's attempts to keep women away from the church's preaching ministries:

Yah! But our grannies were satisfied to do it (resistance) the passive way. You know. Because they used to do house to house. They would visit homes to offer Bible-based counselling and family support. Only women did this, no men were involved in the house to house. They mentored us...In fact they decided that may be the pulpit was not important anyway! They thought so but we thought we needed access to the pulpit, but we did not get any access. Then we later realised that the essence was not on fighting for the pulpit. Not really.

It would seem that the women decided to use their own powers to move themselves and their ministries away from the reach of the domineering powers of men – away from the church into the community. This could be a way of calling to play the dynamics of Foucauldian (Foucault 1980: 141, House 1994: 106, 108-109) ideas of power-resistance, as referred to earlier in chapter three. While the women in Dube did

their resistance this way, something akin to but different from it was happening in Kay's family. Kay says:

I grew up in a home where my parents encouraged us to study, to question and to ask. Not to take anything that is being said. And my dad, my dad. Yah, I got that from him. Not to take anything lying down. When you hear a thing read about it, think about it. Then open your mouth and speak your mind. When you say something it must have been researched upon and thought out. I think I got that from my dad... And someone like me who is very vocal, I always got on the wrong end of things. Because over the years I have learnt not just to take everything just because they have been said. I would think things out, read around the issues and question. With this thing of questioning things, with time I have found myself on the other end of exchange about issues. If you are in a discussion about things for instance, men would put across an idea. And I would then say NO WAY, that does not hold. And I would make my point why I think it is not so. But you see men would like water it down because you are a female, they won't take your idea. But you know I have come to see that they want to have the last say in things. They want to feel they have said it, they know better. Yes they know better because they are men. That's the big thing. They have read it somewhere, they've seen it somewhere. They have been given the authority by God. Women can be listened to but what they are saying is not it.

When she spoke of how her home environment cultivated this trait in her of not taking ideas at face value, but questioning and enquiring, and how specifically her dad contributed to this by way of encouragement, not only did it make me think of the post-modern view regarding the plurality/multiplicity of meaning and the ideas of deconstruction discussed in the previous chapter, I also wondered about the quiet ways of doing gender differently and how resistance works in clever ways with those who hold power. It appears that this often happens behind closed doors, in homes. Having said this, the opposite is also true that the abuse of women also happens in those quiet spaces behind closed doors. Where should the endeavour to get more voices of women start; in the homes of our members or in the church? Or may be it might need to be advanced from all fronts at the same time. How do we encourage our girl-children to look for opportunities to make a meaningful contribution in the church and community and boy-children to be more open to expecting women as well

as men to be able to meaningfully participate in the doing of life in all its spheres? It would seem that Kay has come to conclude that she has to strain, to try harder than men have to, to earn a right to be heard. I wonder whether one can have the strength to go through life in an 'over-drive' just to make sure that they are heard in the essential things of life. It makes me wonder what wisdom and knowledge Kay has from her background that could contribute to a course on family life. This local knowledge is so often disregarded as anecdotal or unimportant. For example, what would happen if I engaged her in a conversation about respectful practices in a church service, drawing on her own experience of her family in Zambia?

4.5 On women leadership

My conversation with Kay also took me through a path that was sometimes thought provoking, but at other times brought sadness in my own heart. She spoke with passion and expressed a lot of personal concern on the effects of the silencing of the voices of women and limited participation of women in church leadership. But Kay herself struck me as a person who is able to insist in making sure that she is heard, or at least listened to. When the Dube church got into a rather heated debate in response to the nominating committee's recommendation that the church allow it to nominate also a woman to serve as one of the elders, this part of my conversation with Kay re-sounded in my mind:

Dube has been liberal and progressive in many spheres. I think they are backward when it comes to the role of women in the church. In Dube there are still people who think that women should play a back role, they should not be elected into leadership and they should not preach. Those are very strong views that are held at Dube and I do not think that they are willing to accept it even though they may be willing to accept other things.

Referring to this experience, Kuki says:

I felt the church was stifling. It was not what I wanted for myself. Also your fathers, our husbands, and the type of school they came from; they preferred the women to take a background position, never coming to the fore, not becoming prominent, they were

excluded from certain roles. So you would experience the pressure starting at home, you know.

Listening to Kuki and Kay express their experiences, which is also that of other women, I felt a little discouraged. I wondered if we were ever going to realise a paradigm shift at all in the question of women involvement. This was especially so when considering what the Three Men said:

Nowhere does it say women are equal to men. It never says if a woman wants to be a bishop. Or does it? Church leaders should be males according to the Bible...There is no scripture allowing women to lead...Even if you consider the animal kingdom. The males are the leaders and protectors there as well. That is the order created by God. Historically, whenever women have been allowed to take influential positions in life, destruction of that community always followed. Like in Sodom and Gomorrah. Look what happened when Jezebel was in power! Balaam also used women to seduce Israel into destruction.

4.6 Shifting and not dislodging paradigms; including women not dislodging men

Kay's vision of an inclusive church resonated very well with my own commitment, first to gently move with the church towards a paradigm shift, and also to make sure that we do not end up dislodging men in the ministry of the church. Both men and women would have unrestricted access to the expression of their spirituality and desire to minister. I found her idea of incorporating men; including the voices of and participation of men in the ministries of the church where hitherto men have not taken part in, very illuminating and ushering a brilliant idea which would benefit men (by way of enriching their insights and participation) and children. In Kay's own words:

If things were up to me; if say we had eight elders for the church, four of them would be females. I would encourage that four of the eight be women. Encourage that, not force it but encourage it. It would be women who meet the standards. I would encourage more participation of the women in the activities of the church. Not just taking out the glasses and pouring out of the wine by deaconesses during the Communion service. And pouring the water in the dishes and holding towels. I would encourage that they play a more active role in the church. If I had my way I would have more women preaching every

now and then. Look out for suitable people who can deliver the message, but make sure that a woman preaches at least once a month. I would involve women in a lot of programmes, but also vice-versa. For instance I would involve men in as well in children's ministries. It is always women who minister to these children. The children never get to see men involved with them. Some children do not have fathers in their homes and they do not have opportunities to interact with these men. The men should also learn to be involved with children, tell them Bible stories and do some things...I think that there would be a double benefit. The children would benefit, they would feel that the men care for them. These are our daddies. The men would say gee! This is what my wife does! It means I can be more helpful. The women would feel that the men are being helpful, and everyone would feel better. I feel it would benefit the church more.

I believe that this way of working for shifts in paradigm and church practice may gently bring about some of the desired changes without threatening the males in the church, and also without causing destabilisation of the church systems. This way it would have a way of minimising resistance, I presume. To accomplish this, it may require patience as it sure would take time before the desired outcomes are seen.

When one listens to the Three Men make statements like: "*That's straight forward; it does not need any explanation...There is no scripture allowing women to lead*", it is difficult to immediately think of an entering wedge in bringing about a shift in paradigm. But by carefully and respectfully inviting men to women's experiences the way Kay suggests, I believe more can thus be accomplished as men become more aware and understanding. It can be hoped that men can also gain respect for the roles traditionally played by women.

The Three Men came across to me as quite convinced and resolute in their position that God's will is that women be excluded from both preaching and leadership in the church. There are some members in Dube; both men and women, who sincerely believe the same. Thinking about this, I have wondered if there might be some patriarchal practices that might not be harmful, which we could embrace to assist for a smooth movement towards the reversal of some injustices against women that have been part of the patriarchal way of doing things. When I reflect on this, I ask myself

whether it is possible to work with order, hierarchy and patriarchy in ways that might subvert the dominant text but at the same time hold enough multiplicity of meaning as to accommodate traditional practices in order not to crush an order that might have worked in Africa and elsewhere for many thousands of years. Accommodating some wisdom/traditions that are not oppressive.

That men may feel threatened by new ways of doing church should we fail to be thoughtful in our approach to work for change can be evidenced by what the Three Men said:

It is not working, it is completely dead. Even those men who think they are leading, they are just fronts for women, just like in BEE. We have women who are very influential in the church. Men no longer have any effective say over women in the church. This shows itself in the dress code, music and church order. It is because women are now exerting an economic influence in the church. It is because they are educated. Male preachers are now soft. They are afraid to challenge women...They are intimidated! They are even becoming reluctant to take leadership positions. They are relinquishing leadership to women. Another contributing factor is family life problems. Because of problems at home, men are reluctant to stand up and face the church. So women are trying to then dominate the men.

On the possibility of embracing women participation in doing church life, I take the challenge that comes from where the Three Men would least expect it from; the voices from the rural and what should be a traditional setting. When I had a conversation with an elderly traditional community leader, Ndhuna Mageza, his observation and attitude towards the participation of women in community matters and leadership, this is what he said:

In the past women were sidelined and oppressed. It was a form of oppression to exclude them. We used to relegate them to the kitchen and the fields. They were supposed to look after the household but not make major decisions. Yes long ago women were excluded from these activities. However now it is different. Right now they are expected to make decisions and to lead. They are expected to be responsible and to be accountable. They must participate in these processes. Then women were not involved in wars, only men were, but today we have women soldiers and women police officers. This is what democracy is about.

Yes, it is totally acceptable in this community – you see, they (women) are people like everyone. I've even seen women lead and preach in churches, they are doing well, no problem. They are doing very well. We are satisfied with their performance of tasks.

I also spoke to Khensani, the area chief's secretary. Her observation and ideas about women participation and involvement corroborated and were similar to those of Ndhuna Mageza. She said:

Yes there women who hold offices in the community structures. Like being ward councillors. I will give Belgrade as an example. She is a councillor. Women are quite involved in the affairs of the tribe. We also have Maria Moyo, who is also a ward-councillor. She actually is leading two wards in this village...Yes there is a role that she is playing. If there are developments and matters from the provincial government, she is the first to know and she will be the one that advises the tribal authorities. Having counselled with the chief, the chief might even delegate her to call a community meeting to communicate such matters if it concerns the community. And life goes on like that, with no issues whatsoever.

While the Three Men were concerned that 'the world' and 'Beijing' influenced the church on the matter of women involvement, they also appealed to what they said could be taken from the traditional practices as evidence of how natural it is for men to be leaders and women to play a secondary role in life. When I see tremendous strides on the side of rural communities towards inclusive practices; and away from some of the oppressive patriarchal practices, I just wonder if we shouldn't, as church men, also see that as 'natural' evidence for us to need to rethink our own position on the matter. If the church is to fully play its prophetic role, it might need even to champion these changes and lead the secular world.

In reflecting on the idea by the Three Men that the church is failing to be an example to the world, I thought that Shell's (1992: 165,166) idea could be useful here to challenge this way of evaluating the church and the world around it. Shell suggests that may be it might be the church that leads or support the world in perpetuating oppressive practices, that perhaps the church should, as a way of being the salt, challenge the unjust practices. What can be said of the church in South Africa and elsewhere? Has not the church led society using scriptures in oppressive practices of

apartheid and slavery? If the world changes for the better before the church, is it not a useful opportunity for the church to re-evaluate its own beliefs and practices given an environment that would be enabling? If we allowed for more women participation in the church ministry, would we be following Christ or would we be following the world?

4.7 If we had women elders!

As a way of concluding our conversation I asked Kay to tell me anything that she wishes for me to know that I did not raise during the conversation. This was her response:

The sad thing that makes me feel very concerned in our church is that a lot is happening in our church which the leadership is just pushing under the carpet. There is a lot of abuse that is happening to women in the church. There is physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and abuse in different forms. By the elders themselves and other leaders in the church – and I have heard of pastors as well. And women have no voice, they just do not have anybody to talk to. They talk to me, may be because I am a professional. But I find it sad that the women just feel that there is no avenue where they could be heard. They had gone to tell the elder about what is going on and they get dismissed so very lightly. It saddens me because the church does not belong to an elder, it is God's church. And if certain things are not right they must be dealt with. There are instances where children are sexually abused by their own fathers and the mother is aware of but there is no one she can talk to in the church because the father is in a position in the church, his friends will be the very people she would talk to. There are issues that are there in the church and they need to be addressed and keeping women out of positions is not the answer – we are talented and gifted, we should be moving and marching on – we are going on as a united front; not as a segregated people.

When she spoke of how some women have failed to have their stories of abuse be heard, and how these have been ignored and silenced, I personally felt sad, may be because I was aware of some of the cases she was referring to. It worried me that our way of doing church in Dube leaves some of the members having to do their lives alone without the care of the church. Kay's ideas have already found implementation in the Ka-N'wamitwa and Ka-Mandlakazi communities (and in many communities

within our country). Within the twelve-year old democracy of South Africa, more women have been included in leadership in various community structures and it would seem to be a working practice that is finding acceptance. Khensani observes this way about the outcomes of the trend of women involvement:

It is quite beneficial. If it was men only, there would hardly be development and growth, particularly for women. Like when a child (girl-child) needed to proceed with her educational career, men would decide that a junior primary education is sufficient. This would also be compounded by lack of funds when it was only the men who were bread-winners. Now that we as women are also working and involved, the girl-child is able to further her education and do what she likes and what is best for her. Together as women and men, we are more able to be productive and successful.

In the Kelvin church where the church elected a woman to be one of the two elders for the year 2007, I notice that her presence compels us (the other elder and I) to hear what we would normally fail to hear on women matters. She has also gently assisted us to review some of the matters affecting women that had been finalised last year. This she does so without alienating the men that are immediately around her.

Khensani also sees a benefit that is being experienced by her community since women have been involved at leadership capacity in adjudicating on cases in the community courts:

It does help in making sure that all angles are considered, unlike if it were men only. It would be difficult for men only to have a woman perspective in issues, that way the matters would be adjudicated in a one-sided way. It is better this way when women's perspectives are considered.

It would seem to me that giving some women voice in leadership would also give voice to more women in the pews who would otherwise not be properly heard. What I see in Kelvin appears to be what Kay anticipates would happen at Dube if women were included in leadership (eldership) of the church. The same is experienced by Khensani and her community. Certainly, we would have to start with women whose

approach would be sensitive to men's fears, to try and build a case for women participation, until it becomes a way of doing church life in Dube to be inclusive.

4.8 The Three Men and scriptural interpretation

As I listened to the Three Men use scripture to strengthen their case against women participation in leadership and preaching in church, it reminded me of how much we are involved in interpretation as we seek to give meaning to scriptures. What was remarkable to me was the certainty and apparent sincerity that the men spoke with.

Nowhere does it (the Bible) say women are equal to men. The Bible says a man is the head of the family, and if he is the head of the family automatically he is the head in the church. He is a God of order, he cannot say he is the head of the family and then lets a woman be a head of the church. The Bible says if a man wants to be a Bishop in the church, he must be a husband of one wife. It never says if a woman wants to be a bishop. Or does it? Church leaders should be males according to the Bible. Check Genesis 3: 16:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Read also Jeremiah 31: 22: How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.

I felt compelled to suggest to them by way of asking a question, that the views that they were advancing from the scripture that they quoted were a result of an interpretation that they held. I was hoping that they may sense a need for allowing for other ways of giving meaning to the same scripture and reality by challenging the notion of absolute truth or objective reality but embracing the ideas of multiple/plural realities (Brueggemann 1993: 9, Burr 1995: 3-5). They said:

Well, people have been interpreting the Bible. They have even become abusive in their interpretation. That is why people even abuse power. For example, when the Bible says you will have dominion, people abused this mandate to dominate instead.

I wondered as to how far, as men, can we go in trusting ourselves in the justness of our Bible interpretation, while we admit the tendency to be abusive. The

interpretations that we have for so long embraced have some of them come to be taken for granted truths (Morgan 2000: 45) that may need to be reviewed. Should we not rigorously call ourselves to accountability for the actual effects of our interpreting and meaning-giving of the scriptures? Who checks us? More so when one remembers how even apartheid in South Africa was defended using the scriptures.

I also experienced uses of certain words by the Three Men as cause for concern for me when I thought of how powerful words can be. During the conversations with the Three Men the following words were used to describe people and their behaviour in the church: "They used the *Mafia style* to let the women preach", "Well there is a problem here, the way I see the people of Dube they are very *liberal.*", also "But putting women in power – *that is like men becoming gays – both unnatural*". I have wondered if the use of words in this way could also serve to create an 'us and them' dichotomy. And who then becomes the "other" in that dichotomy? Who becomes the undesirable one?

4.9 The journey to the North: Conversations with Ndhuna Mageza and Khensani; culture and paradigm shifts

My conversation with the iNdhuna and Khensani made me realise again how culture has to be considered in context. Values and paradigms change and shift during the passage of time and values sometimes get re-evaluated and adjusted in keeping with the prevailing needs of the time (Kotzé 2002: 9). Looking at what is described in the conversation as prevailing practices, not only do we observe shifts in cultural practices in that area but we must conclude that it is absurd to speak of culture as if it were static. Further, a question might need to be asked: Which culture we are appealing to as a basis for continuing with certain practices in the church that might be oppressive to part of the membership? If the notion of 'culture' includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements that characterises its practice (Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2004 (CD-ROM)), then it is very clear from the conversation

that the N'wamitwa community has or is experiencing a shift in its culture. According to the Ndhuna, the advent of the South African democracy caused the shift in practices regarding the inclusion of women in participatory community leadership. He observes that people are welcoming of the changes, and women leaders are performing well. For me the question is whether we, as a church, have something to learn from these cultural shifts. If this community and others have successfully embraced the changes ushered by the democratic changes in the country without causing chaos, shouldn't we then with confidence move towards more inclusive practices within the church, given the ethics of love and mutual respect that is supposed to be inherent within the body of Christ? Can't we tap to the same or similar resources that the South African society is and has tapped from? I take it that the South African experience of democracy has also raised levels of awareness of human rights and inalienable human dignity among the formerly marginalised communities, including women. It is this awareness that increases the potential of heightened frustration when needs are not met, and we might end up with a membership of women who get disillusioned with the church if we fail to make adjustments in the way we do church life.

It would appear that the Ndhuna (and the chief) have chosen to embrace the democratic changes, incorporate women into the structures and relate with the women colleagues in a respecting manner. This is so interesting because I would have assumed that a rural community might be the last to embrace change and the city the first. These conversations challenge this and perhaps go to show how we can be so reductive in our readings of gender. The demeanour of the Ndhuna during our conversation seemed to suggest that he embraces the development without reluctance; one can dare to say he embraces it with enthusiasm. Although my conversation with the Ndhuna and Khensani were simply to attend to the curiosity raised by the conversation with the Three Men, and not the focus of my research, these conversations did serve to raise pertinent questions. How have these communities managed to experience and accept the changes? Did they work for these changes from within the communities or were the changes brought in from outside the communities? It would appear that the traditional leaders have positioned themselves

to work within a traditional structure that is allowing culture to change without collapsing. It does seem also that the inclusion of women did not result in the alienation or polarisation of traditional leaders either. As indicated in chapter one and two, it is my wish also to see the inclusion of women in the doing of church life without polarising the church and collapsing the stability that is currently experienced in the church. It does look like the church and I could learn something from the dynamics that are brought about the changes within the communities lead by the Ndhuna and the chief. Both Ndhuna Mageza and Khensani shared with me how shifts in practices within their communities of community service are occurring, particularly in the increased recognition of women's capacity to make meaningful contribution in the community and their participation in community leadership. Ndhuna Mageza, an old man himself, impressed me as accepting and appreciating of these developments. Khensani, a woman, showed appreciation also. These shifts in the non-church world could be a source of enlightenment and encouragement to the church. We could as a church take the challenge and also begin to move towards practices that are more life-giving and inclusive of all members of the church community.

4.10 Khensani's drum of melancholy

When we were winding up the conversation, Khensani brought up some observation of areas where some practices are still being experienced by women as unjust. I got the picture that whereas in areas of community leadership there has been significant progress made towards the inclusion of women, there remains certain customs and practices that subjugate women and assail their dignity.

How is it that when there is a death of a spouse there are double standards with regards to the societal expectations on the mourning of the surviving spouse? Women are expected to be in a state of mourning longer and suffer from extreme restrictions during the mourning period. They are expected to wear blacks clothes from head to toe prescribed for the entire period. On the other hand, at the most men may only need to pin a small black patch on the sleeve of a shirt or a jacket. Even that for a shorter time and with less strictness and fewer restrictions. Why the difference?...The double standards are unbearable!

This cry would be that of many a woman in the church. Considering that we draw our church membership from the community, we can say that the challenge of the community tends to be the challenge of the church.

4.11 The Task-Team and the Dube Church

Although it was an unexpected turn of events when the Dube church resolved to task a group of members to investigate what the church could do with the question of women participation in the church, I felt very happy with the decision. I was happy because I cherished certain expectations from the process. I was happy also just to see the church beginning to take some concrete steps towards coming to a resolution on the matter. As nominations were in progress, a member raised a need to make sure that there was a balance in the positions of the members constituting the Task Team on the question at hand. There should be a mix of both those who are known to be pro women involvement and those who believe women should not be included in the preaching and leadership of the church. I found this remark and request interesting and wondered what prompted it: Was it a fear that the Task Team might come out biased towards a particular position and unduly influence the church to move towards their position? As I reflected more on the idea, I also became concerned that it was possible that a polarized membership of the Task Team could also possibly result in the process of its deliberations being riddled with debates and arguing, further polarizing the group. This would be an undesirable outcome of the process.

Unfortunately, my fears were not totally unfounded. There were times when in the cause of the deliberations there were tempers and emotions that flared. This contributed also in the delay in finalizing the report to the church (from October 2005 to August 2006). What I would consider a positive outcome from the mixture is that the members knew that they had to exert and fully apply their minds to what they were doing and submitting, expecting that their submissions will be questioned thoroughly by the group.

When the Task Team indicated readiness to bring its report to the church, we assembled the church to receive the report and to act on the report. As Mr. Nyama was presenting the report, I noted his deliberate way of being gentle in his presentation, indicating that it was the 'observation' and 'suggestion' of the Task Team. I found his approach possibly disarming in an environment where it appeared that some people were prepared for confrontation. I also thought it wise for him to have invited the head elder to take the process further, to help lead the church on a possible way forward after the report was presented. I thought it to be important for him to include the Dube leadership in the process; I thought it would help avoid the 'us and them' possible scenario.

I stood with the head elder in front of the church to proceed to negotiate a possible way forward with the church. The elder urged the Dube Church to accept the official church position on the two matters and not resolve to take a divergent position. I shared with the congregation my thoughts about its practice and apparent position on the question of whether women may preach in Dube. I remarked on how I realise that they seem to have been unopposed to the idea of women preachers in general, seeing there seem to be no expressed disagreement when women preach in the church's prayer meetings, during special days like AWM's and Dorcas days. It seemed to me, I said, the issue was only whether women may preach during the Divine service, which is the church's prime time of worship. I noticed that there were some laughter and smiles on the faces of some people, including those who hold strong position against women preachers. I did this as a way of exposing the already practiced subjugated text that challenged the dominant patriarchal order. This way of exposing did not directly attack patriarchy, but rather allowed space for greater awareness of practices that were already including women as preachers. I felt elated when the church resolved to include women preachers in all its worship services. The decision by the church to delay taking a resolution on whether women may serve as elders or not was sad, but understandable – may be even acceptable to me. It was clear that the issue had a great potential to divide the church, and I found it wise for the church to have decided to first prepare and bring the church to what it referred to as 'readiness' to

make a decision on the matter. I would want to see women included in the leadership of the church, but not at all costs.

Chapter 5

Looking at now and beyond

In this chapter I will be reflecting on the current situation that provides for opportunities to work for change towards inclusive church practices. I will also look into future possibilities granted the current situation. While doing so, I will weave in ideas related to the research aim and question.

5.1 Looking into the future

I do not know what to expect in the future regarding the inclusion of women in the preaching programme and the leadership of the church. It is true that the church took a resolution to include women in its preaching programme. What is of concern to me is that currently, the body that plans the preaching schedule is composed of men only. This will be so until the church comes to decide that women may be included as elders. A day after the church made the resolution on women preachers I got a telephone call from the head-elder communicating to me that he was going to find it difficult to facilitate for the implementation of the resolution the church took on women preachers. He reminded me of how he had requested the church not to ask him to serve as an elder if he was going to lead the church during its attempts to grapple with the subject (he had also indicated that he would never serve as an elder where one of the elders is a woman). He said to me: "As far as I am concerned, this is not about women preaching, this is about women empowerment" (This made me wonder if there was a connection in this remark with Kuki's remark that there was particular resistance to her plea for women inclusion after she returned from the Beijing Conference, and what Papi said in the first conversation:

"It all started after women came from Beijing! The thing of Dube introducing the preaching of women was influenced by the world, it was influenced by Beijing. We never had a problem of women until people came from Beijing".

My dilemma is that in Dube, the majority of men who are in the pool of those who meet the criteria to can be elected as church elders are opposed to having women as elders and as preachers, and I must work respectfully with them. It is likely that at any given moment for now and the near future we will have in the team of elders, elders who might tend to resist progress towards women inclusion. Interestingly, within the Dube congregation, during the Task Team report, there have been women members who argued for the status quo to be maintained, explaining it as the will of God for them not to speak or lead in the church. It would appear that they might have bought into the patriarchal discourses and adopted the patriarchal view of women, a phenomenon consistent with situations of oppression where the oppressed are led to a low self-esteem by the oppressor's low view of the oppressed (Wolterstorff 1986: 287). They might, though, be subscribing to these views about the will of God for them sincerely believing that that is the expressed will of God in the scriptures. How does one shake their interpretation without shaking their faith in the scriptures? Nevertheless, I want to try to approach the road ahead with a positive outlook, anticipating pleasant surprises.

5.2 Possibilities and Opportunities ahead

I look forward to continuous attempts to keep the church sensitized of the need to embrace more inclusive practices in its doing of church. I will look for opportunities to facilitate for this inclusion, and for possibilities for paradigm shifts. One of the ways I plan to do this is to make use of my privilege of the office of a pastor. In pursuit of an answer to my research question, I asked the participants for their ideas in ways that I could contribute towards paradigm shifts that would enable women inclusion. Kay said:

I think an effective way you could help in this situation is to hold Bible studies with the church. Give information or an outline; say a week before fore people to go and acquaint themselves with the subject. Bring up the different aspects of it. I think that information is power. Sister White says there is power in the Word. In time all these barriers will be broken down I get the impression that people would be more attentive if YOU presented it than if it was anybody; because the pastor knows more. You see the pastor knows more! We can say the

same things, but if the pastor said it – haa! It makes more sense. And to allow those sessions not to be debates but studies. In times attitudes can change.

Kuki said: "... Also as you are preaching on equality of believers before the Lord, it is helping."

The Three Men said:

" You as a pastor needs to stick to the Bible, be Bible-based. That's it...Increase the number and quality of Bible studies. Restore the MV⁷ classes for youth so that they get that training that we got in the knowledge of the Bible. You can also use your pastoral power and influence to guide people to the Bible doctrines.

During the church's business meeting, several Dube members also expressed the need for pastors to provide guidance on the matter that they were discussing. This vesting of the office of the pastor with power and authority opens up a possibility for influence (Weber 1986: 282). If used carefully and with sensitivity, the pastor could serve as an agent for change because members are poised to listen to him better. The congregation and the participants' responses seem to suggest that it is possible to get the participation of the congregation in discussions that could lead to paradigm shifts towards inclusive practices. While church members are likely to continue their practices of questioning of any perceived departure from dogma and tradition, the authority vested in the office of the pastor on scriptural matters opens up more opportunities to influence change.

In going about working for change, I seriously consider Hiebert's admonition (Hiebert 1986: 275):

"The issue of whether or not to accept this change is a controversial one in the evangelical church today. Much will depend on the strategies of those who desire change and how they go about implementing them".

I share the desire for change with some of the current elders, some men in the church and some women who have expressed their own felt need for change. The desire and

vision for change is not enough. How we go about working for this change is equally critical in determining whether the desired outcomes will be realised. This is a sobering thought.

While I concur that a great deal depends on the change agent's approach for the change process to yield the desired results, and while I personally am willing to carry that burden of responsibility for the process, I am also aware that for some people who are opposed to women inclusion just will not never be willing to allow for change because of what they personally have at stake in the outcome of change (Weber 1986: 282). I have sensed something akin to this in my informal discussions with some men at Dube. Some would site how they would find it offensive just to think of their own spouses 'ruling' them in church. These vested interests in the subject complicate the situation and makes working for change even more tricky. However, Weber (Weber 1986: 282) continues to say that "most people will not be willing to deal with their hidden agendas until their pastors help them discover what they are".

5.3 Inconsistencies in the practices in the Church

There are some inconsistencies that are practiced in the church regarding the role of women in the church. I have already mentioned how women are allowed to preach and teach at various times of the church worship meetings while restricting them from accessing the pulpit at the Saturday Divine worship service. I have also made observations regarding the church allowing women to play leadership roles in the various ministry departments of the church save serving as elders. I further observe that women are often invited to present the 'sermonnette' or story for children during the Divine service. Also, women do get invited by the church fathers to lead the worship in song during the Divine service. All choristers and choir-leaders this year are women. Women soloists and women-only singing groups have often lead the church in song; for a moment commanding the attention of both men and women; including the

⁷ Missionary Volunteer Society: A scout-like youth organisation in the church, which include a curriculum on Bible Studies and leadership training.

pastor and elders, during the worship in song. Jorgensen (1995: 50-51) thinks this incongruity is because

"Many Adventist church leaders do not understand the power and leadership exerted by the musician within the religious service. They see music in a supporting role in the service and think that as the female musician is not ordained she is not threatening the doctrine of male 'headship' over women or violating the spirit of the Pauline injunction that women should accept a subordinate status in the Christian community".

These inconsistencies in the application of the scriptures that are used to teach women submission and silence in the church raises some questions: Are we as a church committed to obedience to what we see as scriptural injunctions to guide our church and personal lives? Can we afford to pick and choose what we will embrace and what we will ignore from the teachings of these Bible passages? Or could it be that we are somewhat aware of some possible bias in the interpretation of these passages? And are keenly aware of how much such interpretations takes away our preferred way of doing church, and hence some relaxations in part of the applications of these interpretations? Could it be a subtle admission that may be pure patriarchal practices are not life-given to all involved? Inconsistencies in another way open the door to alternate interpretations and ways of understanding women in the church. By exposing inconsistency and working with subjugated knowledges it also allows a greater leverage within the already unstable power relationship of those who hold offices of power and those who are in resistance to it. Although beyond the scope of this research project, it would be interesting to revisit the texts of the participants with such inconsistency in mind, knowing that instability is perhaps the greatest seat of change. In this way change is not necessarily attacked head-on, but as explored in some of the texts of the three men, there were ways in which they were embracing change. By taking advantage of these inconsistencies, dialogue opportunities can be created, and more gains be made in the direction towards more inclusive practices. It was in line with this when I helped the church to consciously realise that they did not oppose women preaching per se, but them preaching during the worship hour. I hoped that this would assist the church reflect more on its practices and perhaps allow for more flexibility or even change when they realise that they have been somewhat

accommodative without harming themselves. This was in keeping with my wish to work for change without shocking the church and thereby bring instability and division.

5.4 Searching for possibilities for change

Looking ahead, I want to position myself as part of agents for change, change towards congregations that are characterized by church practices that are more inclusive and participatory. I suspect that this will be a life-long journey. In working for this change on the matter of inclusive practices, I will use for my anchor and point of departure, one of the Adventist pride when it comes to its dogma. The Adventist church prides itself as a 'people of the Book', referring to its insistence on founding all its doctrines on the scriptures. When people get baptised into the church, among the statements of profession of faith they must make is: "I believe that the Bible is God's inspired word, and that it constitutes the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian". The church states as the first statement of belief in its list of the twenty eight fundamental beliefs:

(<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>)

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16)

This declaration of belief and understanding can be referred to, as is mentioned in the statement itself, as a foundation for all other doctrines held by the church. The validity of its other doctrines needs to be checked therefore as to their standing in the light of this. The church's position on women inclusion needs to be tested against this assertion also. It also needs to be looked in the light of its teaching on the doctrine of unity in the body of Christ (statement number fourteen):

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation,

kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children. (Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; Matt. 28:19, 20; Ps. 133:1; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:27, 29; Col. 3:10-15; Eph. 4:14-16; 4:1-6; John 17:20-23.)

The third doctrine of the church that may be helpful in formulating a basis for contextual further dialogue at Dube on the quest for the inclusion of women is the church's teaching on the gifts of the Spirit to the members of the Body of Christ and the doing of the ministries of the church:

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfil its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love. (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:9-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)

There is agreement in the church that these doctrines are important and biblically founded, giving a position from which church identity can be formulated. For me, this would serve as a useful point of departure, working on agreement rather than disagreement and finding those spaces that can open up for change within a dominant

discourse. By starting here, we would also be generating trust within a relational ethic in which dogma is tentatively laid aside while time is taken to allow for multiple voices of respect. The problem with this way is not that Scriptures (and Sola Scriptura for that matter) form the basis of our faith and experience; but rather the rigid and abusive interpretation of scripture that becomes the concern.

If God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity (which gifts include proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, pastoral, evangelistic, apostolic, and teaching), then it would be necessary to ask if it will not be grossly inconsistent with Adventism to then exclude women in the various ministries and functioning in the church. Flikkema (1986: 259) argues:

"Today, one need not be active in the church very long to find that the ministry of the body still depends upon the gifts God gives to women as well as men. The important point is that all gifts are meant for ministry, whether they are possessed by men or women".

I believe that there is a chance for the opening of other possibilities of paradigm shifts if these ideas are carefully shared with members with the necessary sensitivities over time. Groothuis (1997: 232) says:

"This issue needs to be discussed and debated, but not without the grace to forebear and forgive, and the equanimity to 'speak the truth in love' (Eph.4:15), with civility, courtesy, and consideration for others".

5.5 Recognising and celebrating what is in the bag.

As we journey forward seeking for ways towards more inclusion of women in the life of the church, I think that it is important to fully recognise and fully appreciate what has been accomplished or the good that has been happening in women participation in the church. When we are more aware of the good that is already in place, we can celebrate this and also draw strength to negotiate for more in areas where there is still an observed lack without one group being silenced in favour of another. This

favouring could so easily have happened in this research had I not been vigilant in my own capacity to reflect and include the three men's voices without violently reacting to them.

I believe that a balanced assessment of the situation, an appreciation for the gains; will assist in keeping focus as we try to get the remaining areas in the bag. Change is happening in the church and the issues around women and marginalisation are not new to the ecclesial debates. Change is also slow and happens, as I have argued in chapter two, when we find language for alternate ways of relating to one another. The SDA church has perhaps been cautious in its inclusion of women in roles of authority, but as can be seen in this study, change is happening and my interest has been to help this birthing process in ways that do not rupture the stability of scripture and tradition.

Conclusion

An unnamed South African Adventist woman asked President Paulsen on December 14th 2006 (<http://www.news.advetist.org> (2006)): "We make up the majority of the membership of our church...I'd like to know what you plan for the future to change the paradigm in our region in regards to the imbalance in leadership at the local level, which really has no women in administrative work". I embrace this woman's plea for my work in the local church setting. To seek for ways to increase the level of woman participation in all the spheres of church life and leadership. What remains to happen in Dube, and what I wish to join others in working for is, first, the consolidation of the resolution taken by the church to open up the divine service preaching ministries for women as well. Whereas a decision has been taken in this regard, there is still a challenge of implementation. It cannot be assumed that the decision will lead to an automatic implementation.

Secondly, there is a need to work with the Dube congregation towards a leadership/eldership that is inclusive of women. There needs to be the opening up of this hitherto an exclusively male domain to all qualifying members in Dube, including

women. One benefit of this practice would be that if there were women included in the team of elders that lead the church in a pastoral way, the women members who constitute more than half of the Dube membership would have an elder to approach when they need intervention in areas where they would be uncomfortable to speak to a male about (Groothuis 1997: 241).

In going about negotiating for change in these areas, I must constantly seek to 'speak the truth in love', and as affirmed by the participants in the research, avoiding polarizing the church, while seeking to include all believers. The Adventist Church world president alludes to this approach also when he addresses the subject of women participation in leadership, emphasising the need for broader consensus on the matter. I also find it encouraging having him also say to the women in the church: "As far as local congregations are concerned you have a choice in the selection of your own leadership. You can make change by making yourself available. Become a spokesperson, the Lord has gifted you with many, many skills and it is important that you allow that to flow into the life of the church" (<http://www.news.advetist.org> (2006)).

This research process has galvanised my commitment to work consultatively and to encourage participation of all, even if it works against my position. Only in such an environment can lasting growth take place. I am strengthened in my resolve by the developments I observe in others of my congregations. The decision taken by the Kelvin congregation to intentionally include a woman in the team of two elders and their decision to ordain both the woman elder and the deaconesses is a step in the right direction. Their awareness of my position on this issue helped facilitate the carrying out of this bold step which is a first in their history of existence as a congregation. The Malihambe congregation's nominating committee tasked with the election of 2007 church leaders also expressed willingness and a desire to include women as elders, albeit they were limited by the size of their congregation.

I wish to finish off by including a paragraph attributed to an unnamed small girl. This was sent to me via email some eight years ago together with other sayings attributed

to children. I have kept these sayings and from time to time I share them with my audiences. This particular one, sticks out now because of how it is so laden with discourse pertinent to the subject that has been under discussion in this paper. Groothuis (1997: 7, 8) helped me deconstruct the discourses so beautifully and in a way that I had not seen all the years that I had kept the paragraph in my files. Here it follows:

"Dear God,
Are boys better than girls?
I know you are one,
But try to be fair."

The main reason I want to embrace this girl's letter anew is that in doing my work, I want to remember that I am "one", and "try to be fair".

My thoughts on stereotyping and the taken for granted truths have further been challenged and stimulated by a story that I listened to from Kornilia Schuaf. Kornilia is a pastor in Kelvin, a suburb of Johannesburg. I met her in a meeting organised by Bridgid Hess where Bridgid had a conversation with Adrian Vlok. As we were chatting with Kornilia, she told me of an experience that she had in her church. She was not going to be present in one particular Sunday. She then arranged with the church elder to read her prepared sermon to the church. As the pastor and elder were conversing about the sermon, the elder's four year old son was listening. In amazement at what his father was now required to do (to do what is usually done by the pastor), the boy turned to Pastor Kornilia and asked if boys (males) are allowed to be pastors! What a world that this boy has been exposed to!

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Appendix A

MINUTES OF THE PRESIDENTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE SAU BOARDROOM OF THE NORTH BUILDING ON 26 NOVEMBER 1992 AT 08H30

J T Bradfield (Chairman) B H Parkerson, D Birken- PRESENT stock, W H Bohme, S M Chauke, S Mahamba, P M Mabena, P Masitise, O T Mngqibisa, N Ryan, H F Steenberg, C F Venter

H Baptiste, M Bediako, F Thomas

GC

D M Baird, V Wakaba, R Zeeman

INVITATION

VOTED to recommend that the SAU adopt GC Action GC 75-153 in which the guidelines for the ordination of lady elders have been outlined. (See Annual Council Document).

ORDINATION
OF LADY
ELDERS
9

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTS COUNCIL HELD IN THE MAIN BOARDROOM OF SAU OFFICE ON NOVEMBER 7, 1993 AT 12H00

D W B Chalale (Chairman), B H Parkerson (Secretary), D Alien, D Birkenstock, W Bohme, J T Bradfield, D Donga, S Mahamba, P Masitise, N Ryan, H Steenberg, R Zeeman

PRPRESENT

W Eva, A Thorpe, J M Harris

INVITATION

VOTED to affirm the accepted practice that lady elders be ordained but that church boards and business meetings be consulted before implementing the practice.

ORDINATION
OF LADY
ELDERS
32

Appendix B

(An information letter to an individual member in the Dube SDA)

Hearing all the drums: Towards a more inclusive congregation

This letter serves as a request for your participation in a research- project as well as a source of basic information on the project. I would like to invite you as a member in the Dube SDA Church to participate in a research-project, as previously discussed with you. The purpose and other information regarding the project are outlined below for your perusal and to provide basis and information on which you will base your decision to participate or not. Decision to participate or not to should be on a voluntary basis, and should be made only on the basis of interest and understanding of the below-mentioned information.

The purpose of the research work

I am involved with the University of South Africa, through the Institute for Therapeutic Development (Pretoria), where I am studying towards a Masters degree in Practical Theology – with specialization in Pastoral Therapy. This project is in partial fulfilment for this school work. I have personally developed curiosity on the subject and trust that exploring it with the Dube church members and board will yield an opportunity to embark on a worthwhile journey. The scope of your participation will be negotiated together with you first in an initial meeting, but can always be revisited and be renegotiated along the journey. For now, suffice it to mention the following as the purpose of the research work:

- ◆ Examine together the systems of doing our church life at Dube, and the underlying influences impacting on the systems in as far as the participation or not participation of women in directing the church life and organ is concerned.
- ◆ I come with certain assumptions, and one of those is that patriarchy (a system where the 'voices' of men (patriarchs) are given more privilege than those of women (matriarchs)) plays a role in our way of doing church life. I would, however, wish for this assumption that I hold to be challenged if need be. We would then together explore the societal views and practices that might be at play in our current way of doing things. We can, together, investigate the practices we brought from the world that might be guiding the way we do church.
- ◆ We could also explore ways in which patriarchy has worked for our good in our families in the church and in our church family. Perhaps identify those elements of patriarchy that have worked for the good of everyone involved and the system, see if we may want to retain those. I already wonder if we may want to just improve on the patriarchal system, revise it or simply discard it. Or even leave things the way they are!
- ◆ Related to the paragraph above, we would, finally, negotiate Dube participating members' preferred way forward.

I request that we have an initial meeting comprising you and me. After this we will meet with a group of individual selected to participate in this research work, depending on whether the rest of the group will be agreeable to this way of proceeding with the project. Individual members participating in the project will be required to indicate in writing (by completing and signing a consent form) their willingness and that they are aware of the terms of involvement.

With your permission, the discussions will be recorded through the use of a voice recorder to provide a proper source from which to create summaries for use in the project. The written summaries will be made available to each of you as a participant to peruse and make any necessary adjustment on the summaries of your contributions. The duration for which the recordings may be kept by me before discarding/erasure will be negotiated with you.

Confidentiality and freedom to participate or not

The decision to participate or not rests on the individual participant. Where a decision to participate is made, such a decision may be reviewed by the participant at any stage of the process, with no consequence to be suffered by such a member.

The records of the discussions or summaries thereof will be included in the research work to be submitted to Unisa and ITD. If you decide, your identity could be concealed (say by use of a pseudonym). During the process, electronic records (voice recordings and electronic (computer) files will be kept in a controlled access environment.

Other participants

I desire to engage other participants from within the Dube congregation. Some will be selected on the basis of their known positions on the subject matter, while others will be selected randomly. This guideline was used in selecting you. The Dube church board will also be engaged as a unit.

Enquiries

At any stage, enquiries concerning this project can freely be directed to me or my supervisor at ITD.

Thankfully yours

Justice M Mongwe
Tel. 083 266 8016

Supervisor: Bridgid Hess (ITD)
Tel. 012 348 6846 Cell 084 549 6462

Appendix C

Sign consent forms

Hearing all drums: Towards a more inclusive congregation

Consent for participation by a member of the church board/individual participants

I have read and understood the contents of the information letter to the board members concerning the project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have been satisfied with the information provided. Should I have questions in the future, I reserve the right to ask such questions and to pursue satisfactory responses to such questions.

I accept that

- ◆ I volunteer without any pressure put on me to participate in the research project.
- ◆ I reserve the right to withdraw my participation in the project at any time of my choice.
- ◆ I am aware of the storage system (and manner) of the records of my participation and my personal details. The raw data on which the work depends will be properly stored for three years.
- ◆ My participation in the project is for no gain, in cash or kind, to me.
- ◆ All personal information provided by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
- ◆ I am aware that Justice Mongwe’s supervisor will read the material included in the research work.

I am willing to participate in this research project.

.....
Signature of participant

.....
Date

.....
Full Name of Participant

.....
State pseudonym *if desired*

.....
Signature of witness