

**THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICT AND ABUSE ON CHILDREN:  
A PASTORAL CARE APPROACH**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

I, Luvuyo Gladstone Sifo (Rev.) hereby declare that this dissertation which I submit for the Degree of Master of Arts (MA) in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria is my own work. All the sources that have been used or consulted in this work have been thoroughly acknowledged by means of complete references and bibliography. This work has not been previously submitted by me either in part or in its entirety to any other University.

Signature:.....Date.....

Supervisor:.....Date.....

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is entirely dedicated to my late grandmother **JONGIWE NOBANTU ETHEL MYOSANA (Mjongie)** whose contribution in my life will forever be treasured and remembered. She instilled in me the gift and love for education, the appreciation for life and the ability to stand on my own. I am what I am today because of her.

Her prayer was always that God would give her “eyes” to see her grandchildren prospering and making a valuable contribution in this life. When she died in 1992, I felt cheated because I had just started studying for my BCur Degree at the University of Fort Hare. To me, her death meant that she would never see us completing that which she had started in our lives.

I thank Mjongie posthumously for her patience with us, for her self sacrifice and dedication in raising us up and providing for us in a context of abject poverty. I thank her for introducing us to the fellowship of the Christian faith. I thank her for modeling for us an example of resilience and Christlikeness. I thank her for her strict disposition and instillation of discipline to us. Had she not done that we would have been lost forever.

**May her soul rest in peace!**

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- ❖ I would like to thank deeply the people that availed themselves to be interviewed for this study. They are men and women in the ministry of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. For confidentiality reasons and ethical considerations I will not mention their names here. I appreciate that they could open themselves up and share their stories in the manner that they did. I trust that through sharing their stories they have received healing for themselves and that the findings of this study will bring healing and transformation to many people who are struggling with traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within their families.
- ❖ The University of Pretoria has not only given me a platform to broaden my wings in terms of theological and academic development, they have also supported me financially by granting me 100% scholarships in both my Honours and Masters Studies. Their contribution has made it possible for me to get to this point. AmaXhosa athi: Nangamso (Xhosas say: Even tomorrow).
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- ❖ Lastly, but certainly not the least, I thank God for God’s unconditional acceptance and love for me. I thank God for God’s provision and guidance and I pray that this work will bring honour, glory and majesty to God’s holy name.

## ABSTRACT

Traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within a marriage affect the children negatively. These children may develop signs associated with PTSD and maladjusted behavior in their adulthood. This pastoral care study is an investigation of the effects of marital conflict and abuse of children. It seeks to give answers to questions like:

- How does traumatic conflict and abuse within a marriage impact on the lives of the children?
- Does this traumatic conflict and abuse affect the children to continue the cycle of violence in their own homes when they grow up?
- How can a child who grew up within an abusive and violent environment care pastorally for those who are in conflict and abusive marriages?

The researcher is a child who grew up in an environment of traumatic conflict and abuse with the marriage of his parents. He now ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. In his pastoral care ministry, he encounters people who go through the devastation of traumatic abuse and violence in their own marriages. As a caregiver, he struggles to minister effectively to such people because he finds himself being traumatized again by his past, as well as their experiences.

This study aims to heal the author of the traumatic wounds he sustained while growing up. It also aims to help probationer ministers, like himself, who grew up in a traumatizing environment. Finally, it aims to come up with a pastoral care methodology that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa could use in order to empower her ministers who may have grown up in dysfunctional environments as a result of abuse, trauma and violence. The author undertakes this study with the assumption that people who suffered traumatically in their childhood cannot minister effectively to those that come seeking for help.

The findings of this study will therefore heal the ministers of the hurt and pain they sustained while growing up, and help the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to care for its ministers so that they can be effective in their ministry towards victims of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within their parent's marriages.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

A young Xhosa boy grew up in the 1970's without a father. He was raised by his grandmother in the rural Transkei while his mother Bongi (not her real name) was working in the textile industry in Butterworth. He would visit his mother Bongi once a month in Butterworth in order to collect money for food and other necessities for the family back home. He would spend a weekend in Butterworth and return home on Sunday afternoon. It was during such visits where he noticed that his mother was involved in a relationship with a man called Sandi (not his real name) who worked for the local bus company. At first Sandi was loving, caring and very supportive to this boy. He would give him some money and he would speak kindly to the boy and address him as his son. Soon afterwards, Bongi and this seemingly loving, caring and supportive Sandi were married. This meant that the boy and his sister were now Sandi's stepchildren. For a while after the wedding, Sandi continued to be a loving, gracious and a caring man to his stepchildren. For the children, who had grown without a father, this was a blessing since they now had someone they could fondly refer to as their father.

One month end the boy Gcobani (not his real name) visited his parents (Bongi and Sandi) in Butterworth. He spent the weekend with them as usual. During this visit Gcobani noticed something different in the household. He had never seen Sandi behave in this manner before. Sandi came home very late at night. He was drunk, very noisy, and extremely irritated without any obvious cause. He appeared angry and used abusive language towards Bongi. He called her nasty names and swore at her. What the boy didn't know was that this was the beginning of an abusive, traumatic and violent relationship in the hands of the person whom he had grown to love, respect and regard as his father. During subsequent visits Gcobani noticed that the situation was getting worse.



Gcobani didn't want to tell his grandmother about the situation since Bongi, his mother, had made him promise that he would never say a word to his grandmother about this. He kept this secret to himself even though he was troubled by this situation. It worried him that his mother was abused like this. It scared and angered him so much the he did not have peace. He did not look forward to visiting his parents in Butterworth again, but due to circumstances at home he had to. He would not think of refusing to go when sent by his grandmother because she would become suspicious. Things got worse to such an extent that one evening, while Gcobani was visiting, Sandi got home drunk, swearing at all of them and started hitting his mother violently and severely that she 'passed out' in the lounge. Gcobani was so scared that even though he had never seen a dead person before, he thought that his mother was dead. He ran out, called the neighbours, who came and helped his mother. They took her to the hospital and fortunately she recovered adequately. Bongi was so apologetic to Gcobani and once again, she pleaded with him not tell his grandmother of what he had seen that weekend. However, the traumatic experience had impacted on the young man so much that it affected his relationship with his parents. This state of affairs bothered Gcobani terribly, but for the sake of his mother, he didn't tell his grandmother. During subsequent visits, the hitting, abuse, violence, and conflict continued in this household. As a result, Gcobani and his mother would have to spend most of their nights outside of the house fearing for their lives as Sandi would come home drunk to hit Bongi severely.

One night, while Bongi was heavily pregnant with her third child, she had to climb down a double story flat in which they were staying, using the nearby electricity pole. She was running away from the abusive and violent Sandi. After that incident Gcobani and his mother walked for half the night going to report the matter to the police. On arrival at the police station they gave their statement and then, because of the unavailability of police vehicles, they had to sleep in the police station for the night. At daybreak they walked back home. When they got home, the fighting began again because

Sandi accused Bongi of spending the night with other men. This is an indication that not only was he abusive and violent to his wife, he was extremely jealous too. He did not care about how Bongi and Gcobani survived the night in the cold. Neither did he care about the danger he put them through. All he cared about was himself, his feelings and his character.

At first the neighbours were very supportive and helpful to Bongi. They would take her in when these fights erupted. They would call the police if need be. They would call the ambulance if Bongi was injured. They would intervene by talking to the couple and peace would be restored for a while. Sadly, this peace would not last for long. Eventually the neighbours would not get involved anymore. This may be because of the fact that the violence and abuse became a routine occurrence in this family. Perhaps they got tired of trying to help and solve this situation which only would erupt again within days. This left Bongi extremely helpless and vulnerable to more attacks and abusive treatment from Sandi. One day, in an act of self-defense, she stabbed him and he landed up in hospital. Bongi had had enough! She couldn't stand the abuse anymore. But the worst thing of all is that she had to learn to fight violently in order to defend and protect herself. This destroyed her. Her character changed drastically. She became withdrawn, abusive to her children and lost her trust and confidence in men. Because of the traumatic impact of this abuse, Gcobani had to watch his mother turning from a loving, caring and a lovely woman to a drinking, violent and a careless woman. She drank to drown her sorrows. She fought physically to defend herself against her assailant. She developed anger and fear that would later destroy her. This situation continued for many years until she eventually plucked up the courage to leave him. However, this was already late, as the psychological and biological damage was already evident in her life. To this day, she suffers from anxiety attacks, fearful episodes and extremely bad palpitations. She has lost trust in people in general, but specifically in men. She snaps at her children and grandchildren for no apparent reason.

She displays symptoms of emotional instability and vulnerability. These are signs associated with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Studies have shown that the psycho-physiological changes of post traumatic stress disorder are both extensive and enduring. This is evidenced by the following quotation.

“Patients suffer from a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms and specific fears. They do not have a normal level of alert, but relaxed attention. Instead, they have an elevated baseline level of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert for danger. They also have an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event. It also appears that traumatized people cannot “tune out” repetitive stimuli that other people would find merely annoying; rather, they respond to each repetition as though it were a new, and dangerous surprise. The increase in arousal persists during sleep as well as in the waking state, resulting in numerous types of sleep disturbance. People with post traumatic stress disorder take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people. These traumatic events appear to recondition the human nervous system” (Neuger, 2001: 108).

The quotation above clearly captures the signs and symptoms that Bongi displays to this very day. Neuger warns us that people who display such symptoms should receive pastoral counseling. When women who have experienced traumatic intimate violence present themselves for counseling they need to be understood within the post traumatic stress disorder framework. This signifies the gravity and the depth of the aftereffects of intimate violence and abuse on victims.

Not only has Bongi developed symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. She also has lost her sense of self-confidence and dignity. Wimberly refers to this phenomenon as shame (1999: 11). He defines shame as “feeling unlovable or feeling that one’s life has a basic flaw in it.” In concurring

with this description, Ramsay adds yet another dimension. She says that to live with shame is to feel alienated and defeated, never quite good enough to belong. And secretly we feel that we are to blame. We think that the deficiency lies within ourselves alone. For Ramsay, shame is without parallel a sickness of the soul (Ramsay in Glaz & Mossner, 1991: 109). That is exactly how Bongi regards herself now. She regards herself as a failure. In her mind she thinks that she has failed in her marriage. She has failed her children. She has failed her family and community. As a result she thinks that she will never amount to anything in life. She feels that she is not good enough for anything. She is apologetic for everything she does and says. She seems to have internalized all of the negative statements and sentiments expressed by her ex-husband to her. Twenty years later, she still harbours anger, resentment and pain from all of those years of traumatic abuse, humiliation and violence. As a result, she never got married again because in her mind all men are like animals.

Expressed in the sentiments above is the deep and psychological reality of shame. Different studies have shown that:

“Shame thrives in the control, denial, and secrecy of dysfunctional families. Shame is an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging of the self. Shame is more primitive and punitive than guilt. In guilt, one’s behavior, not one’s identity, is questioned and repair seems possible. With shame the sense is not, “I have acted badly,” but “I am bad.” The wound of shame is not external but internal, and a woman cannot make this right by herself” (Ramsay in Glaz & Mossner, 1991: 112).

This quotation shows how shame penetrates and shatters the sense of self worth and value in individuals who have been traumatized. They feel worthless and completely inadequate as people. Their sense of identity and pride in who they are is broken completely. They feel small, are filled with self-doubt and overwhelmed by a sense of self-consciousness. Bongi blames herself for the destructive behavior of her partner. She accuses herself of not having been a good partner to him.

She blames herself for what happened in her relationship with her partner. This behavior of self judgement and blame signifies the amount of shame that Bongi feels about herself.

Researchers warn that all people have some experiences of shame that allows them to learn to cope with the occasional failures, defeat, or rejection inherent in living. In the case of severe trauma and/or chronic trauma, however, the interpersonal experience of shame is internalized (Ramsay in Glaz & Mossner, 1991: 113). Once internalized, the distorting effects of shame may function apart from the original experience with the progressively destructive consequences as we saw in the life of Bongi above. She internalized voices of contempt and blame, prophecies of doom and hopelessness and now can voice them herself unprompted. Flowing out of this, her capacity to love and accept herself unconditionally was completely eroded. Her capacity to genuinely give and receive love was shattered beyond description. As Ramsay has observed, “shame engenders deep estrangement within the self and between the self and others and sometimes between the victim and God” (Ramsay in Glaz & Mossner, 1991: 113). This has led some victims or survivors of trauma to ask: “How can you have a relationship with God without a self and without knowing what love is?” (Ramsay in Glaz & Mossner, 1991: 113).

Bongi lost her sense of self worth and dignity. She developed post traumatic stress disorder. She felt ashamed of herself. Her capacity to give and receive love was eroded severely. This traumatic experience also alienated her from God and fellow humanity. It is evident that the negative effects of this trauma went beyond the physical, emotional and psychological aspects to her spiritual being as well. Having seen what happens to the victims of such traumatic abuse and violence, let us now explore what happens to children within that situation.

## **1.2 IMPACT OF THIS MARITAL CONFLICT AND ABUSE UPON THE CHILDREN**

The impact of marital conflict and abuse within the home affects children in many ways. For example, Gcobani is the firstborn of five siblings. He is the only one of them who has a 'normal' family, good education, a meaningful life and a career. His sister Nomzamo (not her real name) who died in April 2009 was an extreme alcoholic. She had four children, all from different fathers. She was very rebellious in character. She left school before completing standard six (Grade 8). As a result she was unemployed for most of her life and lived in a situation of extreme poverty. The third born Mbali (not her real name) also left school early and she cohabitates in informal settlements around Cape Town. She conceived and gave birth to a baby daughter at a very young age. She then dumped her daughter when she (the daughter) was four years old. It is evident in the way Mbali lives her life that she is uninterested in improving herself. She has no formal education and therefore cannot find employment. She has no prospect of a brighter and meaningful future at present. She, like her late sister Nomzamo, lives in abject poverty and hopelessness. In order to survive she has to cohabitate with men that offer her financial support in return. This is because she cannot support herself in any way. The two younger boys are still at school but not progressing as well as they should. There are already signs of delinquency and disobedience in them as well. These may or may not be attributed to the family background of traumatic violence, abuse and conflict.

When time came for Gcobani (the firstborn) to get married, he was very uncertain of himself. He was not sure of the role and responsibility of a husband, father and a life partner. He was fearful of the fact that his own marriage would end up in traumatic conflict because of what he saw happening in his mother's marriage. Of great concern to him was the fact that he didn't have a positive role model from whom he could learn how to raise a family responsibly. He feared that he would fail his children and the rest of his family. Arising out of this was the need to work hard in his marriage in order to prove to himself first, that he could do it. This is because he didn't trust himself enough to

carry out the responsibilities, obligations and expectations of bringing up a family. As a probationer minister now in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the author is stationed in a cross-cultural environment. He ministers to a mixed congregation in the East Rand. He has had to listen and speak to people who are living in abusive marriages and relationships. As he listens to their stories, he is reminded of his own story of pain and trauma. This renders him ineffective in dealing with these problems. He has discovered that unless he is healed from his past wounds he will never be able to help others in such situations. As he engages with the stories of the people, he relives his own trauma and it paralyses him yet again. Feelings of anger, self-blame and inadequacy flood his mind and render him helpless and inadequate as a caregiver. This may be because he has never dealt with his own pain and trauma that arose as a result of growing within an abusive family background.

It is a known and well-accepted fact that children need to be safe and secure in the home environment. Safety and security ensures that they develop a positive sense of self which is necessary for them to grow into healthy, productive and caring adults. Children need to be safe in their communities as well in order to be able to explore and develop relationships with other people. Children also need to be safe at school in order to successfully learn and be reproductive in society (Osofsky, 1995:1). It goes without saying therefore, that when that sense of safety and security is compromised the children will grow to be the opposite of what they ought to be. They will not develop positively. Their growth and contribution in society will be hampered beyond description. This is evident in the situation of Gcobani's family. Throughout the world, researchers have discovered astonishing statistics of children's exposure to traumatic violence in their homes. Such children tend to display different signs and symptoms at different stages of their lives. These vary in intensity. They range from minor disorders to major dysfunction in the children's lives.

According to Osofsky, very young children exhibit emotional distress, immature behavior, somatic complaints, and regressions in toileting and language. They may also display symptoms very similar to post traumatic stress disorder that is usually seen in adults. School aged children tend to display aggressive delinquent behavior and withdrawal symptoms. Adolescents tend to display high levels of aggression, acting out, anxiety, behavior problems, truancy, and revenge-seeking (1995: 3-4). It has been noted that while some adolescents may be able to overcome their experiences, others suffer considerable scars that they carry into adulthood. Studies have found out that they may become deadened to feelings and pain, with resultant constrictions in emotional development. Others may attach themselves to peer groups and gangs as substitute family. When they do this they may incorporate violence as a method of dealing with disputes or frustration (Osofsky, 1995: 4). All of this gives evidence to the destructive and negative effects of traumatic domestic violence and abuse on the children. It shows clearly that these effects go beyond the childhood development stage into adulthood.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

According to researchers, formulating the research problem consists of two key tasks. Firstly, one needs to specify the unit of analysis (the ‘what’ of the study). Secondly, one needs to clarify the research objective or purpose (the ‘why’ of the study). According to Mouton, specifying the unit of analysis (the ‘case’) involves “a clear identification of the kind of ‘social entity’ to be studied, the variables that one is interested in and the relationships between them” (1996: 91). In this section the author seeks to formulate the problem of this research study. The reader will understand very simply the phenomenon that the author wishes to investigate through this study. While doing this the author will also formulate the research questions that this study seeks to address.



Abuse and conflict is real in marriages and it can lead to psychological trauma to both the victim and the perpetrator alike. However, the impact on the lives of the children within such an environment cannot be ignored. It is a known fact that the impact on children who have been exposed to spousal abuse is negative (Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 2000: 91). Different studies conducted in this area have shown that the impact on children is apparent in the following areas: behavioural and trauma-related, emotional, cognitive/school functioning, social skills and attachment functioning. As a pastoral caregiver the author is challenged to care for both the victim and the perpetrator in a way that challenges the perpetrator and restores the dignity of the victim. As the author seeks to help others he becomes aware of the negative impact of growing up in a family characterized by traumatic conflict and abuse.

The problem statement of this study will be expressed in the form of the following research questions:

- How does traumatic conflict and abuse within a marriage impact on the lives of the children?
- Does this traumatic conflict and abuse affect the children to continue the cycle of violence in their own homes at a later stage?
- How can a child who grew up within an abusive and violent environment care pastorally for those who are in conflict and violent marriages?
- Can the Church (Methodist Church of Southern Africa – MCSA) be a place of healing and restoration for those who are traumatized by conflict and violence in marriages?
- How does the Church (MCSA) meet the needs of probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence that arose in their families as they seek to minister to others?
- How can the Church (MCSA) assist probationers in dealing with the trauma they experienced while growing up so that it does not paralyse them anymore in their ministry?

It is envisaged that answers to these questions will help heal the author of the wounds sustained from an abusive family environment. These answers will also empower him to be an effective pastoral caregiver to those who are struggling with abuse, violence and traumatic conflict within their marriages. These answers will further help the Church (MCSA) to come up with a methodology of equipping and empowering probationer ministers who have grown up in conflicting and abusive family backgrounds so that they can be effective pastoral caregivers. Addressing these questions will also create a space of healing, restoration and transformation for such probationers.

#### **1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Having grown up in a conflicting and abusive family background, the author found himself paralysed when confronted by similar situations in his ministry. When confronted by conflict, abuse and violence in the lives of the members of his congregation he found that he couldn't help them effectively. The reason for this paralysis could be the fact that he had not dealt meaningfully with his own pain and trauma of growing up in an abusive family background. In the helping process at which he was supposed to be the helpful carer, the author experienced certain feelings that rendered him unable to listen to and counsel his clients effectively. As a result of these feelings and emotions he was paralysed beyond description. These feelings include among others uncontrollable anger, deep resentment, frustration, helplessness, guilt and shame. In other words, through the process of seeking to help others the author relived his own trauma. It was as if his past had come to 'haunt' him again.

It is envisaged therefore that from the findings of this study empowerment will happen at two levels namely;

- a) The author will be able to deal with his own pain of growing up in a conflict-ridden and abusive background. The first aim is for the author to heal himself of all the wounds and

trauma that he went through during his childhood years. When this healing has taken place he will be able to work with victims and survivors of similar situations without feeling negative or overwhelmed by it. The greatest achievement would be when he is able to work within his own paralysis in order to minister effectively to victims and perpetrators of spousal abuse. That is the first level of empowerment that this study seeks to achieve.

- b) Secondly, the author seeks to empower probationer ministers who find themselves in a similar situation. As pastoral carers who are called by God to be shepherds of the flock, ministers need all of the available equipment and empowerment in order to deal with the difficult situations that they find themselves in. Gerkin has made the following contribution in this regard.

“The ministry of care seeks to promote a creative modification of the power arrangements in the existing structure of things. It attempts to reorder the values that are contributing to symptomatic behaviours. It identifies destructive outcomes. Thus, for the pastoral caretaker, symptomatic crises are an invitation to be a participant in changing the fundamental fabric of personal and social reality and to reconstruct the environment” (1997: 143).

In essence, pastoral carers are change agents. In order for them to effect the necessary transformation in the lives of the people, they need to be empowered for this role. If they are not healed, restored and transformed themselves, it will be difficult for them to play that role meaningfully. This process will help them to be effective pastoral caregivers to victims of traumatic conflict and abuse. They will achieve this by reclaiming their dignity which was lost during their childhood life. It is envisaged that as they do that they will be empowered in order to be able to acknowledge, accept and overcome their own experiences.

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research will focus on the effects of marital conflict and abuse on the children. This is a great challenge to pastoral caregivers in South Africa because abuse and violence within the family

surroundings has become the norm. The impact of this conflict and abuse, as experienced by the author, can have a negative impact on children and it can traumatize them for life.

This study seeks to create awareness on the traumatic impact that conflict and abuse can cause on the lives of the children. The findings of this research will help pastoral caregivers, especially probationers, to deal effectively with this issue. This process will also enable them to help people who live within family situations that are characterized by conflict and abuse. This study will further empower probationers who have experienced abuse and conflict within their families to restore their dignity and finally help them to move from a place of paralysis to a place of being healers.

## **1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY**

The author undertakes this research with the following assumptions:

Children that are raised within conflict and abusive marriages are affected negatively by such experiences. From his own experience, the author asserts that these children are traumatized and may not function properly in the community as a result of this trauma. Arising out of his own experience as a probationer minister within the MCSA, the author further asserts that ministers who witnessed spousal conflict and abuse between their parents become ineffective when called upon to deal with similar issues in their ministry.

## **1.7 RESEARCH GAP**

This research is necessary because many people are affected negatively by marital conflict and abuse that happens within families. The author's observation is that children growing in such families are traumatized and, as a result, become ineffective later in life. Issues regarding conflict, violence, abuse and its effects on children have been dealt with extensively in the fields of psychology and social work. The author has observed that such studies have been mainly conducted to analyse the situation, diagnose the problems and come up with methodologies of addressing the issue socially and psychologically.

Such studies have been clinical in nature. There is little or no theological input which leads to effective pastoral ministry towards victims. This study is conducted by a person presently ministering within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He grew up in an environment where spousal abuse and violence was the norm. He has recently discovered the negative impact of being raised up in such a situation as he seeks to care for those who are undergoing similar challenges. The gap that the author seeks to fill with this study therefore, is to come up with a theological perspective on the issue. He will seek to establish a pastoral care method which will address the impact of traumatic conflict and abuse towards children who grow witnessing spousal abuse and violence. That will be his contribution to the field of Practical Theology: Pastoral Care. By so doing he will be empowering pastoral caregivers who grew up in such situations to deal with their own trauma and pain and then to become healing and transforming agents to those they seek to help.

## **1.8 METHODOLOGY**

Chapter two will discuss in detail the methodology that will be followed in collecting and interpreting data in this study. For now it suffices to say that the author will use a combination of approaches and techniques in order to tease out the problem and come up with a pastoral care method that will help deal effectively with the problems encountered by children growing up in spousal abuse situations. This study will be based on a “participant observation approach which seeks to investigate a phenomenon that is already there and attempts to correct that phenomenon” (Qina, 2003: 6). Probationer ministers within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa who experienced abuse, violence and conflict within their parents’ marriages will be my co-researchers in this study. This approach will be utilized within the framework of qualitative strategy of information gathering and interpretation.

The co-researchers will be given space and time to narrate their stories with a view of eventually receiving healing and restoration for their experiences. In order to do this effectively an open-ended

questionnaire will be administered in a face-to-face or telephonic interview with them. Insights from the Narrative therapy approach to counseling will be used as a springboard on which to analyze the stories of the co-researchers. This will be done with an aim of helping them to engage in a process of sacred identity formation and privileging God conversation. It is envisaged that as they enter into conversation with God they will reclaim their dignity. Edward Wimberly's book entitled "Claiming God and Reclaiming Dignity" offers insights on how people who have been shamed by negative encounters in this life can build up a positive self esteem again.

Through his own experience, the author has come to understand the value of belonging to a worshipping community. Through corporate worship, victims of traumatic conflict and abuse can have their faith nurtured deeply. That is why Anne Wimberly's book "Nurturing Faith and Hope" will be used as well in this study. In addition, the author will share his own story and listen to stories of other probationers who were traumatized by growing up in abusive family environments. He will consult literature widely with a view of finding out what other authors and scholars have said on the subject. Afterwards he will draw out therapeutic healing methods that can be employed to help empower pastoral caregivers who grew up in abusive environments to be effective in their caregiving ministry. It is believed that the combination of these approaches will bring about a sound epistemological foundation for this study.

### **1.8.1 Insights from Edward Wimberly**

Edward Wimberly deals with issues of brokenness and pain among human beings. In wrestling with these issues he comes up with a helpful methodology of dealing with them. He has discovered that as people deal with these issues they ask certain questions like: "What does it mean to be persons of worth and value in our contemporary culture? And how can a relationship with God give us a renewed sense of our worth and value" (Wimberly, 2003: 8). These are questions that I continue to wrestle with as I try to make sense of my own experiences. The degrading circumstances I experienced while growing up

diminished my sense of self worth. My self esteem was broken to such an extent that I thought I was inferior, unloved and unappreciated as a human being.

Seeing that there was no love and security at home I went to the church with the hope of discovering that which I was missing at home. In the church I was told that I am precious in the eyes of God. I would hear messages of affirmation, love and grace. I knew that somehow I mattered to God. I sought a deeper relationship with God because from that I could at least regain a sense of dignity and self worth. I began engaging myself in what Wimberly calls “privileging God conversation” (2003: 7). I asked deep questions of God, but I also let God ask deep questions of me. This process of privileging God conversation continues now that I am a minister as I seek to address similar issues in the lives of those who come to me for pastoral care.

Edward Wimberly states that:

“...we become persons by internalizing the conversations in which we take part, but we become holy persons by giving conversation with God a privileged status over all other conversations. Conversations with God, then, are personal interchanges with God. They transcend human conversations and bring insight into our human condition in profound ways. As a result of these conversations with God, we gain a fuller understanding of our worth and value” (2003: 8).

The above quotation articulates precisely what I experienced as a young child. For example, the conversation I was involved in at home was very destructive to me. I was told by my abusive stepfather that I was useless. He told me that I would never amount to anything in life. He felt that he was wasting his money in raising us – his stepchildren. When I went to church and when I read my bible I heard something different which gave me a fuller understanding of my worth and value. It is this conversation and fellowship with God that became a source of my sacred identity as a worthwhile and valued person. It also helped me to resist being recruited into the negative identity that my stepfather was instilling in

me. Whenever my stepfather would say all these negative things about me, I would silently recite the positive statements I had heard in church. While I did not understand why I was suffering so much I did get an affirmation that...

“God is ever willing to have a relationship with us. God is able to be in relationship with us through personal communication, in this case, through conversation. We can always depend on God to be our conversation partner” (Wimberly, 2003: 9)

### **1.8.2 Insights from Anne Wimberly**

As I regularly attended church, worship became a healing instrument for me. I was welcome in a way that I had never felt before. I was given a feeling that I belonged in a manner that was opposite to how I felt at home. I was taken care of in a very unique and different way to my home environment. Anne Wimberly has been asking questions as to what happens in the worshipping congregations that makes them a special place for those who come. She asks, “The worshipping congregation is an important place for those who enter it, but what happens there that makes it so? Why do we come to worship?” (Wimberly, 2004: vii). She raised these questions in different forums and explored her answers with many groups of people. She then concluded as follows:

“The word that kept coming to mind, however, was nurture – the kind of care, of nourishment, from which new meanings, purpose and strength for Christian living come, not always without struggle, but come indeed. Although what we shared differed in some very distinct ways, a common thread seemed to weave through all of our stories. This common thread was the intertwining of praise and thanks to God with the quest to know ever more deeply what it means to be people of faith and to live with hope in the fray of life. Those who shared seemed to say in a unified voice that the quest is for something to happen in heart and mind during the worship experience that brings forth a deepening relationship with God and a genuine embrace of beliefs with which to live as black Christian sojourners in today’s world” (Wimberly, 2004: vii).



In other words, worship is a place where the people gathered have an encounter with God and with each other. This encounter empowers them to live with faith and hope in the world.

What does this mean for children growing up in family backgrounds of conflict and abuse? It means that they have a place where they can look beyond their suffering and predicament; a place where they can experience love and nurture which will develop faith and hope in their lives. What does living in faith and hope actually mean? “Living in faith and hope constitutes a dynamic mode of being in the world that opposes the languid and life-defying mind-frame of hopelessness, purposelessness, and lovelessness that pervade the existence of many black persons today” (Wimberly, 2004: xviii). Within the worshipping community the attitude of living in faith and hope is cultivated through sermons, songs, prayers, use of liturgical symbols and metaphors that enrich the nurturing process. All these are meant to “kindle and rekindle worshippers’ recognition and embrace of the able God, relational Jesus, empowering Spirit, valued identity, and journey from sin to salvation that move persons toward a different future away from the one present life in our community and larger society would predict” (Wimberly, 2004: xviii-xix). All of this is meant to evoke a deep awareness within us that God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Once we grasp that God’s presence is with us, we can be assured that we are not alone, no matter what the situation says to us.

My conclusion at this point is that children who grow up in conflict ridden and abusive backgrounds will be able to look beyond their predicament if they join a worshipping community that will affirm their worth and value. They will live in hope for the future because of the nurturing from the worshipping community. This nurturing will eventually restore their dignity. As they privilege God conversation they will be able to move from a place of condemnation, rejection and shame to a place of affirmation, acceptance and love. They will know themselves cared for deeply irrespective of their background. It is therefore the responsibility of pastoral carers to create an environment in their congregations in which God’s people will know God’s love, grace and affirmation. Such an environment, if nurtured with care, will counteract the negative effects of the abusive, unappreciative and violent background.

## **1.9 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the author sought to introduce the reader to the background of the study. The pinnacle point of this study is on marital conflict and abuse that impacts negatively on children. The author seeks to find answers to questions like: Does conflict and abuse that occurs in the home affect the children? Do children continue the cycle of violence learned in their own homes when they reach adulthood? How can a child who grew up within an abusive and violent environment care pastorally for those who are experiencing traumatic conflict and violence in their marriages? Can the Church (Methodist Church of Southern Africa otherwise known as the MCSA) be a place of healing and restoration for those who are traumatized by conflict and violence in marriages? How does the Church (MCSA) meet the needs of probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence that arose in their families when they were growing up? How can the Church (MCSA) assist probationers in dealing with the trauma they experienced while growing up so that it does not paralyse them anymore?

In practical theology there is a gap pertaining to our topic as discussed in the section on the research gap and thus there is a necessity to conduct this research. The aim of this study is to come up with a pastoral care method which will empower probationers and all care givers in order to deal effectively with issues of traumatic conflict and abuse within families. In the following chapter (two), the author will explain methods of how to address problems arising as a result of traumatic conflict and abuse within marriages.

## **2.1 METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter the author will provide the methodology of this research study. Methodology is defined as “a system of methods used in a particular field” (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 529). According to Mouton (1996: 35) these methods are concerned with the questions: How do we attain knowledge? How do we ensure that we reach our research Goal? In other words, this is the knowledge of how to do things or the total set of means that scientists employ in reaching their goal of valid knowledge (Mouton, 1996: 35-36).

This qualitative study seeks to address the impact of conflict, abuse and violence within families on children. By qualitative approach I mean “a multiperspective approach to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meanings that the subjects attach to it” (De Vos, 1998: 240). This approach, as De Vos explains, stems from an antipositivistic, interpretative approach; is idiographic, thus holistic in nature, and the main aim is to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life (1998: 241). Accordingly, this study will be contextual in order to understand phenomena as experienced and interpreted by the co-researchers. Data will be presented in the form of words, quotes from people, documents and transcripts. The whole research process, as De Vos would testify to, will be flexible, unique and evolve throughout (1998: 243). There will be no fixed steps and our data will be analyzed by extraction of themes.

A variety of techniques and models will be employed in this study with the aim of teasing out the problem and coming up with a helpful methodology of assisting the children who grew up in conflicting and abusive families in order to be effective caregivers in their ministry. The author’s aim is to look particularly at Methodist probationers who grew up in conflict-ridden and abusive backgrounds. He will conduct face-to-face and/or telephonic interviews with the identified probationers with a view of helping them to analyse their situation, look beyond their trauma and be effective pastoral caregivers.

A methodology of pastoral care will then be developed in order to assist the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to care pastorally for survivors of trauma who are now ministering as probationers within the Church. The author will use Edward Wimberly's method of 'privileging God conversation in order to develop sacred identity', Anne Wimberly's method of nurturing faith and hope and the narrative approach of story-telling. Having listened to the stories of those who grew up in conflicting and abusive environments the author will use insights from Anne and Edward Wimberly to coin a methodology of pastoral care that will assist the Methodist Church in giving pastoral care to the probationer ministers.

### **2.1 (a) Privileging God conversation by Edward Wimberly**

Edward Wimberly deals with issues of pain, trauma and brokenness in human beings. He is passionate about seeing people's dignity and sense of self-worth restored to wholeness. As a result he has listened and interacted with people who ask deep theological questions. Such questions arise out of their experience of pain and trauma at different levels of their lives. Examples of these questions are: where is God in the midst of tragedy? Why do innocent people suffer? How can we discern God's presence in the midst of the carnage, pain and suffering? (Wimberly, 2003: 7). These questions also come out of his personal life journey as an African American who was discriminated against because of his skin colour. He saw the African American's dignity dragged in the mud. Out of this struggle he came with what he calls '**privileging God conversation**'. Simply put, this means that God 'helps us privilege God conversation by asking us questions' (Wimberly, 2003:7). He uses the book of Job as a model for developing an informed perspective on privileging God conversation. Does God ask us questions in the same way that God asked Job? What do the answers we give to those questions mean for us as we deal with issues of pain and brokenness? How does answering those questions shape the way we live our lives? As we deal with such questions and as we struggle to respond to them, we are privileging God conversation.

As a child who grew up in an environment of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence, the author developed a very negative perception of himself. This arose out of internalizing the negative messages he was receiving at home. These messages were destructive, traumatizing and led him to a state of undermining his sense of self-worth. When he went to church and Sunday school he heard a different message to what he had come to believe about himself. The message from church and Sunday school was more affirming and accepting. This led him to a deep state of confusion. There were different and opposing messages coming to him all the time. At church he was told that he was special, loved and created in image of God. At home he was told that he was useless, unimportant and would never amount to anything in life. He began asking questions of God. Where is God? Does God care about his situation at all? If so, why doesn't God intervene to alleviate the suffering at home? He never for a moment thought that God would be asking questions of himself. What the author did not realize at the time was that this was a process in which God was inviting him to privilege God conversation. It is the author's belief that this process will help in creating a restored self esteem to probationers who are struggling in caring for others because of abuse.

While Trevor Hudson does not use the same terminology (privileging God conversation) like that of Wimberly, he seems to agree with the notion that God asks questions of us. This is his reflection on the matter.

“Have you ever stopped to think about the questions that God asks us in the Bible? For many years I somehow missed focusing on them. Perhaps it was because, like many others do, I thought that the Bible was just a book of answers. It was there to give me solutions to my everyday concerns and dilemmas. Then one day, several years ago, I realized that I might be approaching God and the Bible from the wrong direction. It was as if God said to me, ‘Trevor, rather than you asking questions of me, start listening to the questions I have for you’” (Hudson, 2008: xi).

This resonates well with the story in the book of Job, as Wimberly noted earlier. Job was suffering innocently, and, as a result, wanted answers from God.

“Job did all that he thought God required of him. He was generous to the poor and the underdog, he was a respected member of his community and he even sacrificed to God on behalf of his children just in case they had inadvertently sinned. He was a good man who did not deserve the destruction of his property, the death of his children and the infliction of the leprous disease that made him lose all standing and dignity. Those around him, the friends who came ostensibly to comfort him, told him that he must have sinned to deserve this punishment from God but Job throughout maintained that his suffering was truly undeserved. He did not however give up on God but strove to understand his relationship with God despite the suffering, the hardship and the grief he had to endure” (Alexander & Alexander, 1999: 352).

Throughout the whole book therefore, we hear Job struggling and wrestling with God in a very intense manner. Then, in chapter 40 the Lord asks deep questions of Job. We hear God saying to Job: “brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me” (Job 40: 7 NIV). What happens here is that God is giving an opportunity for Job to privilege God conversation through asking questions of him.

While the children who are traumatized by conflict, violence and abuse within their families have similar question and struggles with God, I think that they would benefit from listening attentively to the questions that God might ask of them. Trevor Hudson has always wondered why God would want to ask us questions. He offers the following insights as an answer to this question. Firstly, God wants to enter into a conversational relationship with each of us. One way in which God shows this deep desire is by asking questions. When we start to hear them being addressed to us, we are given a glimpse into those things that God wants to talk about with us. Our answers draw us into a relationship of deeper sharing and intimacy with God. Secondly, God gives us greater dignity by

allowing us to wrestle with the questions rather than simply giving us the answers. Thirdly, there is much greater power to transform us in a question than there is in a straightforward answer especially when they come from God who knows exactly what questions to ask (Hudson, 2008: xii-xiii).

In concurring with Hudson, and taking into consideration what Wimberly says, I deduct the following:

- God values all of us in such a manner that God gives us an opportunity to be involved in an active conversation with God.
- As we get into this active conversation with God, our dignity and sense of self-worth are restored.
- From restoration we move to transformation wherein we internalize the conversation with God and receive a new sense of identity.

Wimberly gives a strong testimony to this truth. He recalls a question posed to him by a long-time friend and a colleague of his, Burrell Dinkins. Dinkins asked Wimberly, “Did not God teach you to privilege God conversation by asking you questions in the same way God asked Job questions?” (Wimberly, 2003: 7). Wimberly’s answer to this question was a resounding “Yes!”

“I remembered how God came to me in a still small voice during my recovery from a quadruple bypass heart surgery. God had asked me if I could accept the healing that God brought to my life. My answer was yes, although I really did not know the full ramifications of that question. The surgery was in December 1994, and since then the meaning of God’s question has shaped the way I live my life” (Wimberly, 2003: 7-8).

Seemingly, Hudson shares the same sentiments as expressed in the quotation above. He says that when he listened to the questions that God asked him, he was able to look deeply and honestly into

his own heart. He was challenged in his relationships and he was able to engage more realistically with the pain and suffering of our society. As a result, he got deep empowerment that changed him from inside out (Hudson, 2008: xiv-xv). I think that this is the miracle that will happen in the lives of the traumatized children as they allow God to engage them in a meaningful conversation through asking questions of them.

From all of the above we find evidence to the fact that when God asks questions of us, God is giving us a rare opportunity of privileging a God conversation. This leads to a miracle of healing, wholeness and rediscovery of who we are. It is the opinion of the author that privileging God conversation would be helpful to the children who grew up in family backgrounds of conflict and abuse as they deal with their trauma and as they seek wholeness, transformation and restoration. Wimberly is of the opinion that “we become persons by internalizing the conversations in which we take part, but we become holy persons by giving conversation with God a privileged status over all other conversations” (Wimberly, 2003: 8).

Someone might ask: What are these conversations with God? What happens when we engage God in a conversation? How can we engage God in a conversation? Wimberly gives us a helpful response to these questions.

“Conversations with God, then, are personal interchanges with God. They transcend human conversations and bring insight into our human condition in profound ways. As a result of these conversations with God, we gain a fuller understanding of our worth and value. While we may not always know the difference between the voice of God and the voices that otherwise fill our head, we can be assured that we can test our discernment within our Christian Community. Where two or three are gathered, Christ is present. God gives us the gift of Christian friends and community in order to help us with this discernment process” (Wimberly, 2003: 8).



I fully agree with the above statement. When we engage God in a conversation we discover deep truths about ourselves. We understand who we are – people created in the image and likeness of a loving God. We also discover whose we are and for what purpose we were created. It is from such conversations that we receive affirmation and assurance of our belovedness. Once we internalize those affirming conversations we can deconstruct any negative perceptions of ourselves. We begin to appreciate who we are and live with dignity and honour despite the shame of growing up in conflict-ridden and violent backgrounds. It was in a Christian community where I heard something different and life-changing. In this community we were not only told of how we were important and special to God but we also expressed this belovedness in songs like:

“Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so” (Anna Warner in Alexander’s Hymns, undated: Hymn 317).

Whenever I would hear negative statements from my stepfather about my uselessness I would silently sing the above or any similar song. Whenever he would start beating my mother I would silently recite the words of affirmation I had heard in the Christian community that week. This sustained me through these difficulties even though I was wounded. In a sense this became my coping mechanism.

Apart from the above, I had to learn to pray. At Sunday school I was told that God hears prayers and answers them. Even though I cannot remember what the subject matter of my prayers was at the time, I remember reciting the Lord’s Prayer every evening. This was in keeping with the teaching at our church and the expectation of my grandmother. These were very special moments of sharing with God in a conversation. Later, during my confirmation classes I discovered that “prayer is the communication, spoken and unspoken, that takes place between ourselves and God” (Methodist Catechism, 1952: 18). As a minister, I now teach people that prayer is a dialogue between two

people who love each other – God and human beings. Prayer is the most important activity of our lives, because it keeps our relationship with God alive. I have come to understand that prayer is just like being in the presence of someone you love; sometimes you speak, sometimes you let them speak or sometimes you don't speak at all, but just enjoy each other's company. While the company at home in the abusive family setup was unpleasant and traumatizing for me, I soon found out that in the company of God I was safe and welcome every time. That shifted my attention and focus away from conflict and abuse towards love, acceptance, peace and grace. This was always a miracle moment for me, for I knew that while things were bad at home, there were moments of enjoying peace and tranquility in the presence of God through prayer.

Wimberly further asserts that "God also gives us the gift of Scripture" (2003: 8). He uses the book of Job to show how transformation happens when persons learn to put conversations with God in the forefront.

"In the book of Job, we meet a man named Job who was honoured by all who knew him as a righteous person. Yet, this good man suffers staggering losses and is shamed by well-meaning friends who insist that there is something wrong with him. Surely, he has sinned because God is punishing him. Throughout the narrative, Job sorts through different levels of conversation about human value and worth until God's voice breaks through with wind and fury. Although this Biblical story gives no answer to the reason for the suffering of the innocent, it does affirm that God is ever willing to have a relationship with us. God is able to be in relationship with us through personal communication, in this case, through conversation. We can always depend on God to be a conversational partner" (Wimberly, 2003:9).

The above quotation articulates with great clarity my deep and painful journey. The Bible stories we heard at Sunday school spoke of God as someone who was always on the side of the oppressed.

We heard that God journeys alongside the poor, the vulnerable, the discriminated against and the suffering. These truths would come out when we recited some scripture passages like the shepherd's Psalm (Psalm 23). One evening when the fights broke up between my parents I sat in the corner of the room and I recited Psalm 23. I was asking for protection for my mother. I was pleading for strength, courage and the ability to fight back this monster who was abusing her in such a brutal manner. In the midst of the Psalm I found myself asking: Why God, why...? How long will this continue? What have we done to deserve this? What can we do to make this go away? Are we so bad that we can be punished like this? I did not get any answers then, but somehow I asked these questions over and over again as the episodes of abuse and violence erupted in our household. This terrible abuse was uncalled for, undeserved and extremely traumatizing. What I did not understand then was that through these questions I was inviting God into a conversation which would become "the source of **my** sacred identity as worthwhile and **a valued person** and of **my** ability to resist being recruited into negative identity" (Wimberly, 2003: 9).

Wimberly further makes an interesting observation about the story of Job. He observes that God did not answer his question of why he suffered, just as much as God did not answer the questions of why did the African Americans suffer racism and slavery because of their skin colour. To this very day, God has not directly answered my question of why did we have to suffer traumatic abuse and violence in the hands of the man we had come to trust and love as our father. However, I think that Wimberly's observation is very helpful when he says...

"Nonetheless, God did provide the gift of fellowship; and from this gift of fellowship we have discovered our sacred identity as persons made in the image and likeness of God despite what was being said in wider culture. In fellowship with God we also discovered meaning through vocation. God disclosed to us that we were partners with God in redeeming creation from evil. We also learned that we could live victoriously by resisting recruitment into negative identities. In

short, we have learned to overcome racism in all of its manifestations, including our internalization of it, by entering into fellowship with God” (Wimberly, 2003: 9).

Fellowship with God as alluded to in the above statement offers a unique opportunity for people who are traumatized to discover a new identity that dispels the negativity arising out of their experiences of conflict and abuse. The gift of fellowship, as the author can bear witness to in his own life, is that it helps us to look beyond the pain and suffering of the present moment to a brighter future of hope and prosperity. Fellowship with God helps us to close our ears to the voices of condemnation and judgement. It opens our eyes, ears and hearts to receive the unconditional acceptance of love that God offers us. Out of this experience we begin to look at ourselves not as failures but as successful people; not as unwanted but as the beloved people of God; not as victims but as survivors. The lesson that enriches the lives of children who grew up in conflict and abusive backgrounds is that while God did not remove them from the traumatic situation, God however was present in their struggles, offering them a deep fellowship from which they could derive a new sense of identity. This is the same lesson that Wimberly learnt in his own situation. He learnt that “God is present in my struggles with life and death concerns. I can depend on God to be present in both the suffering and pain of the recovery process and in the transition from life to death” (Wimberly, 2003: 9). He further says that he learnt to trust God because God sees him as a person endowed with worth and value.

To me this means that he (Wimberly) does not judge himself anymore on the scale of his negative experiences but on the new scale of God’s affirming and gracious love. Whatever the traumatic, negative and painful experiences did in his life, he no longer uses that to define who he is; he uses the fellowship with God to be the basis for his new identity. Can this be helpful to people who suffered traumatic conflict, abuse and violence when they grew up? Yes, I think so. It will help them to deconstruct those negative identity formations they had and reconstruct a new identity that flows from love, affirmation and

fellowship with God. This process of deconstructing the negative and replacing it with something better is known as “positive deconstruction” (Pollard, 1997: 44). This is how Pollard explains the process:

“The process is ‘deconstruction’ because I am helping people to deconstruct (that is, take apart) what they believe in order to look carefully at the belief and analyse it. The process is ‘positive’ because this deconstruction is done in a positive way – in order to replace it with something better. There are none of the negative connotations that are sometimes associated with the branch of literary criticism known as deconstructionism, but rather a positive search for truth” (Pollard, 1997: 44).

It is worth noting that, “the process of positive deconstruction recognizes and affirms the elements of truth to which individuals already hold, but also helps them to discover for themselves the inadequacies of the underlying worldviews they have absorbed” (Pollard, 1997: 44). This is the gift of grace and the miracle that comes from having fellowship with God. People who were subjected to degrading circumstances of violence, conflict and abuse can benefit from a deep sense of fellowship with God, and as they do, discover for themselves the inadequacies of the worldview they had absorbed. As Wimberly discovered, so will they discover that “God is the ultimate One who bestows life and worth on all of us as human beings” (Wimberly, 2003: 10). A family background of pain and trauma does not bestow life and worth to children. The traumatic experience of growing up in such a background does not help them at all to become responsible adults and citizens of the world. It is God’s affirmation through fellowship that brings them to a place where they can discover a new identity. From such fellowship they will deconstruct the negative images of their worldview and rebuild something positive that will be beneficial not only to themselves but to the rest of humanity.

The process wherein traumatized people can internalize this affirming God conversation is called **sacred identity formation**. This is a process in which God helps us to “sort through a variety of cultural conversations and internal conversations about our human worth and value until we can prioritize God

conversation the way Job did” (Wimberly, 2003: 10). This process of ‘sorting through’ these conversations involves “our ability to respond to God’s gracious transforming presence in our lives, restoring us to our original relationship with God, which was disrupted by the fall” (Wimberly, 2003: 11). In other words, sacred identity formation happens when we give God the centre stage in our lives, leading to transformation and rediscovery of who we really are – people of worth and value. “Being a person of worth and value”, asserts Wimberly, “means being embraced by God’s love despite our faults and human limitations” (2003: 10).

The assumption of this research study therefore, as teased out from Wimberly’s methodology is that giving conversation with God priority in one’s life will transform not only the individual but also the broader community (2003: 13). As evidenced in the personal life of the researcher, who grew up in a traumatizing family background, it is possible to privilege God conversation and by so doing discover a new identity as a person of worth and value through the help of a faith community. The author refused to be molded into the culture of negativity and nothingness. He refused to believe the statements that were uttered to him by his abusive stepfather. Instead, he was adopted into a culture of acceptance and love which nurtured his faith and hope. As a result he discarded all of the prophecies of doom that came from his stepfather and looked positively to the faith community of which he was part. Fortunately, while the stepfather was abusive in every way, he did not stop the author from belonging to a faith community. The author was always looking forward to attending the worship services and Sunday school activities of his local church because that is where he derived a sense of his worth and being.

The method above leads further to a discussion on how one can nurture his or her faith in the midst of traumatic violence and abuse.

## **2.1 (b) Nurturing faith and hope by Anne Wimberly**

What happens in the worshipping community that makes it a place of importance for those who enter it? Anne Wimberly asks. She poses serious questions as to why do people come to worship. What do they seek and what do they gain in a worship service? What happens to the hearts and minds of the worshippers during the worship experience that brings forth a deepening relationship with God and a genuine embrace of the beliefs with which to live as Christians in today's world? What is happening in our worshipping congregation that nurtures us in our search for faith and hope and that does so in ways that evoke within us the answers that we seek? (Wimberly, 2004: vii-viii). Responses to such questions gave birth to a book she published in 2004, "Nurturing faith and hope: Black worship as a model for Christian education." Anne Wimberly says, "living in faith and hope constitutes a dynamic mode of being in the world that opposes the languid and life-defying mind-frame of hopelessness, purposelessness, and lovelessness that pervade the existence of many black persons today" (Wimberly, 2004: xviii). She asserts that the worshipping congregation is a firm ground that nurtures such a faith and hope. My own personal experience affirms the above quotation. My family background did not appreciate who I was as a person. I was told many a time that I was useless and would never amount to anything in life. That drained all the hope I had for the future. That destroyed all of the dreams I had for myself. That left me in a situation of utter despair and trauma. Something life-changing happened to me whenever I went to my local church for worship. I would come out feeling in my heart and knowing in my mind that all will be alright. In the midst of a traumatizing, hopeless and loveless situation I was able to think that all would eventually be okay.

Anne Wimberly says that faith and hope are nurtured in many ways in the black worshipping community. Sermons, songs, prayers, liturgies and symbols used during worship become the catalyst for nurturing faith and hope. These speak directly or indirectly to the needs of the worshippers in a way that seeks to address their situation. That is why the worshippers can come out of that worship service feeling and knowing that it is okay.

Wimberly defines faith as “our belief or trust in our relationship with God and God’s relationship with us through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit” (Wimberly, 2004: xviii). While she puts it differently, her definition of faith clarifies and even simplifies the definition given in the Book of Hebrews. The author of the Book of Hebrews defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11: 1 NIV). In other words, there are two ingredients for a faithful life, namely, 1) belief or trust in God, and 2) relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. She further defines hope as “our expectation and endeavours to live confidently and courageously in community after the model of Jesus in times of triumph and in the midst of hard trials and tribulations” (Wimberly, 2004: xviii). Hope sustains us in our life journey. While lifting us out of the muddy existence of pain and sadness it (hope) also assures us of a bright tomorrow.

Both faith and hope were planted in me through my involvement within a worshipping community. These were my secret weapons against the trauma of being raised up in a conflict-ridden, abusive and violent background. How did this happen? Anne Wimberly shares some useful insights in response to this question.

“Central to the nurturing process is kindling and rekindling worshippers’ recognition and embrace of the able God, relational Jesus, empowering Spirit, valued identity, and journey from sin to salvation that move persons toward a different future away from the one that present life in our community and larger society would predict. Yet, the overarching aim inherent in the nurturing process is the evocation of awareness that it is God with us in the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit at all times, and who has not forsaken us and will not, even in the difficult wrenching trials of life. This God is the only valid source of faith and hope” (Wimberly, 2004: xviii-xix).



The above quotation is true. It relates to how I experienced life. While I could not relate to anyone at home; while I felt that I was imperfect and therefore not worthy to be loved; I turned to God of whom I was assured of love, care and genuine concern. I had to think deeply about my relationship with God and I had to believe strongly that God is there for me, in a way that nobody else had been there for me before. I think that is the reason why Wimberly cautions that:

“...Faith and hope are not what is merely cultivated in the head. Faith and hope are matters of the head and heart. The goal of nurture is to bring forth our knowing the content of the faith and hope we are to embrace. Nurture is to fill us with and invite our digestion by way of critical reflection on what constitutes the nature of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, a valued identity and the journey away from sin to salvation” (Wimberly, 2004: xix-xx).

As soon as the children who grow up in conflict and abusive backgrounds know that God is there for them, with them and along them, they are already on their way to discovering a new sense of identity. As soon as they believe that God embraces them in their situation, they are already on their way to fruitful, transforming and restoring journey of faith and hope. This faith and hope will help them to stand tall with a renewed sense of confidence in the face of trauma and dehumanizing circumstances. This faith and hope will move them from a place of shame to a place of self-worth.

In his book, “Moving from shame to self-worth”, Edward Wimberly defines shame as “feeling unlovable, feeling that one’s life has a basic flaw in it” (1999:11). In finding a relationship with God through the worshipping community, traumatized children can know that they are loved perfectly. As they know themselves deeply loved, they will be able to internalize something new that gives them hope in the world.

## 2.1 (c) Narrative approach

Over and above the two described approaches (privileging God conversation that leads to sacred identity formation and worship that nurtures faith and hope), the author will use stories as a way of compiling case studies from Methodist probationers who grew up in conflict-ridden, abusive and violent family backgrounds. He will listen to their stories of trauma and pain and ask for their insights into how such trauma has affected them in their present lives of ministry. This process of story-telling is called the narrative approach. According to Tau, narrative approach deals with story-telling where stories of the affected people become the centre of focus (2003: 31). I think that this approach will be relevant in this study since it will give my co-researchers a unique opportunity to tell their stories with the particular aim of helping them to come to terms with the traumatic effects of growing up in abusive backgrounds.

This approach is premised on the idea that people's lives and relationships are shaped by:

- a) ...the knowledges and stories that communities of persons negotiate and engage in to give meaning to their experiences,
- b) ...certain practices of self and relationship that make up ways of life associated with the knowledges and stories. (Dulwich Centre, [www.massey.ac.nz/walock/virtual/white.htm](http://www.massey.ac.nz/walock/virtual/white.htm), Retrieved 08/06/2007).

Michael White agrees with the above statement and further argues that:

“It (narrative approach) assists people to resolve problems by enabling them to separate their lives and relationships from those knowledges and stories that they judge to be impoverishing. They are helped to challenge ways of life that they find subjugating and are encouraged to re-author their own lives according to alternative and preferred stories of identity and way of life” (Michael White, [www.massey.ac.nz/walock/virtual/white.htm](http://www.massey.ac.nz/walock/virtual/white.htm), Retrieved 08/06/2007).

This approach is applicable for work with families, groups, communities and even individuals.

Since I will be listening to individual stories I think that this approach is relevant in this study for the following reason:

“In narrative therapy, people are encouraged to tell their stories in a way that enables them to deal with the hurt and pain that is carried within. They are given an opportunity to open up and share those deep hurts in a safe, non-threatening, and non-judgmental environment. This is done with the sole purpose of facilitating healing and wholeness” (TEE, 2005, 7375, Workbook 2: 164).

In other words, as the participants will be telling their stories, they will also be offered a unique opportunity to deal with their pain, hurt and trauma so that they can move to a place of knowing that there is hope and life after their trauma.

## **2.2 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION**

The author understands methodology as the study of the methods of research. According to Willemse (2008: 17) methodology is the study of the methods used in a particular subject. In this chapter the author attempted to help the reader in understanding the methods to be used in this study. The author will use contextual, qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing data. In this chapter, a combination of approaches have been used in order to tease out the problem faced by children who grew up in abusive and conflicting family backgrounds.

The author has guided the reader into the art of the pastoral care model suggested by Edward Wimberly in his book, “Claiming God reclaiming dignity”. This model suggests that privileging God conversation will restore a sense of self-worth and value to people who have been traumatized by conflict and abuse in their families. As they engage in conversation with God through fellowship, they discover a new sense of identity that shatters their shame, restores their dignity and transforms their outlook in life.

The reader has been made aware of the fact that such a conversation can happen only if it is facilitated within a worshipping environment. Anne Wimberly's model of nurturing faith and hope within the worshipping community has been explained as a useful tool that can help traumatized people to look beyond their predicament to a God who embraces them lovingly and graciously.

In conducting the study, the author will listen to different stories of people who have been traumatized by their upbringing in conflict-ridden and abusive backgrounds. Narrations of such stories will not only give the researcher the information he needs to complete this research, but will also help the co-researchers to come to a place of safety where they can share their stories in order to deal meaningfully with their trauma and get to a place of healing and wholeness.

This chapter has also brought to the fore the author's own understanding of what it means to privilege God conversation with a view of building up a sacred identity for traumatized people. The author shared his own story of how he was able to move beyond the destructive effects of trauma that he was subjected to within his own family to a life of faith and hope.

In the next chapter the author will explain and discuss the traumatic experiences within conflict marriages with particular reference to the impact of such trauma on children and the effects of abuse on the whole family.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OF CONFLICT MARRIAGES**

This chapter will deal with traumatic experiences of conflict marriages. Extensive literature review will be carried out in order to discern the impact of this conflict, abuse and violence on children. In order to reach that goal certain steps will be undertaken in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter endeavours to explain the following concepts: marriage and family, conflict, abuse and domestic violence that leads to trauma. The impact of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence on the children will be dealt with in this chapter as well. Finally, pastoral care for victims in conflict-ridden backgrounds will be proposed. The layout of this chapter is as follows:

- 3.1 Marriage and family.
- 3.2 Conflict – what is it?
- 3.3 The impact of trauma.
- 3.4 Abuse in the family.
- 3.5 Domestic violence.
- 3.6 Impact of conflict, abuse and violence on children.
- 3.7 Pastoral care for the victims.
- 3.8 Preliminary conclusion.

At the end of this chapter the reader should be able to clearly see the impact of spousal traumatic conflict, abuse and violence on children.

#### **3.1 Marriage and family**

In the creation story of Genesis chapter two one finds these beautiful words, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2: 24 NIV). These words are reiterated by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Mark. In his reiteration, Jesus adds another element to this statement. He says, “... So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God

has joined together, let man (sic) not separate” (Mark 10: 8b-9 NIV). I think that this is a point of departure for coining a workable definition of marriage. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman according to the will of God. Is this a sufficient understanding of marriage? That question cannot be answered adequately unless we look at other descriptions or definitions proposed by different authors. Marriage can also be defined as...

“...A legal relationship between two spouses, established by a civil or religious ceremony between two people who intend to live together as sexual and domestic partners. It is the joining together of two people in wedlock” (Encarta Dictionary, 2006: unnumbered).

From this quotation we make another discovery. We discover that marriage is not only recognized religiously, it is also recognized legally. Therefore it is both a religious and a social institution. The aim of marriage, as we can see from the above quotation is for two people to live together as sexual and domestic partners. The Oxford Dictionary highlights another dimension in its definition of marriage. Marriage is described as “the formal union of a man and a woman by which they become husband and wife” (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 515).

One can already deduce that while marriage is personal (that is, happening between two people), it is also institutional (that is, recognized by civil and religious societies). This view is also held by the Watchtower Society.

“Marriage is a divine institution, authorized and established by Jehovah in Eden. Marriage brings into being the family unit, the family circle. Its basic purpose was the reproducing of the members of the human family. Jehovah the Creator made male and female and ordained marriage as the proper arrangement for the multiplication of the human race. The first human wedding was performed by Jehovah as described at Genesis 2: 22-24” (Watchtower Society, 1969: 1114).

It is evident that marriage was designed by God to form a permanent bond or union between a man and a woman.

The author is quite aware of the fact that the institution of marriage has evolved over a number of years. Many governments and societies now also recognize the union between same sex partners as legal marriage. However this is not the focus of this study. This study will only concentrate on the union between a man and a woman within the Christian perspective. In Christianity the basis for such a union is love. When two people love each other they commit themselves to live together. While it may be difficult to define love in concrete terms, for the purposes of this chapter it may suffice to say that real love is characterized among other things by being (a) unselfish – seeking the benefit of others, even at cost to oneself, and (b) sincere – not just an expression of a passing emotion and not just concentration on outward appearance (Davis and Preston, 1994: 267).

We have said that this chapter will only focus on the understanding of marriage from the Christian perspective. Joan and Richard Hunt advise us that there are different understandings of marriage even within the Christian context. They claim that there is no one correct Christian way to view it. As a result, they advocate that couples who want to get married must look at the different perspectives of marriage within Christianity. Such perspectives might be:

“Our church holds marriage to be a sacred covenant relationship – not a mere dull legalistic institution. Marriage is a dynamic, growing interaction, between spouses which is modeled upon God’s covenant of unconditional love with Israel, and with all people, through Jesus Christ. This promise of love and grace is supremely expressed in the appearance of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah – God present in the world” (Hunt and Hunt, 1981: 74).

This basic form of love ensures that the mutual attraction between two people leads to appreciation of one by the other. Is that however a secure basis for marriage or is something else required? Davis and Preston further suggest that marriage is about commitment for life, fidelity and mutual support, sexual union, and, self-giving (1994: 270-271). Let us now look at these aspects one-by-one.

### 3.1.1 Commitment for Life

Marriage is a life-long commitment. It is important for the people who intend on getting married to be aware of this – they are in it for the long haul. Davis and Preston note that life for most people is a very long time. People and their circumstances can change. Social conditions and environmental factors can change. Therefore people who undertake marriage need to understand that this commitment is not only for a specified period of time, or provided that all goes well, or provided that neither of the partners finds someone else whom s/he prefers. It is a total commitment for life (1994: 270). In the Methodist Service Book one finds the following declaration when people make their marriage vows:

“I call upon these persons here present to witness that I (*Name*) do take thee (*Name*) to be my lawful wedded husband or wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy law; and thereto I give thee my troth” (MCSA, 1936: 204).

The above quotation bears testimony to the life-long commitment of the marital relationship. The married partners pledge their love for each other. They pledge that their love will not change even if circumstances like finances, health status and environmental factors change. This is a deep and a serious commitment. As a result, such a commitment needs to be made freely by both partners. There must be no fear, coercion, or any false pretexts; otherwise that would not constitute true marriage.

After the marrying people have made the declaration above, the officiating minister then goes on to say:

“Forasmuch as (*Name*) and (*Name*) have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have pledged their troth either to other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving of a Ring, and by joining of hands; I pronounce that they be Man and Wife together, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God hath joined together let no man (sic) put asunder” (MCSA, 1936, 204-205).



This pronouncement by the officiating minister seals the commitment made earlier by the wedding partners. The understanding of the church is that the marrying partners have made their commitment not only in front of those present, but also in front of God. This understanding comes from the promise made by Jesus in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (18: 20 NIV). The officiating minister then proclaims that this commitment has been sealed. The symbol used for that seal is the ring.

Hunt and Hunt express the concept of commitment as a covenant. They say that the root word ‘wed’ means ‘to covenant, promise, pledge, or vow’ (1981: 74). They move their argument a little further by suggesting that marriage is one way to express ourselves as persons before God. This is in keeping with the understanding that the marrying partners pledge their commitment before God. Because of this, marriage is a parable of God’s relationship to the world. In other words, in marriage we are expressing our relationship with God and each other. The way we relate to each other in love and grace is a meaningful and a practical declaration of our commitment to God. That is why this is expressed in terms of a covenant. As a result of the above, we enter into a relationship of living together. Let us now analyze the words expressed in such a covenant. These include fidelity and mutual support, sexual union and self-giving.

### **3.1.2 Fidelity and Mutual Support**

Fidelity can be defined as “continuing faithfulness to a person, cause, or belief” (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 303). The word used to express this sentiment in marriage is ‘troth’ which suggests faith, fidelity and truth (Hunt and Hunt, 1981: 74). This sentiment is also expressed in the words of the marrying partners’ declaration ‘to love and to cherish’ each other. According to Davis and Preston, “all this means, of course, is that they are pledged to avoid adultery, but it goes further than that” (1994: 271). It calls for an expression of loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness and faithfulness in all of

the aspects of their relationship. As they express these elements to each other in word and deed, the married partners then trust each other and give of themselves to each other fully without doubt and reservation. A union characterized by these elements guarantees safety and peaceful existence of the partners. It wipes away elements of suspicion and undue pressures within the relationship. It is a well-known fact that the call to fidelity is Biblical. From the Old Testament we find in the Ten Commandments words like, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20: 14 NIV). It is important that the married couple hold themselves accountable and true to this imperative.

### **3.1.3 Sexual Union**

According to Davis and Preston, “In marriage, sexual intercourse is, of course, the means of fulfilling one of the fundamental purposes of marriage, the bringing of new human life into the world and the founding of a new family” (1994: 271). In other words, marriage is the institution that has been set apart by God and recognized by civil society for the sole purpose of procreation through sexual union. Having said that, it is worth noting that, procreation is not the only purpose for sexual intimacy in marriage.

“Sexual intercourse is the physical symbol or expression of the total gift and commitment of themselves to each other which husband and wife make when they get married. It both expresses and reinforces that gift and commitment, strengthening the bond of love between husband and wife. Sex is not the only thing in marriage, but it is an important part of it. If however, it is to be a true expression of married commitment, each partner has to approach it with care, consideration, and respect for the other” (Davis and Preston, 1994: 271).

What do we learn from this? We learn that sex is both a gift for married couples and a responsibility. If used with care and consideration, as an expression of love and commitment, it becomes a great blessing for the couple. As Hybels would put it, “For a marriage relationship to flourish, there must be intimacy” (1987: 17).

While marriage may be described as the joining of two persons into ‘one flesh’, it has to be understood that this means more than just sexual intercourse.

“One flesh implies more than just sexual intercourse, although that act is included in the expression. Important as it is, it takes more than sexual interest to maintain a marriage. Common goals, the residence, affectional, and personal needs, and relations with relatives, and friends – all are involved in the covenant of marriage” (Hunt and Hun, 1981: 75).

This would mean that while sexual intimacy is important, the partners must bring their uniqueness that will enrich their union and guarantee sustainability.

### **3.1.4 Self-Giving**

What has been said so far bears testimony to the fact that mutual attraction, though necessary, cannot in itself be sufficient to maintain and nurture a life-long commitment of marriage. “Since Christian marriage in itself is a form of self-giving, a total commitment of one to the other, the necessary basis for such a union must include an attitude of real unselfish self-giving love. The very nature of marriage demands it” (Davis and Preston, 1994: 271). This is why premarital counseling is necessary. Some people get into marriage without really considering the importance of this commitment. Some get married for different reasons with different aims and objectives. Such may include selfish reasons where one or both partners seek to enrich themselves out of this union. What we learn here is that marriage is about two people giving of themselves to each other without consideration of what they will get out of it. Considering that marriage is life-long commitment, it is then unlikely that where there is lack of self-giving love, such a union will survive.

I think that the words of the Pope John Paul II sum up all of what has been said above. Speaking on the elements that constitute a successful marriage, he said:

“In a marriage a man and a woman pledge themselves to one another in an unbreakable alliance of total mutual self-giving, a total union of love. Love that is not a passing emotion or temporary infatuation, but a responsible and free decision to bind oneself completely ‘in good times and in bad’ to one’s partner. It is the gift of oneself to the other” (Pope John Paul II in Davis and Preston, 1994: 271).

Having considered the important elements that are marks of a true marriage, we need to look at the issue of marriage and children. We need to acknowledge that the above picture is a depiction of an ideal marriage situation. However, in reality, not all marriages are like that. Some marriages are turbulent and full of conflict. Some are characterized by selfishness and lack of commitment. Some married people indulge themselves in extra-marital affairs without regard for their partners. In some marriages, spouses are treated as unequal partners and therefore abused in a variety of ways. There are people who have also been raped by their partners within marriage. The reader must be aware that the author is conscious of such challenges. In fact, this study is a result of the author having witnessed such challenges in the marriage of his own parents. The author observed a violent and abusive marriage during his childhood. This research arises out of that childhood experience.

### **3.1.5 Marriage and Children**

How important are children when it comes to marriage? My grandmother used to say that children are a gift from God. That made me to feel very special – knowing that God had made me to be a gift for my parents. I thought that our parents would cherish us, love us and take pride in us as their children. However there were moments when I wondered why God gave me as a gift to these parents that were abusive to each other and even to us, their children. I am also aware that some people cannot have children, either because of choice, sterility, their age, or other health considerations.

Coming from a Xhosa culture where a woman's worth in marriage is measured by the number of children she bears, inability to bear children can be very painful for some women or even both partners. The in-laws would label such a woman as 'idlolo' (a derogatory term used for someone who cannot bear children). This could put a strain in the marital relationship. Usually the inability to have children in the Xhosa culture is put solely on the shoulders of the woman. In some instances this becomes so bad to such an extent that the husband would be advised by the elders to find a secret partner with whom he could test his 'manhood' by impregnating her. Let alone the infidelity, the risk of sexually transmitted infections and the dehumanization and shaming of the wife. When such occurs, one wonders what happened to the covenant of marriage.

There are some couples, who, like my grandmother, would take the view that children are a gift from God. While they would pray and do everything in their power to get children, their inability to have them would not really affect their relationship. They understand that their inability to have children is not of their doing. It is something over which they have no control. However some couples would deliberately choose not to have children at all. Those who choose to have children should understand that...

“...Having children, of course, brings with it new responsibilities. A baby is not just an addition to the family; it involves a whole change in the parents' way of life. People sometimes have an over-romanticised view of babies as soft, cuddly, peaceful and sweet, giving little smiles and gurgles and binding parents together. Well, all these things are true some of the time, but there is another side also. Babies are very demanding; they need a lot of looking after; they tend to wake up and start wailing in the early hours of the morning; they cannot just be left, when the parents want to go for a night out” (Davis and Preston, 1994: 272).

As a parent of three children myself, I can identify with the quotation above. While children are a gift and a blessing, they come with an enormous responsibility. When we had our first child, our

lives changed drastically. We couldn't go out as we wanted to; we couldn't do some of the things that we used to do because there were now new financial challenges. However, having said that, we wouldn't substitute the joy and the love that we have experienced from our children. From them we have received unconditional acceptance and we have learnt what it means to love and to be loved. Our relationship has taken a new dimension altogether which I do not think it would have taken had we not have received these precious gifts.

It goes without saying that children need tender love, affection, attention and great care as they grow up within their families. They need security, shelter, and education over and above nutrition, clothing and all their other needs. Growing up in such a conducive environment contributes to their emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual well-being. It is the opinion of the author that if they grow in a home environment where there is chronic conflict, abuse and violence they might be affected negatively as they develop and mature in life. It is therefore imperative for parents-to-be to get instruction or assistance in coming to terms with such expectations as they plan their families. Premarital counseling then becomes no option but a necessity in order to avoid problems arising at a later stage within the marriage.

Of importance as well in the raising up of children are the roles that each parent will play. Parents-to-be would do well to note that the traditional role of the mother staying at home and raising the children while the father works is changing fast. Many women are choosing to contribute economically to the welfare of the family. "The submissive position by women is no longer accepted by all, and role expectations are often unrealistic, and may differ vastly, in the case of a particular husband and wife, resulting in role confusion and conflict" (Gerdes and Philips, 1976: 6). Some husbands may subscribe to the traditional view of marital roles which dictate that the husband is the head of the household and the sole breadwinner. The wife in that view should just be submissive to her husband and become the housewife. This may cause conflict and confusion when it comes to parenting if such role descriptions are not clearly

articulated in the marriage. When such situations arise within a marriage, then children become a burden and not a blessing.

It would be important to heed the following advice when it comes to parenting.

“Good parenting does not just happen or come naturally. Most parents are not formally trained. For better or worse, most learn their skills from childhood family experiences and from talking with relatives and friends and observing the way they relate to their children. In addition, parent education can help to improve your parenting skills” (Hunt and Hunt, 1981: 59-60).

For me this means that parenting is not something to be taken lightly. Just like marriage, it is not something to be entered into without proper consideration, adequate communication and expression of expectations. Narramore in his book entitled ‘You can be a better parent,’ writes a chapter in which he captures the same essence of the sentiments expressed above. He says that good parents don’t just happen. For him parenting is a task that has to be learned and worked upon.

“I know of a few people who find it easy to be good parents. They are naturally cool, calm and collected; so they hit it off well with their children. They are also sensitive and kind; yet they find it easy to carry out needed discipline. These parents enjoy their children and have few hassles with them. Even when the children encounter adolescence, things go smoothly between the two generations. These people seem to be naturally effective parents. Most of us, however, are not that way. We have to work hard at parenting” (Narramore, 1979: 7).

I concur with the above quotation. I have discovered that when I became a parent myself, nothing had prepared me for this responsibility. It was, and still is, a matter of trial and error. More so, that I grew up in a conflicting, abusive and a violent family background. I have had no role models within my household to learn from. For me, parenting has been extremely challenging. While I have covenanted with myself and God that I would never treat my family the way my stepfather treated his, I still fear that there may be elements of being unsuitable for parenting within me. That is why I ask in this study: Do

the children who grew up in traumatizing conflict and abuse within their families continue the cycle of violence in their own families at a later stage?

What was devastating in my situation was that all of this abuse, violence and conflict happened within a Christian family. How do people who claim to worship the living God treat each other as badly as my parents did? What happened to the Biblical teaching of loving your neighbor as yourself? Walker says that parenting is a ministry. She suggests that it is a calling in a sense.

“The Christian parent is called by God to embrace the following characteristics: to place Jesus at the center of value and meaning; to be emotionally differentiated or be able to separate what one feels from the feelings of others, while being emotionally connected to others; to be socially interdependent with others and not isolated; and to appeal to a set of core values that add texture and assistance to the function of parenting” (Walker in Wimberly, 2005: 76).

This is what was missing in my home. While my parents professed to be Christian, Christ was not at the centre of their universe. They were not at peace with themselves as individuals and within their relationship. As a result, while they may not have intended for it to happen, they modeled a bad example of parenting for their children. There was no caring and supportive family structure that would help us as children to grow to responsible adulthood, autonomy and maturity.

### **3.2 Conflict – What is it?**

The term conflict is defined as, “a serious disagreement or a lack of agreement between opinions, principles etc.” (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 172). It can also be defined as “a state that occurs when two or more parties believe that they have incompatible objectives” (Kriesberg, 1982: 17). Just considering these definitions, it goes without saying that whenever two or more people come together from different backgrounds there are bound to be differences of opinion, principles, values and interests. Does that mean conflict is all bad? Does that mean that a successful, happy marriage will be without conflict at all? I do not think so. “A successful marriage is not characterized by an absence of all conflict and difficulty,



but rather by the ability to work through them” (Ard and Ard in Alpaslan, 1997: 83). The concept usually applied to describe the process of working constructively to deal with differences and difficulty (conflict) is called conflict resolution. All married couples need to learn the skills of conflict resolution for their relationship to survive. That is why it is absolutely important that those who wish to get married must first go for pre-marital counseling or guidance. The reason for this is that, “preparation for marriage guidance then becomes the milieu within which the skills for conflict resolution, as it manifests at present in marriage, are evaluated and if necessary, new strategies for constructive conflict resolution are explored and acquired” (Alpaslan, 1997: 83).

What factors contribute to conflict within marriages where people are supposed to love and care for each other deeply? It has been discovered that unfulfilled expectations are, to a great extent, responsible for conflict in marriages (Alpaslan, 1997: 83). There are always certain expectations between partners but these should be communicated repeatedly in a responsible manner. Alpaslan advises that, “during such a conversation negotiations must take place, wherein not only expectations are mentioned, but where the responsibility to comply with these expectations is accepted or rejected. In this way disappointment and hurt will be eliminated” (199: 83). Since the relationship of marriage is formed by two unique individuals, each with his/her own character, needs, desires, expectations, cultural or educational background etc. it would not be unrealistic to expect certain differences. Mayer classifies the causal elements of conflict into five categories. While he speaks of social conflict in general, it would appear that marital conflict falls within the ambit of social conflict. He suggests that conflict can arise out of: (1) relationship issues, (2) value conflicts, (3) inconsistencies in data, (4) structural problems, and, (5) different interests (Mayer, 1995: 614). From these categories we can conclude that within any marriage conflict may arise due to relationship issues, different value systems and different interests between the couple.

As we have noted above, these causal or contributory elements need to be dealt with properly through communication. As Alpaslan suggests, "...It is therefore correct to say that conflict is a natural phenomenon within the marital relationship" (1997: 83). Some authors would go on further to claim that marital conflict or fighting is inevitable, necessary and even desirable. Others would even propose that conflict, aggression, frustration and stress must in some way or another find expression within the relationship. Having said that, there is an acknowledgement to the effect that such expressions can be negative and have a detrimental effect on the relationship. If the two persons are loving and caring, a constructive conflict resolution mechanism must be developed (Alpaslan, 1997: 83-84). There are different ways in which the married couple can deal with their conflict. Some are healthy, helpful and constructive, but unfortunately, some are not. These mechanisms could be avoidance, denial, withdrawal, superficiality, or settlement of the dispute deliberately and thoroughly (Alpaslan, 1997: 84).

If conflict can be dealt with constructively, one wonders what leads the married couple to fight and plunge their relationship in abuse and violence. Alpaslan gives us a few indications of the causes of conflict. Even though they can never be exhausted, the following are some of the causes.

"Since the marital relationship is characterized by closeness and intimacy, the chances of irritation are much greater, and conflict is unavoidable. Differences in background and personality contribute to different gender role expectations as well as differences regarding role division, which can contribute to the development of a conflict situation. When partners regard their relationship as a tug of war or a power struggle, they will find themselves continuously in a conflict situation. Conflict can flare up due to misunderstandings as a result of inadequate communication. Trying to change the other partner's personality and values can start conflict, especially where the wrong strategies are used. Certain patterns of behavior and habits, for instance, leaving clothes lying around, can in due course create tension, which could degenerate into conflict" (1997: 84-85).

My stepfather was a ‘control freak’ in our family. He would say that he was the head of the household, and where he was concerned there was no negotiation or communication in matters regarding the running of the house. Conflict arose out of a power struggle. If anyone suggested anything contrary to what he believed was right, he would take it as a personal attack on his authoritative status. There was inadequate communication in the house as a result. In order to enforce his authority which he felt was undermined, he would use tantrums, physical assaults and verbal abuse on our mother.

The effects of this on our family were negative. Mother became withdrawn and lost her sense of self-confidence. She was fearful of her husband so much that she would apologise for every little thing that happened, thinking that apologies would appease his anger. She became abusive to her children in turn, and slowly but surely neglected us. She would throw tantrums when we did wrong, and her behavior gradually became unpredictable. She then started drinking with the aim of drowning her sorrows. This uncontrollable drinking resulted in her losing her job and becoming completely dependent on her husband. Her husband would then use her dependence as a tool to abuse her further. If she did not comply with any of his demands he would punish her by not giving her money for food and other necessities in the house. As we watched this happening in our home, as the children, we became fearful of both our parents. We felt unsafe in their presence and we wished that we would have a better home where there would be a sense of peace, security, quietness and stability. The negative manner in which our parents dealt with their differences affected not only their relationship but ours as their children as well. There is no joy and sense of belonging in a household where there is always destructive conflict that inevitably leads to abuse and violence.

There is value in constructive conflict resolution. Not only will there be peace, security and stability, but also the married couple will grow in intimacy, love and respect for each other. They will trust each other and express themselves without fear. Their communication will be open, honest and true. Their self-esteem and sense of dignity will be protected and they will grow together as individuals and partners.

In agreement, Alpaslan cites the following as benefits for constructive conflict resolution. She says that marital conflict relieves stress when the partners afford each other the opportunity to identify their anger, frustration and discomfort in terms of cause and eventually vent it. This helps to prevent bitterness and resentment in partners. Marital conflict also helps the partners to identify problems within their marriage which will in turn promote possible growth. It also stimulates the feeling of appreciation and intimacy of the partners for each other. In other words, conflict that is resolved properly is like a tonic to the marital relationship and marital growth (1997: 88-89). We learn that proper resolution of conflict will help the couple to avoid abuse and violence that will have a negative impact on their marriage and family.

### **3.3 The Impact of Trauma**

Trauma is defined as “a sudden, unexpected and horrifying experience during which the person believes that he (sic) or another person will be seriously injured or killed” (Lewis in Walker, 2002: 40). Parkinson agrees with this definition. He says that any incident we experience that is sudden and unexpected can result in emotional as well as physical trauma and shock (1993: 18). Jones brings out another insight. She says that trauma happens when a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with an event that threatens death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others (Jones in Willemse, 2008: 49). On the other hand, Pearlman brings out a different dimension to what we have heard so far. He says that trauma is sudden, unexpected and non-normative, it exceeds the individual’s ability to meet demands and disrupts the individual’s frame of reference and other central psychological needs and related schemas (Pearlman in Willemse 2008: 49).

From what we have heard so far we can conclude that for something to be traumatic it has to be sudden and unexpected. In other words, a traumatic event is any sudden interruption in the normal course of events in the life of an individual or society. The word ‘trauma’ can be used for both

physical and psychological injury. Traumatic psychological injury is usually caused by extreme emotional assault while traumatic physical injury is caused by a violent activity that leaves a wound on the body. Trauma can have many effects on the victim, like intense fear, feeling of helplessness and an overwhelming sense of lack of control over the situation (Lewis in Walker 2002: 40). The main marker for trauma is the intense fear the person feels for his or her own psychological or physical safety or that of others or both, and their feeling of helplessness to control the threat (Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 2000: 72). This arises because of the fact that one's usual coping skills or abilities are not sufficient enough to deal with the traumatic incident. It goes without saying therefore that trauma is disruptive and it produces discomfort and dysfunction in the victim. As a result trauma is always regarded as damaging to the mental health of children (Walker, 2002: 40). Having said that, the fact that trauma affects the whole person cannot be denied. It affects the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of the person. For the purpose of this study, it may be necessary to ask: Who is prone to become a victim of trauma? Walker suggests that victims of trauma can either be those who have directly experienced a traumatic event, those who witnessed the event from a distance, or those who have had contact with the direct victim (2002: 40). This implies that there is primary or direct trauma and secondary or indirect trauma.

Walker, in her work entitled "The exposure to violence experienced by Grade three pupils in Gauteng" did an extensive literature review that gives us useful insights into the traumatic experiences of people. In her third chapter she differentiates between stress, crisis, trauma and violence. Insofar as trauma is concerned, she proposes that there are four categories of traumatization. She names them as follows: Single trauma, multiple trauma, continuous traumatic stress and complex trauma (Walker, 2002: 40-41). Let us now analyze how she describes these categories of trauma.

### **3.3.1 Single Trauma**

She says that this is a sudden, unexpected traumatic event such as an armed robbery. After the single incident the trauma is over. However she cautions that even single traumas can differ in intensity. This difference in intensity could range from being knocked down by an attacker to being shot in a robbery. The difference from all of the others is that it happens only once.

### **3.3.2 Multiple Trauma**

As the word suggests, this happens when one is exposed to more than one incident of trauma. For example, a person who has been involved in an armed robbery and then is attacked by a vicious dog on a separate occasion would be regarded to have experienced multiple trauma. A single trauma can also develop into multiple traumatization. For example, if a child is injured, hospitalized and then confined to a wheelchair that would be considered multiple trauma. Another type of multiple traumatization would be when a child experiences trauma where a parent is killed. In addition to the trauma, the child also has to deal with issues of loss and bereavement.

### **3.3.3 Continuous Traumatic Stress**

This term is used to describe a situation where a person is continuously exposed to ongoing levels and incidents of trauma. When there is a constant threat of trauma and/or people known to one are constantly traumatized, there is an increase in one's sense of personal vulnerability. In South Africa, it is known that many children are exposed to continuous traumatic experiences. These are either direct occurrences where the children are victims themselves or indirect occurrences where the children witness trauma or hear about it. These children live with the constant threat of danger and violence. I believe that children who constantly witness conflict, violence and abuse in their homes are subjected to this kind of trauma.

### 3.3.4 Complex Trauma

This also refers to prolonged and repeated trauma. The difference here is that there is a relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The victim is usually under the control of the perpetrator and cannot escape. Examples of these situations are hostage situations, concentration camps and domestic violence. Although the first traumatic experience is unexpected and sudden, after time the victim exposed to complex trauma usually begins to expect the abuse.

From the above discussion by Walker, it is evident that spouses who are in situations of domestic abuse and violence experience complex trauma. Their children, in turn, who witness such abuse and violence, are subjected to continuous traumatic stress. We can see that not only are the spouses affected but also the children in that situation are affected. Research has shown that people who have been subjected to any kind of trauma could develop symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). People who have been traumatized in one way or another may display the following symptoms:

- Emotions without clear memory of the event,
- Remembering everything in detail but without emotion,
- Finding oneself in a constant state of vigilance, and,
- Irritability without know the cause (Herman, 1997: 16).

These have been associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). How can we define PTSD? At its simplest, it can be defined as “the normal reactions of normal people to events that for them are unusual or abnormal” (Parkinson, 1993: 29). According to Rakuba, PTSD is the name given to a cluster of symptoms often seen in trauma survivors. He states that the more severe the trauma, the longer these symptoms will persist. It has been observed that in cases of major and or repeated trauma, strong reactions may continue for years (2008: 56). Parkinson agrees, and further warns that most survivors of trauma will experience post-trauma stress, but in different intensities at the time or later and for different lengths of time after the incident. “Some may be slightly distressed for a few hours or a few days and

then recover quite naturally and continue with their lives. Others suffer longer, and if the symptoms persist for more than a month, these people are usually identified as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder” (Parkinson, 1993: 29). Walker concurs, stating that in order to qualify for a diagnosis of PTSD the person must report symptoms lasting for more than one month and must report significant impairment in his/her daily functioning (2002: 54).

The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders which was revised in 1995 defines PTSD as, “the development of certain characteristic symptoms following a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of normal human experience” (Parkinson, 1993: 29-30). While Walker puts it differently, she seems to capture the same sentiments in her definition (taken from Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders):

“A particular set of symptoms that develop after seeing, hearing, or being involved in an extremely traumatic stressful experience. The person reacts to this experience with feelings of intense fear and helplessness. After the experience, the person usually tries to avoid reminders of the event, however, tends to relive the experience in his/her mind repeatedly” (Walker, 2002: 54).

It has been proven that survivors of domestic abuse and violence tend to display such symptoms of fear and helplessness. While they may try to ‘forget’ the experience and to ‘move on’, it may come back to haunt them over and over again. These symptoms may be experienced in one of three ways namely: re-experiencing, avoidance and arousal (Parkinson, 1993: 52-62).

**Re-experiencing:** According to Parkinson (1993: 52), the trauma-inducing event can be experienced again hours, days, months or even years later. Feelings and emotions that were generated at the time can be felt as if they were happening now, in the present. These can vary from being mildly disturbing and upsetting to intense and overwhelming. The sensations and emotions felt at the time of the incident



which have been repressed into the depths of the mind come to the surface when least expected. Other authors call this process intrusion (Walker, 2002: 55; Willemse, 2008:53).

**Avoidance:** Parkinson suggests that any frightening or traumatic incident can make a person very careful about being in the same situation again (1999: 56). This is called avoidance. The person may try to avoid anything that is a reminder of the traumatic event or anything that creates an awareness of vulnerability. This may be initially powerful or effective at first, but if left unattended, it may later impair the person's emotional, social and occupational functioning. The person's life may be consumed by trying to avoid situations or people that are a reminder of the incident. Not only that, cautions Parkinson (1993: 58), the biggest problem of avoidance is denial. People deny their feelings, and the more or longer the denial goes on, the less likely they will acknowledge that something is wrong. They become stuck inside their own feelings and cannot move forward. This prevents them from living in the present or facing up to reality.

**Arousal:** Because a traumatic incident sensitizes the nervous system, other symptoms may arise. A traumatic event can make us touchy and jumpy, and our reactions can be erratic and unexpected (Parkinson, 1993: 60). This is what Garbarino (in Walker, 2002: 55-56) and other authors call hyperarousal. This is characterized by anger, fear, irritability, inability to concentrate, sleep disturbances, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response. This overstimulated sense of awareness and arousal can lead to an incapacity to cope with normal events and experiences. It could lead the victim into isolation and retreat. Parkinson notes that the outbursts of anger and violence could be interchanged with bouts of silence and withdrawal into self (1993: 61). The effects of this can be devastating not only to the person concerned but to the families, friends, workmates and usual acquaintances.

With regards to the symptoms of Post-trauma Stress it is important to note that,

“Re-experiencing the event, avoiding reminders, elation and arousal are typical symptoms of post-trauma stress. They may or may not be evident at the time of the incident, but can return months or years afterward, sometimes with devastating effects” (Parkinson, 1993: 62).

These effects may take the form and shape of psycho-physiological changes that are both extensive and enduring. As Herman describes:

“Patients suffer from a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms and specific fears. They do not have a normal level of alert, but relaxed attention. Instead, they have an elevated baseline level of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert for danger. They also have an extreme startle response to the unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event. It also appears that traumatized people cannot ‘tune out’ repetitive stimuli that other people would find merely annoying; rather, they respond to each repetition as though it were a new, and dangerous, surprise. The increase in arousal persists during sleep as well as in the waking state, resulting in numerous types of sleep disturbance. People with post-traumatic stress disorder take longer to fall asleep, are more sensitive to noise, and awaken more frequently during the night than ordinary people. These traumatic events appear to recondition the human nervous system” (Herman in Neuger, 2001: 108).

The above quotation testifies to the devastating effects of trauma to the victims, not only in the short term but in the long run as well. I believe that the longer the traumatic situation is allowed to continue, the more enduring and grave will the consequences be for the victim.

### **3.4 Abuse in the Family**

“Never again will I be able to trust men. I have been hurt too much. I don’t want to date, and I’m not sure I even want to change” (Collins, 1988: 294). These are the words of a young girl who had suffered severe sexual abuse in the hands of a person whom she had come to trust within her family.

She had been hurt over a number of years and had been threatened with violence if she ever exposed this evil that was happening to her. When she eventually plucked up the courage to inform her parents, they were very shocked yet supportive. They found her a male counselor who helped her deal with her pain and trauma. Weeks later, it was announced over the radio that her counselor had been arrested for taking ‘indecent liberties’ with a young patient in the psychiatric hospital where he worked. Ginny (not her real name) has been severely harmed by the self-centred actions of two insensitive men. While healing and recovery is possible for her, it may take a long time. This is but one case of many that happens within a family setup.

Collins has this to say with regards to violence and abuse in the home.

“Violence and abuse, especially in the home, appear to be increasing. It is possible, of course that we are only now beginning to recognize the widespread prevalence of a problem that has been with us for centuries. Media attention and public outcries have riveted attention on child neglect and abuse, sexual violence, psychological maltreatment of children, rape, mate beating, and mistreatment of the elderly. Various observers have confirmed that these problems of abuse not only are getting more attention, they are getting worse” (1988: 294).

The focus of this study is on spousal conflict, abuse and violence that traumatize the children that grow within such an environment. According to Collins, the concept of abuse is difficult to define because the term covers so much physical and psychological maltreatment (1998: 294). He then offers a definition of child abuse from the US Child Abuse and Treatment Act which says:

“Physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment, or maltreatment of a child under the age of eighteen, by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare and under circumstances which indicate the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby” (Collins, 1988: 294-295).

While this study focuses on abuse between the spouses that raise the children, it is evident that such abuse will at one stage or another affect the children negatively. When the spouses abuse each other, that causes psychological damage to the children. The author who grew up in such an abusive environment noticed that his mother who was constantly abused verbally, physically, and emotionally by her husband changed from a loving and caring person to being negligent and abusive towards her children. She started drinking excessively in order to ‘drown’ her sorrows. The children’s health and security were always at risk when the fightings began in the house. They would have to either hide under the beds while harmful instruments like knives and pots were thrown around by their parents at each other. On many occasions the children had to sleep outside in the cold, or with certain friends, because they were running away from violent fights and abuse at home. During those running incidents at night, they could have been injured or fallen prey to further abuse and trauma at the hands of other people who could have taken advantage of their vulnerability. Arising out of the abuse between the parents, children suffered maltreatment, gross negligence, and psychological trauma and were prone to physical danger.

What was happening in our home is what Collins refers to as ‘mate abuse.’

“Mate abuse most often has the wife as the victim and includes deliberate physical assault, threats of violence, emotional abuse (including ridicule, demeaning behavior, and neglect), and forced involvement in sexual acts” (Collins, 1988: 295).

My stepfather was the powerful figure who ‘called the shots’ in the house. When things didn’t go his way he would start swearing at our mother and even at us. Many a time we heard him telling our mother that, he had done her a great favour by marrying her. He would call her many other derogatory names in front of us children. He would physically assault her with fists and any loose objects he would find in the house. Our mother would defend herself by returning the swearing and hitting back at him. It was always a frightful scene to look at. As a result we lost respect for our parents as children.

As the firstborn in the family I felt it was my responsibility to protect my mother from this monster. However, I was too young and too small to do anything against this grown-up man who was violating and traumatizing us in such a manner. I would sit in the corner of the room and rehearse how one day I would attack him in revenge for my mother. When I realized that I couldn't do anything to him I began feeling guilty. I was guilty at the fact that I couldn't protect my mother. I was guilty because I thought that it was our fault that our parents were fighting. I was guilty because of the fact that we were his stepchildren and not his biological children. From guilt I became angry, not only with myself but with my parents and with God. I asked myself questions like:

- Why was I not strong enough to help my mother?
- Why did we end up with a monstrous stepfather like this?
- Why could not our parents resolve their problems as adults without fighting and threatening to kill each other?
- Why did God create us?
- Why did God allow us to live in such a frightening, disempowering and traumatizing situation?
- Did God love us, if so, why did God not intervene in our situation?

Such questions, and more, would come back over-and-over again when the incidents of abuse erupted in our household. Even though I thought of revenge I could not carry it out because of being young.

From asking these questions I began seeking for deeper answers and truths regarding our situation. Why do people who are supposed to love each other, care for each other and look out for each other end up abusing each other? Why would one human being physically, emotionally and psychologically abuse another? Collins says that the most basic answer to such questions is human sinfulness (1988: 297). He however, acknowledges that even that explanation does not adequately answer why some people act in sinful abusive ways while most others do not. He also dispels the myth that victims and their families in abusive situations frequently believe.

“It is not correct to assume that victims of abuse usually ask for it by giving subtle hints to indicate that they would like to be mistreated. It is cruel and inaccurate to conclude, for example, that rape victims somehow really want to be raped and that they could prevent this personal sexual attack if they really wanted to escape. On rare occasions, victims may subtly invite the attackers assaults, but this is unusual and certainly not the norm. Rape victims, like all other recipients of abuse, do not encourage it to happen and neither do they secretly enjoy the experience” (Collins, 1988: 297).

I think that abuse of any kind is life-threatening, dehumanizing, and shameful to any person who becomes a victim. There is no way, in my thinking, that someone would consciously invite a dehumanizing, degrading and shameful incident upon themselves. The real question still remains: What causes abuse to occur? Among the numerous, complex and overlapping reasons counselors have discovered the following as causes of abuse.

#### **3.4.1 Environmental Stress**

Collins says that many years ago, psychologists first identified frustration-aggression behavior (1988: 297) and discovered that whenever people get really frustrated, a common reaction is to respond to these feelings by verbally or physically ‘lashing out’ at some other person or object. It would seem that a person who gets frustrated in this manner will seek an object or a person of a lower status in order to lash out at them. In case of family situations, the husband would then lash out at his wife or the children. While recognizing the importance of dealing with frustrating situations constructively, one finds it difficult to accept a situation where the frustrated person lashes out at others thereby causing them to be frustrated as well. Common examples of environmental stress that is not dealt with appropriately are: The boss who snaps at his secretary, the person who kicks the family dog after an argument and the tennis player who throws his racket on the ground. It is worth noting that the abuser usually takes out the

pressure on family members who are either weak or vulnerable and therefore unable to help or defend themselves.

“Sometimes even trivial stresses can trigger abuse, like the crying child who interrupts parents’ sexual intercourse or the frustration of cleaning up after a messy feeding or soiling. Stress in the life of the abuser, of course, is never an excuse for violence, even if the victim creates the stress. Nevertheless stress may help us understand why some people are abusive” (Collins, 1988: 297).

This suggests that anything can then trigger the abuse. Whatever the trigger, however, there is no justification for abuse in any situation.

### **3.4.2 Learned Abuse**

One of the questions that this study seeks to address is: Do children who grew up in an abusive background continue the cycle of violence in their own homes when they grow up? Collins seems to think that the answer is yes. He captures the above thought in the following quotation:

“Children who are abused or who observe violence between their parents often become abusers in later life. One study of elder abuse found that one in four hundred children who are reared nonviolently attack their parents in later life, compared to one in two children who are abused by their parents. Another report showed that, children who are neglected never learn how to care for others, so they grow up to become neglecters of their own children” (Collins, 1988: 298).

This quotation suggests that children reared in abusive environments somehow internalize that abuse and practice it in later life. They may think that the life of abuse and conflict is normal and therefore they will display characteristics of abuse in their own families or relationships later. From a review of different studies and research, Collins has come to the following painful conclusion: “Abusive behavior – and criminal behavior as well – clearly can be learned and passed from generation to the next” (1988: 298).

### **3.4.3 Personal Insecurity**

Studies often show that abusers are people who feel insecure, impulsive, and threatened; they generally hold low self-concepts. Sometimes wife beaters feel jealous, possessive, or intimidated by their wives, so the husband tries to boost his own feelings of inadequacy by being tough (Collins, 1998: 298). This was the case in our household. My stepfather was extremely jealous and would often accuse my mother of having extramarital relationships. He was also aggressively controlling all the matters in the household. If nothing went his own way, he would use violence to force his authority on all of us.

Collins admits that there can be other causes of abuse. This is a complex phenomenon that cannot only be classified simply using the above categories. There may be power struggles between the abused and the abuser. Research has shown that watching violent television programs, pornographic material and sexually violent movies can and does promote abuse and violence, especially against women.

### **3.5 Domestic Violence**

Research has shown that in the early 1980's children began to be labeled as the silent victims of domestic violence. Until then, child witnesses of domestic violence went largely unnoticed as a group requiring intervention. Currently, child witnesses of domestic violence are also referred to as the forgotten or unintended victims of domestic violence (McCann, 2001: 1). According to Walker, domestic violence has been defined by several authors as an abuse of power and acts carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury (2002: 48). She, like McCann, claims that children who witness domestic violence have been referred to as the "forgotten" victims. It is worth noting that exposure to domestic violence can include overhearing violent acts, direct involvement due to an attempt to intervene and subsequently experiencing the aftermath like getting hurt or viewing a mother's depression (McCann, 2001: 1).



Many children who witness the violence are also victims or they may be used as a tool by the perpetrator. These children all experience the aftermath of the violence as well. Miller-Perrin and Perrin agree with the sentiments expressed above. They say that children suffer not only from abuse and neglect experienced directly, but also from violence that they are exposed to indirectly. They have made the following observation on the matter:

“A growing literature focuses on forms of child maltreatment that center on experiencing violence indirectly through either exposure to the violence that occurs between family members (primary parents) or exposure to violence that occurs within the community. These experiences are of concern, in part, because of the potential negative effects they have on children” (Miller-Perrin and Perrin, 1999: 198).

Having grown up within an environment of abuse, the author can concur with the above statements. It was devastating to witness this violence day in and day out. My stepfather would hit our mother in front of us as if we did not exist. On the rare occasion of the neighbours coming to intervene, no one would speak to us as children. Everyone would concentrate on our parents and forget about us. When mother and I went to the police station to open a case against my stepfather, the police would not listen to me because I was a child. I couldn't be a witness in court because I was a minor. I was forgotten in the midst of traumatizing abuse and violence. That was devastating for me because I was present in the house when my mother was nearly beaten to death, yet nobody wanted to hear my story. I was the forgotten victim. I became angry; not only at my stepfather for being abusive, but also at the authorities that would 'send me to play outside' when they wanted to talk about the violence in my house. I wondered why did they not come and send me outside when mother was beaten up in front of us, especially when we had to run away from the physical violence.

Children who witness domestic violence suffer terribly as well. The after-effects live with them for life. Walker states that children who witness domestic violence exhibit it through:

“...externalized behavior such as aggression and antisocial acts as well as more internalized behaviours such as fear and inhibited behavior. Anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms and temperament problems were also higher in child witnesses of domestic violence compared to those who did not witness violence at home. They also exhibit a higher incidence of learning difficulties, psychosomatic conduct and emotional disorders compared to children who have not been exposed to violence at home” (2002: 49).

Thus, it is clear that domestic violence affects children negatively. How can such children be expected to become functional and productive members of society? To what level does their exposure to violence inhibit them from engaging in meaningful relationships in the future? To what extent does their exposure to violence contribute to a development of violent behavior in later life?

Walker gives us a glimpse of the level of suffering that the children exposed to violence in the home go through. In conducting literature review on the effects of domestic violence on children she came with the following painful but true conclusions:

- The children tend to blame themselves for causing the violence in the home.
- They tend to view the world as a dangerous place where they are vulnerable and prone to further victimization.
- These children are more likely to be traumatized, vulnerable and at risk of developing long-term adjustment problems such as relationship difficulties, low self-esteem, and learned helplessness response styles (Walker, 2002: 49).

This goes without saying that when children constantly observe violence in the home they are deeply affected in such a way that it may be difficult for them to lead meaningful lives at a later stage. It has been observed that...

“Children who live with a battering relationship experience the most insidious form of child abuse. Whether or not they are physically abused by either parent is less important than the

psychological scars they bear from watching their fathers beat their mothers. They learn to become part of a dishonest conspiracy of silence. They learn to lie in order to prevent inappropriate behavior and they learn to suspend fulfillment of their needs rather than risk another confrontation. They expend a lot of energy avoiding problems. They live in a world of make believe” (Walker, 1979: 46).

It is clear that the negative effects of domestic violence to the children become evident from when they are young and develop into their adulthood.

### **3.6 Impact of Conflict, Abuse and Violence on Children**

Children are affected negatively by conflict, abuse and violence that happen in the family environment. Studies have shown that the impact of exposure to wife abuse is negative on children (Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 2000: 91). This impact is apparent in the following areas: behavioural and trauma-related, emotional, cognitive/school functioning, social skills and attachment functioning.

A home is a place where children need to be nurtured in love, safety and peace. It is a place where they need to derive a sense of belonging. At home children begin to interact with those people around them. Through that interaction they learn to develop a sense of identity and pride in who they are as individuals. The primary people with whom children learn to interact are their parents. When conflict that leads to abuse happens in the home it confuses the children. It shatters their sense of security and identity. It renders them vulnerable to developing significant emotional, psychological and social problems. These problems may develop into adulthood and affect them in their personal and social relations. There have been numerous studies in the fields of psychology, social work and even pastoral care that attest to this truth. In 2002 Walker conducted a study on “the exposure to violence experienced by Grade three pupils in Gauteng.” Amongst other things she discovered that:

“Many children experience or observe violence in their homes or within their neighbourhoods. Their exposure to violence affects their physical health, safety, psychological adjustment, social relations and academic achievement. It also extends beyond emotional and behavioural disorders. It affects the child’s view of the world, of himself (or herself), his (her) ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, his (her) expectations of future happiness and moral development. The impact of violence may also affect the individual into adulthood” (Walker, 2002: 20).

Arising out of the author’s personal experience of traumatizing conflict, abuse and violence within his family, this study seeks to address the following pertinent questions:

- How does conflict and abuse within a marriage impact on the lives of the children?
- Does conflict and abuse that occurs in the home affect the children to continue the cycle of violence in their own homes at a later stage?
- How can a child who grew within an abusive and violent environment care pastorally for those who are in conflict and violent marriages?
- Can the Church meet the needs of probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence that arose in their families as they seek to minister to others?
- How can the Church assist probationers in dealing with the trauma they experienced while growing up so that it does not paralyse them anymore in their ministry?

It is evident from the above quotation by Walker that these questions are worth answering so that children from abusive and conflict-ridden backgrounds may grow to be fruitful citizens who will contribute meaningfully to society.

While Walker concentrates on the impact of community violence to children, her findings are also relevant to this study on family conflict, abuse and violence. She looked at different studies conducted throughout the world on the issue of community violence.

“The results of these studies have shown that children who are exposed to high levels of community violence are at significant risk for developing emotional problems. These problems include increased anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, inattention, sleep disturbances and symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Aggression and self-destructive behaviours have also been reported in this literature following exposure to violence” (Walker, 2002: 21).

From the quotation above, one can easily note that children who grow up in dysfunctional environments, whether it be from family or community, may develop dysfunctional personalities. They may adopt certain coping strategies that would render them “dysfunctional” in normal society. They may either be hyperactive or aggressive which may lead to rejection by peers and family. Others may withdraw emotionally, psychologically or socially. These coping strategies could become detrimental not only in the short term but also in the long term development of such children.

In his study on “Traumatic violence that leads to family murders by fathers”, Willemse also expresses similar sentiments like those alluded to by Walker. Even though he uses different terminology, Willemse seems to concur with Walker’s findings. He says that domestic violence affects children negatively. He quotes Barnett who has observed that “marital violence reveals that children are prone to suffer psychological damage in four areas namely: immediate trauma; adverse effects on development; living under high levels of stress, particularly fear of injury to themselves or their mother and exposure to violent role models” (Willemse, 2008:44). Simply stated, this clearly indicates the negative impact traumatic conflict, abuse and violence has on children. “When children constantly observe violent actions such as domestic violence, they are deeply affected in their inner being” (Willemse, 2008:44). This arises out of the fact that...

“Children are also directly beaten in domestic violence or they are indirectly affected when they watch their mother being beaten. It has been reported that about 50% of the children in violent households are also victims. Some are physically abused, some are sexually abused by their very fathers or other relatives and all are emotionally abused. Some husbands beat their wives in front of their children in order to humiliate them and cover their wives with shame. Observation of such violent acts by the children leaves them profoundly affected in their inner being. The children experience shock and are afraid to do anything while their mother is being beaten. Some children may seek help in order to stop the violence” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 130).

I can identify with this truth from my own personal experience of growing up in such a violent household. I would blame myself for being helpless in protecting my mother as she was beaten up by my stepfather. I would sit and think of creative ways in which I could stop this shaming experience of my mother. When I couldn't, I would feel so guilty and angry at myself for being small and unable to face this terrible giant. In some instances I would promise myself that when I grow up and gather enough strength, I would avenge my mother's pain by beating up this monster until he wets himself. In short, the cycle of violence has already begun emotionally within me. On the other hand, I took a resolution that I would never do such a thing to my own wife if I would ever get married one day. I would suffer anxiety attacks and was always nervous in the presence of my stepfather since his outbursts were very unpredictable. I would do everything in my power and knowledge to keep him happy, but seemingly that was not enough. As a way of avoiding this traumatic conflict and abuse I ran away from home often and slept with friends in their own homes.

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike hits the nail in the head when she says:

“Children who have grown up in domestic violence display nervousness and withdrawal, anxiety, bedwetting, restlessness, low school performance, illnesses such as headaches, stomach complaints, asthmas, stuttering, cruelty to animals, copying aggressive language and behavior in their play, running away from home, teenage boys beating their girlfriends” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 131).

In this statement Nasimiyu-Wasike demonstrates the depth and gravity of the impact of violence and abuse on children. Of concern is the fact that these children may continue the cycle of violence in their own homes and families when they grow up. This is because...

“Children in violent homes come to accept violence as normal. They see violence as a way to cope with stress and pressure. The boys develop a disrespect for women and the girls develop inferiority complex. The children could be neglected emotionally. Since the mother spends all her energy struggling just to survive, it has been researched and it is suggested that 50% to 80% of men who abuse their wives and/or children, grew up in violent homes” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 131).

Netswera comes to a similar conclusion in his study of abuse on children. He says that when abused adolescents become parents they are likely to continue the vicious cycle of child abuse especially towards their own children. In raising their children they may identify with their own abusive parents and project that abuse towards their children (2004: 28). This is a sad state of affairs, especially considering the fact that this violence and abuse may carry on generation after generation. Netswera further discovered three distinct patterns of behavior displayed by abused children in their later lives. They may display destructive, frightened or private behavior (2004: 28). These may manifest in violent behavior, disobedient and maladjustive conduct or passivity, withdrawal and compulsive acts. This suggests that children growing in conflict-ridden and abusive backgrounds are affected negatively not only in their childhood but also into their adulthood.

### 3.7 Pastoral Care for the Victims

In section 3.6 above we have seen the devastating impact of conflict, abuse and violence to children who grow up in such situations. These children need an environment in which they can heal so that they do not develop to maladjusted, disobedient and abusive adults. As I see it, the Church is a healing community which has a vital role to play in this regard. In most communities the children are taken care of by their mothers. We have noted that if the mothers are abused they can not fulfill that role meaningfully. In light of that understanding, care to the battered women would directly or indirectly benefit the children, especially if they are still too young to personally care for themselves. Nasimiyu-Wasike has this to say about the healing role of the Church.

“The Church as a healing community should reach out to battered women, their children and their husbands. The Church should bring God’s compassion and healing presence to such families. Like Christ the Good Shepherd, the Church should bring Christ’s healing ministry to these families. Jesus in his life here on earth restored many people to wholeness” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 132).

It is clear that families that are characterized by traumatic conflict, abuse and violence live in a state of brokenness. Children growing under such situations carry that brokenness into adulthood. They, in turn, perpetrate the injustices in their own families and relationships when they become adults. Unless they are healed, restored and transformed, they will not be able to recover their wholeness in the image and likeness of God who created them. When the Church intervenes, it brings about that much needed healing and wholeness in the lives of the broken children and becomes the agent of restoration and transformation. In bringing about this transformation the Church must speak prophetically against violence and abuse within families and communities. It must educate communities about the negative outcomes of violence and abuse not only to those involved but to the society at large. The Church must create a sacred space for victims of abuse and violence, especially women and children, to share their stories in a safe, non-judgmental, and non-threatening environment.



Where possible, the Church must intervene practically to help the victims of violence and abuse. It must be an advocate for human rights of the victims and the voice of the voiceless in situations where other people's dignity and self-worth is undermined. The mission of the Church is "not to encourage battered women (together with their children) to remain in abusive relationships, but rather to rescue them and seek to bring a rebirth in their abusive relationship that will lead to affirmative and healthy relationship" (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 132).

Many a time my mother wanted to leave the abusive situation but she could not because of her economic dependence on my step-father. She also would think of the negative consequences associated with someone who is divorced in our culture. A divorced woman is called names like "umabuy' ekwendeni" (the one who has failed in marriage). Such a woman has no place in our culture and tradition. She is a subject for ridicule, rejection and shame in our community. Because of that, women who struggle in their relationships are advised and counseled by the elders to persevere. In many traditional wedding ceremonies, the woman would be given a shawl or small blanket as a gift by her family. As the elders put it, this shawl is meant for her to cover up all of the problems and challenges she will encounter in her marriage. Simply put, that means she must not complain about her problems or seek help to address them; she must just suffer in silence. That means bearing the pain even if it is unbearable. This thinking goes beyond cultural contexts to the religious arena as well. As a result, some churches do not look favourably upon divorcees. In short, they participate in the trauma, abuse and violence through their theological stance. These are some of the reasons that made my mother stay in a situation that was not conducive for her and her children.

Nasimiyu-Wasike advocates against this understanding and teaching. She says that,

"In an abusive relationship, separation may in some instances lead to healing in both the abused and the abuser. The community of believers within which our communion with Christ is rooted is

called to endeavour towards bringing about the reign of God by enabling individuals to develop a healing relationship with God, a healing relationship with individual self, with the community, with other individuals and with the world” (Nasimiyu-Wasike, in Waruta, 2005: 133).

This, she says, will lead to salvation which includes wholeness, healthier personal and social relationships, and wholistic, integral and dynamic way of living. Thus the Church’s mission is “to promote and foster healthy and healing human relationships at public level, Church level and at family level” (Nasimiyu-Wasike, in Waruta, 2005: 133). This implies that the Church should challenge all evil conditions, especially those caused by abuse, exploitation and irresponsibility. In a situation of abuse and violence the Church is called not to conduct business as usual. The Church is challenged to stand up and act decisively in addressing such a situation. First, it must address its theology that keeps women submissive under the authority of men. The Church is challenged to adopt an attitude of “therapeutic and loving liberation rather than that of a judge” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 133).

Further, in caring pastorally for the victims the Church should...

“Support women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Let their problems become our problems. The Church should establish centres where these people can take refuge. Both the abused and the abuser must be helped to search for meaning and authentic values in their concrete context. The Church has to promote respectful dialogue for both parties in order to lead them to Christ who is the Truth, the Life and the Way” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 134).

The above quotation indicates the broad role and function of the Church within society. The Church is not just a building in which people meet once-a-week for worship. The Church is the Body of Christ – that is, people who live in fellowship with God and each other. In this role then, it should

respond to the particular needs and challenges of the society and address these adequately. When it does, it would be contributing meaningfully and effectively to community building and advancement. This means that it would act as a transforming agent that builds people up and ensures that they develop to contribute meaningfully to the life of their communities. This is what the Church is called to be and to do. This is mission in action. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has a mission statement that encapsulates this missionary imperative. “God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (MCSA, 2009: 2). From this statement flow the four mission imperatives which are stated thus:

- Evangelism and Church growth,
- Spirituality,
- Justice and Service, and,
- Human and Economic Development and Empowerment (MCSA, 2009: 2).

These imperatives agree to the idea of providing shelter for the abused to take refuge, advocacy and empowerment that Nasimiyu-Wasike calls for. A true Church of Christ has to respond timeously, intentionally and actively to the challenges that face families characterized by traumatic abuse and violence.

In order for the victims to re-establish their self-esteem they need to be helped with counseling. It is true that...

“The Church has to provide pastoral counselors that will endeavour to direct the abused and the abuser towards Christ and His reign of love and peace. Victims of abuse should have access to centres of counseling services and temporal economic support could be offered to them. Such victims could be enabled to settle down on their own by providing them with skills or some loans to start small businesses. Very often women have no neutral place to run for

support. The fear of running away and be branded as prostitutes traps them in a violent relationship” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 134).

It is my personal opinion that my mother is still haunted by her traumatic experiences of abuse and violence at the hands of her husband. This is partly attributed to the fact that she did not receive counseling and empowerment as alluded to in the above quotation. She sees herself as a failure and she has not recovered from the effects of her abuse. She has vowed never to get married again for she has trust issues when it comes to men. She sees and regards them (men) as monsters and therefore unworthy of love and respect. She has not learnt to overcome the humiliation, torture, disrespect and psychological trauma that she was subjected to. I find Nasimiyu-Wasike’s observation helpful and true if taken seriously. She says that these women need to be educated into rejecting humiliation, ridicule and psychological and physical torture. They have to develop self-assertiveness (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 135).

Apart from this she advocates for the encouragement of these victims to become counselors themselves through support groups. In these groups they can talk about their problems, pray for each other, and encourage each other towards healing and rehabilitation. She makes a very bold and useful statement about the role of the Church regarding divorce. She says, “Without encouraging divorce, the Church should allow marriages that cannot be reconciled to die. Christ never sanctified suffering but rather he alleviated it whenever and wherever he encountered it” (Nasimiyu-Wasike in Waruta, 2005: 135).

This goes without saying that the Church cannot continue to condemn victims of abuse and violence to suffering by its insistence on them persevering in this situation. It has to encourage and even help them to be set free from such degrading and dehumanizing situations. It is my utmost conviction that

if the Church becomes a place of healing and restoration for the victims of abuse and violence, they will be empowered to be effective contributors in society. If children who experienced abuse and violence within their families will be counseled and empowered adequately they will recover and be healed completely to take their rightful place in society as men and women of worth and value.

### **3.8 Preliminary Conclusion**

In this chapter the author has been dealing with the traumatic experiences of conflict marriages with a particular reference to the impact of such on the children. The author has carried out a literature review pertaining to marriage and family, traumatic conflict within marriage, domestic abuse and violence, trauma and pastoral care of the victims. Out of this chapter the reader can determine the negative impact of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within a marriage to the children.

In the next chapter the author will share stories of Methodist probationers who grew up in conflict-ridden and violent backgrounds. This will be done with a view of listening to their experiences, helping them to express their feelings and determining how the Church (MCSA) could develop a method of pastoral care that would empower the probationers to be effective pastoral caregivers.

## **Stories of traumatic abuse within marital relationships that affected the children**

In this chapter the author will share with the reader four stories of abuse, trauma and violence within marriages as expressed by the children. The respondents who share these stories are now adults, that is, older than 18 years. Two of them are married with their own families, and the other two are single. They are all probationer ministers<sup>1</sup> within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). They are stationed in different contexts within the Connexion<sup>2</sup> of the MCSA. All of them grew up in an environment of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within their parents' marital relationship. The layout of this chapter is as follows:

### 4.1. Sampling and data-gathering procedures

### 4.2. Stories of the respondents

#### 4.2.1. Jay's story

#### 4.2.2. Susan's story

#### 4.2.3. Tony's story

#### 4.2.4. Sabelo's story

### 4.3. Preliminary conclusion

## **4.1 Sampling and Data-Gathering Procedures.**

The author of this study is a probationer minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He grew up within a family environment that was characterized with traumatic conflict, abuse and violence. Now that he is a minister, he finds himself paralysed and therefore unable to deal pastorally with similar situations that arise within his congregation. As a result, he becomes ineffective in helping victims of

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<sup>1</sup> A probationer in the MCSA is a minister on training. It is someone who has not yet been ordained.

<sup>2</sup> The Connexion of the MCSA covers six nations namely: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland

traumatic conflict, abuse and violence. Instead of helping those that seek his expertise, he relives the experiences of the past trauma that he was subjected to when growing up. The aim of this study is to help the author and other probationers with similar experiences to work within their own paralysis in order to minister effectively to people who are going through conflict and abuse within their families or marital relationships. Arising out of the above, the author selected probationer ministers of the MCSA as his population.

For the purposes of this study, a population is “a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristic that the researcher is interested in studying” (Roscoe in Mouton, 1996: 134). Selttiz and Cook define the population as the aggregate of all the cases that conform to some designated set of specifications (in Mouton 1996: 134). In other words, the probationer ministers within the MCSA are the group of people that possess certain elements or characteristics that the researcher is interested in. From this population of probationers the researcher constructed a sampling frame. The sampling frame refers to the set of all cases from which the sample will actually be selected (Mouton, 1996: 135). Mouton cautions us to note that the sampling frame is not the sample in itself; it is the operational definition of the population that provides the basis for sampling (Mouton, 1995: 135).

In social research sampling is a familiar notion. According to Mouton, we talk of sampling when we refer to the process of selecting things or objects when it is impossible to have knowledge of a larger collection of these objects. He further states that in social research, sampling refers to (probability) sampling procedures which involve some form of elements from a target population. The aim of sampling in social research is to produce representative selections of population elements (Mouton, 1996: 132). A sample is thus the element of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study. It can be viewed as a subset of measurements drawn from a population in which we are interested. This means that we study the sample in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn (De Vos, 1998: 191). Accordingly, for this study, the population comprises of the Methodist probationer ministers.

A list of all the probationer ministers as appearing in the 2009 Yearbook and Directory of the MCSA was compiled. Only those in Phases 1 and 2 of probation were selected for this study. Phase 1 ministers are the ministers that are stationed in circuit for practical experience of ministry before they go on to study at the seminary. Phase 2 ministers are those that are either stationed at the seminary or already in circuit after a year or two in seminary. Phase 3 ministers, even though still on probation, were not selected because they are ordinands. This means that they are preparing for their ordination which takes place at Conference that meets annually in September. Therefore, at the completion of this study they will have already been ordained.

Of the 1230 (one thousand two hundred and thirty)<sup>3</sup> minister listed in the 2009 Yearbook and Directory there are 75 (seventy five) ministers listed as belonging to phases 1 and 2 of probation (MCSA, 2009: 113-235). This number represents 6.09% of all the listed ministers in the directory. The researcher used these 75 probationers as the population for this study. He communicated with all of them using electronic mail or facsimile. The communication included a letter of introduction and consent asking for their participation in the study (See appendix A). Also included in the communication was a sample of the questions to which they would respond if they met the criteria for the study (See appendix B). The criteria for participation in the study were:

- a. One had to be a Methodist probationer in Phase 1 or 2.
- b. One had to have grown up in a family environment of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence that happened between their parents.

Of the 75 (seventy five) probationers to whom this correspondence was sent 30 (thirty) responded. The responses indicated willingness to participate in the study. However, not all of them met the set criteria for inclusion. Out of the 30 (thirty) responses, only 4 people met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. This represents 5.3% of the total population of 75 (seventy five) probationers.

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<sup>3</sup> This number is inclusive of all persons in ministry within the MCSA, whether they are ordained ministers, probationers, deacons or supernumeraries i.e. retired.



Of these respondents 2 (two) were white, English-speaking males. One is married with a family of his own and the other is single. The other 2 (two) respondents are black – one male and married, and the other female and single. This means that 50% (2 probationers) of the respondents are white and 50% (2 probationers) are black. 50% (2 probationers) are married and the other 50% (2 probationers) single. 75% (3 probationers) are male and 25% (1 probationer) female. Two respondents (50%) were interviewed face-to-face and the other two telephonically. For confidentiality purposes their original names will not be mentioned at all in this study. Pseudonyms<sup>4</sup> will be used instead.

## **4.2 Stories of the Respondents**

### **4.2.1 Jay's story**

Jay (not his real name) is a Methodist probationer in the second phase of training within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. He grew up in a context of emotional and physical abuse perpetrated by his father against his mother. He started noticing that 'something was wrong' when he was about 8 (eight) years old. He remembers his father physically assaulting his mother in his presence at least twice. He states that his father had extramarital affairs which put his parents' marriage under great strain. Asked about why his parents did not break up in such a situation, Jay responded, "I think that my father wanted the convenience and comfort of marriage while enjoying the pleasures of his extramarital relationships." Eventually his parents separated when Jay was nine and got divorced when he was 11 years old.

Jay feels that this conflict and abuse within his parents' relationship was extremely traumatic to him. He could not understand why his father did this to them. Even at such a tender age he could notice that there was no expression of love between his parents. His father would not relate lovingly to his children as well. As a result, Jay did not cope well with this situation. He found himself struggling

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<sup>4</sup> A pseudonym is a false name. A name that is not somebody's original name, especially one used by an author in publications (Microsoft Encarta, 2005: unnumbered).

to ‘come to terms’ with what was happening between his parents. He feels that at that time he had not developed enough coping mechanisms to deal with the situation. Coupled with the fact that his parents were not Christian then, they (as a family) did not get church support or counseling that could have helped them. Now as an adult, Jay is a committed Christian, a husband, father and a minister who seeks to bring wholeness and healing to the people he encounters in the journey of life. However, this is not easy for him because when he thinks of what happened to his family he gets mixed emotions. Deep down he knows that he is a good father to his child, a loving husband to his wife, but he longs for what he missed as a child. He longs for the father-son relationship that he never had with his father. He longs to have experienced that ‘daddy stuff’ that fathers and their sons do. These include things like watching rugby together, going for walks in the park or just playing together as the ‘boys’ of the family. If only his father could have been a good role model!

Things turned around for Jay when he was 18 years old. He says that life changed in many ways when he became a Christian. As he grew in faith and received the unconditional acceptance of Jesus he began to ‘see’ both his parents and accept them for who and what they were. He saw them as humans who are fallible like everybody else, and he realized that his father’s behavior, while inexcusable, can be forgiven. His mother became a Christian 6 months after Jay’s conversion. His father has not taken the step of accepting Jesus Christ as yet. However, Jay and his father are beginning to share a bond now. Even though this bond has not really reached the level of a proper father-son relationship, it is a step in the right direction.

Jay feels that one of the two things happens to children who have grown up in a family of abuse, violence and conflict. In most cases they continue the cycle of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence in their own homes. In other cases, which are very rare, they develop into responsible citizens, loving partners or spouses and caring parents. This, Jay attributes to the gracious intervention of Jesus

Christ in the life of such a person. When this happens, the person is transformed so much that s/he is determined never to do the same in their own relationship. This becomes a conscious, intentional and willful decision on the part of the person.

As a minister on probation, Jay has encountered a person who has been in an abusive relationship. When he met the lady, her husband had already moved out. This surfaced in the counseling scenario for the HIV positive status of this lady. In dealing with the situation, Jay listened actively, attentively and completely to the lady. He offered her a 'shoulder to cry on'. As a pastor, he felt that he needed to be present for this lady. While he may not always have known what to say or how to deal with the situation, he found that his presence was helpful. From helping this lady he saw the negative effects of broken relationships in the world. He realized how selfish people can be and that was very disheartening for him.

Jay believes strongly that the Church (the Body of Christ, especially the MCSA) can be a place of healing, transformation and restoration for the victims of traumatic marital conflict, abuse and violence. The difficulty for him is that this kind of conflict and abuse happens 'underground' or below the surface. There is so much secrecy within families where this happens, such that it never really comes to the fore. This means that those affected will never get the help they need. Jay makes the following propositions for the Church to become a healing community in the face of abuse, violence and conflict within families.

- a. Create an environment of trust within the local church so that victims of abuse and violence can come freely to seek help and support.
- b. The local church, as well as the wider Church should be proactive in addressing issues relating to marriage and relationships. Marriages should not break down before something is done.

Premarital counseling, marriage enrichment workshops and support groups should be in the ‘activity list’ of every local church.

- c. Uphold the healthy Christian marriage as the ideal state of affairs for people who have committed themselves to such a lifestyle. Those healthy relations should be championed throughout the local church as examples and models of Christian lifestyle in marriage.

Sadly enough, Jay feels that he received very little support from the MCSA (Methodist Church of Southern Africa) as a probationer minister who went through the traumatic experience of violence and abuse in his family. He says that probationers’ life experiences mean nothing to the MCSA. All probationers are treated uniformly without consideration of unique and individual experiences. The Education for Ministry and Mission Unit (EMMU) which is tasked with the responsibility of forming men and women for ministry does not have space for people with such experiences in their curriculum. There is no exploration of different backgrounds of probationers. All probationers just have to conform to the system and the structure that is in place. For an example, states Jay, a man who is a breadwinner in his family is sent to the seminary without any consideration of how the family will survive in that situation. This in itself may lead to broken families. Jay states unapologetically that the MCSA has got no clue about the needs, challenges and difficulties of the probationers. This has been his experience, “If you begin to ask questions or raise concerns you are labeled as either delinquent or disobedient.”

According to Jay, the MCSA would be able to meet the needs of these probationers only if there are open channels of communication. Flowing from this open communication would be a situation where probationers would be treated as individuals with unique experiences and background. The screening procedures during the process of candidature should explore deeply and meaningfully the

life of the person intending to be accepted into probation. The whole process should discern and seek to answer the following questions:

- a. Who is this person presenting him/herself of ministry?
- b. What makes this particular person tick?
- c. What is this person's background?
- d. How can the MCSA minister to the needs, hurts, disappointments and anger that this person may bring to the ministry?
- e. How can the MCSA use this person's life experience to heal, transform and challenge the lives of those to whom s/he will minister?

These and other questions would inform the MCSA of what approach to use as they deal with that particular candidate in ministry. For example, Jay mentions that he attached a 17 page document to his application forms for admission into the ministry of the MCSA. This document sought to explain in detail to the Church his experiences, hurts, pains, achievements and joys. He explained his dreams, ambitions, gifts, skills, weaknesses and strengths. To this day he has not received any feedback pertaining to the information he supplied. He laments with great sadness the fact that God did not erase his memory of growing up in a dysfunctional family when God called him to ministry. What does the MCSA stand to benefit from such woundedness if it does not address it in a manner that brings healing and restoration? How can a wounded healer seek to transform other people's lives when his/her own life is not restored and/or transformed?

According to Jay, the MCSA needs to understand who the probationers are and create an environment where their healing and restoration can take place. The process of probation should be a time where the Church could minister to the probationers meaningfully so that they, in turn, could minister on her behalf to others. For Jay, healing happened when he poured his 'guts' out in front of 150 men in a retreat. After that sharing he felt relieved and knew that he could forgive his father. Jay offers the following helpful suggestions that will help in this regard:

- a. MCSA must train pastors who will be counselors for people undergoing abuse, violence and conflict in their marriages.
- b. In order to equip and empower the probationers, the MCSA needs to tailor their training so that it addresses the brokenness that candidates bring into the ministry.
- c. A mentorship programme that will address the issues of broken family backgrounds for probationers needs to be established.
- d. A Connexional Task Team that will investigate, give recommendations, and support ministers in training needs to be established so that they can journey alongside the probationers.

#### **4.2.2 Susan's story**

Susan (not her real name) grew up in what would be classified as a 'dysfunctional' family environment. According to researchers, "dysfunctional families display lasting family problems which are characterized by parental discord and violence" (van Nijnatten & van Huizen, 2004: 234). This is exactly what Susan experienced within her family. Her father was an alcoholic who would physically and emotionally abuse his wife. The beatings would be worse during the last days of the month when he would have earned his salary. The children would have to run away from their home – a place where they were supposed to be safe – into the streets. All this happened when Susan was between 8 and 13 years of age. During that time her father left them for about three years.

This conflict, abuse and violence had traumatic and damaging effects to Susan as a child. She was mostly isolated from other people. She wanted to keep to herself because "being around people as a child was a nightmare." Now that she is an adult she is able to socialize more and open up to others. She has noted that the abusive pattern has changed between her parents. Her mother is now the one who is abusive to her father. As a probationer minister she feels that the things happening at her home affect her. They haunt her and 'hit back' hard at her. She feels that she is burdened with the responsibility of keeping the

family together. Now that she is a minister the welfare of the family is upon her shoulders. This places a huge amount of pressure on her.

According to Susan, children who grew up in such environments, become abusive when they grow up. They tend to continue the cycle of violence in their own homes or to their own partners or even their parents. This is a general trend that Susan has noticed in the lives of those she has come across. She has also noticed this in her own family. Her sister is now emotionally abusive to their parents. This, Susan attributes to the effects of the traumatic experiences they went through in their household as children.

While Susan has not really encountered people who need counseling for their marital problems in her ministry, she is of the opinion that the Church can be a place of healing, restoration and transformation for both the victims and perpetrators of abuse. For example, the victims can be supported, empowered, advocated for, counseled and given some space to share their experiences. The perpetrators can be challenged, rehabilitated and restored to their full humanity through support groups and counseling. She holds strongly to the understanding that caring aimed at these people should be done in a pastoral way that seeks to restore their dignity and nurture their faith. According to Susan, the MCSA would achieve that in the following manner:

- a. Establishment of support groups for the abused, victimized and vulnerable. This would offer them a safe place to share their experiences, receive counseling, empowerment and support. Every local church within the MCSA should be empowered for this kind of ministry.
- b. Those undergoing difficulties within their families should not be labeled or discriminated against within the Body of Christ. They should rather be welcomed, embraced and given a space to belong. The Church should actively campaign against stigmatization of victims of spousal abuse.

- c. Every local church should be intentional in designing healing services that would be aimed at victims of abuse and violence within families. This calls for empowerment of worship leaders, ministers, society stewards and all involved within the life of the congregation.
- d. Creation of space for victims and survivors of abuse to share their testimonies in worship services. The aim for these would be to heal the wounded, restore the broken, give hope to the hopeless, encourage the weak and challenge the perpetrators. Those testifying would not only be healing themselves but others as well.
- e. Eradication of silence by the Church when it comes to issues of abuse, violence and conflict. The Church should be at the forefront in advocating and prophesying against the evils of abuse and violence within families. Sermons, workshops and retreats should be planned to address this particular issue head on. This would not only strengthen the prophetic ministry of the Church but also empower the victims meaningfully.

Susan is of the opinion that the MCSA does not meet the needs of the probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence that happened in their families. She states categorically that the MCSA cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this pertinent issue. She recognizes that people who offer themselves for ministry bring different life experiences to the process. These include joys and sadnesses, hurts and pains, strengths and weaknesses, hopes and dreams. To this effect she suggests that the screening process for ministry should go deeper in order to explore the different backgrounds of candidates. Having done that, it should open avenues for healing and restoration of those who have been hurt and traumatized by the dysfunctional backgrounds of their families. This would be helpful in that it would ensure that those who carry wounds into the ministry do not continue to wound others as they seek to minister to them.



#### 4.2.3 Tony's story

For Tony (not his real name) childhood was very rough at most times. This was because of the problems that his parents had in their marriage. His father worked for the South African Police Services. From the age of 6 years, Tony noticed that his parents had difficulties in their relationship. His father had a drinking problem which caused all their marital difficulties. He (father) would come home drunk, swear at his wife, threaten her and call her nasty names. While Tony never saw his father actually hitting his mother, the emotional abuse left huge scars in his life. In extreme circumstances his mother would just put her children in the car and drive away. That is how unbearable the situation was for her.

As a child, Tony kept all of this within himself. While he had friends to play with, he never shared what was happening at home with them. The main reason was that he was ashamed of the situation at home. He did not know how his friends would relate to him if they found out what was happening at home. In other words, he feared that his friends would reject him. Now that he is an adult, he realizes the depth of the impact of this situation in his life. This has affected him negatively in his adult relationships. All of the relationships he has had with the opposite sex have not lasted long. This, he attributes to the difficult background he was raised in. He is still fearful of rejection and discrimination. He fears that if he ever has a romantic relationship it will end up in traumatic conflict like his parents' marriage. He has trust issues as well. He does not trust the potential partners or even himself to make it meaningfully in a relationship. He would like to settle down one day, but the flashbacks of his childhood haunt him into paralysis. As a probationer, he acknowledges that he brings these wounds into ministry. When confronted with similar situations in his ministry he becomes traumatized again to such an extent that he does not help his congregants effectively as he is supposed to.

Do children who grew up in situations of traumatic conflict, violence and abuse continue the cycle of violence in their own homes when they grow up? Tony's answer to this question is both yes and no. He says that it all depends on the person and the choices they make. One can either choose to continue the cycle of violence in one's own home or make a conscious decision not to continue that cycle. While Tony struggles to form meaningful romantic relationships he has intentionally taken the decision that violence and abuse will not characterize his relationship with his future partner. He believes that he can do it because he has the inner strength, inner wisdom and is driven by a strong will to succeed in his relationship. To this end, he is undergoing psychological counseling to help him deal with the trauma he was subjected to as a child.

In his ministry, Tony has encountered young people who, like him, are struggling with their parents' relationships. When confronted with such situations he struggles enormously because of his own past experiences. When trying to help them, he gets overcome by a sense of extreme self consciousness that renders him pastorally incapable of addressing their situation. It almost feels as if he relives his past experiences. He experiences flashbacks of his own childhood. These flashbacks make him feel sad just as he felt sad for his mother when she was abused by his father. This is something he does not want to experience again, but it comes back to him when he least expects it. As a result, he has decided to study psychology as a means of healing and empowering himself to deal with these difficult situations.

According to Tony, the Church can be a place of healing and restorations for people like him. But, sadly enough, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), does not offer that space. Ministers and pastoral carers within the MCSA are themselves ill-equipped to deal with such situations. As far as he is concerned, there are no specialists within the MCSA who are equipped to deal meaningfully and effectively with such situations. Ministers and those tasked with the responsibility of mentoring probationers in the MCSA are themselves not empowered adequately to help with healing and restoration of these probationers. As a result, instead of being helpful, they (ministers and mentors) unconsciously

so, inflict more wounds and pain on the probationers. In Tony's experience, the MCSA does not meet the needs of probationers who come from conflict-ridden and abusive backgrounds.

He suggests that the MCSA can meet the needs of the probationers above by:

- a. Offering a conducive space within the church for probationers to express themselves, 'offload' their burdens and seek healing and restoration.
- b. Offering appropriate training for ministers and mentors that will equip, empower and skill them adequately to deal with the traumatic experiences of the probationers.
- c. Open up counseling centres or centers of healing for members of the church (including probationers) who struggle with issues of abuse, violence and traumatic conflict.
- d. Encourage ministers and leaders within the structures of the church to study psychology so that they can be better equipped to assess, monitor and minister to wounded people.
- e. Encourage probationers from backgrounds of traumatic conflict and violence to come forward and offer support to each other, and in so doing, hopefully, they will heal themselves and will be transformed into healing and restoration instruments for the people of God.

Tony is of the opinion that not everyone is called to such a ministry – the ministry of healing and restoring broken and wounded souls as a result of traumatic conflict and abuse. However, if the MCSA would open up avenues for those called to such a ministry to respond to their calling and equip themselves for such ministry there would be a notable difference in the life of the church.

#### 4.2.4 Sabelo's story

Sabelo (not his real name) remembers the incidents of physical abuse, violence and traumatic conflict between his parents as if they happened yesterday. At first he did not want to share his story out of fear that he will relive what he has been trying to forget all these years. From about ten years old, his family's life was characterized with pain and hurtful incidents. He remembers his father coming home drunk and not only being abusive to their mother but also to the children. On many occasions, they were beaten up for no apparent reason. His mother left his father on many occasions only to go back to him over again. The children had to ensure endless moments of moving and staying with relatives for long periods of time as their parents were 'working' on their relationship. They changed schools frequently as they would be placed with different relatives in different villages. This delayed their progress at school. It frustrated them in that they had to make new friends every time they moved. As they got used to their new environment and friends, they would be uprooted to the next location.

Sabelo still harbours anger at his father for treating them the way he did. Even though his father died two years ago, he has not come to a place of healing. He says that at his father's funeral he cried his heart out. He is not sure if he was crying because of grief or it was bottled anger and frustration coming out. Sabelo is angry at his mother for having put up with this trauma for so long. He is angry at himself for not protecting his mother and his sister from this monstrous father. He is angry at God for having allowed this to happen to his family.

He narrates an incident where one day they came from school to find their mother lying unconsciously on the floor as if dead. They did not know how long had she been lying there for. They did not know where their father had gone. They did not know what to do with the situation. All they knew was that their father did this to their mother. They called the neighbours who came to help. Eventually a 'good Samaritan' offered to take their mother to hospital. When his father finally returned home in the evening, he 'hit the hell out of them' for having taken their mother to hospital. According to him (the father), they

should have left their mother to die. She was as good as dead to him. That is when Sabelo realized the danger they were faced with in that family. He left home for good and went to stay with relatives at the age of 15.

This traumatic conflict and abuse had a very negative impact on him as a child. He had to move and stay with different relatives, some of whom were also abusive to him. He missed a number of years at school as he would move from place to place. As a result, he took longer than usual to finish his basic education. As an adult, he believes that he is coping somehow. He acknowledges that he is still angry at his parents or the situation he grew up with. He sometimes is overwhelmed by guilt feelings at his inadequacy of dealing with the situation at the time. He struggles to trust people now, which is why he is still single. He is fearful and cannot open himself for love because of that. It is difficult for him to minister to people in sadness and pain. He says that he becomes extremely emotional and therefore ineffective when confronted with situations that arouse the painful memories of his past.

Sabelo says that children who were raised up with traumatic conflict between their parents are more than likely to continue the cycle of violence in their own relationships when they grow up. He cites examples of people he knew from his childhood who have turned out to be abusers, wife-batterers and irresponsible partners. Some of the people he knows have joined the ranks of gangsters and are now fully fledged criminals. This, he attributes to their traumatic background.

In his ministry, Sabelo has counseled two people who are in abusive situations. He says that he failed both of them because instead of being helpful to them, he transferred his own anger and guilt into the helping situation. At one instance, he froze in the middle of the helping session and just decided to walk out, leaving the counselee all alone. After he regained his composure, he came back and apologized to the counselee who was gracious enough to accept his apology. This was so embarrassing for him that he

decided it was the last time he counseled someone with marital problems. Fortunately, no one has come to him with that kind of a problem since then.

From this incident he realized that he still needs healing himself. In his own words he says that, “I do not see myself healing God’s people when I am still as wounded as I am. I need healing first, so that I can be an agent of healing for others.” While he agrees that the Church can be a place of healing for people like him, he laments the fact that the MCSA does not seem to meet the needs of probationers like himself. The Church is too busy with programmes and structures that it neglects the people who seek healing restoration. The Education for Mission and Ministry Unit (EMMU) concentrates mainly on academic and vocational development of probationer ministers and less on healing of spiritual, psychological and emotional brokenness.

According to Sabelo, the MCSA needs to take seriously the background of people who candidate for ministry. It needs to ‘dig deep’ into their history, not for academic purposes only, but in order to heal them of their past hurts and pains. While the screening process has psychologists and social workers, Sabelo feels that it is superficial. There should not be a blanket approach of screening for all of the candidates. Each case must be treated according to its own merits. Sabelo believes that if the MCSA would invest its time and resources in ensuring that the healing and restoration of their probationers happens meaningfully, the probationers would be powerful tools in the hands of God. They would be empowered to minister meaningfully to the hurting, the broken-hearted and the wounded members of our society. To this effect, Sabelo has begun seeking counseling for himself so that he may be healed, restored and transformed for God’s purposes in the world.

### **4.3 Preliminary Conclusion**

In this chapter the author narrated four stories of probationers who grew up in conflict-ridden family environments. They have been affected negatively by such backgrounds and struggle with ministering to people that have similar problems. They gave a few suggestion on how the Church (MCSA) can be a community of healing and restoration for such probationers.

In the next chapter (five) I will be dealing with therapeutic healing methods based on the stories of these probationers. This will be done as a way of addressing their problems so that they and the rest of the victims can be healed.

## **THERAPEUTIC HEALING METHODS ON THE SHARED CASE STUDIES**

*It has happened again...You came home with a temper...It's been a long day at work and maybe you even had a few drinks, and your partner does or says something that upsets you. Before you know it, your fists are out and she is on the floor begging you to stop, but you can't see past the anger and finally when she is completely battered and bruised...you stop. You wake up the next day and realize what has happened. Guilt overcomes you. Filled with apologies and regret, you promise not to do it again, but you know deep down this is not true. How many countless times have you said those words and then followed the same pattern time and time again? It really doesn't matter if your partner keeps quiet or retaliates; you will always find something to be angry and vengeful about. You ask her for the hundredth time to pretend that she hurt herself because she was clumsy or reckless; so that others won't know what goes on behind your closed doors. Her own fear also keeps her from talking to others. She may even remove herself from her family and close friends so that she doesn't have to explain the bruises and cuts. The relationship takes on a normal tone once more, and all is well for a while. You turn on the charm and you spoil her. However, after a short while, you begin to think about the wrongs that your partner has done to you. In your eyes, the only way to stop the lack of respect from your partner or your lack of control over the relationship is to apply aggression and attack, and so the cycle of abuse begins again (Daily Sun, 18 November 2009: 24).*

The above quotation is taken from an article published by Makhanya Cebisile in the Daily Sun (18 November 2009: 24). The article clearly articulates the harmful and traumatic scenario that prevails in an environment where spousal abuse is the norm. The abuser is depicted as someone who is a control freak in the relationship. He will find any reason to abuse and traumatize his partner. Having done that, he will seek to justify his behavior. He will blame the partner for his actions. When he



comes to his senses, he will apologise, but that will not last for long. The cycle of violence, abuse and traumatic conflict continues soon after he finds other reasons for carrying on. Not only that, he will blackmail her to keep silent about the traumatic abuse he has put her through.

While the article does not include the impact of this traumatic violence on the children within this kind of a family, it captures clearly the scenario that all the four probationers painted in their interviews. While their stories may have taken different dimensions, there is a similar trend suggestive of the experience given in the article above. In all their stories, the father figure was the abuser. Misuse of alcohol had a contributory factor in the abuse of their mothers. Their families were ruined beyond restoration as a result of this traumatic abuse. It is evident that while their stories took different forms and shapes, the pattern of abuse in their families was almost similar. Control and domination by the father figure was the central factor that led to abuse and violence in their parents' relationships. Makhanya has this to say:

“Domestic abuse or violence occurs when one person in an intimate relationship or marriage tries to dominate and control the other. It is used for one purpose alone – to gain and maintain control. By using emotions like fear, guilt, intimidation, threats and pain, the abuser will try and wear their partner down so that they can keep them under their rule and power” (Daily Sun, 18 November 2009: 24).

It is evident that in order for the abuser to maintain control in the relationship he has to instill fear into his partner. All of the interviewees in this study mentioned how fearful the situation was in their homes. Some of them were constantly on the run from their homes due to the fearful circumstances that they found themselves in. It is also evident that traumatic abuse and violence is widespread throughout the different cultures, races, ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

“Domestic violence and abuse does not discriminate. It happens among heterosexual couples and in same-sex partnerships. It occurs within all ages, ethnic backgrounds and financial levels. While women are more commonly victimized, men are also abused, especially verbally and emotionally: (Daily Sun, 18 November 2009: 24).

This is true. The co-researchers in this study come from different backgrounds; culturally, racially, economically, ethnically and socially. They all grew within an environment of traumatic abuse and violence between their parents. As a result, they (the co-researchers) all suffered spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, economically and otherwise. To this very day, they live with the psychological and emotional scars that they received from their traumatic backgrounds. They seek healing and restoration for themselves so that they, in turn, may be agents of healing and restoration. Their example bears witness to the indiscriminatory nature of abuse and violence. In this chapter I will be dealing with therapeutic healing methods based on the stories of these probationers as expressed in chapter four. This will be done as a way of addressing their problems so that they, and countless other people, can be healed.

This chapter will focus on pastoral care which is the task of all caregivers to individual persons and communities. The aim is to understand the impact of growing up in conflict-ridden, abusive and violent backgrounds on the children who have now offered themselves for ministry in the MCSA. Having understood the impact, a method of caring pastorally for them will be developed. This arose out of the realization that the cycle of violence to which the children are exposed in their youth may be continued in their own homes when they grow up. Coupled with that, is a quest for this research paper to empower those children to be effective pastoral caregivers to the people who may be going through similar situations in their marriages. This demands that those called to pastoral care be fully transformed, restored and healed in order for them to impart healing to those people they encounter. It is understandable that:

“The responsibility and power lies with the abuser if change is to occur within a relationship that is filled with violence and pain. Understanding the patterns of abuse, and that it (abuse) does not serve the health of a relationship will go a long way to help the abuser to heal and become the solution to the problem of domestic violence rather than the problem itself” (Daily Sun, 18 November 2009: 24).

As pastoral carers, people in ministry are charged with a responsibility of challenging the abuser to change his/her habits and helping the abused to heal meaningfully. If the pastoral caregivers are not healed adequately from their past hurts they will be overwhelmed by the unresolved issues that are still within them. For example, in the helping process they may find themselves reliving the experiences of their childhood. This will render them inadequate in dealing with the present situation effectively. As evidenced in some of the shared case studies, and in the story of the author himself, if healing has not occurred adequately, it paralyzes the caregiver in the helping process. When confronted by the abuser who came for counseling, the author was helpless because all of the negative feelings that he harbored against his abusive stepfather came to the fore. When confronted by a situation of the abused seeking help, guidance and counseling, different feelings of anger, hurt, guilt and helplessness arose within him.

This has revealed that...

“The arena of pastoral work is multifaceted and full of surprises, unexpected problems and opportunities for profound insight into the human situation. It is an arena within which the pastor is privileged to be with people where they live and breathe, succeed and fail, relate intimately and experience alienation. It is the down-to-earth world of the human living” (Gerkin, 1997: 11).

This means that caregivers are called to journey alongside God’s people in their distresses and joys, moments of peace and turbulence in order to give them support, encouragement and to ‘hold their hands’ through the dark valleys of life. According to Chirinda, caregivers are therefore challenged to do their

work in such a way that will liberate and enable both the caregiver and the help seeker to develop a healthy relationship. This will lead to healing and transformation of the society (2008: 110). This means that the caregiver needs all of the empowerment in order to become the voice of the voiceless and the prophet to the powerful.

Formation for ministry within the MCSA is geared at addressing different dimensions within the lives of the probationers. It addresses aspects such as spirituality, academic development, development of community values, personal formation, development of practical ministry skills and servanthood (Sifo, 2007: 16-17). This happens throughout the probation period from Phase 1 through to ordination. Formation occurs in different communities within the vast Connexion of the MCSA, as well as at the seminary. While the probationers are still on training, they are expected to lead the congregations they are stationed in. This happens under limited supervision. It is during their ministry within their congregations that they encounter situations where they need to exercise their pastoral skills. As pastors they have to care for individuals and communities. It would be helpful to note that...

“Those communities include not only families living together and groups of people who work and play together, but also, most significantly, communities of faith who live and worship together as they seek to be faithful Disciples of Christ in the world. Touring that world will cause us to encounter the inevitable tensions involved in providing pastoral care for individuals and for congregations” (Gerkin, 1997:11).

It goes without saying that traumatic conflict, violence and abuse within families is one of the tensions that probationers encounter within their congregations. In order to minister effectively to such situations of tension they need adequate preparation. They also need to have been healed of past hurts and wounds so that they do not inflict more harm to the help seekers.

The author and the participants in this study were affected negatively by the conflict, abuse and violence that occurred in their parents' relationship when they were growing up. For some participants the impact of growing up in a conflict-ridden background is more evident to them now that they are adults. This has affected them differently in their ministry. All of them agree to a certain extent that the Church (MCSA) can be a place of healing and restoration for those who are traumatized by conflict and abuse in their marriages. It can also be a place of healing for the children that are raised within such a situation. However, in their experience, as probationers within the MCSA, they have discovered that the Church does not necessarily meet the needs of probationers that grew up in conflict-ridden backgrounds. Due to that failure, they then found themselves unable to minister to people that were victims and/or perpetrators of abuse within their congregations. Following is a pastoral care methodology that seeks to empower the probationers to be effective caregivers when they are confronted with such situations.

### **5.1 Pastoral Care Methodology.**

The faith community needs to be a place that nurtures growth and development of those who are members. It needs to challenge negative areas within individual members' lives and also affirm positive areas. A pastoral carer should journey alongside God's people offering support, encouragement and prophetic witness when the need arises. Such a carer would need to have dealt adequately with negative areas within his/her life. The MCSA needs to prepare the people called to be pastors so that they can deal with matters of marital conflict effectively. Arising out of the shared case studies in chapter four, the researcher came up with the following therapeutic healing methods that the MCSA can use to empower and equip probationer ministers that grew up in traumatizing and conflict-ridden backgrounds.

### 5.1.1 Creating an Environment of Trust within the MCSA

Through informal and formal interactions with clergy, the researcher found out that the ministers of the MCSA do not trust each other. This is a sad but true reality that is confronting the clergy within the Methodist Church. The seminarians at John Wesley College expressed this concern in 2007<sup>5</sup>. The Phase two probationers of the Highveld and Swaziland District met in one of the internship programs with their Bishop in 2008 and reiterated the same concern<sup>6</sup>. The ministers (probationers and ordained) in the Highveld and Swaziland District echoed the same sentiments in their annual retreat in 2009. As recently as March 2010, the same cry was raised by five ministers in their Circuit staff meeting where the author is currently stationed. If such an amount of distrust is evident among those who are called to shepherd the flock, one wonders how much more it (distrust) could have penetrated the local worshipping communities within the MCSA. It is the researcher's observation, even though no formal study has been conducted, that there is a level of distrust within local congregations. Such amounts of distrust results in many people being unable to open up regarding their traumatic encounters. The MCSA has a responsibility and a challenge therefore to create an environment of trust so that God's people may share their stories of hurt and pain easily. At this point an explanation of the concept of trust is warranted.

Trust is defined as a 'firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something' (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 901). It can also be explained as "to put one's confidence in a person or thing" (Knight, 2005: 338). An environment of trust within the MCSA therefore, would be an environment where the victims of traumatic abuse can be confident enough to share openly their stories without fear or suspicion. In the author's experience, the level of distrust in the MCSA is twofold. Clergy do not trust each other but also they do not trust the Church as an institution.

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<sup>5</sup> The author as at John Wesley Methodist Seminary in 2007.

<sup>6</sup> In 2008 the author was stationed in a Circuit within the Highveld and Swaziland District of the MCSA and he was part of the Phase 2 probationers in that District.

This phenomenon has been observed not only within the MCSA but also throughout churches in Africa. Mwikamba says that distrust originates from the following:

“Generally in most churches, the hierarchy tends to treat problems of pastors as personnel problems having little or no bearing at all to the churches as institutions. At times pastors because of one reason or another are disowned, defrocked, suspended by their own churches in a crude, inhuman, let alone Christian manner. The assumption is that the Church has no problem but the pastor does. But who is the Church? Another assumption is that the pastor must be faithful, loyal and serve the church with all the heart, mind and body (sic). Whether the Church is loyal, faithful, serves and appreciates the pastor even in the hour of need is a question that is rarely asked” (Mwikamba in Waruta and Kinoti, 2005: 252).

This quotation expresses the origin of distrust within clergy circles. It is evident that those who are open about their problems or challenges are labeled, disowned or discriminated against by their colleagues and the ‘system’. This makes it difficult for people in ministry to unload their burdens because they do not know if they will be victimized by the system or become objects of ridicule among their colleagues. As a result, they would rather live in secrecy and deal with their own problems themselves without seeking help from colleagues or even the church. By so doing they miss out on the opportunities available for support, mentoring, counseling and relief.

Sadly enough, this deep-seated distrust is not only limited to clergy within the Church. It has infected local congregations and the laity as well. As a result, people who are suffering with abuse and traumatic conflict do not find it easy to share their stories within their congregations. They fear that they may be discriminated against, victimized or even stigmatized severely. This does not help in dealing with the abuse, but it perpetuates it even further. One of the respondents mentioned that the secrecy and silence about abuse and violence in the families of congregants is a huge matter that needs to be dealt with urgently. This can be addressed effectively when the Church intentionally creates an environment of trust

where God's people – both clergy and lay – can express their hurts and struggles without fear of victimization, discrimination and stigmatization by the wider community of faith.

Creating an environment of trust means that those in leadership need to display a deep sense of integrity and God honouring disposition when dealing with confidential matters that come to their attention. It means that they need to take seriously the call of God to shepherd God's people in a manner that brings about transformation, healing and restoration. It also means that they need to display in their own lives a character worth imitating by the rest of the community. Their attitude should display the Christ-like qualities that are called for in Philippians chapter two.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 5-11 NIV).

This is a God-honoring, Christ-like disposition and attitude that will create an environment of trust within the Church. When dealing with issues pertaining to God's people, an attitude of humility instead of pride and 'better-than-thou' disposition will create and maintain an environment of trust and confidence that is needed to help them to open up to their leaders. Probationers that come from environments of traumatic abuse and conflict will find it easier to share their stories in such an environment. As they share their stories, they will receive the healing that they need. Not only is trust essential, but also offering education and awareness regarding abuse, violence and traumatic conflict is of great importance.



### **5.1.2 Offering Education and Awareness regarding Abuse, Violence and Traumatic Conflict within Families.**

This study has revealed to us that issues of conflict, violence and abuse affect everybody within the families where this happens. Not only that, the worshipping communities within which victims and perpetrators of abuse worship are affected as well. This is because we are members of one body. “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body” (1 Corinthians 12: 12 NIV). When one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers. Therefore all of the parts of the body should “have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12: 25 NIV).

Within any worshipping congregation are many people who are blessed with different gifts, skills, abilities and professions. There are doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, engineers, labourers, politicians etc. These people bring with them a wealth of experience, expertise and willingness that can be tapped into for enriching, nurturing and advancing transformation within the worshipping community. These people can and would be willing to give of their time and other resources to teach about any aspect that needs attention within the congregation. This means that the pastor does not always have to do the teaching him/herself. S/he can use the people within the congregation who may be specialists in their field of trauma, abuse, conflict and violence.

It is helpful to keep in mind that “there are many vehicles one can use to bring about awareness and education in a church environment. Some of these are workshops, sermon and teaching series, Bible study sessions, liturgies and songs/hymns that are appropriate for such a purpose” (Sifo, 2009: 111). Sifo warns that such educational programs should be implemented with sensitivity and professionalism based on accurate information, love, compassion and with a deep concern for human rights and dignity (2009: 111). They should seek to challenge the abuser, affirm and support the abused and persuade a lifestyle change in all people. They should re-examine the human conditions that promote abuse and violence in

families and advocate for Christian values that call for behavioural change in individuals, families and congregations.

Our teaching and empowerment would be incomplete if we do not give attention to gender issues, including the empowerment of women and girls. Not only that, the Church would have to “examine critically some of the cultural, customary and sexist practices that have been perpetuated in certain circles of society” (Sifo, 2009: 110). Failure to do this would continue to render women and children vulnerable to abuse and traumatic conflict within their families. For example, the MCSA would need to challenge some of the customary and traditional practices and statements within different societies that keep women subservient to men. It is known that many men who are abusive to their partners use culture and tradition as their scapegoat. When the Church addresses this head on in its education and awareness drive, it would strengthen its prophetic ministry and empower victims of abuse considerably. This would send a clear message to all concerned that the MCSA views abuse and traumatic conflict within families in a very serious light. It would communicate a clear message that people who are abused should not be rejected, stigmatized, labelled, and discriminated against in any way by the Church. It would also communicate a message of love, care, acceptance, grace and compassion to those living and struggling with issues of traumatic conflict in their families. Such education and empowerment would challenge the whole body of Christ to examine itself. Such examination would flow from a deep reflection and understanding of how are we affected by abuse and conflict within our families. We would realise and deeply reflect on “how are we part of the problem? How can we become part of the solution?” (Dube in Sifo, 2009: 111).

Part of education and awareness within a congregation involves sharing of testimonies by the survivors of abuse. These would give hope to those who are still struggling with abuse and nurture faith in those who have lost it through their trauma. Through such testimonies some victims would regain a sense of strength and positive regard for themselves. They would receive empowerment to

go and face their abusers with courage. When opportunities for testimonies are opened, people should also be given space to express their lament regarding the trauma they are subjected to. According to Wimberly, laments are the moans of the soul that arise from life's struggles and losses and that are brought to speech in prayer. Laments are our pleas for God's help (2004: 162). In times of trouble, God's people are encouraged to bring their cries for help to God. As they do, they express their confidence in a compassionate God who hears them, answers them and walks alongside them. This is a unique opportunity that the Church can offer to the hurting so that they can know the comfort of God in their pain. Wimberly says that participation in prayers of lament is an activity that nurtures faith and hope through fostering the formation of a language of lament while, at the same time, evoking the creation of a posture of hope (2004: 162).

The author can testify to the truth contained in Wimberly's assertions. He would cry to God for help when his parents were fighting at home. He would ask God questions and vent his anger at God. While he did not receive any answers at the time, he was comforted by the fact that he could express his concerns to God. In lamentation he received comfort. In lamentation he developed a sense of hope that one day this traumatic encounter would come to an end.

Of importance as well is the creation and development of support groups within the church. People that are faced with traumatic conflict and abuse within their families can come together to share their stories and encourage each other in a support group setting. Within such an environment they would learn to trust and support each other meaningfully. Such groups should not only be aimed at victims of abuse. They should also be available for perpetrators of abuse and violence. In such a group, perpetrators would be challenged to change their behavior. They would covenant to hold each other accountable and to pray for each other. In their journey they would seek guidance, love, compassion and opportunities to make right that which they did wrong through their actions.

From this discussion it is clear that education and awareness involves more than just teaching about abuse and violence. It involves the whole community of faith standing in solidarity together before God and crying out to God for God's intervention and assistance. It also involves the Church establishing ministries that will train and empower clergy to become counselors and mentors to probationers that were raised in conflict-ridden backgrounds. It involves tailoring education and the formation process to the needs of the probationers so that their brokenness can be addressed adequately.

Not only that, every local congregation should be intentional in designing and conducting healing services that would be aimed at victims and perpetrators of abuse within families. The benefit of this would be that those people who would find it difficult to speak to a counselor on a one-to-one basis would be able to express their pain openly if the opportunity is given as part of worship. However this would call for empowerment and training of worship leaders, ministers, society stewards and all involved within the life of the congregation.

### **5.1.3 Destigmatization of Abuse, Violence and Traumatic Conflict within Families**

Stigma can be described as "a mark or sign of disgrace" (Oxford Dictionary, 2001: 824). It is a sign of social unacceptability associated with a deep sense of shame. I believe that our biggest mistake as a Christian community has been to attach stigma to violence, abuse and traumatic conflict that happen in the homes of believers. This has resulted in many people unable to come forward and share their stories and experiences because they fear that they will be judged, rejected and discriminated against by the Church. Until stigma is eradicated fully, it will remain difficult for people to fight abuse and violence in their homes. People will die silently and secretly as a result of trauma, abuse and violence in their families.

In his paper on HIV and AIDS, Sifo has shared with deep concern his understanding of how stigma continues to violate God's people within the Church. He has made the following observation pertaining to HIV/AIDS which I believe can be applied to traumatic conflict, violence and abuse within families as well.

“Unfortunately, the Church is often guilty of promoting the stigmatization of people through their silence, judgmental attitude and proclamation that HIV/AIDS<sup>7</sup> is God's punishment for sinfulness. We need to re-interpret Scripture in light of God's love, grace, and non-judgmental attitude” (2009: 112).

Unless the Church speaks up with conviction against the effects of violence and abuse in families, the issue of stigma will remain unchallenged. Unless it becomes less judgmental and more supportive and embracing towards victims of abuse, there will be no positive progress in terms of dealing with this evil. The Church can make a significant contribution when it begins to accept, embrace and care lovingly for the victims of abuse.

Destigmatization in this regard would imply that we treat the victims with dignity, love, and compassion so that they, in turn, may feel that they are still important human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 27). This means that they would know themselves as people of worth and dignity and people of equal standing with others in the community. Through this we will be communicating to them a strong message that says that they are still God's own beloved children who need not be ashamed of themselves just because they are victims of abuse. Destigmatization would also mean that the abuser has an avenue to come and be ministered to as well. While his (usually male figure) behavior will be challenged graciously and lovingly, his humanity will and should not be looked down at. When that happens he will be given a unique

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this discussion the author would insert the words abuse, violence and traumatic conflict instead of HIV/AIDS.

opportunity to change and embrace a new kind of life that Jesus offers him. Destigmatization for the abuser will mean that the message of the Gospel is communicated in a manner that brings about healing and transformation.

#### **5.1.4 Establishment of Centres of Healing or both Victims and Perpetrators of Abuse.**

Healing for the victims and perpetrators of abuse would aim at achieving the following purposes:

“To transform individuals into a real personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Baptism of the Spirit; to heal relationships and to build community – especially in the family and the neighbourhood community; and, to transform society by healing relationships of injustice and oppression” (MacNutt, 1974: 19).

This goes without saying that every local congregation within the MCSA should be a centre of healing if we take seriously our mission statement. We believe that the Methodist Church in Southern Africa is called to “proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (MCSA, 2007: 2). However because of the special nature, depth and gravity of abuse within families, a special effort should be made in addressing these issues. People that are trained specifically to deal with abuse and trauma are needed within the Church so that they can offer referral service for pastors and leaders who feel ill-equipped to deal with such issues.

At present, the author is aware of only one centre of healing within the MCSA. This center is situated at the Bryanston Methodist Church. It offers counseling courses and counselor training as well as counseling to individuals. As part of their extended ministry, the Bryanston Methodist Church has a National Counselling Centre Development Ministry (NCCDM). This ministry is headed by an ordained minister, the Rev. Dr. Leon Klein. Their reason for existence is to assist and empower local congregations to develop and maintain their own healing centres. They offer training, ongoing support;

practical guidance and practical advice to churches that want to open such centres. In addition, they offer supervision for the staff of those centres.

The lack of centres of healing is not unique to Methodism in Southern Africa. It is a widespread phenomenon throughout Africa, to say the least. In his article on pastoral care for the clergy, Magesa advocates for the establishment of professional counseling centres in Tanzania. These centres, attests Magesa, could specifically be aimed at caring for the clergy.

“In the absence of professional counselors, or counseling centres in the country, it seems to be of paramount importance that the church in Tanzania, establish them at several strategic locations. The number of clergy who are falling victim to alcoholism, for example, is rising too quickly to ignore. But there are other things for which professional care (outside the confessional) is clearly needed. Perhaps they are less obvious in their physical effects than alcohol abuse, but they are no less deadly in every other sense of the word with regard to the priest’s personality and ministry” (Magesa in Waruta and Kinoti, 2005: 230).

It is envisaged that these centres would be places of healing, restoration and transformation for the people of God who have been subjected to abuse. They would be most beneficial for probationers who feel ill-equipped to deal with trauma that affects their congregants, especially if they (probationers) have grown up in traumatic environments. As they open up their wounds in a non-judgmental, caring and embracing atmosphere, they would receive the healing that they desperately need.

#### **5.1.5 Screening of Candidates for Ministry.**

At present, the MCSA screens all candidates for ministry. The screening process seeks to examine the candidate’s understanding of Methodist theology and preparedness for ministry. It seeks to discern whether the candidate has the gifts and graces for our work or not. The screening panel is composed of theologians of different specialties and lay people from different backgrounds like psychology and social

work. This is an involved process that seeks to discern the call to ministry for each candidate and recommend to the Church if the candidate is worth joining the ministry of the MCSA.

Even though this process is in place, it is clear from the responses of my co-researchers that it is not adequate. All of them voiced the opinion that the screening process does not cater for the needs of candidates that grew up in a traumatizing environment. The co-researchers lament the fact that the screening process is generic for all the candidates. They would like to see a process that is tailor-made for the needs of each candidate that presents themselves for ministry. A blanket approach of screening does not help discern if a candidate has traumatic wounds they carry into the ministry. All the people that candidate for ministry come from different backgrounds, with different experiences and different expectations and reactions to the process of candidature. To treat them as if they come from similar backgrounds is making mockery of a process that would have been otherwise very effective in healing the wounds that they may be bringing with them into ministry.

For an example: One of the respondents in this study mentioned that he submitted all the relevant forms that were needed for his candidature. In addition to that, he appended a 17-page document that clearly explained to the Church his experiences, hurts, pains, achievements and joys. He explained his dreams, ambitions, gifts, skills, weaknesses and strengths. To his disappointment, nothing was mentioned at the screening process about that document. To this very day, he has not received feedback regarding the information he supplied to the Church. He feels that if that information was taken into consideration, the Church would have been better informed in terms of his stationing. He is now frustrated because he feels that he is stationed in a place and a context that does not match his gifts, abilities and skills. The cry from all the respondents was that probationers should not be treated uniformly in the screening process. There must be a clear consideration of their individual and unique experiences. This makes sense when it comes to people that were subjected to violence and abuse when they grew up. The screening process, if conducted correctly, would offer a golden opportunity for the Church to pick up problems from the



candidate's background and offer counseling, support and mentoring if need be. Also, it would inform the stationing committee of what kind of station would be appropriate for such a candidate, so that ministry does not harm him/her any further.

#### **5.1.6 Welfare, Advocacy and Support.**

Not only should the MCSA educate and teach about the devastating effects of traumatic abuse and conflict on families, it should also advocate for the rights of the people who are traumatized by such abuse. The Church should be proactive in addressing issues relating to marriage and relationships. At least one respondent is of the view that marriages should not break down before something is done. Premarital counseling and marriage enrichment workshops should be in the 'activity list' of every local congregation. People who are affected by abuse should be cared for specifically and intentionally, not only by the Church but also by the society. For such to happen, the Church needs to be the voice of the voiceless and the consciousness of the society. While doing this, the Church should not push its responsibility of caring for the people. It should develop ministries specifically aimed at the abused. It should establish care centres or shelters that would house vulnerable people for safety. Coupled with that, is the need to establish recovery or rehabilitation centres for the abusers.

It is very important for the Church to understand that it has a mission to be a visible sign of Christ's presence in the world. According to Nasimiyu-Wasike, the vitality of the Church depends to some extent on the health and integral well-being of the society and the culture within which the people of God live. Therefore, it is the Church's salvific mission to promote and foster healthy and healing human relationships at public level (in Waruta and Kinoti, 205: 133). This means that the Church can and should partner with all other organizations that seek to advance the cause of the victims of abuse. These partnerships need to go further to the political and social service arenas. The Church can take part in

secular activities that speak against violence and abuse within families. An example of that is the ‘16 days of activism against women and child abuse.’

The purpose for such partnerships would be to offer support for the organizations that actively stand against abuse in the society but also to hold accountable those that do not live up to their mandate in terms of delivering acceptable service to victims of abuse. Nasimiyu-Wasike further advocates that the Church should follow in the example of Jesus Christ who challenged evil conditions especially those caused by abuse, exploitation and irresponsibility. The Church’s responsibility in all these evil conditions is one of therapeutic and loving liberation rather than that of a judge (in Waruta and Kinoti, 2005: 133).

It is evident that the Church should be at the forefront in addressing issues of trauma, violence and abuse within families. Otherwise it would not be living out its God-given mandate of preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, releasing the oppressed and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour (Luke 4 : 18-19 NIV). Probationers from backgrounds of trauma and abuse would be useful resources within the Church in this regard. In their testimonies and story-telling, they would offer hope to others, support and mentor each other and hopefully heal themselves and become instruments of healing and restoration for the people of God.

## **5.2 Preliminary Conclusion**

This chapter was an attempt by the author to develop a methodology of healing and restoration for the probationers that encountered traumatic conflict in their home environments when they were growing up. The aim of this methodology was to assist the MCSA to provide an environment of healing and transformation for such probationers. This came out of the realization that trauma within families affects the children negatively. It was discovered that probationers from such backgrounds carry with them the wounds that they were inflicted with during their childhood. As a result, they may find it difficult, if not impossible, to minister to people that experience abuse and violence within their families.

The author, having grown up in such an environment himself, discovered the devastating effects of growing up in a conflict-ridden background when he was called upon to counsel victims and perpetrators of abuse within his congregation. At such a point, he discovered that his probation within the MCSA did not prepare him adequately to deal with such challenges. Moreover, he discovered that he still carried within himself anger, frustration and unresolved conflict as a result of the pain and suffering that he was subjected to as a child. He learnt that if he is not healed of the wounds of his past he will not be an effective agent of healing in his ministry. This was clearly alluded to by the co-researchers in this study.

Out of their stories of pain and suffering, the co-researchers offered valuable insights into how the MCSA can be a place of healing and restoration for probationers that face these challenges. As a result, this chapter was entirely dedicated to the development of therapeutic healing methods that came out of the experiences of the co-researchers. Pastoral care is a process that engages people towards healing and restoration. It is a process that seeks to restore the worth and dignity of God's people. It is from this understanding that the author developed his argument. He used the case studies and stories of his co-researchers. After listening to their stores and hearing their suggestions, he gathered the insights gained and developed them into six points of departure. These points inform the therapeutic methodology that this chapter has outlined as:

- Creating an environment of trust within the MCSA.
- Offering education and awareness regarding abuse, violence and traumatic conflict within families.
- Destigmatization of abuse, violence and traumatic conflict within families.
- Establishment of centres of healing for both victims and perpetrators of abuse.
- Screening of candidates for ministry.
- Welfare, advocacy and support.

In this chapter the author applied the methodology he proposed in chapter two of this study. This methodology entailed three aspects namely:

1. Privileging God conversation.
2. Nurturing Faith and Hope
3. Narrative approach to therapy.

### **1. Privileging God Conversation.**

At the centre of traumatic violence and abuse is a conversation that seeks to elevate the abuser at the expense of the victim. As a result, the victim is degraded, humiliated and shamed to a point of internalizing his or her worthlessness and shamefulness. If this is not addressed through pastoral care and other interventions, this completely destroys the sense of self worth and dignity of the victim. Wimberly says that we become people of worth and dignity when we internalize the conversations that God privileges us to take part in (2003: 8). In his strategic intervention he proposes that the role of pastoral therapy is to identify the conversations that are at work in the lives of the people and deconstruct those in light of God's affirming and transforming conversations. This he calls sacred identity formation.

“Sacred identity formation is a gift from God that is bestowed as a result of fellowship with God. In fellowship with God, not only are our worth and value established but we also learn to resist being recruited into negative identities, conversations and stories existing in wider culture. In fellowship with God and through participation in our faith communities, we discover our own unique identities. Indeed, we are not passive recipients of conversations, stories and societal identities. Moreover, in fellowship with God, we learn to externalize those negative and detrimental identities. As a result of this externalization, we learn to update negative conversations, as well as to internalize new conversations that facilitate growth” (2003: 122).

The methodology suggested in this chapter will help the Methodist probationers to develop a sacred identity that assures them that they are worthwhile people created in the image of loving, caring and a compassionate God. As they develop this identity for themselves, they will help other victims of traumatic abuse to externalize negative conversations and internalize new life-giving and transforming conversations in fellowship with God and God's people.

## **2. Nurturing Faith and Hope**

People who have been subjected to chronic abuse, violence and trauma lose their faith in a loving and a caring God. The Church can play a vital role in restoring faith and hope to such people. Likewise, the probationers that grew up in conflict-ridden family environments found themselves unable to deal with similar problems that arose in the life of their congregations. While they may not have lost their faith, they lost confidence in their ability to care meaningfully for victims of abuse. The methodology suggested in this chapter seeks to nurture again faith and hope for such probationers. To nurture is "to suckle, nourish or cultivate" (Wimberly, 2004: xiii). This nurturing of faith and hope involves a process of reawakening in the believer the understanding that God loves them, God cares for them and God is compassionate towards them.

When the MCSA applies the suggested methodology it would help to nurture the faith of the probationers and all the victims of abuse. They would have a renewed sense of God's presence in a world that communicates something different. They would have a renewed sense of hope in a world that is characterized by hopelessness as a result of abuse, trauma and violence. Application of this methodology would communicate an intentional willingness on the part of the MCSA to build fellowshiping communities that evoke people's trust in God loving-kindness.

### **3. Narrative Approach to Therapy.**

The first question that was posed to the participants of this study was: narrate your story of growing up in a family background of conflict and abuse. For all of them it was quite difficult at first to share their stories because sharing meant that they had to relive the trauma that they were subjected to as children. But as they opened up in the process they discovered that there is power in story sharing. The power lies in the fact that they had to remember the tragic circumstances that they wanted to forget. As they remembered, they were overcome by certain emotions that they thought had been dealt with. Finally they realized their need for healing.

The author listened compassionately, actively and attentively to their stories. He offered a safe environment in which they could 'bare their souls' out. He was not judgmental, but rather affirming and appreciative of their willingness to open up to him. He did not offer counseling or any advice, but sat and absorbed the narratives as they were presented to him. He approached the whole process with reverence, respect and honesty. This made it easy for the participants to share even the aspects that they would not have shared with anybody else.

This approach to healing would work best with victims of abuse and trauma within the wider Methodist circles. Whether it be in small groups or during healing services or in individual counselling, God's people need to be offered space to narrate their stories. Such a space should not be clinical as in a laboratory; it should rather be open, holy, absolutely supportive and affirming. The methodology suggested in this chapter would be most effective if applied within an atmosphere of narrative approach to counseling.

Chapter six will bring the conclusion of this research study and offer recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter brings to an end the pastoral care study on the effects of marital conflict and abuse on children. It is composed of two parts, namely, insights gained from this research study and recommendations for further research.

The major objective of this study was to explore the extent of the impact of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence within a marriage to children. To that end, this study raised these pertinent questions:

- How does conflict and abuse within a marriage impact on the lives of the children?
- Does conflict and abuse that occurs in the home affect the children to continue the cycle of violence in their own homes at a later stage in life?
- How can a child who grew within an abusive and violent environment care pastorally for those who are in conflict and violent marriages?
- Can the Church (MCSA) be a place of healing and restoration for those who are traumatized by conflict and violence in marriages?
- How does the Church (MCSA) meet the needs of probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence that arose in their families as they seek to minister to others?
- How can the Church (MCSA) assist probationers in dealing with the trauma they experienced while growing up so that it does not paralyse them anymore in their ministry?

The whole process began with the author's personal story. He grew up in a traumatizing, abusive and violent family background that left psychological, emotional and mental scars within him. When confronted with similar situations in his ministry, he found himself paralysed and therefore unable to care pastorally for the help seekers. He discovered that he still harbored unresolved anger, frustration, guilt and helplessness from his past. He realized that the wounds that were inflicted upon him by his traumatic background had never been healed. The 'ghosts' from his past came to haunt him over and over again, so

to speak. This study was an attempt by the author to heal himself of his wounds and to offer a therapeutic healing method to the MCSA that can be used to heal probationers like himself.

Four similar stories were shared by ministers who are currently on probation within the MCSA. These stories confirmed the assumptions that the author had when he undertook this study. His assumption was that children who are raised within conflict and abusive marriages are affected negatively by such experiences. These children are traumatized and, as a result, may not function properly in the community. Further, the assumption was that ministers who witnessed spousal abuse between their parents become ineffective when called upon to deal with similar situations in their ministry.

## **6.2 Insights gained from this study**

In the comprehensive literature review and the shared case studies from the probationers, the author came out with the following insights:

6.2.1 Children that have grown up in a family environment of traumatic conflict, abuse and violence are affected negatively by that experience. Literature reviewed has revealed that they may display psychological, social, mental, emotional, behavioural and other devastating symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorders. All of the participants in this study agreed that spousal abuse between their parents affected them negatively, not only as children, but also, as adults and probationer ministers in the MCSA. The gravity of this negative impact renders them ineffective in caring pastorally for the people in similar situations that seek their help.

6.2.2 Studies conducted in the fields of Psychology and Social Work have shown that children who grew up in a family background of abuse and trauma have a potential of being abusers when they grow up. This arises out of their conditioning at home. They may think that violence is a normal way of expressing emotions in the home. The respondents in this study brought another helpful dimension that was not evident in the Psychology and Social Work arenas. They said that it is



possible that these children may display violence in their own homes, but they can choose either to express their emotions within their relationships violently or not violently. The ability to choose violence or not is attributed to a development, nurture and a sustenance of a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship is nurtured within a fellowshiping or worshipping community. It is the opinion of the respondents that when Jesus Christ becomes the centre of a person's universe, they will produce the fruits of the Spirit. This understanding is both Biblical and Christian. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5: 22-23 NIV).

The question arises as to what happens in a Christian home that is characterized by traumatic conflict and violence? Why is there no tolerance, love and peace? The co-researchers of this study are of the opinion that people have choices to make in this life. They can either choose to love or to hate, to forgive or not to forgive, to be violent or peaceful. Just as anybody can choose to accept the love and grace of God, so can they choose to display these fruits in their lives. The results of their choices will be evident in every sphere of their existence, whether it be at home, work, at play, in relationships and the society in general.

6.2.3 A child who grew up in an abusive and traumatic background can be used of God to care pastorally for the people who are in conflict and abusive marriage situations. However, such a person needs to be healed, restored, and transformed first. When s/he is healed completely, s/he can be an agent of healing and transformation for others. Not only does such a person need healing for themselves, s/he needs empowerment in terms of training, education, mentoring, supervision and formation for such a ministry. It is evident that ordination is not enough to equip and empower ministers for ministry to the abused and victimized. This ministry is a highly specialized form of ministry that calls for extraordinary equipment for those who are called to it.

6.2.4 All of the respondents in this study strongly agreed that the Church (MCSA) can be a place of healing, restoration and transformation for the people who are traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence in their marriages. However, the MCSA has not fulfilled its calling to ministering to probationers that come from a background of abuse and violence. The calling of the MCSA is “to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (MCSA, 2009: 2). This calling was re-iterated in the Charter of the Mission Congress adopted by Conference 2005.

“In trust and obedience we commit ourselves anew to the four imperatives for mission in our time – a deepened spirituality as individuals and a Christian community. Justice and service in Church and Society. Evangelism and Church growth which build up the people of God. ***Empowerment and development which give dignity and new purpose to those who have been deprived.*** We resolve to take intentional and sustained action to implement these imperatives in such areas as:

***The healing ministry.***

Deepening our understanding of African and other Spiritualities,

**Co-ordinated programmes for Christian education, information and communication.**

Building meaningful relationships that transcend racism, sexism, and all other forms of discrimination.

A vigorous response to the crisis of HIV and AIDS.

***Informing our prophetic ministry by research into socio-economic issues.***

***Becoming a Church in solidarity with the poor.***

***Training ministers for the African context.”*** (MCSA, 2005: 1) (*The Bold and Italic emphasis is mine. The statement has been abbreviated for the purpose of this study).*

From the statement above one can see that the MCSA has the right vision, is guided by a God-inspired mission and seeks to minister to the world in a God-honouring way. However, the probationers who grew up in a violent and traumatic background are waiting with deep anticipation for the day when this vision will be put into practice. Part of this vision is a call to ensure that our mission of healing and transformation is holistic and embracing all the imperatives for mission. This vision also calls for participation in God's mission in ways that are appropriate to our local contexts and in partnership with the wider church and community. When the MCSA fulfils this calling, it would be a place of healing, restoration and transformation for people who have been traumatized by abuse, violence and conflict. This statement ends with a prayer that signifies commitment on the part of the MCSA to carry the vision that God has placed upon the Church.

“God bless this Africa which is our home. Give us grace to follow Jesus the healer, Jesus the peacemaker, Jesus the Saviour of the world, Jesus the Lord of all life. Restore us and make your face shine on us that we may be saved” (MCSA, 2005: 1).

This prayer is appropriate to all the probationers that grew up in homes characterized by conflict, violence and abuse. It is a prayer that all the people subjected to abuse and violence within their families should say. They need to be saved. They need to be cared for. They need to be restored. The Church through Jesus Christ is called to be an answer to this prayer.

6.2.5 While the responses to this study revealed that the MCSA can be a place of healing and transformation for the probationers who have grown in conflict-ridden situations, it was evident that the Church has failed to do so. All the respondents concurred that their needs as people who have been traumatized have not been met by the Church. As a result, they found themselves ill-equipped to deal with challenges that people in abusive situations are confronted with. To this end, they suggested a therapeutic method in which the MCSA can begin addressing not only their needs, but also the needs of the victims of abuse and violence in local congregations. Such a methodology would include intentional, deliberate and purposeful actions like:

- Creating an environment of trust within the MCSA.
- Offering education and awareness regarding abuse, violence and traumatic conflict within families.
- Destigmatization of abuse, violence and traumatic conflict within families.
- Establishment of centres of healing for both victims and perpetrators of abuse.
- Screening of candidates for ministry with a view to establishing whether or not they carry woundedness from their past.
- Welfare, advocacy and support.

6.2.6 Not all the respondents have had the experience of dealing with people in marriages that are characterized by conflict, abuse and trauma. However, those that have had that experience have verbalized that it brought certain feelings of anger, guilt, and inadequacy in dealing with such situations. They verbalized a need for further training and equipment in this kind of ministry that the MCSA does not provide at the present moment. It is evident that the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit (EMMU) needs to take into account issues of spiritual, psychological and emotional brokenness as they seek to train probationers for ministry. Such consideration should not end with ordination but should go beyond ordination so that the rest of the clergy within the MCSA can be adequately equipped for ministry to the traumatized and broken people of God.

### **6.3 Recommendations for Further Research**

Through this research, the author has realized the depth, gravity and impact of traumatization both to victims and perpetrators of abuse within families. This research has opened his eyes to the woundedness that probationers carry into the ministry of the MCSA. He has realized that unless these wounds are healed, pastoral care to God's people will always be ineffective if conducted by these wounded pastors. This study has also revealed that the Church is strategically placed by God to

minister to the hurting, injured and broken souls. However, the Church needs to take seriously its call to this vital ministry of restoration, transformation and healing.

This research was conducted on a small scale. Therefore it would be difficult to generalize its finding to the whole of the Methodist Church, never mind the larger community of faith which is composed of different denominations and sects. Further research on a much larger scale, with a greater population and sample is therefore recommended. Such research would need to take into consideration different trends within Methodism worldwide and extract lessons, if any, of how our sister churches deal with issues of brokenness among their candidates and probationers.

Furthermore, a study of this nature need not be limited only to ministers on probation. Ordained ministers within the MCSA also carry woundedness that may not have been dealt with in their probation and beyond. A study on how such woundedness impacts on their ministry is vital. Some ministers may be in abusive and traumatizing relationships that hinder them from ministering effectively to God's people. They may be in need of healing and restoration so that their woundedness does not infect the whole community of faith.

This study has developed a methodology of caring that can be used by the MCSA to minister to her probationers that were traumatized by their backgrounds. However, it does not give clear guidelines on how such methodology could be applied in the Church. A research study that would give such guidelines is recommended.

The main focus of this study was on probationers that grew up in traumatizing family backgrounds as a result of abuse and violence. It sought to examine the impact of their experience now that they are ministers. It is the opinion of the author that a further study aimed at perpetrators of abuse would be

beneficial. Such a study would show the other side of the coin and would come up with a therapeutic methodology aimed specifically at the abuser.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

The author has learnt that traumatic abuse and violence within families impacts negatively on children that are raised in such environments. If these children are to make a meaningful contribution in the world they need to be healed, restored and transformed. The Church (MCSA) can be a place of healing and restoration for such people if it puts into action the vision and mission that has been entrusted to it by God.



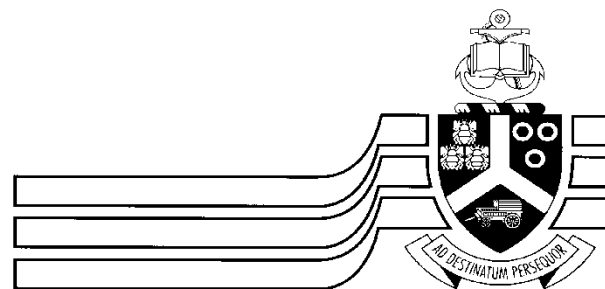
## APPENDIX A

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

**Luvuyo Gladstone Sifo**  
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University of Pretoria  
BCur, Dip Nursing, BTh, BA Hon Theol.  
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#### Supervisor

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University of Pretoria

#### **“The effects of marital conflict and abuse on children: A pastoral care approach.”**

I am a Master's student in Theology at the University of Pretoria. This course requires us to gain applied experience in designing and conducting research. As such, I have designed a research project to study what are the effects of marital conflict and abuse on children.

During this study you will be asked to answer certain questions in a face-to-face interview concerning your personal experiences of growing up in a conflicting and abusive family background. You will also be asked to share your insights on how such experiences have affected you in your present ministry. Your participation will require approximately 45 minutes of your time.

There is no known harm associated with your participation in the study. None of the findings will be used against you in any way whatsoever. The potential benefits are that the research will come out with a helpful methodology that will help probationer ministers to deal with their experiences so that they can be effective pastoral caregivers.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only I and my supervisor will have access to the information. Your name will not be used directly or indirectly in any of the records and therefore your anonymity is guaranteed. All data will be destroyed by shredding at the end of the project. The results from this study will be reported in a written research report and an oral report during class presentation. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. It may be discontinued at any time for any reason without explanation and without penalty. Feel free to contact me or my supervisor at any time using the above contact details.

Thanking you in advance for your participation.

#### **CONSENT**

I have read the above letter, understand the information read, understand that I can ask questions or withdraw at any time. I consent to participate in this research study.

-----  
Participant's signature

-----  
Researcher's signature

On the (date) -----

At (Place) -----



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

Gender: ..... Age: .....  
Marital Status: ..... Racial Group: .....  
Phase in probation: ..... Envisaged year of ordination.....

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1. Narrate your story of growing up in a family background of conflict and abuse.
2. How did this conflict and abuse within your parents' relationship impact on you:
  - a. As a child
  - b. As an adult
  - c. As a minister
3. Do you think that children who grew in such circumstances continue the cycle of violence in their own homes when they grow up? Elaborate...
4. In your ministry, have you encountered people who experience conflict, violence or abuse in their marriages?
5. How have you dealt with such situation/s?
6. Has dealing with issues of conflict, abuse and violence in other people's marriages affected you in any way? How so?
7. In your opinion, can the Church be a place of healing and restoration for those who are traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence in their marriages? How so?
8. In your opinion, does the Church meet the needs of probationers who have been traumatized by conflict, abuse and violence when they grew up?
9. How can the Church meet the needs of the probationers above?
10. How can the Church assist probationers in dealing with the trauma they experienced while growing up so that it does not paralyse them anymore in their ministry?
11. Please offer any general comments

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**Thank you for your participation!**

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