



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Relocation of clergy and its impact on the family: A pastoral challenge

By

PATRICIA NYANDORO

Student No. 23296357

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

In the

Department of Practical Theology

At The University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof Maake Masango

2025

Acknowledgements

This study could not have been completed without the support, encouragement, and prayers of many people and communities.

I give thanks to God, whose presence sustained me throughout this research journey. In moments of exhaustion and doubt, I was reminded of His call to persevere and of His faithfulness in every season. “In Thee O Lord I put my trust”

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Prof Masango, whose guidance, wisdom, and critical feedback shaped this thesis and helped me to find my scholarly and pastoral voice. Your patience and encouragement kept me moving forward, even when the path felt overwhelming.

To my daughter, Sheena, my son-in-law Tatenda and my “handbag”, my granddaughter, Taanashe, your love gave me the strength to press on.

To my research participants, clergy wives and children of the MCSA, I owe a debt of gratitude. You entrusted me with your stories, stories of pain, resilience, loss, and hope. This work stands as a testimony to your courage, and I pray it contributes to a church that listens more attentively to your voices.

I also acknowledge my colleagues and friends, who encouraged me in countless ways, and the church community that inspired me to undertake this work. Special thanks to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for allowing access to clergy families and for providing the context within which this study was conducted.

To Zephania Mundhluri, for that one phone call you made and the follow up sessions of support gave life to this work. You are indeed a good Shepherd. I am grateful to my fellow scholars for the encouragement and companionship which made the long hours of research possible.

Finally, I am grateful to Christine Nel for her assistance with resources and to Doris for your patience with me on missing deadlines.

This thesis is truly the fruit of a community of support.

Dedication

To my family

for walking with me through the many roles I represent,
transition, and moments of change.

Your resilience, patience, and love have been my anchor.

To my granddaughter

a reminder that every story is worth telling,
and that hope is found in the next generation.

Above all, to God


whose faithfulness has carried me through this journey,
and whose grace turns every disruption into a new beginning.

DECLARATION

“I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the PhD Degree in Practical Theology, at University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references”.

Patricia Nyandoro

Student Number: 23296357

Signature: 

Date: 29 September 2025

Supervisor: Professor Maake Masango

Signature:

Date:

ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of clergy relocation on families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), with particular focus on the experiences of clergy wives and adult children. Rooted in the Wesleyan tradition of itinerancy, relocation is often framed as an administrative necessity for mission and deployment, yet for clergy households it is also experienced as loss, disruption, and repeated grief. The research aimed to examine these experiences in depth and to propose a pastoral response that acknowledges both the pain and resilience of clergy families.

A qualitative design, situated within an interpretivist and phenomenological paradigm, guided the study. Semi-structured interviews with clergy wives and adult children enabled participants to narrate their lived experiences. This approach captured the emotional, vocational, relational, and spiritual dimensions of relocation.

Findings revealed themes of vocational disruption, loneliness, and unacknowledged expectations among clergy wives, alongside identity struggles, loss of friendships, and exclusion among clergy children. A common thread was the absence of sustained support from church leadership, leaving families to navigate relocation largely on their own. Theologically, relocation was interpreted as a repeated cycle of grief, drawing on Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, Worden's tasks of mourning, Schlossberg's transition theory and Pollard's deconstruction model.

Building on these frameworks, the research developed a pastoral intervention rooted in Wimberly and Wimberly's story-sharing model, emphasising healing through communal narration. The study contributes to pastoral theology by highlighting the hidden costs of itinerant ministry in Southern Africa and by offering practical strategies for pastoral accompaniment and institutional reform.

Keywords: Clergy, Relocation, Clergy family, Pastoral care, MCSA, Story-sharing

Acknowledgements	ii
Dedication	iii
DECLARATION	iv
ABSTRACT	v
ACRONYMNS:.....	xiii
CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS	xiii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. STUDY BACKGROUND	1
1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT	3
1.2.1 Research Questions	3
1.2.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study	3
1.3 RESEARCH GAP.....	4
1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
1.5.1 Population Sampling.....	6
1.5.2 Data Collection	7
1.5.3 Data Analysis	8
1.5.4 Theories	8
1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	10
1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	11
1.8 RESEARCH CONSTRAINTS & LIMITATIONS OF SCOPE.....	12
1.9 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER OUTLINE	12
1.20 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW	14
2.1.1 Justifying the Need to Understand the General Effects of Relocation and its Impact on Families.....	14
2.1.2 The Rationale for a General Understanding of Relocation and Family Impact	15
2.2 UNDERSTANDING RELOCATION: DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGIES.....	17
2.2.1 Relocation Defined.....	17
2.2.1 Typologies of Relocation	18
2.3 THE RELEVANCE OF RELOCATION AS A GLOBAL, SOCIAL, AND SPIRITUAL PHENOMENON.....	19
2.3.1 Relocation as a Global Phenomenon.....	19
2.3.2 Relocation as a Social Phenomenon	20
2.3.3 Relocation as a Spiritual Phenomenon	20

2.4	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO RELOCATION	21
2.4.1	Systems Theory	21
2.4.2	Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus and Folkman).....	22
2.4.3	Transition Theory (Schlossberg)	22
2.4.4	Relevance across Contexts	23
2.5	SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF RELOCATION	23
2.5.1	Job Displacement and Employment Adjustment	24
2.5.2	Financial Stress	24
2.5.3	Housing Instability	25
2.6	PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF RELOCATION.....	25
2.6.1	Emotional Disruption and Loss	26
2.6.2	Psychological Stress and Mental Health	26
2.6.3	Impact on Family Relationships	26
2.6.4	Cultural Shock in Cross-border Relocations	27
2.6.5	Coping and Resilience	29
2.7	THE FAMILY UNIT.....	29
2.8	TYPES OF FAMILY.....	30
2.8.1	Nuclear Family	31
2.8.2	Extended Family	31
2.8.3	Single-Parent Family	31
2.8.4	Blended or Reconstituted Family	32
2.8.5	Childless Family	32
2.9	THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE AND RELOCATION	32
2.9.1	Infants and Toddlers (0-3 years)	33
2.9.2	Preschool and Primary School-aged Children (3-12 years).....	33
2.9.3	Adolescents (13-18 years).....	33
2.9.4	Youth and identity formation	34
2.9.5	Emerging and Young Adults (18-30 years).....	35
2.9.6	Midlife Adults (30- 60 years).....	35
2.9.7	Older Adults and Elderly Family Members (60+ years).....	36
2.10	PARENTAL ROLES IN FAMILY SOCIALISATION.....	37
2.11	SOCIETAL ROLES IN FAMILY SOCIALIZATION	38
2.11.1	Community and Cultural Institutions	38
2.12	THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF FAMILIES.....	39
2.12.1	Dual Career Families	39
2.12.2	Female Liberation and shifting gender roles.....	40

2.12.3	The Reluctant wife	40
2.13	THE SOCIALISATION INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY	42
2.14	THE CLERGY FAMILY	44
2.14.1	The Clergy Family as a Distinct Social Unit.....	44
2.14.2	Clergy Family Systems and Emotional Wellbeing	44
2.14.3	Nature and Trends of Clergy Families.....	45
2.14.4	The Silent Voices of Families in Relocation	45
2.15	THE IMPACT OF THE DARK SIDES OF RELOCATION ON THE FAMILY	46
2.15.1	Disruption of Stability and Routine.....	47
2.15.2	Spousal Role Strain and Career Sacrifice	47
2.15.3	Children’s Adjustment and Developmental Challenges	47
2.15.4	Relocation and Marital Dynamics	48
2.16	DEFINING TRAUMA IN THE CONTEXT OF RELOCATION	48
2.16.1	Trauma Related to Relocation	49
2.16.2	Understanding Relocation as a Traumatic Experience	49
2.16.3	The Hidden Grief of Relocation	50
2.16.4	Transitioning to Clergy Families and Relocation Trauma	50
2.16.5	Toward a Trauma-Informed Understanding of Clergy Relocation	51
2.16.6	Unspoken Trauma and Silence Culture	52
2.17	FROM TRAUMA TO CARE: THE IMPERATIVE FOR PASTORAL RESPONSE	53
2.18	THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF PASTORAL CARE.....	54
2.18.1	Relocation as a Disruptive and Neglected Pastoral Issue	54
2.18.2	Clergy Families as Pastoral Care Recipients	55
2.19	RELOCATION IN FAITH-BASED OR MISSIONARY CONTEXTS.....	55
2.20	HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES OF CLERGY AND MISSIONARY RELOCATION	56
2.21	MISSIOLOGICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES	57
2.22	PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	58
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		59
3.1	INTRODUCTION	59
3.2	THE NATURE OF PARADIGMS.....	59
3.2.1	The Interpretivist/Constructivist Paradigm	62
3.2.2	Key Assumptions of the Interpretivist Paradigm:	63
3.3	RESEARCH THEORIES	64
3.3.1	Stages of Grief and Loss in the Context of Clergy Relocation	64
3.3.2	Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction Model.....	68
3.4	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	71

3.5	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS	75
3.5.1	Case Study	75
3.5.2	Narrative Approach.....	75
3.5.3	Ethnography	76
3.5.4	Grounded Theory	76
3.5.5	Phenomenology.....	77
3.5.6	Summary of Recommendations:.....	78
3.6	EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING	78
3.7	POPULATION OF THE STUDY	79
3.8	SAMPLE AND SAMPLING	80
3.8.2	Sample Size and Justification in Qualitative Research	82
3.9	DATA COLLECTION	83
3.9.1	Document Analysis.....	84
3.9.2	Interviews	85
3.9.3	Observation	90
3.10	PROCEDURE OF DATA ANALYSIS	91
3.10.1	Credibility	93
3.10.2	Dependability	93
3.10.3	Confirmability.....	94
3.10.4	Transferability.....	94
3.11	DELIMITATIONS.....	95
3.11.1	Delimitations	95
3.12	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	95
3.13	PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	98
CHAPTER 4: THE IMPACT OF RELOCATION ON CLERGY FAMILIES.....		99
4.1	INTRODUCTION	99
4.2	THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF CLERGY RELOCATION IN THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (MCSA)	101
4.2.1	Stationing of Ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa	103
4.2.2	The Silent Voice of Clergy Wives and Children in Relocation Decisions ..	106
4.3	THE ROLE OF ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY IN CLERGY RELOCATION DECISIONS.....	108
4.3.1	Theological Basis of Ecclesiastical Authority in Relocation.....	109
4.3.2	Pastoral and Institutional Implications.....	112
4.4	CLERGY FAMILY LIFE.....	115
4.4.1	A Unique Context	116
4.4.2	The Pastor's Family as a Public and Spiritual Symbol	117

4.4.3	Role Expectations of the Clergy Wife and Children.....	117
4.4.4	Gendered Expectations in Clergy Relocation.....	119
4.4.5	The Parsonage as a Public Space	120
4.4.6	Lack of Rootedness.....	121
4.4.7	Harmonising Ministry Demands and Family Well-being.....	125
4.5	THE IMPACT OF THE DARK SIDE OF RELOCATION ON CLERGY FAMILIES 126	
4.5.1	Clergy Marriages	127
4.5.2	Stressors of Adapting to New Congregational Dynamics.....	128
4.5.3	Changes in Intimacy, Time Together and Spousal Support	129
4.5.4	Role Conflict and Emotional Burnout.....	129
4.5.5	Identity and Role Negotiation in Clergy Families	130
4.5.6	Identity Crisis	131
4.5.7	Impact on Clergy Children	132
4.5.9	Resentment and Silent Grief in Clergy Families	139
4.5.10	Theological Paradox of Obedience vs. Justice.....	140
4.6	FINANCIAL AND VOCATIONAL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CLERGY RELOCATION.....	141
4.6.1	Housing and Financial Pressures.....	142
4.6.2	Spousal Employment Disruptions.....	142
4.6.3	Congregational Financial Viability and Stipend Insecurity	143
4.6.4	Career Progression and Vocational Identity of Ministers.. Error! Bookmark not defined.	
4.7	PASTORAL-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CLERGY RELOCATION	146
4.7.1	Pastoral Care and the Call to Support Clergy Families	146
4.8	PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	148
CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS		150
5.1	INTRODUCTION	150
5.3	FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF CLERGY WIVES AND CHILDREN	153
5.3.1	Interviews with Clergy Wives	154
5.3.2	Interviews with Children of Clergy	177
5.4	INTERPRETATION OF THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH CLERGY WIVES AND CHILDREN.....	189
5.4.1	Theme Selection and Framing.....	189
5.4.2	Theme 1: Emotional Stress (Fear of the Unknown.....	190
5.4.3	Theme 2: Social Disruption (Friendships, Jobs, and Family)	192
5.4.4	Theme 3: Loss of Identity (Cultural and Language Challenges)	194

5.4.5	Theme 4: Parsonage Life (Privacy, Ownership, and Belonging)	196
5.4.6	Theme 5: Unspoken Pain (Hidden Grief and Silent Struggles)	198
5.4.7	Theme 6: Financial Challenges Associated with Relocation (Int	200
5.5	PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	202
CHAPTER 6:	DEVELOPING A HEALING METHODOLOGY	203
6.1	INTRODUCTION	203
6.2	APPLICATION OF THE PASTORAL CARE THEORIES	204
6.2.1	The Five Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler: 2005)	204
6.2.2	Pollard's Positive Deconstruction (1997).	209
6.3	GRIEVING TASKS EMERGING FROM THE STUDY	212
6.3.1	Story-Sharing as a Pastoral Healing Method	214
6.4	PASTORAL RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN TRANSITION	233
6.5	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STORY-SHARING MODEL	235
6.5.1	Training of Facilitators	235
6.5.2	Integration into Church Structures	235
6.5.3	Support Networks for Spouses and Children	235
6.5.4	Liturgical and Ritual Practices	236
6.5.5	Accountability and Evaluation	236
6.5.6	Resource Considerations	236
6.6	PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION	236
CHAPTER 7:		238
7.1	INTRODUCTION	238
7.2	SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	240
7.2.1	Clergy Wives	240
7.2.2	Clergy Children	241
7.2.3	Common to Both Groups	242
7.2.4	Synthesis with Literature	242
7.3	CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	244
7.3.1	Academic Contribution	244
7.3.2	Theological Contribution	245
7.3.3	Practical Contribution	246
7.4	RECOMMENDATIONS	247
7.4.1	Recommendations for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa	247
7.4.2	Recommendations for Clergy Families	249
7.4.3	Recommendations for Further Research	251
7.5	LIMITATIONS	253

7.6	PERSONAL REFLECTION	254
7.7	CONCLUSION	255
	APPENDIX A: APPENDIX A: LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE ETHICS COMMITTEE	257
	APPENDIX B: INFORMATION DOCUMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT	258
	APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE WIVES OF CLERGY	260
	FACULTY OF THEOLOGY	261
	APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE ADULT CHILDREN OF CLERGY	262
	263
	APPENDIX E: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE CHURCH	264
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	266
	List of Tables and Figures	282

ACRONYMS:

DNA – In this study, the phrase “*Methodist DNA*” is used metaphorically to describe the essential identity, theological ethos, and historical values embedded in the Methodist tradition, particularly its practices of connexionalism, itinerancy, and mission.

MCSA – The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is known by its acronym, MCSA. The term Methodist is used by numerous groups whose doctrines are based on John Wesley’s teachings (Lyons & Truesdale 2000:187). This abbreviation will be used in this study to refer to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS

Circuit: Is a collection of societies served by a group of ministers? Circuits supervise and coordinate the activities of Societies and promote the execution of mission imperatives across the Circuit, under the direction of a Superintendent (Methodist Book of Order 2016: 73)

Clergy: In this study, clergy refers to an individual who has responded to the call of God to serve in a particular ministry that sets them apart from the lay members of the congregation (Patte 2010). In the MCSA, these specific ministries are: ministry of word and sacrament, (Presbyters) and ministry of word and service, (Deacons).

Clergy Family: Will be used in this research to refer to the wife and adult children of the clergy

Conference: Is the highest governance body of the Southern African Connexion of the Methodist Church where policies are formulated and decisions are made. The Presiding Bishop is the head of Conference. (Methodist Book of Order 2016:53).

Connexion: For Methodists, this entails becoming a member of a wider, interconnected community. In the Methodist Church, ordained ministers become members of the “Full Connexion”. (Methodist Book of Order 2016:53).

District: A group of local Circuits as determined by the Conference and is under the authority of a Bishop, (Methodist Book of Order 2016:64).

Grieving: is the normal emotional, spiritual, physical and relational reaction to the experience of loss and change.

Itinerancy: One feature of the ordained ministry in the Methodist Church is itinerancy. It means that Methodist ministers are connected individuals who are at the Conference's disposal for mission deployment in accordance with the needs and priorities of the Methodist Church (<https://www.methodist.org.uk>).

Manyano: According to Brandel-Syrer (1962:240), the word manyano was formerly a Xhosa noun that was the reciprocal form of the verb ukunyana, which means "join." In Setswana and Sepedi, this "join" or manyano is referred to as kopano, a meeting for the purpose of worship and prayer, (Madise & Lebeloane 2008:121).

A manse is a house provided by the church for its minister and family, typically located on church grounds. In this study, "manse," "parsonage," and "mission house" are used interchangeably.

Society Stewards: The administrators of each respective society who also serve as ex officio members of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting (Methodist Book of Order 2016:86).

Society: A local congregation within a Circuit. (Methodist Book of Order 2016: 83) Circuits are separated into local congregations called societies.

Stationing: Refers to the appointment of a minister to the oversight of a society (Methodist Book of Order 2016:76)

Stationing Committee: A committee composed of circuit and society stewards that oversees facilitating the appointment of ministers at societies in the circuit. (Methodist Book of Order 2016:76).

Pastoral Care: According to Clebsch and Jaekle, this is "the ministry of cure of souls, or pastoral care, which consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons directed toward the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns" (1975:17).

Relocation: the act of moving or moving something or someone from one place to another. In this study this term will be used to represent the moving of clergy from one congregation to another in different towns or districts.

Spiritual resilience is the ability to sustain or renegotiate one's faith, meaning, and spiritual identity in the face of adversity, loss, or disruption (Pargament, 1997:121).

The terms, clergy and minister will be utilized interchangeably in this research to represent the minister of religion or the clergy in the MCSA.

This is a very sensitive topic which requires protection of those that will be interviewed, especially the children. Therefore, coding will be used to avoid the use of names of people.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. STUDY BACKGROUND

The author serves as an ordained Deacon in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). With a nursing background, one of the gifts that the author has selflessly given in serving God is that of supporting the ordained ministers and the congregation on health-related issues. On one of the author's hospital visits to a clergy colleague who was admitted, Reverend Nyawo (not his real name), the author found the clergy very withdrawn. When the author asked the clergy how he was doing, tears started rolling down his cheeks. The author pulled a chair and sat next to the bed and held the clergy's hand. After a while, the clergy looked at the author and said, "*Moruti*" (*Minister*), "*please pray for me. I have been a failure and have caused pain to my family whilst I served God. It is 15 years since my ordination. I met my wife whilst I was still at the seminary. We got married in the year that I finished my seminary studies and we started serving together in the circuit that I was appointed to for my formation. We were blessed with a son during that year, and it was a great pleasure to experience family life amid my demanding ministerial roles. After ordination, I was relocated to another district where I was stationed for three years by the conference. My wife and son joined me at this new station. When I met my wife, she was studying and had now completed her studies. She got a job as a financial administrator at one of the big companies in the town where I was serving. After the three years, the society that I was serving invited me to stay on and continue for another two years. An invitation of staying to me was an affirmation that I was doing what God called me to do and therefore, I relaxed, with the hope of a re-invitation for another five years after these two years. My wife was happy at work, and she got promoted as a financial manager. We decided to buy our own house and make this town our residence.*

At the end of the two years, my expectations were shattered." The reader will now understand the trauma and the impact upon the clergy family. "*I was not re-invited. I therefore had to look for another station. I was invited for five years to a station which was 600km away from the family. This meant separation from my family. I resented the circuit that had given me false hope of staying together with my family. Ministry can be very lonely,*" ...a pause with tears rolling down his cheeks. "*I visited my wife once every month when I had a long weekend off, and she came through to the manse every second week in the beginning but as the financial demands became more, she*

could only visit once a month. My wife conceived and we were again blessed with a daughter. My wife started feeling the strain of her demanding job and having to raise the children alone without me. There were also the expected roles of being a minister's wife that she had to honour occasionally as these could not be delegated to another person except the minister's wife, for example chairing the Manyano general meetings and attending the Manyano". In the context of the MCSA, the minister's wife becomes the president of the Manyano, which means that she presides over the smooth running of this organization. However, this is not the focus of this study. *"The impact of relocation led me to alcoholism which further affected the family as my wife ended up separating with me and took the children with her".*

As a pastoral caregiver, I was wrestling with the following thoughts as I sat and listened attentively, *"How do we preach the gospel of being a one and undivided church when our church processes of stationing ministers divide them from their families? How then do we heal nations when the "healers" are broken?"*

The (MCSA), functions under the concept of itinerancy, which means that clergy members are required to be stationed from one society to another as the need arises. The minister and their family find themselves relocating because of this stationing procedure, from one congregation to another, between circuits and districts, and even outside the borders of South Africa, in this case Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho and Eswathini. A congregation in a circuit can invite a minister to be stationed there, or the MCSA's highest authority, the Connexion, can make the appointment. For those ministers who are invited, the stationing is for five years at the same society whilst the conference appointment is for three years. What this means is that the minister can move every three to five years. This frequent relocation due to the stationing of clergy disrupts the well-being of the clergy family.

The author experienced feelings of inadequacy in the role of caregiver and hence this research. The study aims to develop a pastoral care response for clergy families affected by relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), focusing on congregations in the Limpopo District. Adopting a qualitative approach enables a nuanced exploration of the problem and the development of a contextually grounded healing model which will guide the researcher to pastorally enter the space of the clergy families in order to minister to their needs (Nyandoro, 2023:1).

Although there has been an increase in the ordination of women into ministry, this study focusses on the families of male clergy members. A literature review on the relocation of ministers and the impact that this has on the family will be critically analyzed. Different authors will be analytically and objectively reviewed to identify the gap, which will consequently assist in contributing to the available academic information on the topic. Pollard's positive deconstruction model (1997) and Kübler-Ross and Kessler's theory of the five stages of grief (2005) will be utilized in affirming and validating the feelings that the families of clergy are experiencing due to the frequent relocations so that they might heal and begin to live a "new normal". Twelve ministers' wives and twelve adult children of ministers from the (MCSA), congregations in the Limpopo District will be interviewed.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The narrative presented in the introduction poses several questions that will direct the investigation. The main question is: Why does the church divide the families of clergy by appointing the clergy every 3-5 years? The relocation not only affect the clergy, but it has more impact on the family.

1.2.1 Research Questions

1. In what way can the ministers' families be empowered to break their silence when experiencing challenges because of relocations?
2. Is there any pastoral system in place that could care for families of clergy who are experiencing trauma from relocation?
3. How can the church journey effectively with families of clergy during placement in circuits?
4. What pastoral mechanism may be established to care for the families of clergy members impacted by relocation?

1.2.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of study is to pastorally journey with clergy families who have experienced trauma related to frequent relocation due to ministerial relocation. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the current relocation process for ministers and how it affects the family.
2. To investigate the impact of the clergy relocation on the family.
3. To investigate if the MCSA has addressed the pastoral needs of the families of clergy in response to relocations.
4. To propose a healing model that can be utilized in the MCSA when dealing with the families of clergy who are experiencing trauma related to relocation.

1.3 RESEARCH GAP

In the human sciences, studies have already been carried out with an emphasis on “ministers’ wives: marital satisfaction and the itinerant life style” (Cooke 1977); “Relocation stress and coping among clergy husbands and wives”, (Frame & Shehan 1994) and in pastoral psychology “Relocation and Well-Being in United Methodist Clergy and Their Spouses: What Pastoral Counsellors Need to Know”, (Frame 1998). Authors such as Peega (2009) researched on “Caring for traumatized families of ‘crucified’ clergy: a challenge to pastoral care”, and Likhi (2018) researched on “Congregational abuse towards the clergy and families” However not much has been researched on the trauma caused by relocations on the clergy families in the MCSA. This is therefore the gap that this research seeks to investigate.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The research methodology used in practical theology is interdisciplinary. This entails having scholarly conversations about social sciences like psychology and sociology. To determine parallels and differences in approach, the study will examine the literature from a variety of fields that deals with relocation and other related issues. Through the opinions of several authors, the literature on clergy relocation and the suffering this has caused to the families of clergy will be critically examined. The researcher wonders how itinerancy and John Wesley has contributed to the relocation of clergy in the MCSA. Those who have responded to the “call” to ministry are required to fulfil the commitments outlined in the Book of Order (2016), paragraph 4.17, which includes the statement, among other things, "I will go to whichever Circuit or Station I am appointed." This undertaking has seen ministers in the MCSA relocating at least every 3 to 5 years through the stationing process. The challenge with this relocation

is worsened when ministers are stationed in settings where their spouses cannot find employment. This results in the separation of the clergy and his family. Researching this clause will help the researcher to find out how it affects the families of clergy.

Wimberly and Wimberly's book, "*The Winds of Promise: Building and Maintaining Strong Clergy Families*", will be referenced in this research. These writers affirm that, "Clergy families attest to, and research affirms the issues of clergy mobility syndrome." (2007:20). They add that, "The stories of clergy families are replete with experiences of grief and loss, a sense of powerlessness, or loss of control, anger, fear about an unknown future and continued transience, strain on family life and profound loneliness" (2007:20). The stories shared by clergy families on being relocated will shed light on the topic under study, especially the "Perspectives on the nature and consequences of moving" (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:71).

The book, "*When Steeples Cry: leading congregations through loss and change*" by Jaco Hamman will be a useful resource on "Exploring numerical, relationship, material, identity, functional, role, and systemic losses," (Hamman 2005) that the clergy families may have incurred. Additionally, this book offers suggestions for healthy, life-giving ways to move on from grief.

Frame did research in 1998 on "*The well-being of relocated and non-relocated male United Methodist clergy and their spouses*". Her work will be helpful in identifying issues of concern in the relocation process for the clergy and family.

As the focus of this study is on clergy relocation and its impact on family in the MCSA, references to the relocation of clergy in other denominations are not as extensive and are dated, (Frame 1998; Frame & Shehan 1994; Cooke 1969). These will be used for comparative purposes.

1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study comprises both literary and empirical components. In the empirical component, a sample of clergy spouses and adult children from the MCSA in the Limpopo District will be interviewed using a phenomenological qualitative study approach. Phenomenology is a method of investigation that originated in psychology and philosophy and is used to describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. (Creswell and Creswell 2023:15). The

qualitative study design relies primarily on the collection of data that is non-numerical e.g., using open-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell 2023:5). Creswell and Creswell add that, “Qualitative researchers collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study,”2023:193. According to Creswell and Creswell, “The research process involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants’ setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (2023:5).

Additionally, Hogan, Donal and Donnelly clarify that the qualitative study design is “a multifaceted approach that investigate culture, society and behaviour through an analysis of people’s words and actions” (2009:3). The qualitative method has been selected instead of the quantitative method. This is because the subject under investigation aims to address a phenomenon that can only be understood by hearing the perspectives of the clergy families who have suffered because of relocation. According to Schurink in De Vos, “The qualitative design will do justice in understanding this phenomenon drawing from the perspectives of those involved whereas the quantitative approach will not be able to answer the deep-seated questions of the phenomenon but will simply provide the general statistics from where one can objectively deduce results and make a conclusion” (1998:242).

1.5.1 Population Sampling

Babbie and Mouton define population sampling as “the process of selecting observations” (2001:164). However, according to Creswell and Creswell, “Qualitative research aims to purposefully sample to select participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (2023:198). “While Creswell states that “qualitative inquiry is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (2012: 206). The purposive sampling method will be used to select participants for the study. This sampling method will assist the researcher to find individuals who match the needed characteristics and are willing to participate in the study, (Christensen, Burke Johnson & Turner 2015:171). Schurink in De Vos upholds this rational by adding that “The qualitative researcher will use purposive sampling methods by identifying access points, settings where subjects could be more easily reached, and selecting especially

informative subjects” (1998: 253). Purposive sampling will assist the researcher to select individuals that can provide the needed information that will assist in understanding the case, responding to the research questions, and addressing the purpose of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Access to the study participants will also be easy due to the proximity of the researcher to the congregations in and around the Limpopo District.

The ministers’ wives who have experienced more than two relocations due to the stationing of the husband, will serve as the study population, to ensure achievement of the study objectives. The adult children of clergy will also be included to determine their individual experiences of the relocations. The recruitment of participants will be done through the District Executive of the Women’s Manyano as the ministers’ wives form part of this organization. A letter of request to participate as well as the topic of research and contacts of the researcher will be given out for those interested in contacting the researcher. The church leadership in the various circuits will be requested to assist in identifying the children of clergy.

The research will be conducted within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, in the Limpopo District. This will be an easy access point for research as the researcher is a Deacon in the Limpopo District and is acquainted with the ministers’ wives in the district.

The qualitative sampling will be directed at either confirming or disclaiming the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon, based on the assumption that the stationing of ministers which results in their frequent relocations leaves the family traumatised as they are constantly faced with losses in their lives. The researcher is mindful that this selected model may change as more insight unfolds which might require that the sample be redefined continuously (Schurink in De Vos: 1988:254). Twelve ministers’ wives and twelve adult children will be interviewed

1.5.2 Data Collection

Data collection will be done using semi-structured interviews with the study participants. A list of questions and key points will be drawn up to facilitate a useful conversation, (See Appendix B and C for questions). There will be two sets of questions: one is directed at the wives who were impacted by the relocation. (The

researcher is aware that some questions may refer to a man who is married to a female minister, however, this is not the focus of this research). The other set of questions will focus on adult children, (18 years and above). The purpose in questioning these children is to find out how the relocation affected them. To get the most out of the study participants, the researcher will utilize the following interview techniques:

- Open ended questions will be asked to encourage a diverse approach
- The participants' responses will be mirrored to understand what they are actually saying
- Follow up questions will be asked where more information is needed

1.5.3 Data Analysis

A combination of narrative and content analysis will be applied to analyze data. The study questions will be used in grouping responses and to look for similarities and differences. By analyzing stories and the ways in which they are told, the researcher will unpack the ways in which the storytellers deal with, cope with and make sense of reality. Key points that come from the interviews will be summarized.

1.5.4 Theories

In order to critically understand the difficulties faced by the clergy families who have experienced pain because of frequent relocations, the researcher will utilize the Grief theory by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) and this will be buttressed by Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model (1997), which will assist in providing a healing model for journeying with the grieving clergy families in their loss.

1.5.4.1 The Five Stages of Grief

Kübler-Ross's model of caring will help the researcher to journey with the families of clergy who are affected by relocation. Kübler-Ross proposed that a person would go through five stages when confronted with the imminence of finitude: denial (and isolation), anger, negotiation or bargaining, despair, and acceptance (1969). Her research on "death and dying" gave the medical community insight on how to treat the terminally sick with respect by being aware of their needs and emotions. In 2005, posthumous publication of her book with David Kessler, "On grief and grieving" took

place. This book is seen as development to the first publication written in 1965 as it utilizes the five stages that the terminally ill went through as a foundation for those experiencing loss. The fundamental claim is that both individuals who are mourning and those who are dying are going through loss. While the latter is dealing with the death of a loved one, the former is dealing with a loss of health. The first stage, denial where the patient believes that the diagnosis is incorrect and chooses to believe in a false reality. The second stage, anger is where the patient can no longer deny the realities of their situation and begin to blame someone else for this, it could be the doctor, the hospital or their family or even God. The third stage is the bargaining stage where the individual is trying to bargain with God and promise to be a changed person if God heals them. The fourth stage is depression where the patient gives in to the realities of their condition and goes into a mournful and sullen state. The fifth stage is acceptance where the patient has resolved that their condition is not going to change and therefore, they need to accept it and prepare for death. They usually become calm and embrace the inevitable future. Kûbler-Ross and Kessler used these five stages of grief to help those mourning the loss of loved ones (Kûbler-Ross & Kessler 2005:7). The five stages of grief will be utilized to identify the challenges that clergy families go through because of relocation.

The work of Kûbler-Ross and Kessler (2005) highlights the stages of grief and the process the grieving person goes through. However, it falls short of providing a methodology that will therapeutically journey with the grieving in their loss. With the above in mind, this is where Pollard enters the journey of caring for them through the model of positive deconstruction.

1.5.4.2 Positive Deconstruction Model (Pollard: 1997)

Positive Deconstruction theory emanates from Nick Pollard's belief that if one needs to reconstruct anything one needs not change everything, all one needs to do is to take out the part(s) that is non-functioning and replace it with the parts that will enhance the performance of the model/object. The aim is not to change, overnight, the relocation of clergy, rather, to identify aspects in the stationing process that influences the frequent relocation and work on these and put in place a system that will support the clergy and their families during the frequent relocations. Pollard notes that the process of positive deconstruction contains four components; identifying the

underlying worldview, which highlights the values, beliefs and attitudes that are being communicated. The second one is analyzing the world view to ascertain what the fundamental reality is confronting all human beings and what the solution will be. We then enter the affirmation stage, that is, affirming the elements of truth in it. In other words, confirming what aspects of the worldview agree with a Christian worldview and discovering its errors, those aspects that are in conflict with a Christian worldview. (1997:48). these will guide the caregivers towards caring for the clergy families.

It is through articulating these worldviews that the caregivers will be able to identify what they believe is bothering the clergy families, break this down and come up with better views on how they can support them. This process will also affirm realities in the current beliefs on the stationing of ministers which is the basis of relocation but also challenge these beliefs until the ministers' families realize their shortcomings (Pollard 1997:44). The aim of this process is to break down the ideas and attitudes about the relocation of clergy that the clergy and their families have formed and replace these with a new belief system which is made up of parts from their original worldview which hold true meaning about relocation related trauma. The researcher will enter the space of the clergy families through the interview process, see appendix B and C for questions, with the hope of allowing them to express their experience of the relocation and guiding them to articulate how they have been coping. This process will be conducted in a positive manner so that the researcher is able to understand what the people's beliefs are. As Pollard states, "It is only when the leader is able to comprehend what the world views is, that he or she can start to ask questions" (1997:47)

1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To protect sampled persons from any negative impact, this study follows the regulations and guidelines stipulated by the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee. Therefore, to maintain high ethical standards, the following processes will be observed:

- (1) *Informed Consent* – all respondents and participants will be notified beforehand of the nature of the study, and they will be requested to give consent to the study before participation in interviews.

(2) *Right to Privacy* – the identities of participants and their views will be treated with utmost of confidence. Pseudonyms and codes will be utilized to protect personalized identifiable data.

(3) *Dignity* - the dignity and character of all participants will be upheld and will not be subjected to embarrassment or unbecoming behaviour.

(4) *Freedom of choice*-all participants will be notified beforehand about their right to ask questions, to refuse to give information and the decision to pull out from the study at any time during the study.

(5) *Honesty* – findings of the study will be reported honestly., This will also apply should the results turn out to be unfavourable or different from the author's expectations. Research activities will begin after ethical clearance by the Faculty of Theology and a letter of permission from the Bishop of the Limpopo District from where the study participants will be selected.

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study comes at a time when the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has called upon the people called Methodists to be “prophetic agents” (Nzimande, 2023). She further asserts that being prophetic involves “reading the signs of the times and offering a social critique and response that is inspired and guided by scripture and the principles of the Kingdom of God” (Nzimande, 2023). In the Old Testament tradition, prophets functioned as God's mouthpiece, proclaiming divine messages even when such messages caused discomfort or challenged prevailing structures. In this spirit, the present study seeks to prophetically highlight the often-silenced experiences of clergy families who endure repeated relocations and the emotional, psychological, and relational disruptions that accompany them.

By foregrounding the lived experiences of ministers' wives and adult children of clergy, this study responds not only to a pastoral concern within the MCSA but also to broader global commitments to human well-being. This study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which seeks to promote good health and well-being, including mental and emotional health, for people of all ages (*United Nations, 2015*), which emphasises the promotion of mental health, emotional well-being, and the reduction of psychosocial stress across all populations. Frequent clergy relocations

may contribute to cumulative stress, unresolved grief, identity disruption, and emotional fatigue within clergy families, thereby affecting their overall well-being. Addressing these challenges through a structured pastoral healing model positions the church as an active agent in promoting holistic health and well-being among its clergy families.

The identified population sample, ministers' wives and adult children of clergy, provides a balanced and intergenerational perspective on the phenomenon under study. Given the limited pastoral-theological research on the impact of clergy relocation on families within the MCSA, this study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge. Moreover, it offers contextually grounded pastoral insights that may inform church policy, pastoral practice, and family-centred interventions, thereby strengthening the church's prophetic witness and its commitment to the well-being of those who serve within it.

1.8 RESEARCH CONSTRAINTS & LIMITATIONS OF SCOPE

The study is limited and delimited to the congregations of the (MCSA) in the Limpopo District and may not necessarily constitute generalized phenomena of other churches in South Africa or Christianity in general. The clergy families under study are limited to the spouse of the male clergy and the children who are 18 years and above and therefore may not represent the generalized phenomena of clergy families in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Representatives to the sample have been selected to facilitate the gathering of in-depth knowledge.

1.9 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter One: – Introduces the research, scope of the research, and background to the research. It includes a brief outline of justification of the research, the research problem and question, methodology, and the framework of the research.

Chapter Two: - Literature Review- analyses existing literature on relocation, the stationing of ministers, families of clergy, pastoral care and what new views this research will bring to light

Chapter Three: Outlines the selected research paradigm and methodology used in this research, which will outline the theory, the model and research design. . Sampling,

ethical issues, data collection and analysis will also be included in this chapter. The Grief theory by Kübler- Ross and Kessler (2005) and Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model (1997), will be discussed in this chapter

Chapter Four: - Will unpack the relocation of ministers and trauma on the family and how this affects pastoral care, in detail.

Chapter Five: - This chapter presents the interviews of the clergy's families and the analysis of data collected.

Chapter Six: - Will explore and develop a healing methodology to pastorally journey with the families of who are affected by relocations.

Chapter Seven: - This final chapter concludes the research by providing the findings, recommendations and closing remarks. Research significance and limitations will also be highlighted in this chapter.

1.20 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This chapter has set the groundwork for the study. The background and rationale for exploring the impact of clergy relocation on the family within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa were outlined, together with the research problem, aim, and objectives. Key terms relevant to this investigation were defined, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study were introduced. The qualitative methodology adopted, along with considerations of ethics, trustworthiness, and limitations, were also discussed. The next chapter will present a focused literature review, examining the challenges of clergy relocation, the coping mechanisms of clergy families, and the pastoral responses that shape their experiences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter One introduced the scope and background of the study, outlined the research justification, and set out the problem statement, methodology, and guiding framework. It also presented the narrative of a clergy member whose relocation, arising from vocational and covenantal obligations, disrupted family life in significant ways. That narrative sharpened the rationale for this inquiry by foregrounding the pastoral dimensions of clergy relocation and its often-unacknowledged effects on spouses and children. In particular, it highlighted the need to interrogate how the church responds to families who experience the trauma of relocation, especially when such moves occur with limited consultation or preparation.

Against this background, the present chapter reviews relevant scholarship on the experiences and perceptions of clergy families within Christian ministry and clarifies the specific analytical lens advanced by this study. The review surveys literature across five interrelated sub-themes: (1) the vocation of the minister/clergy, with attention to ecclesial expectations and role demands; (2) the family unit as a site of meaning-making and support; (3) the family life cycle and processes of socialisation; (4) changing dynamics of contemporary families; and (5) relocation as a recurrent stressor within ministerial life. Together, these strands provide the conceptual grounding for the study's empirical focus.

2.1.1 Justifying the Need to Understand the General Effects of Relocation and its Impact on Families

Before narrowing the focus to the specific phenomenon of clergy relocation, it is essential to examine the broader context of relocation and its impact on families. Relocation is a complex and multidimensional process that encompasses geographical, social, psychological, and institutional shifts. According to Brown and Perkins (1992:5), relocation represents a "major life transition" that requires individuals and families to renegotiate their sense of place, belonging, and identity. Sussman (2000:355) similarly observes that relocation often disrupts established social networks, compelling families to develop new coping mechanisms and adapt to unfamiliar environments.

From a psychological perspective, relocation can trigger stress responses comparable to other major life changes, such as marriage or bereavement, particularly when moves are frequent or involuntary (Schweiger & Denisi 1991:112). Within family systems theory, such transitions are understood to affect the entire family unit, as changes in one member's circumstances inevitably influence the dynamics of the whole (Carter & McGoldrick 2005:17). The disruption of children's education, friendships, and social routines has also been shown to have lasting implications for emotional well-being and identity formation (Anderson et al., 2014:223).

By situating clergy relocation within the broader field of relocation studies, a more nuanced perspective emerges on the underlying stressors and transitions involved. Scholars note that all relocating families, regardless of vocation, encounter significant emotional labour in saying goodbye, managing the uncertainty of unfamiliar environments, and rebuilding networks of community and belonging (Wiles 2008:120; Brown & Perkins, 1992:5; Sussman, 2000:355). Research further highlights that such transitions often disrupt social networks, create psychological strain comparable to other major life events, and require adaptive coping mechanisms to re-establish stability (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991:112; Carter & McGoldrick, 2005:17).

This scholarly understanding of relocation provides a comparative lens for analysing clergy relocation more meaningfully, where spiritual, professional, and relational pressures intersect with the general challenges identified in broader relocation literature. In this way, the study draws on established theoretical and empirical insights to contextualise the unique experiences of clergy families.

2.1.2 The Rationale for a General Understanding of Relocation and Family Impact

It is crucial to first understand the general impact of relocation on families before focusing specifically on clergy families. Relocation, regardless of type, has been found to impact family structures by altering interpersonal roles, disrupting routines, and challenging collective coping mechanisms (Brown & Perkins 1992:280). These impacts include stress, grief, and reduced social support, conditions that can have lasting effects on marital satisfaction, child development, and overall family functioning.

By placing clergy relocation within the wider context of relocation studies, a richer understanding of the fundamental stressors and transitions that are involved comes to light. Researchers point out that families moving, irrespective of their profession, experience considerable emotional effort in parting ways, navigating the uncertainty of new surroundings, and reconstructing their community and sense of belonging (Wiles 2008:120; Brown & Perkins, 1992:5; Sussman 2000:355). Additionally, studies indicate that these transitions frequently disrupt social connections, generate psychological pressure like other significant life events, and necessitate adaptive coping strategies to regain a sense of stability (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991:112; Carter & McGoldrick 2005:17).

This academic perspective on relocation offers a comparative framework for examining clergy relocation in a more significant way, as it highlights the intersection of spiritual, professional, and relational pressures with the general difficulties noted in wider relocation studies. In doing so, the research utilizes recognized theoretical and empirical knowledge to frame the distinct experiences of clergy families.

A general understanding of the effects of relocation also illuminates how different family structures (e.g., nuclear, extended, single-parent) and life stages (e.g., young children, adolescents, elderly dependents) respond differently to such transitions (Mallett 2004:67). This knowledge is particularly relevant for examining clergy families, who often face frequent and sometimes involuntary moves as part of their vocational commitment.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) operates under the principle of itinerancy, which requires clergy members to be stationed to different Societies within a Circuit or District as necessary. Consequently, the minister and their family frequently relocate due to this stationing process, moving from one congregation to another, across circuits and districts, and even across the South African boards, to places such as Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, and Eswatini, as these countries are part of the MCSA's Connexional structure. The stationing in the MCSA has got two Pillars, the invitation and the Connexional appointment. The Connexion is MCSA's highest governing body where all decisions made are final. Through invitation, a congregation within a circuit has the option to invite a minister for stationing.

For those ministers who were not lucky enough to be invited, stationing will be done by the District Bishop and in extreme cases, some ministers who could not be stationed by the bishop in a particular district will then be placed in available stations at Conference in September of each year, and this is known as a Connexional appointment. For ministers who receive an invitation, their stationing lasts for five years at the same Society/ Circuit, whereas a conference appointment is for three years. The final stations are read out at Conference in September and changes to what a minister might have been aware of, especially those who were not invited by Circuits, can change here (Methodist Book of Order 2016:86-91). This structure implies that the minister is not psychologically settled until stationing is finalised at Conference, and clergy and their families might move every three to five years. Such frequent relocations due to clergy stationing can negatively impact the overall well-being of the clergy family as they move along with him.

Moreover, relocation is known to affect not only practical aspects of life (such as housing, schooling, and employment for spouses) but also emotional and spiritual well-being (Fullilove 1996:1520). By first considering these broader impacts, one gains a more nuanced appreciation of the potential cumulative toll that repeated or sudden moves may have on family systems. This perspective becomes indispensable when examining clergy families, who may also contend with unique spiritual, communal, and professional pressures in the midst of relocation.

Therefore, establishing a general framework for understanding relocation's impact on families' enables a more informed, contextualised, and comparative analysis of clergy relocation. It ensures that the specific challenges faced by clergy families are not viewed in isolation but are instead interpreted within a broader psychosocial and context. The definition and types of relocation will now be presented.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING RELOCATION: DEFINITIONS AND TYPOLOGIES

2.2.1 Relocation Defined

Relocation, broadly defined, refers to the process of moving individuals or families from one geographical location to another, often involving changes in social, occupational, and psychological contexts (Campbell 2008; McAdam & Ferris, 2015). In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, relocation refers to the stationing of clergy from one Circuit or District to another. In some cases, this stationing can be across

the borders which are in the Southern Africa Connexion, countries like Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho. Though the process of stationing starts at district level, the final stations are read at Conference in September of each year. (Book of Order 2016:85-88). From a sociological perspective, relocation is viewed as a significant life transition that alters social roles, disrupts established networks, and may challenge one's identity within community structures (Mallett, 2004:67). It is often associated with shifts in class culture, understood here as the shared values, lifestyles, and social practices tied to socio-economic position, which shape one's sense of belonging within a community (Bourdieu, 1984:170).

From a psychological standpoint, relocation is understood as a stress-inducing event that can impact emotional well-being, sense of identity, and mental health. According to Fullilove, displacement or relocation often leads to a phenomenon called "root shock," an experience that plants go through when they are pulled out from their original setting and planted in a new place. This experience includes feelings of grief, disorientation, and anxiety due to the loss of place attachment and familiar surroundings (1996:1518). The researcher agrees with the writer as she left her country of origin and relocated to South Africa for work purposes. Though this was a choice, being in a place where she knew no one and did not understand the language as well as the culture, was very depressing.

From an organisational or occupational perspective, relocation is typically examined in terms of workforce mobility. It is defined as a strategic human resources activity involving the transfer of employees and their families to new locations to fulfil organisational needs (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2016:13). In this context, relocation is often planned by the employer, and the employee is involved, but this still entails significant adjustment for the family unit. A common context where organisational relocation occurs is the military and those working as ambassadors of their countries.

2.2.1 Typologies of Relocation

Relocation can be classified into several types, depending on the nature, purpose, and voluntariness of the move. One critical distinction is between voluntary and involuntary relocation. Voluntary relocation typically occurs when individuals or families choose to move for better opportunities, such as employment, education, or improved living

conditions. Involuntary relocation, on the other hand, is imposed by external forces such as organisational mandate, natural disasters, political conflict, or housing evictions (Moser 2009:12). Clergy relocations often fall into a hybrid category: voluntary in terms of initial vocational consent, yet involuntary in how and when they are transferred.

Relocation is also categorised as local (within national boundaries) and international (across countries). While local relocation may still involve disruption of social ties and familiar routines, international relocation introduces additional challenges such as cultural dissonance, language barriers, and legal adjustments (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001:101). Both types have implications for family dynamics, children's education, and spousal employment. The degree of control over the move is a critical factor in how families adapt.

2.3 THE RELEVANCE OF RELOCATION AS A GLOBAL, SOCIAL, AND SPIRITUAL PHENOMENON

Relocation has become a notable occurrence in the 21st century, influenced by various global, social, spiritual, and financial factors, as individuals move for different opportunities. This dynamic process reflects broader global patterns and intersects with individual and communal social realities, including religious or spiritual vocations.

2.3.1 Relocation as a Global Phenomenon

Globally, relocation is often associated with migration, displacement due to conflict, economic transitions, or institutional demands such as military or religious assignments. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 280 million people globally were living outside their countries of origin in 2020, reflecting the scale and significance of human mobility (IOM 2021:12). The relocation of professionals, including clergy, mirrors this global trend, often influenced by institutional strategies, mission work, and socio-political shifts (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2014:29).

In religious contexts, relocation may involve transfers across dioceses, circuits, districts, or even countries to meet ministry needs or accommodate leadership structures. For clergy families, these global patterns of mobility are not only organizational requirements but also deeply personal experiences, affecting family

routines, social networks, and children's education (Warner & Grubbs 2012:45). Just as migrants and professionals worldwide navigate the challenges of establishing new communities and adapting to unfamiliar environments, clergy families encounter similar pressures, compounded by vocational and spiritual responsibilities unique to religious service. Recognizing relocation as a global phenomenon thus provides a comparative framework for understanding the distinctive social, emotional, and professional impacts of clergy mobility (Castles, de Haas & Miller 2014:29).

2.3.2 Relocation as a Social Phenomenon

Socially, relocation impacts family structures, community integration, and identity formation. It influences how individuals and families adapt to new environments, renegotiate roles, and rebuild social capital. Sociologists argue that relocation challenges social continuity and can disrupt networks of support, particularly when it involves uprooting children from schools, spouses from careers, and families from communities (Berger & Luckmann 1991:182). Relocation affects psychosocial well-being, often causing stress, grief, and identity confusion, especially when social ties are severed (Carter & McGoldrick 2005:102). For clergy families, this transition may be compounded by congregational expectations and institutional pressures to adapt quickly and maintain spiritual leadership (Frame & Shehan 2005:64). From the researcher's perspective, the social impacts of relocation among clergy and their families is a reality. The background story that prompted this study is one of many stories that is experienced by clergy families. Clergy in the MCSA move to the new circuit during the third week of December and they are expected to conduct the Christmas worship service, when in fact they should be unpacking their belongings after the move.

2.3.3 Relocation as a Spiritual Phenomenon

Spiritually, relocation is often framed within the theological understanding of calling, mission, and divine guidance. Throughout biblical narratives, relocation is a recurring theme. Abraham's call to leave his country (Genesis 12:1–4 NIV) sets a paradigm for relocation as obedience to God's command. Similarly, Jesus' ministry involved constant movement, symbolising the transient nature of spiritual vocation (Luke 9:58 NIV). For clergy, relocation is not merely logistical but deeply spiritual, an act of

surrender, faith, and service. It involves discerning God's purpose in new geographical and ministerial contexts (Louw 2000:71). However, this spiritual framing does not negate the human cost of dislocation, especially on the family, who must find meaning and belonging in unfamiliar spaces (Doehring 2015:146).

Relocation must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, global in its scope, social in its impact, and spiritual in its significance. Its relevance lies in its pervasive influence on modern life, particularly for those in vocational service such as clergy. Institutions and communities must therefore adopt holistic strategies that support relocated individuals and families emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO RELOCATION

Relocation is a disruptive life event that intersects with psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of human functioning. To understand its multifaceted impact, especially within families such as those of clergy, scholars have drawn upon several theoretical frameworks. Among the most relevant are von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory, (1968); Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory (1984), and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2011). Each offers unique insights into the relational, psychological, and developmental processes involved in relocation. These theories will be discussed in the sections that follow.

2.4.1 Systems Theory

The Systems Theory offers a foundational framework for understanding the relational dynamics that emerge during relocation. Originating from the work of von Bertalanffy and later applied in family therapy, this perspective marked a shift from Freud's singular focus on the unconscious life of the individual to an approach that *"took into account actual rather than just fantasised family relationships in therapeutic experience"* (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013:16). In this view, when one member of the family system undergoes change, such as a clergy member being relocated, the entire system is inevitably affected.

Relocation challenges the family's homeostasis (its tendency toward stability) and demands morphogenesis (adaptive change). A spouse's loss of employment or a child's difficulty adjusting to a new school can trigger systemic tension, influencing the

functioning of the entire family unit (Carter & McGoldrick 2005:103). In clergy families, this is often intensified by the dual system of church and home life, where spiritual and emotional demands co-exist (Frame & Shehan 2005:65).

2.4.2 Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus and Folkman)

Lazarus & Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory provides a psychological lens for interpreting how individuals appraise and respond to stressful events such as relocation. According to this model, stress is not solely caused by external events but by how individuals appraise these events and assess their ability to cope (Lazarus & Folkman 1984:21).

Relocation often activates both primary appraisals ("Is this harmful or beneficial?") and secondary appraisals ("Can I handle this?"). Clergy spouses, for instance, may perceive relocation as a threat to social identity or personal stability, while children may see it as a loss of friendships and security (Boss 2002:96). Effective coping involves both problem-focused strategies (e.g. securing housing, finding new schools) and emotion-focused strategies (e.g. seeking emotional support or spiritual comfort (Lazarus & Folkman 1984:150). This theory is vital for understanding variations in adaptation to relocation across individuals and family members.

2.4.3 Transition Theory (Schlossberg)

Schlossberg's Transition Theory offers a developmental perspective on how people experience and adapt to life changes. A transition is defined as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (1981: 5). Relocation clearly qualifies as a major transition that alters individuals' roles and contexts.

This theory emphasizes four key factors: Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies, collectively known as the "4 S's" (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg 2012: 45). Each of these influences how well an individual manages the transition:

- **Situation:** Was the relocation expected or sudden?
- **Self:** What is the person's age, personality, and psychological resilience?
- **Support:** Are there social networks, institutional help, or spiritual communities?

- **Strategies:** What coping mechanisms are available?

Clergy families may differ in how they transition based on the timing of the move, the receptiveness of the new congregation, and the presence (or absence) of denominational support systems. Transition Theory helps explain why some families thrive post-relocation while others experience long-term strain.

2.4.4 Relevance across Contexts

Together, these three theories: Systems Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Transition Theory, offer a multi-level understanding of relocation:

- At the relational level, Systems Theory highlights how change in one family member affects the entire unit, making it critical for church bodies to address not just the clergy person, but their spouse and children.
- At the psychological level, Stress and Coping Theory accounts for individual differences in emotional responses and adjustment mechanisms.
- At the developmental level, Transition Theory frames relocation as a critical life transition that demands adaptive strategies and external support.

These frameworks are especially relevant in vocational contexts such as clergy relocations, global relocations tied to employment or migration, and spiritual relocations involving missionary or religious assignments. In all cases, understanding the theoretical underpinnings enables institutions, caregivers, and researchers to better support those undergoing such life-altering changes.

2.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF RELOCATION

Relocation, whether voluntary or imposed, often results in substantial socio-economic consequences for families. These effects can be particularly pronounced when relocation occurs without adequate preparation, institutional support, or choice, conditions that are not uncommon in vocational contexts such as the clergy. The socio-economic dimensions of relocation encompass job displacement, financial stress, housing instability, and employment adjustment challenges, all of which have far-reaching implications for individual and family well-being. These aspects will be discussed in the section that follows:

2.5.1 Job Displacement and Employment Adjustment

One of the most immediate socio-economic consequences of relocation is job displacement, particularly for non-relocating spouses. When one member of a dual-earner household is required to relocate, such as a clergy person being reassigned to a new parish, the accompanying spouse often faces career interruption or job loss as well as financial loss. Studies show that trailing spouses frequently experience a loss of employment status, underemployment, or difficulty re-entering the workforce post-relocation (Shaffer *et al.*, 2001:102). This is compounded by limited local job opportunities, lack of professional networks in the new location, and in some cases, credential recognition issues. The above can affect the spouse, especially when a clergy is relocated to rural areas, where there are no job possibilities.

Relocation can also disrupt career progression, especially for professional spouses whose career paths rely on long-term investments in specific geographic or organisational contexts. According to Harvey, relocation often places women's careers at a disadvantage, particularly when families follow the primary earner's employment move (1997:626). Such career stagnation can affect self-esteem, financial independence, and marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, employment adjustment in a new environment is not always seamless. Individuals may face mismatches in skills, workplace culture, or remuneration. These challenges can cause emotional strain, reduced job satisfaction, and a decrease in household income (Green 2004:61). For clergy spouses who are educators, healthcare workers, or small business owners, relocation can mean starting from scratch in building professional identity and credibility.

2.5.2 Financial Stress

Relocation also incurs direct and indirect financial costs, including moving expenses, temporary accommodation, school re-enrolment fees for children, and the loss of dual incomes. Even when institutional support is available, as is the case in clergy settings, hidden costs often remain a burden for families. According to Binstock & George, families that relocate frequently without economic buffers or long-term financial planning are particularly vulnerable to long-term financial instability (2001:215).

Unpredictable income patterns, combined with the cost of settling in new areas, contribute to financial stress, a major determinant of family tension, anxiety, and even conflict (Conger et al., 1990:539). For clergy families, who may already be living on modest incomes, financial stress due to relocation can significantly affect their capacity to thrive in new stations.

2.5.3 Housing Instability

Another key socio-economic impact of relocation is housing instability. For many families in the general population, frequent moves may create challenges in securing affordable and adequate housing, particularly in urban or high-cost areas where rental markets are competitive (Desmond 2016:102). By contrast, in institutional contexts such as the military, diplomatic service, or the clergy, housing is often provided by the employer, yet this does not remove the problem entirely. In clergy contexts, for instance, while a manse or rectory is usually allocated, such housing may not always meet the needs or expectations of the relocating family. Issues such as poor maintenance, limited privacy, and unsuitability for children's developmental needs may arise (Foster 2014:89). Thus, housing instability for clergy families is less about *access* to housing and more about the quality, adequacy, and control over the living space provided.

For families who must find their own housing and set up a home, relocation often disrupts the process of building home equity, limits options for property ownership, and results in extended periods in temporary or transitional housing. This instability can affect children's schooling continuity, social integration, and overall family morale (Wiles 2008:120).

2.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACTS OF RELOCATION

Relocation is not solely a logistical or physical transition; it is a deeply psychological and emotional experience that affects individuals and families in profound ways. Moving to a new environment often entails loss of familiarity, disruption of routines, and detachment from social networks, all of which can trigger significant emotional and mental health responses (Fullilove, 1996:1517). The psychological effects of relocation are influenced by factors such as age, personality, coping capacity, support systems, and whether the relocation is voluntary or forced.

2.6.1 Emotional Disruption and Loss

Relocation typically involves a grieving process, as individuals are separated from places, people, roles, and identities that have provided emotional stability and a sense of belonging. Fullilove refers to this as "*root shock*," a traumatic stress reaction to the loss of one's emotional ecosystem. This emotional dislocation can manifest in sadness, irritability, frustration, or a pervasive sense of being "unsettled" (1996:1520).

For children and adolescents, emotional disruption may be particularly acute. They often experience separation anxiety, withdrawal, or behavioural problems as a result of leaving behind friends, school, and familiar routines (Black 1992:314). Adults may also experience emotional fatigue, particularly when they must support other family members through the transition while managing their own unresolved emotions. This is the case with clergy families who tag along to support the "one who is called into ministry."

2.6.2 Psychological Stress and Mental Health

The psychological impact of relocation includes elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and even depressive symptoms, particularly when the relocation is sudden or involuntary. According to Brown and Perkins place attachment plays a crucial role in identity and mental stability, and its disruption through relocation can lead to psychological disequilibrium. Individuals may feel disoriented, disconnected, and uncertain about their future in the new environment (1992:281).

The process of acculturating to a new community or adapting to a new social system often triggers adjustment disorders. When individuals are unable to establish new relationships or integrate into the local culture, they may experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, and low self-worth (Mallett 2004:68). This is especially common when relocation is accompanied by changes in employment, housing instability, or a lack of support structures.

2.6.3 Impact on Family Relationships

Relocation places stress on marital and parental relationships, often intensifying pre-existing tensions or introducing new dynamics. When one partner's career is prioritised

during relocation, common in clergy families, this can lead to resentment, role confusion, or communication breakdown within the marriage (Shaffer et al., 2001:105). The pressures of helping children adapt, finding new schools, and adjusting to unfamiliar social environments can also strain parent-child interactions.

Moreover, relocation can interrupt established routines and shared family activities that serve as protective factors for emotional wellbeing. Without these stabilising rituals, families may find it more difficult to maintain cohesion and a shared sense of purpose in their new environment (Wiles 2008:120).

2.6.4 Cultural Shock in Cross-border Relocations

Cross-border relocation often involves transitioning into a society that may differ significantly from one's native culture, leading to what is widely referred to as culture shock. Culture shock is defined as the disorientation and psychological stress experienced when individuals are exposed to unfamiliar cultural norms, values, language, and social practices (Oberg 1960:177). It comprises several stages: the honeymoon phase, negotiation phase, where shock and frustration emerge, adjustment phase, and mastery phase (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001:86). For clergy, this adjustment process can be particularly profound due to the vocational and relational expectations embedded in their pastoral role.

2.6.4.1 Sociological Perspective

From a sociological perspective, cultural shock disrupts social identity, communication practices, and relational norms, especially for individuals tasked with leadership or pastoral responsibilities. Clergy relocating across borders often encounter differences in religious expressions, liturgical traditions, and community expectations, which may contrast with their previous ministry experience (Kraft 2005:23). These discrepancies can lead to misunderstandings, alienation, and identity dissonance, particularly when the host community's interpretation of faith and pastoral care differs from the clergy's own tradition.

2.6.4.2 Psychological Perspective

Psychologically, cross-cultural relocation may give rise to anxiety, loneliness, homesickness, and even depression, especially when the clergy member or their family struggles to integrate or build social support networks (Brown & Holloway 2008:34). This impact is compounded when clergy are also expected to be sources of spiritual stability for others, while navigating their own emotional instability. For clergy spouses and children, these challenges can affect family cohesion and lead to emotional withdrawal or conflict, especially if language barriers and local customs hinder everyday functioning (McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto 2005:198).

2.6.4.3 Vocational and Theological Meaning-Making

Cultural shock also intersects with vocational identity and theological meaning-making. Clergy who relocates across cultural boundaries must often re-evaluate their pastoral identity and recalibrate their leadership style in line with new cultural expectations (Lartey 2003:49). For example, in some African contexts, clergy are expected to play a more community-integrated, kinship-based role, whereas in Western contexts, pastoral functions may be more individualised and administratively oriented. Misalignment in these expectations may cause internal conflict, ministry ineffectiveness, or burnout.

2.6.4.4 Theological Standpoint

From a theological standpoint, cross-cultural relocation of clergy challenges the universal and incarnational aspects of ministry. The incarnational model of ministry, which emphasises “being with” rather than simply “ministering to” people, requires deep cultural empathy and contextual understanding (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:33). Without this, clergy risk imposing their own cultural lens on communities, further exacerbating the cultural divide. As such, cultural competence and intercultural theological training become essential for clergy preparing for cross-border appointments.

Culture shock in cross-border relocation is a significant dimension of the clergy relocation experience, affecting their emotional well-being, pastoral identity, family life, and ministerial effectiveness. Theological institutions and church bodies that deploy

clergy across cultural settings must provide intentional intercultural preparation, pastoral supervision, and family support to mitigate the negative impacts of culture shock and promote holistic adjustment.

2.6.5 Coping and Resilience

While the psychological and emotional effects of relocation are often challenging, many individuals and families demonstrate resilience by employing coping strategies such as maintaining spiritual practices, seeking counselling, or staying connected to supportive networks. Lazarus and Folkman's *Stress and Coping Theory* suggests that outcomes are determined not only by the stressor (relocation) itself but by the individual's appraisal of the event and availability of coping resources (1994:141). Supportive interventions and preparatory programs can significantly reduce psychological strain and foster emotional adaptation.

Relocation exerts profound psychological and emotional impacts on individuals and families. Vulnerable groups such as children, spouses, and trailing partners are particularly susceptible to these challenges. Recognising the mental health dimensions of relocation is essential for developing responsive support systems that promote psychological resilience and emotional well-being, especially in vocations like clergy life, where relocation is often a structural requirement.

The relocation of clergy not only affects the clergy member but the family at large. In order to understand the how the intensity of the trauma faced by clergy families because of relocations, it is important to understand what family is. The family is one of the most fundamental social institutions across cultures, serving as a unit for socialization, emotional support, economic cooperation, and cultural transmission. Over time, the structure and function of families have evolved due to shifting economic, cultural, and demographic factors. The following write-up explores the family unit, various types of family, the concept of the family life cycle, and the key roles within family dynamics, namely parental and spousal roles.

2.7 THE FAMILY UNIT

Family, as a social institution, exists across all cultures (Cloete 2016:2). Conventional definitions describe a family as a group of two or more individuals who cohabit, function

as a unified economic unit, and have offspring. They might also be connected through blood relations, marriage, or adoption (Benokraitis 2005:5). Sociologists characterize a family as a closely-knit community of at least two people who share strong emotional bonds and essential functions, live together in a committed relationship, and consider their identity to be significantly tied to the group (Benokraitis 2005:5).

From a theological perspective, the family serves as the primary environment in which children learn about God, the world, and their own identities. Such close relationships allow individuals to develop a sense of self, grow personally, and internalize moral values. Furthermore, this setting can facilitate spiritual growth. A family goes beyond merely being a system; it plays a crucial role in shaping identity, character, and spiritual development throughout this journey (Cloete 2013:5).

Family is a child's first socialization agent and the main factor influencing their personality development and growth (Villegas 2013:2). Families teach their children the customs and values of their society. Children are raised by their families with the morals, abilities, and information needed to function in the community. The family is the most important socialization factor in an adolescent's early years. With regard to the importance of education, parents and adolescents usually have similar beliefs and attitudes (Asamen et al 2008:148). Family is the structure of relationships that people build over time and in different contexts in an effort to meet their needs for attachment and belonging as well as to share resources, assistance, and life goals (Nel 2018:83). The clergy family faces a challenge in bringing up the children together.

2.8 TYPES OF FAMILY

Family structures are diverse and have a significant influence on how individuals experience major life transitions, including relocation. Relocation, whether for employment, conflict, environmental reasons, or lifestyle changes, affects family dynamics, roles, and overall well-being. The following discussion explores the primary types of families (nuclear, extended, single-parent and blended families) and examines how each experiences relocation differently.

2.8.1 Nuclear Family

Nuclear families, typically consisting of two parents and their biological or adopted children living in a single household are often considered the normative family unit in Western societies. According to Bengtson et al, nuclear families tend to rely heavily on internal support systems (2002:115), this structure allows for close parent-relationships but may lack extended support networks. Research shows that nuclear families are often associated with increased autonomy, individualized child-rearing, and streamlined decision-making (Cheal 2002:34). When relocating, this self-reliance can be both an advantage and a limitation, especially if they move away from extended family support networks (Hill 2015: 78).

2.8.2 Extended Family

Extended families consist of other relatives in addition to the immediate nuclear family, which includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This family type is prevalent in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where familial interdependence and collective support systems are culturally emphasized. Extended families often benefit from built-in support during relocation. However, the complexity of coordinating the move of multiple members can increase stress and logistical challenges (Cheal 2008:42). For instance, intergenerational tensions may arise when younger members adapt more quickly to new environments than older members (Mason 2013:211).

2.8.3 Single-Parent Family

Single-parent families are headed by one adult raising one or more children due to divorce, separation, death, or individual choice. Single-parent families, often led by women, face unique challenges during relocation. Financial constraints and the lack of a co-parent can make moving more difficult (Amato 2000 :1278). Relocation may be driven by necessity, such as job loss or the need for better social services, and the stress associated with these pressures can impact both the parent and children negatively (Turney & Harknett 2007:386). These families may face emotional challenges but also demonstrate resilience and adaptability (Amato 2000:1273).

2.8.4 Blended or Reconstituted Family

Blended families emerge when partners with children from previous relationships form a new household. These families must navigate complex relationships among step-parents, step-siblings and biological children (Ganong & Coleman 2004:49). Blended families, formed after remarriage or cohabitation, must manage the relocation experience alongside pre-existing dynamics from previous family arrangements. Relocation can be an opportunity for a fresh start, but it also may exacerbate tensions among step-siblings and between children and stepparents (Ganong & Coleman 2017:159). Emotional adjustment is critical, particularly when children must navigate shared custody agreements across locations (Smart & Neale 1999:84).

2.8.5 Childless Family

This refers to married or couples without children, either by choice or circumstances. While traditionally less recognized, childless families are increasingly acknowledged as valid family forms, particularly in urban and professional contexts (Park 2002:21).

In this study, the word "family" will be used to refer to parents and their children, who live together, have shared objectives, possess a mutual culture, and experience love and faith. In the case of clergy families, the study focusses on the wife and children over 18years of age.

2.9 THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE AND RELOCATION

Relocation decisions affect the entire family system, yet individual responses and adjustment outcomes are highly influenced by the developmental stage of each family member. Life span development theory and family systems theory emphasize that transitions, such as relocation, interact with age-specific psychological needs, social roles, and identity tasks (Bronfenbrenner 1979:23; Carter & McGoldrick 2005:235). The review that follows explores how infants, children, adolescents, adults, and older adults experience relocation differently, and how these stages influence family relocation decisions and outcomes.

2.9.2 Infants and Toddlers (0-3 years)

While infants are often perceived as the least affected by relocation, research shows that early disruptions in caregiving environments can affect emotional regulation and attachment patterns (Ainsworth 1989:141). Infants are highly sensitive to caregiver stress; therefore, parental anxiety during relocation may impact infant well-being indirectly (Davies *et al.*, 200:294). Routines such as feeding, sleeping, and physical comfort are easily disrupted during a move, which can contribute to fussiness or sleep disturbances (Honig 1996:10). Parents of infants may thus require added support, influencing the timing and logistics of a relocation

2.9.3 Preschool and Primary School-aged Children (3-12 years)

Young children often form strong attachments to familiar places, routines, and peers. Disruption caused by moving can generate anxiety, sadness, or behavioural regression (Vernon 1999:36). School-aged children also experience relocation through the lens of cognitive development, understanding the reasons for the move and processing changes varies with age and maturity (Piaget 1963:117). A longitudinal study by Simpson and Fowler found that frequently early childhood moves were associated with poorer emotional and behavioural outcomes in later years (1994:301). Thus, parents often consider educational continuity, school quality and peer relationships when making relocation decisions (South & Haynie 2004:285).

2.9.4 Adolescents (13-18 years)

Adolescents face unique challenges during relocation due to their developmental need for identity formation, autonomy and peer belonging (Erickson 1968:128). Moving during this stage can disrupt close friendships, romantic relationships and social status. These factors are critical to adolescent self-esteem. Adolescents may resist relocation more strongly than younger children and show signs of withdrawal, defiance, or depression (Oishi 2010: 67). Their feedback often carries more weight in family decision-making processes, as parents may hesitate to disrupt schooling during critical academic years like final exams or transition to university or college.

2.9.5 Youth and identity formation

The term "youth" is commonly associated with certain age brackets, typically ranging from 12 to 18 years. Theories that define life stages outline the attributes of these stages in a manner that tends to be fairly predictable. A more intricate and sophisticated understanding of "youth" can be framed as a lifestyle influenced by social structures such as family, work environments, educational systems, and various cultural contexts (Miles 2000; see Cloete 2012:2). The concept of youth encompasses more than merely adhering to developmental theories and a specific age group. It can also be seen as a cultural idea from before industrial times that originated during the industrial revolution, significantly shaped by industrialization. This concept was formalized through educational institutions (Cloete 2016:1). The term "youth" includes both children and teenagers (Nel 2000:8).

Youth development and identity formation are intricately linked. Adolescence represents a developmental phase marked by the process of establishing one's identity. During this stage, young individuals strive to understand "who they are" in the face of various biological, psychological, and societal changes. These aspects of identity are interconnected (Davies & Eynon 2013:60). Throughout their journey in identity formation, young people seek answers to fundamental existential questions. They might encounter misleading information or viewpoints that clash with their family's beliefs. As adolescents broaden their circles of friends, this phase is characterized by substantial social engagement. This heightened interaction can expose youth to dangers such as cyberbullying and harassment (Mesch & Talmud 2010:26-27).

Theologically, the period of adolescence involves grappling with one's beliefs. Young individuals try to organize their values into a unified and coherent framework. The quest for identity frequently includes an exploration of their spirituality. Gaining adult skills and learning how to navigate life are just two facets of forming one's identity. It addresses fundamental and existential questions regarding life and its meaning. Developing an identity is a crucial aspect of understanding who God is. Many young people struggle to establish a cohesive and Christ-centered perspective of themselves due to a lack of opportunities and a supportive environment. The processes of faith and identity formation are interlinked, allowing individuals to become "who they already

are in Christ.” The processes of identity development and spiritual growth are interconnected and supportive of one another (Cloete 2013:74).

Research shows that although the media significantly affects young people today, the influence of family life remains stronger on children and teenagers (Cloete 2012:5). Adolescents face unique challenges during relocation due to their developmental need for identity formation, autonomy and peer belonging (Erickson 1968:128). Moving during this stage can disrupt close friendships, romantic relationships and social status. These factors are critical to adolescent self-esteem.

Adolescents may resist relocation more strongly than younger children and show signs of withdrawal, defiance, or depression (Oishi 2010:67). Their feedback often carries more weight in family decision-making processes, as parents may hesitate to disrupt schooling during critical academic years like final exams or transition to university or college. In other words, relocation affects them in such a way that they are not able to deal with loss of friends

2.9.6 Emerging and Young Adults (18-30 years)

For emerging adults, relocation may coincide with transitions into higher education, employment or independent living (Arnett 2000:473). In some cases, family relocation prompts difficult decisions about whether to stay behind or move with the family. Those attending college or living independently may be less directly affected, though emotional ties and financial dependency can still complicate adjustment (Mitchell 2007:141). Relocation can also create tension around autonomy, particularly if the move challenges established independence (Feldman & Barrett 2001:175).

2.9.7 Midlife Adults (30- 60 years)

Adults in this stage often play dual roles as decision-makers and caretakers. Relocation decisions are frequently tied to career progression, caregiving for children or aging parents, and financial stability. The midlife stage is associated with balancing personal development and family responsibilities, and relocation can either alleviate or intensify this tension (Lachman 2004:306). Married couples may weigh spousal employment, children's needs, and mortgage or housing considerations.

2.9.8 Older Adults and Elderly Family Members (60+ years)

Older adults experience relocation through the lens of loss, continuity, and stability. Moves later in life are often precipitated by health needs, downsizing, or proximity to family caregivers (Golant 2003:22). The emotional impact can be profound, especially when it involves leaving long-term homes or communities. Relocation may also challenge their sense of identity and control, particularly if the move is involuntary (Bekhet, Zausniewshi & Nakhla 2009:83). However, when older adults are included in the decision-making process and move to supportive environments, outcomes tend to be more positive (Wiles et al., 2012:357).

From the writer's experience, decisions on clergy relocation are made by the church and in the case of invitations, the clergy member is involved. The wife of the clergy, though informed, cannot give inputs into the relocation. I have seen ministers relocated at the age of 62 years, leaving their families behind, as at this age, most ministers will have secured a home in preparation for their retirement from the full work of ministry, superannuate. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, ministers superannuate at the age of 65 (Methodist Book of Order 2016:49).

The developmental stage of each family member plays a critical role in how relocation is experienced and managed. While adults often drive relocation decisions, the emotional, psychological, and practical needs of children, adolescents, and elderly family members heavily influence both the process and its outcomes. Family-centered relocation planning that accounts for developmental needs and provides tailored support can significantly enhance adjustment and well-being across the life course. In most professional or secular contexts, families may have some degree of choice or negotiation in planning a move, allowing time for open discussions and preparations that take developmental needs into account.

In clergy families, however, a distinct tension emerges. Relocation is typically mandated by ecclesiastical authority, such as a bishop or denominational appointment system, which leaves limited room for negotiation (Carroll, 2006). This top-down process often means that clergy parents and their children are informed rather than consulted about the decision (Morse, 2011). Such dynamics raise important questions about how clergy families navigate communication around relocation, particularly whether parents involve their children in conversations about the move, and how

developmental considerations shape these discussions. Ministry guidelines suggest that transparent, age-appropriate communication with children is vital for easing the stress of transition (Wespath, 2022), yet research indicates that practice varies considerably across clergy households.

2.10 PARENTAL ROLES IN FAMILY SOCIALISATION

When a couple, at their wedding while stating their marital vows, commit to loving and accepting children from God, they inherently take on the responsibility that comes with raising those children. Parenteral roles involve responsibilities and behaviours expected of individuals in the role of mother or father. These roles are influenced by cultural norms, gender expectations and individual beliefs. Historically, mothers have been associated with caregiving, emotional support, and domestic responsibilities, while fathers were seen as providers and authority figures (Lamb 2000:9). There is a growing trend toward shared parenting and involved fatherhood, especially in dual-income households. Research shows that engaged fathers positively influence children's cognitive and emotional development (Pleck 2010:60).

The father's role is especially vital as he serves to his children in a way that parallels how God interacts with humanity. He embodies the functions of a provider, protector, progenitor, and guardian within the family (Scott, 2011:41). As a protector, it is the father's duty to ensure the family's safety, creating a secure and nurturing environment that fosters the healthy development of the children. The father's responsibilities as a provider involve addressing both the material and the spiritual and moral needs of the family. Given these responsibilities, the father's active involvement is crucial for the upbringing of family members (Vatican Council II, 1964, section 11). The lack of a father can complicate parenting for single mothers, who often view the father as a figure of authority. Meanwhile, the mother also has a significant role within the household. Children, particularly younger ones, rely heavily on her for nearly everything. She is the initial teacher for the child and the caretaker for all family members, including the father. From a very young age, she instils important values in her children (Florence Adetoun Oso 2020: 325).

2.11 SOCIETAL ROLES IN FAMILY SOCIALIZATION

Family socialisation refers to the process through which individuals, particularly children, acquire the norms, values, behaviours, and social skills necessary to function effectively within society. While the nuclear family plays a central role in this process, broader societal institutions such as education systems, religious organisations, peer groups, media, and the state serve as both direct and indirect agents of socialisation (Berger & Luckmann 1966:32).

2.11.2 Community and Cultural Institutions

Society establishes normative frameworks that guide family practices. Community institutions like schools and religious centres reinforce cultural expectations surrounding gender roles, discipline, respect for authority, and moral development. For example, schooling fosters cognitive development and social integration, helping children navigate peer relationships and societal hierarchies. These institutions often serve as extensions of the family, especially in collectivist cultures where communal child-rearing practices are emphasised (Bronfenbrenner 1979:5-10). Relocation, whether voluntary or forced, often disrupts established patterns of family socialisation. Migration alters the societal landscape in which families operate, potentially weakening traditional support systems and introducing new societal expectations. Migrant families may struggle to reconcile differing value systems, leading to intergenerational tensions and shifts in parenting strategies (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 2001: 57–59). Additionally, the absence of extended family and community networks in new environments can reduce the collective nature of child-rearing, intensifying the burden on nuclear family units.

In diasporic or refugee contexts, families often face the dual pressure of preserving heritage culture while adapting to host norms, complicating socialisation processes. Children may assimilate more rapidly than adults, leading to role reversals where children act as cultural and linguistic brokers, a phenomenon that redefines traditional authority structures within families (Orellana 2009:32–35). The section below discusses the changing dynamics of families which also impact the family during relocation.

2.12 THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF FAMILIES

The concept of family has undergone significant transformations over the past century, influenced by socio-economic, political, and cultural shifts. These changes have been particularly pronounced in the areas of gender roles, employment patterns, and domestic responsibilities. In the context of relocation, such changes become even more salient as families adapt to new environments, expectations, and pressures. This section explores three key aspects of evolving family dynamics: dual-career families, female liberation, and the reluctant wife.

2.12.2 Dual Career Families

The emergence of dual-career families marks a critical shift in traditional family structures. Unlike the conventional nuclear model, where the male was the breadwinner and the female the homemaker, dual-career households involve both partners pursuing full-time professional careers. This reconfiguration introduces new challenges, such as time management, child-rearing coordination, and relocation decision-making (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985:80). Relocation can generate significant strain in dual-career households, where one partner may be forced to sacrifice their career prospects for the other's job transfer or promotion (Rapoport & Rapoport 1976:34).

The need to balance career ambitions with family responsibilities has prompted the rise of complex negotiation processes within marriages. Research shows that in relocation scenarios, women are disproportionately affected, often becoming "trailing spouses" who must either find new employment in unfamiliar markets or temporarily exit the workforce (Shauman 2010 :211). The emotional responses that trailing spouses experience during their transitions can vary significantly and are influenced by numerous personal and career-related factors. Emotional ties to the old community, the quality of life in the new area, and the person's ability to handle change are just a few of the individual factors that impact the adjustment to the move. Leaving a job to accompany a partner carries inherent risks.

Alongside the potential loss of income and disruption in career progression, the relocating spouse frequently forfeits a network of professional relationships, faces a change in job status, and often experiences a diminishment of personal identity and

self-esteem. This contributes to career discontinuity and, in some cases, marital dissatisfaction. The situation led to the phenomenon of what became known as the “reluctant wife” (Shaw 2001:43). Relocation for the clergy families in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is caused by one person, the clergy who made a commitment with the Church at candidature and ordination, that they will go where they are sent. This has brought bitterness and anger within the family.

2.12.3 Female Liberation and shifting gender roles

The feminist movements of the 20th century significantly redefined women’s roles within society and the family. Greater access to education, reproductive rights, and labour market opportunities have led to increased female participation in the workforce and a broader questioning of traditional domestic roles (Oakley 1974:65). Women’s liberation has, therefore, catalysed a re-evaluation of family roles, particularly within marriage. With relocation, these gains can be jeopardized. Studies show that professional women are more likely to experience a sense of role reversal or regression when moving for their partner’s job, particularly when such moves result in underemployment or domestic isolation (Boyle et al., 2001:42). The issue is not merely economic but also psychological, as women’s sense of identity and autonomy may be challenged (Kofman 2004:258). This transformation also intersects with expectations surrounding motherhood and domestic labour. Even in dual-income households, women often perform a disproportionate share of caregiving and housework, a dynamic that can intensify following relocation due to a lack of local support networks (Hochschild & Machung 2012:122).

2.12.4 The Reluctant wife

The concept of the “reluctant wife” refers to women who are resistant to domestic relocation especially when it is primarily motivated by the husband’s career progression. These women may face a conflict between supporting their partner’s career and maintaining their own personal and professional identities (Cooke 2008: 485). In some cases, relocation becomes a site of marital tension, with dissatisfaction stemming from perceived inequality or lack of consultation in decision making (Harvey 1998:46). Research into expatriate assignments has particularly highlighted the phenomenon of the reluctant wife as a major factor in assignment failure. When female

partners are unable to adjust or feel marginalised, the emotional toll can affect family cohesion and influence the success of the relocation itself (Shaffer & Harrison 2001:238). These dynamics illustrate the broader implications of mobility on marital and family stability. Leaving a job to move with one's partner involves risk. In addition to risking a potential loss of income and career momentum, the relocating spouse quite often loses a network of professional contacts, experiences a shift in job status, and often suffers a loss of personal identity and an erosion in self-confidence.

In the context of clergy relocation, the notion of the reluctant wife refers to a clergy spouse, typically female, who experiences resistance, emotional burden, or dissatisfaction with frequent and often involuntary relocations due to her husband's pastoral appointment. This concept has been largely underexplored in formal theological discourse but has received attention in sociological and psychological studies on clergy family life. A key feature of the reluctant wife is the lack of personal agency in decisions that significantly affect her life. In many denominations, clergy moves are determined by ecclesiastical authorities with little to no consultation with spouses or family members (Frame & Shehan 1994:202). The wife is expected to relocate, uproot her social and professional life, and support her husband's calling, often without a platform to voice hesitation or dissent (Darling *et al.*, 2004:265). This dynamic can create feelings of marginalization and loss of control. The above tension may result in the wife remaining behind in the old place and connect with the spouse on weekends. At times it may lead to divorce.

Reluctant wives often report emotional fatigue, grief, and identity erosion linked to the frequency of relocation. These feelings are intensified when spouses are also caretakers of children or are employed in careers that are disrupted by each move (McMinn *et al.*, 2005:141). The role of "ministry partner" can conflict with their personal aspirations, creating inner tension between support for their husband's calling and the cost to their own life path (Hall 1997:136).

Some reluctant wives experience role overload, as they are expected to serve informally in church functions while simultaneously managing the family's adaptation to a new environment. When emotional support from church leadership is minimal, this stress may lead to burnout, resentment, or even marital strain (Warner & Carter, 1984: 73). This role overload has been noted by the Committee on Divorce and Remarriage

in their report to the MCSA 2024 Conference. The committee highlights that, “The pressure brought upon, particularly Black Ministers’ wives, from the Circuits, and Women’s Organisations, is showing up as conflict issues within clergy marriages. Some ministers’ wives have their careers and do not wish to fulfil those roles” MCSA Yearbook 2025:329). The Divorce and Remarriage committee has proposed to Conference, the review of the constitution that forces ministers’ wives to lead Women’s organisations in the church.

Clergy spouses who are professionals often find their own careers placed on hold due to relocation, especially in rural or under-resourced areas where employment opportunities are scarce (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011:40). The repeated forfeiture of work leads to economic dependency and a compromised sense of self-worth. A reluctant wife may internalize guilt or spiritual pressure to remain supportive, despite growing dissatisfaction (Morse 2020:235).

In many cases, clergy wives are reluctant not because they oppose ministry, but because they are conflicted spiritually and emotionally. Religious language around obedience, sacrifice, and calling often leads them to suppress their grief or doubt (Starr 2018:90). This creates cognitive dissonance, feeling frustrated or wounded by the relocation process while simultaneously believing they should “submit” to God’s will through their husband’s calling; a calling that they committed to during candidature by responding positively to the question “Will you go to whichever Circuit or Station your husband is appointed?” (Methodist Book of Order 2016:36). Such inner conflict is compounded when the wife’s spiritual gifts or ministry aspirations are overlooked or dismissed in the new church context. The invisibility of their sacrifice often leads to isolation and disengagement from the local congregation (Morris & Blanton 1994: 194).

2.13 THE SOCIALISATION INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

The family serves as the primary agent of socialization, shaping individual values, norms, and behaviours from early childhood and continuing to influence identity and social integration throughout life (Berger & Luckmann 1991:149). As a core institution, the family transmits cultural and religious beliefs, facilitates emotional support, and fosters social competence. In the context of clergy families, the socialization role

becomes particularly complex, as spiritual and vocational expectations intertwine with personal and familial identity.

Parsons and Bales argue that the nuclear family is essential in performing two critical functions: primary socialization of children and the stabilization of adult personalities (1955:16). This becomes particularly salient for clergy families, where roles and responsibilities often extend beyond the private sphere into the congregation and wider community. Children in such households are often socialized not only into broader societal norms but also into specific denominational and religious expectations (Lee & Balswick 1989:97). This dual socialization can produce a unique family culture, marked by heightened visibility and moral expectations.

Relocation disrupts these socialization processes by displacing family members from familiar environments, social networks, and routines. For clergy families, the relocation often results in intensified role strain, as parents must navigate new congregational dynamics while supporting their children through educational, emotional, and social transitions (Frame 1998:56). Social capital, which facilitates community integration and emotional well-being, is often lost or weakened during relocation, thereby impacting the family's capacity to sustain effective socialization (Putnam 2000:276).

Furthermore, research suggests that children of clergy may experience "role ambiguity" or "role diffusion," particularly when frequent relocations prevent the development of stable peer relationships and consistent educational experiences (Strohl 2019:118). This not only affects their socio-emotional development but can also influence their perception of religious institutions and family cohesion.

The literature also indicates that clergy spouses, often playing auxiliary roles in ministry, experience disruption in their own social identity and professional goals due to relocation (Warner & Carter 1984:44). The constant need to renegotiate family routines and re-establish social ties can result in emotional exhaustion and reduced efficacy in fulfilling the family's socialization role. In summary the family's function as a socialization institution is deeply challenged by the relocation of clergy. The process alters the socio-cultural environment in which family values and identities are formed and maintained, potentially reshaping the very nature of family dynamics and intergenerational transmission of beliefs

2.14 THE CLERGY FAMILY

The clergy family occupies a unique social and spiritual position, functioning within overlapping roles of public ministry and private life. The intersection of ecclesial expectations and familial responsibilities renders the clergy family both spiritually significant and sociologically distinct (Frame & Shehan 2005:89). In the context of relocation, a common feature of clerical life, the dynamics and identity of the clergy family are tested in profound ways, influencing their cohesion, stability, and adaptation.

2.14.2 The Clergy Family as a Distinct Social Unit

The clergy family has been described as a “public family in a private role,” situated at the nexus of institutional religion and domestic life (Lee 1999:37). Due to the vocational demands of the minister, the family becomes a symbolic extension of the church's expectations, often placed under the scrutiny of congregational life. Carroll *et al.*, argue that the clergy household is not merely a nuclear family unit, but a semi-public entity expected to model ideal Christian values (2007:112).

Spouses and children of clergy often experience role ambiguity, functioning simultaneously as family members, ministry partners, and representatives of the faith community. This overlapping of roles, as noted by Hartley, leads to “role diffusion,” which can complicate identity formation and boundary setting within the family (2007:54). The above may lead to divorce, because the family may not feel to move with the clergy

2.14.3 Clergy Family Systems and Emotional Wellbeing

The emotional wellbeing of clergy families is closely linked to how they manage the stress of vocational demands, including relocation, congregational expectations, and work-life balance. Research grounded in family systems theory, such as that by Morris and Blanton highlights the importance of emotional differentiation in clergy households (Morris & Blanton 1998:184). High levels of role conflict can result in burnout or relational strain, particularly for clergy spouses and adolescent children.

The family's spiritual orientation may serve as a protective factor. Dudley and Kosinski found that religious commitment and open communication helped clergy families

navigate the pressures of ministry, offering internal resilience during transitional periods (1995:67). However, this spiritual buffer may not be sufficient to offset the cumulative stress of frequent relocations.

2.14.4 Nature and Trends of Clergy Families

In their journal article titled, *Voice of the Clergy Wife: A Phenomenological Study*, Luedtke and Sneed remarked that “The clergy wife is an overlooked and muted demographic. While the minister himself is well articulated in the literature ... his spouse remains unheard and longing for her needs to be recognized and addressed.” The necessity of recognizing that many ministers’ wives endure their struggles quietly amid their husbands’ ministry is clear from such findings. Acknowledging the silent suffering experienced by ministers’ wives is vital for the health of clergy families and the church at large. The contributions and significance of ministers’ wives must be acknowledged going forward. The consequences of this were evident in the study conducted on the views of ministers and their spouses regarding the influence that ministry has on their family dynamics (2018).

2.14.5 The Silent Voices of Families in Relocation

Too often, the experiences of families undergoing relocation remain unheard or unacknowledged. In many cases, stories of struggle are submerged, not because challenges do not exist, but because individuals may fear that voicing them will be seen as complaining or as a sign of weakness. The lack of safe spaces for disclosure further contributes to this silence, leaving families to cope privately with the stresses of mobility. The demand to present an image of resilience or to conform to perceived ideals often discourages open expression, resulting in struggles that remain unspoken yet unresolved (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:19–20).

Relocation frequently exposes tensions between institutional authority and the lived realities of families. From a systems theory and sociological perspective, mobility disrupts established networks, alters family roles, and challenges personal and social identities (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013:16; Mallett, 2004:67). Theological and ethical perspectives, meanwhile, highlight the responsibility of institutions to listen to and support vulnerable voices within their structures. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995:89),

for example, critiques the ways in which social systems and institutions often silence those most affected by structural decisions, particularly women and children.

A telling illustration is found in military relocations, where families are frequently uprooted due to postings and deployments. Research shows that military spouses often feel silenced by the culture of resilience within the armed forces, where admitting to loneliness, career disruption, or children's adjustment difficulties may be interpreted as disloyalty or weakness (Riggs & Riggs, 2011:190). These silent struggles highlight how institutional priorities can overshadow personal needs, leaving families without adequate avenues of support.

Similar dynamics can be seen in corporate or professional relocations, particularly among expatriate families working with multinational companies. While such moves are often framed as career opportunities, spouses and children may feel unheard in the decision-making process, especially when they face disrupted careers, language barriers, or difficulties integrating into new communities (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001:230). Families may refrain from voicing dissatisfaction for fear of jeopardising professional advancement, leading to hidden tensions and unacknowledged costs beneath the surface of apparent success.

The following section will explore the broader impact of relocation on families, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of the pastoral and social care required in contexts of mobility.

2.15 THE IMPACT OF THE DARK SIDES OF RELOCATION ON THE FAMILY

Relocation is a significant life event that can deeply affect the structure, cohesion, and emotional well-being of families of clergy. Whether driven by career changes, ministry appointments, or broader socio-economic factors, the process of uprooting and resettling introduces disruptions that influence family dynamics, individual development, and the capacity for adaptation. For families involved in vocational ministry, such disruptions are often repeated, magnifying their effects (Frame & Shehan 2005:891).

2.15.2 Disruption of Stability and Routine

One of the most immediate impacts of relocation is the disruption of daily routines and established social systems. Families lose proximity to extended relatives, friends, school networks, and community resources, which play a vital role in family resilience (Anderson et al., 2014:112). The logistical stress of packing, finding housing, and adjusting to new environments can lead to increased conflict, anxiety, and emotional fatigue across the family unit (Lichter & Brown 2011:21).

For clergy families, such instability is compounded by the spiritual and institutional expectations placed upon them, particularly when transitions are frequent or occur with little preparation time (Lee 1999: 45). In the MCSA, this is most seen in those clergy families who move on Conference appointments as these are announced in September, and the move follows in December. This gives the family limited time to make decisions on the children's schools, employment transfers for the wife and for some families, finding a replacement for their family doctor.

This decision to confirm stations at Conference creates a sense of having no control on one's life, on the family. And then, there is the anxiety that is brought on by the waiting and the fear of the unknown (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:74).

2.15.3 Spousal Role Strain and Career Sacrifice

Relocation often forces one partner, typically the spouse of the transferred individual, to sacrifice or adjust their career, personal goals, or social identity. In clergy families, spouses may be expected to serve informally in ministry roles without formal recognition or compensation, further straining their sense of autonomy (Zahl & Flanagan 2010:90). Cooke & Speirs demonstrate that repeated mobility can result in cumulative disadvantages for spouses, including interrupted employment trajectories, social isolation, and reduced life satisfaction (Cooke & Speirs 2005:152).

2.15.4 Children's Adjustment and Developmental Challenges

Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of relocation, especially during key developmental stages. Frequent moves can disrupt educational continuity, impact peer relationships, hinder identity formation and even their academic work. According

to Simpson and Fowler, “Children who relocate frequently are more likely to experience academic decline and behavioural issues (1994:288). In clergy families, children often experience “visibility stress,” feeling pressure to represent the church through their behaviour while simultaneously managing personal losses due to relocation (Frame 2001:29). Adolescents may struggle with loyalty conflicts and emotional detachment, particularly when they are not consulted or emotionally prepared for the move (Hartley 2007:56).

2.15.5 Relocation and Marital Dynamics

Relocation can also place significant strain on marital relationships, particularly when the move is involuntary or perceived as being more beneficial to one spouse's career. Disagreements over priorities, parenting adjustments, and the stress of managing new environments can lead to increased conflict and reduced marital satisfaction (Morris & Blanton 1998:193).

Supportive communication and shared decision-making have been identified as protective factors. When couples engage in mutual planning and openly express concerns, they are better able to weather the emotional turbulence of relocation (Meek et al., 2003:362). With the above in mind, let us now analyse the trauma caused by relocation, especially within the Methodist Church.

2.16 DEFINING TRAUMA IN THE CONTEXT OF RELOCATION

Psychological trauma is commonly defined as an emotional response to a distressing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, leaving them feeling helpless or threatened (American Psychiatric Association 2018:1). Relocation, when experienced repeatedly or without consent, especially by non-primary decision-makers like spouses and children, can produce symptoms of traumatic stress, including anxiety, depression, and identity loss (Van der Kolk 2014:87).

While trauma is typically associated with catastrophic events, scholars have noted that “chronic relational disruptions”, such as repeated moves, loss of friendships, and dislocation from support systems, can be equally traumatic, particularly for children and dependent family members (Pynoos et al., 2007:350).

2.16.1 Trauma Related to Relocation

Relocation is often framed in terms of logistical adjustment, institutional planning, or cultural adaptation. Yet it can also trigger deep psychological and emotional distress, sometimes rising to the level of trauma, particularly when the move is unanticipated, involuntary, or accompanied by a loss of familiar social, cultural, or familial anchors. Trauma, in its broadest sense, refers to an overwhelming emotional response to a deeply distressing event that exceeds an individual's capacity to cope (Herman, 1992:33).

In the context of relocation, trauma may emerge through experiences of displacement, disruption of personal and social identity, loss of belonging, and the breakdown of established community ties (Fullilove, 2004:14). The consequences can manifest not only at the individual level but also within the family unit, as members struggle to re-establish continuity, negotiate new roles, and adapt to unfamiliar environments. Where relocation is linked to economic vulnerability or diminished opportunities, the psychological impact can be further compounded by financial strain and uncertainty. The clergy families are also not immune to this trauma as they experience frequent relocations some of which are to circuits that are struggling financially. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.

2.16.2 Understanding Relocation as a Traumatic Experience

Relocation involves more than a physical move; it entails a psychosocial rupture. Research has shown that individuals subjected to frequent or involuntary relocation, whether due to work, conflict, ministry, or socio-political upheaval, often report symptoms associated with trauma: chronic stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), (Bhugra 2004: 241). These effects are heightened in contexts where relocation severs one's connection to cultural roots, community rituals, spiritual support, and familiar environments, all of which are crucial components of human psychological stability (Van der Kolk 2014:210).

Relocation-related trauma can be cumulative. Repeated moves compound the psychological toll, especially when individuals are not given adequate time to process their previous transitions. Children, for example, may internalise relocation as abandonment or instability, while adults may experience a loss of identity and purpose,

particularly when their professional roles or community status are altered (Boss 2006:54). These dynamics are especially relevant in faith-based settings, where vocational identity and spiritual meaning-making are central to self-concept. Relocation does not only affect clergy, but also congregation's that they serve. However, this is not the focus of this research.

2.16.3 The Hidden Grief of Relocation

A particularly understudied dimension of relocation is what Pauline Boss describes as "ambiguous loss" (2006), a state of mourning what is lost without closure. Individuals may grieve the loss of friendships, familiar routines, cultural customs, and social status without societal acknowledgment of their grief. This hidden mourning can result in disenfranchised grief, wherein the trauma is intensified by the lack of communal support or validation (Attig 2004:199). In religious contexts, this may be further complicated by theological narratives that encourage resilience and sacrifice without adequately naming or holding space for loss.

2.16.4 Transitioning to Clergy Families and Relocation Trauma

These realities are acutely felt within clergy families, who often undergo frequent or institutionally mandated relocations as part of denominational deployment policies. While relocation is typically framed theologically as part of the minister's "call" to serve, its impact on clergy families is often minimised or neglected (Hart 2007:81). The families of clergy, particularly spouses and children, are indirect recipients of institutional decisions, yet they experience direct consequences in terms of uprooting, cultural dislocation, and emotional strain. The question to ask is, who pastorally care for clergy families when affected by relocation? The church may answer by saying the Bishop. Is there care for them in the church?

Relocation trauma among clergy families is multifaceted. Spouses often experience social isolation, especially when they are removed from existing support networks, and must navigate new church cultures where expectations are high but unclear. Children may suffer educational disruption, difficulty forming stable peer relationships, and loss of home continuity, which can lead to identity fragmentation and behavioural challenges (Frame & Shehan 1994:229). These symptoms are not dissimilar to those

seen in military or diplomatic families but are often spiritually cloaked in narratives of sacrifice and obedience.

Furthermore, clergy families may feel trapped in roles that offer little voice in relocation decisions. In denominations such as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, where stationing is determined every three to five years by ecclesiastical authority, clergy spouses report feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, and vocational displacement, particularly when they must give up employment or relocate to unfamiliar or under-resourced areas (Ntlha, 2010:94). These dynamics contribute to secondary trauma, where family members bear the emotional burden of institutional processes without institutional recognition or support.

Theological and pastoral frameworks often fail to name these experiences as traumatic, instead encouraging stoicism or framing suffering as a pathway to spiritual maturity. While this can offer existential meaning, it can also silence pain and inhibit healing, especially when clergy families internalise their distress as a failure of faith rather than as a legitimate psychological response (Doehring 2015:117).

2.16.5 Toward a Trauma-Informed Understanding of Clergy Relocation

Recognising the trauma of relocation in clergy families calls for a more pastorally sensitive and psychologically informed approach to ecclesiastical transitions. This includes:

- Pre-relocation assessments that consider the psychological readiness of clergy and their families.
- Family-centred consultation processes during placement decisions.
- Ongoing psychosocial support, including spiritual direction, counselling, and peer support groups.
- Theological education that integrates trauma theory into pastoral formation, enabling clergy to name and address trauma in themselves and others.

Incorporating a trauma-informed lens challenges faith-based institutions to reimagine relocation not merely as an operational or theological exercise but as a relational and emotional process that requires accompaniment, care, and accountability. It also

affirms the embodied humanity of clergy and their families, honouring their sacrifices without ignoring their suffering.

Relocation, particularly in faith-based contexts, can be a deeply traumatic experience that impacts not only individuals but entire clergy families. The trauma associated with dislocation, loss, and forced adaptation is often spiritualised or dismissed in religious institutions, leading to unacknowledged grief and long-term psychological harm. A trauma-informed approach to clergy relocation affirms the complexity of transition and calls for ecclesiastical processes that are not only efficient but also compassionate, inclusive, and healing. Ultimately, this requires a reframing of relocation from an institutional obligation to a pastoral journey, one that acknowledges both its cost and its sacredness.

A recurring feature in trauma studies is the tendency toward silence. Families experiencing the dislocation of relocation may suppress their feelings due to cultural expectations of resilience, institutional pressures to conform, or fears of being perceived as weak. This “culture of silence” often prevents individuals from acknowledging loss, grief, or psychological strain, thereby deepening the trauma and slowing the process of adaptation and healing (Danieli, 1998:63; Fullilove, 2004:18). Whether in the context of forced migration, corporate expatriation, or military reassignment, silence functions as both a coping mechanism and a barrier to recovery. Recognising the role of silence in relocation trauma is therefore essential in understanding the hidden costs of mobility and in identifying avenues for more supportive responses.

2.16.6 Unspoken Trauma and Silence Culture

A recurring feature in trauma studies is the tendency toward silence. Families experiencing relocation may suppress their feelings due to cultural expectations of resilience, institutional pressures to conform, or fears of being perceived as weak. This “culture of silence” often prevents individuals from acknowledging loss, grief, or psychological strain, thereby deepening the trauma and slowing the process of adaptation and healing (Danieli, 1998:63; Fullilove, 2004:18).

Whether in the context of forced migration, corporate expatriation, or military reassignment, silence functions as both a coping mechanism and a barrier to recovery.

Families may feel compelled to present an image of strength, leaving their unspoken struggles hidden beneath the surface. Recognising the role of silence in relocation trauma is therefore essential in understanding the hidden costs of mobility and in identifying avenues for more supportive responses.

This theme of silence will be explored further in Chapter 4, where it takes on unique dimensions in the lives of clergy families who

2.17 FROM TRAUMA TO CARE: THE IMPERATIVE FOR PASTORAL RESPONSE

The emotional, psychological, and spiritual distress experienced by clergy families during relocation underscores a compelling need for intentional and sustained pastoral care. Given that trauma linked to relocation often manifests as invisible wounds, ambiguous grief, identity disruption, family strain, and emotional exhaustion, pastoral care becomes not only relevant but essential for holistic restoration and continuity of vocation.

Pastoral care, at its core, is the ministry of presence, listening, empathy, and support, aimed at nurturing healing, resilience, and meaning making in the face of suffering (Lartey 2003:12). It engages individuals not merely as subjects in transition but as whole persons navigating spiritual, emotional, and relational dislocation. In the context of relocation, pastoral care serves to bridge the gap between institutional expectation and personal experience, offering safe space for reflection, lament, and reorientation.

For clergy families, this means recognising their vulnerability, not as a sign of spiritual weakness, but as a legitimate response to upheaval and loss. Churches and denominational structures must therefore provide proactive and trauma-informed pastoral care that includes:

- Pre- and post-relocation debriefings to acknowledge grief and facilitate emotional processing.
- Support groups or peer mentoring networks for clergy spouses and children.
- Pastoral supervision and spiritual direction that validate emotional experiences and promote vocational resilience.
- Theological reframing of relocation not only as a calling but also as a crucible of transformation and healing.

Pastoral care is not an ancillary service but a theological and ecclesial mandate, rooted in the example of Christ the Good Shepherd, who tends to the wounded and walks with the disoriented. It affirms that the well-being of those who serve is not expendable in the pursuit of ministry goals, but central to the health of the Church itself.

In this light, pastoral care becomes the pastoral theology of accompaniment, an incarnational response to trauma that ensures no minister or ministerial family carries the burden of transition alone.

2.18 THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF PASTORAL CARE

The biblical model of pastoral care finds its foundation in the metaphor of the shepherd. Jesus refers to Himself as the *Good Shepherd* who knows, leads, and lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11–14). The shepherding model underscores relational care, presence, and protection. In Ezekiel 34, God rebukes negligent shepherds who have failed to care for the flock, emphasizing the importance of attending to the weak, healing the injured, and seeking the lost (Ezekiel 34:4–6). This biblical framework positions pastoral care as incarnational and holistic, addressing emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

Applied to clergy families, the biblical model demands that the church, including denominational leadership, recognize and respond to the suffering of ministry households, particularly during transitions such as relocation. Pastoral care is not limited to preaching or sacraments but includes acts of presence, listening, and advocacy, especially when relocation causes stress, disconnection, or trauma.

2.18.2 Relocation as a Disruptive and Neglected Pastoral Issue

Relocation introduces a complex pastoral care challenge because it often places clergy families in distress without appropriate systems of care. Clergy spouses and children must repeatedly adjust to new environments, lose familiar support structures, and often do so without structured emotional or spiritual support (Frame & Shehan 1994:204). Yet, their suffering is frequently spiritualized or minimized, framed as part of their "sacrifice" for the kingdom, rather than treated as a pastoral concern in need of intervention (Hall 1997:137).

Denominational leaders may focus on institutional needs or congregational fit during placements, while the well-being of the clergy family remains peripheral. This oversight leads to pastoral neglect and violates the very essence of biblical care, to shepherd the vulnerable and provide rest for the weary (Matthew 11:28–30).

2.18.3 Clergy Families as Pastoral Care Recipients

Although clergy are typically positioned as pastoral caregivers, relocation reveals that they and their families are also in need of care. When systems fail to recognize this dual role, clergy families become the "invisible sufferers" of the ministry enterprise (Warner & Carter 1984:74). The stress of repeated moves without sufficient emotional, spiritual, or logistical support can result in marital strain, depression, and family disintegration, all of which require pastoral intervention (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011: 42).

Pastoral care, in this context, must be proactive and systemic, involving pre-relocation counselling, transitional support, and follow-up visits. It must be theologically grounded, drawing on the biblical model of shepherding and mutual care within the body of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Relocation, while often framed as a logistical or administrative matter, is fundamentally a pastoral care issue. It presents unique emotional and spiritual challenges to clergy families that, if left unaddressed, undermine the health of both the family and the broader ministry. The biblical mandate to shepherd includes caring for the caregivers, recognizing their vulnerability, and responding with intentional, relational, and holistic pastoral support.

2.19 RELOCATION IN FAITH-BASED OR MISSIONARY CONTEXTS

Relocation within faith-based and missionary contexts has long been a defining feature of religious vocation. Unlike secular forms of relocation driven primarily by economic or political motives, relocation in these contexts is typically perceived as a divine calling or a spiritual mandate. For clergy and missionaries, movement across geographical and cultural boundaries is often tied to the theological imperatives of witness, service, and obedience to divine commission (Bosch 1991:56).

From a theological standpoint, the concept of relocation is rooted in the biblical narratives of Abraham, who left his homeland in obedience to God's call (Genesis 12:1), and of Jesus, whose incarnation and itinerant ministry modelled movement for the sake of mission (John 1:14). The Apostle Paul's missionary journeys further exemplify relocation as central to evangelism, church planting, and cross-cultural engagement. These scriptural foundations have shaped Christian traditions to view relocation not as disruption, but as part of the vocational identity of ministry (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:29).

2.20 HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES OF CLERGY AND MISSIONARY RELOCATION

Historically, missionaries in the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly from Europe and North America, were often sent to regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with the aim of spreading Christianity and establishing mission stations. This form of relocation was frequently long-term or permanent, involving not just individual missionaries but entire families (Walls 1996:24).

These relocations came with multiple challenges. Missionaries had to learn local languages, navigate unfamiliar social hierarchies, and adjust to different climates and diseases, such as malaria. Many missionaries and their family members died within the first few years of relocation, leading to the term "white man's grave" for parts of West Africa (Walls 1996:29). Nonetheless, many persevered, driven by strong theological conviction and organisational support from sending churches and mission boards.

For Roman Catholic clergy, relocation was managed through the missionary arm of the Church, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which coordinated clergy placements globally. Priests from Europe were often sent to colonial territories to establish parishes and schools, a pattern that persisted well into the 20th century. In modern times, this movement has reversed, with many clergy from Africa and Asia now serving in Western countries experiencing clergy shortages (Phiri & Nadar 2010:110).

In South Africa, relocation in missionary contexts was particularly complex due to colonial and apartheid histories. European missionaries, including those from the

Dutch Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Anglican Church, and Catholic orders, often imposed Western cultural norms and theological frameworks on local communities, creating tensions between faith and cultural identity. However, indigenous clergy, such as those in the African Independent Churches (AICs), also engaged in relocation as part of spreading a contextualised African Christianity (Anderson, 2000:17).

Clergy relocation within denominations such as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) continues to follow a stationing system, where ministers are relocated every three or five years across different regions, often crossing ethnic, linguistic, and socio-economic boundaries. This creates both opportunities for spiritual growth and stress for families, especially in rural or culturally unfamiliar areas. The stationing of ministers in the MCSA will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

2.21 MISSIOLOGICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

From a missiological perspective, relocation is not only a logistical activity but also a spiritual discipline involving adaptation, contextual theology, and incarnational ministry (Luzbetak, 1988:57). Missionaries are often trained to “enter the culture” of others, mirroring the incarnational model of Christ, by engaging respectfully with local customs and religious worldviews (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:33). However, despite training, relocation can produce culture shock, identity disruption, and vocational uncertainty, especially when the host context is resistant or radically different from the missionary’s sending culture.

Organisationally, faith-based relocation is governed by ecclesiastical structures such as denominational boards, synods, and mission councils, which coordinate placements, tenure, and transition support. However, studies show that while spiritual preparation is often prioritised, there is less emphasis on psychological readiness, family wellbeing, and reintegration post-assignment, leading to burnout and early departure from mission fields (McConnell 2013:89).

Relocation in faith-based and missionary contexts is both a historical and contemporary phenomenon deeply embedded in the theological and vocational ethos of ministry. While driven by spiritual convictions, it entails significant personal, familial, and cultural transitions that require holistic preparation and support. The historical

experiences of clergy and missionaries, from colonial mission fields to contemporary global deployments, reveal a complex interplay between divine calling and human vulnerability. As such, faith communities must continue to develop frameworks that affirm the spiritual significance of relocation while addressing its practical and emotional implications.

2.22 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This literature review has critically examined the multidimensional phenomenon of relocation, highlighting its complex implications across psychological, sociological, spiritual, and institutional domains. While relocation is often framed as a vocational or organisational necessity, the literature reveals that it can precipitate significant trauma, cultural disorientation, identity disruption, and familial distress, particularly for clergy families who frequently bear the burdens of transition with minimal agency or support. From the psychological and emotional consequences of cultural shock in cross-border deployments, to the historical patterns of missionary relocation, the review has illuminated how relocation not only affects the individual minister but disrupts the entire familial and spiritual ecosystem. The influence of ecclesiastical authority in these decisions, while structurally necessary, often compounds the stress of relocation when exercised without adequate consultation, transparency, or pastoral sensitivity.

Moreover, the theological framing of relocation, as calling, obedience, or sacrifice, while meaningful, has often contributed to the silencing of trauma and grief experienced by clergy and their families. This reinforces the urgent need for ecclesial structures to adopt trauma-informed and family-centred approaches to clergy mobility. Central to this response is the ministry of pastoral care, which emerges from the literature not merely as a supportive practice, but as a theological imperative that affirms the humanity, vulnerability, and resilience of those called to serve.

In conclusion, this chapter has established that relocation is not a neutral or purely logistical event, but a deeply disruptive life transition that requires intentional theological reflection, institutional accountability, and compassionate pastoral engagement. These insights lay a critical foundation for exploring, in subsequent chapters, how clergy and their families experience and navigate relocation in practice, and how faith communities might better support them during these transitions. The report proceeds to Chapter 3 in which the methodology will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter critically reviewed existing literature on the relocation of clergy and the experiences of clergy families, highlighting key insights and gaps in current scholarship. The main purpose of this research is to explore *the* lived experiences of clergy families who undergo repeated relocations, with particular attention to the emotional, social, and spiritual challenges they face. The study also aims to examine the extent to which church structures support these families in their experiences of pain, and how such support may facilitate processes of healing. The overarching goal of the study is to pastorally journey with clergy families who have experienced grief as a result of frequent relocations, particularly those associated with being moved from one circuit or district to another. To address this, the study employs a qualitative research design, selected for its appropriateness in exploring personal and contextual experiences in depth. To achieve this, the researcher utilized the Grief Theory proposed by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) and this was buttressed by Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction Model (1997), which enabled the researcher to "enter the vulnerable space" of the clergy families as they narrate their personal realities encountered during their time of loss and pain. The following areas will be discussed: qualitative approach, research paradigm and the motivation for using these methods, research population, data collection procedure and analysis of data as well as ethical considerations. The research paradigm will be presented first, and this will be followed by the theories.

3.2 THE NATURE OF PARADIGMS

Qualitative researchers typically operate within one of two major paradigms: interpretivism or critical theory. These paradigms are umbrella terms that encompass various theoretical schools of thought (Leavy 2017:129), as seen in the table 3.2.1 below:

Table 3.1: Paradigms and Theological Schools of Thought

Paradigm	Philosophical Assumption	Related Theological/Philosophical Schools of Thought
Positivism	Objective reality exists; knowledge is discovered through observation and measurement	Empiricism, Enlightenment rationalism
Post-positivism	Reality exists but can only be known imperfectly; objectivity is pursued but recognised as partial	Critical realism, Fallibilism
Interpretivism	Reality is socially constructed; understanding is shaped by context and meaning	Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Liberation Theology
Constructivism	Knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participants; emphasis on lived experience	Process Theology, Narrative Theology
Critical Theory	Reality is influenced by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender norms.	Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Black Theology
Postmodernism	Truth is relative and multiple; challenges grand narratives and universal claims	Radical Orthodoxy, Deconstructionism, Queer Theology
Pragmatism	Truth is what works in practice; research is problem-centered and flexible in method choice	Practical Theology, Pastoral Theology
Transformative	Research as a tool for social justice and emancipation; engages with marginalised voices	Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology, Public Theology

SOURCE: (Adapted from Leavy 2017:132)

The critical theory and interpretivist/constructivist paradigms will now be presented in the section that follows:

The critical theory paradigm investigates and ultimately seeks to transform, social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender formations. It treats social reality as historically contingent and saturated with power relations, directing attention to how institutions reproduce advantage and marginality. Methodologically, critical approaches often favour long-term ethnographic and historical analyses of systemic processes and organisational practices (Healy & Perry, 2000). While these tools are valuable for social critique and for sensitising the study to power in church stationing policies, the paradigm is less well suited to the present focus: eliciting the deeply personal, emotional, and spiritual meanings of relocation for clergy families. That idiographic, lived-experience emphasis aligns more closely with an interpretivist, phenomenological design.

In contrast, the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm aligns more closely with the aims of this research. This worldview assumes that individuals actively construct meaning as they engage with the world, and that these meanings are shaped through social interactions, historical context, and cultural norms. Foundational texts such as Berger & Luckmann's, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Lincoln and Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), and more recent works by Crotty (1998), Martens (2010), and Lincoln et al. (2011), have established interpretivism as a central paradigm in qualitative inquiry.

According to Creswell and Creswell (2023:9), those who hold a constructivist worldview believe that "individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things." These meanings are often complex and multiple, requiring the researcher to draw out participants' own interpretations, rather than imposing predetermined categories. Open-ended questions and dialogical engagement are preferred in order to allow meaning to emerge through the participants' own language and perspectives.

Importantly, constructivist researchers recognise that their own backgrounds, values, and experiences influence how they interpret the data. Thus, the researcher does not claim neutrality, but rather enters into a relational, participatory space with the subjects of the study, a key ethical and theological commitment in pastoral research.

As Littlejohn and Foss (2009) explain, interpretivist inquiry may draw on various traditions, including:

- **Hermeneutics:** The interpretation of texts and meaning, often applied in theological and scriptural contexts.
- **Phenomenology:** Understanding lived experience from the first-person perspective.
- **Symbolic Interactionism:** Exploring how shared symbols shape and support social reality.

According to Irshaidat (2019), interpretive research assumes that ideas, norms, and meaning systems shape human action, and that researchers must be “passionate participants”, immersed in and empathetically attuned to the world of those being studied. Healy and Perry (2000), add that researchers must highlight subjectivity and pay close attention to subtle meanings embedded in human experience.

In this study, a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm is adopted because clergy relocation is a complex social process saturated with emotional and spiritual meaning. Ontologically, the paradigm assumes multiple, co-constructed realities; epistemologically, knowledge emerges through dialogical engagement between researcher and participants. As Leavy notes, it is well suited to understanding how people generate and reconstruct meaning through everyday interactions (Leavy, 2017:129). Methodologically, this orientation supports qualitative, phenomenological interviewing and context-attentive interpretation. Such alignment enables nuanced accounts from clergy spouses and adult children, illuminating how relocation is experienced, narrated, and negotiated within family systems and ecclesial settings.

This approach aligns with the pastoral theological aim of this study: to uncover how clergy relocation has shaped the lives of clergy families, particularly in relation to grief, trauma, and spiritual disruption.

3.2.1 The Interpretivist/Constructivist Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm has its philosophical roots in phenomenology, particularly the work of Edmund Husserl, and hermeneutics, as articulated by Wilhelm Dilthey (Kawulich & Chilisa 2012:9). It emphasizes how individuals engage in meaning-making through interactions within their sociocultural and spiritual contexts.

According to Leavy, “the inquirer’s voice is that of the ‘passionate participant’ ... actively engaged in facilitating the ‘multivoice’ reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants.” (2017:129). Similarly, Guba and Lincoln emphasise that reality is socially constructed and interpreted through interaction (1994:110). For this study, understanding the trauma of clergy families resulting from repeated relocation required entering their emotional and spiritual space to allow them to narrate their own stories, often marked by loneliness, disconnection, and loss.

3.2.2 Key Assumptions of the Interpretivist Paradigm:

- **Ontology:** Reality is understood as subjective, socially constructed, and mind dependent. Interpretivists view people as creative agents who construct their own social worlds (Dammak 2018:5). Therefore, understanding clergy families' pain requires immersing oneself in their natural environment to see through their eyes.
- **Epistemology:** Knowledge is subjective, contextual, and shaped by culture and history. Constructivists believe that truth is not universal but grounded in human experience (Kawulich & Chilisa 2012:10). Thus, interviews allow clergy families to define what their reality feels like, not what others assume it to be.
- **Axiology:** The research process is value laden. Since reality and knowledge are socially constructed, the researcher cannot remain detached but must acknowledge their values and personal background in shaping interpretation (Kawulich & Chilisa 2012:10).
- **Methodology:** Interpretivist methodology favours naturalistic settings, allowing participants to tell their stories in their own words and on their own terms. As Cohen et al. (2003:19, in Dammak 2018:6) argue, “The social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action.” The researcher’s role is not to stand apart but to walk alongside the participants as a co-interpreter of meaning.

Within this paradigm, the relocation of clergy is understood not merely as an event, but as an existential and spiritual rupture, a process of reconstructing a world of meaning disrupted by repeated, complicated losses. While many people are able to

return to pre-loss functioning after disruption, clergy families often remain in a cycle of unresolved grief, compounded by the ongoing and often involuntary nature of their relocations.

By prioritising the subjective experiences of clergy families and listening deeply to the multiple meanings they assign to relocation, grief, and identity, this paradigm allows for a nuanced, compassionate, and theologically sensitive interpretation. It also provides a foundation for developing a healing pastoral model, helping families re-establish a coherent narrative that integrates their experiences of loss while offering a vision for spiritual and emotional restoration.

With the above in mind, the two theories and how they will assist the researcher to journey with the grieving clergy families will be unpacked, starting with the Five Stages of Grief by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), in the context of relocation.

3.3 RESEARCH THEORIES

3.3.1 Stages of Grief and Loss in the Context of Clergy Relocation

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross proposed a psychological model outlining five stages people may experience when confronting death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (1969). Developed from work with terminally ill patients, the framework was subsequently extended to encompass broader experiences of loss, including bereavement, serious illness, divorce, organizational change, and other life transitions (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). It remains influential in pastoral and clinical grief work.

Although initially developed for end-of-life care, the underlying principle, that loss triggers profound emotional responses, applies to non-death losses, such as the disruption and dislocation brought about by frequent clergy relocation. In pastoral contexts, particularly within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, relocation can result in the loss of familiar community, support systems, stable employment for the clergy spouse, consistent education for children, and established social identities. These disruptions can evoke grief responses similar to those associated with bereavement, making the Kübler-Ross model relevant to the pastoral care of clergy families navigating relocation.

3.3.1.1 Denial

Denial in bereavement often shows as the mind's refusal to accept that a loved one will not return. On first receiving the news, many experience shock and numbness, typical early features of denial, especially after a sudden or unexpected death. In the context of relocation, denial may manifest as disbelief or minimisation of the impact of the move, particularly in families accustomed to frequent transfers. A clergy spouse might continue preparing family routines as if the relocation will not happen, or a child may resist saying goodbye to friends, believing the family will return. Denial functions as a psychological buffer, enabling individuals to process the change gradually.

This stage is especially pronounced in dual-career families, where one spouse may struggle to accept the loss of a stable job, professional network, or career trajectory. Like the bereavement experience, storytelling and narrative sharing can assist clergy families in gradually confronting the reality of loss (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:8–10).

The researcher remembers the experience of denial when a patient she was nursing in the Intensive Care Unit was informed of a diagnosis of cancer. The patient closed her eyes and was in a sleep mode for three days. She was hoping to die in her sleep. When she opened her eyes on the fourth day her first words were, "hoekom is ek nie dood nie", the Afrikaans meaning of "how come I am not dead". At this stage, a pastoral caregiver can accompany the mourner with steady presence and pacing, supporting them until they begin to orient themselves within the reality of the loss.

As engagement with the circumstances deepens, awareness of the loss becomes clearer and harder to dismiss. Acceptance, though a necessary step toward healing, can surface previously muted emotions and may initially intensify the pain. According to Kübler-Ross and Kessler, "This is what might trigger anger," (2005:11), which is the following step.

3.3.1.2 Anger

Relocation-related anger may be directed at the church institution, the clergy member, or even God. A spouse may feel resentful for having to sacrifice personal career goals or social ties, while children may lash out over disrupted schooling or friendships. This

anger often masks deeper emotions of helplessness, fear, or rejection, and may be amplified in cases where the family feels excluded from decision-making processes. In religious contexts, this anger may be spiritualised. Clergy spouses or children might ask, *“Why did God call us to a ministry that keeps tearing our family apart?”* This reaction, while painful, is part of the emotional reorganisation process. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler observe, “Anger becomes the bridge over the open sea” (2005:16), offering a tangible way to reconnect with others, even when the underlying loss is not fully understood.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler counsel, “Do not bottle up anger inside. Instead, explore it” (2005:16). Anger can be expressed through healthy channels, naming it, speaking it in safe pastoral or therapeutic conversations, and directing its energy into reflective practices, so it does not corrode relationships. Unmanaged anger often isolates the bereaved; friends and family may withdraw, and the mourner can feel further alienated. For this reason, those closest to the bereaved should be encouraged to exercise patience, avoid taking expressions of anger personally, and resist the impulse to hurry recovery. Pressuring a person to “get over it” tends to prolong healing, whereas allowing emotions to unfold at a humane pace supports genuine integration (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:16). Over time, the fatigue that accompanies sustained anger can open space for reconsideration, prompting the bereaved to seek alternative ways of coping, often moving next into the dynamics of bargaining.

3.3.1.3 Bargaining

Bargaining within clergy families may take the form of internal negotiations: “If I support this relocation, maybe we can settle in the next town longer,” or “Maybe the church will compensate with better housing.” Others may direct their bargaining towards God, promising more faithful ministry or submission in exchange for stability.

This phase is often characterised by guilt, especially among clergy spouses who feel responsible for their children’s emotional wellbeing, or for not resisting the transfer more forcefully. While bargaining may offer temporary comfort, it also highlights the underlying sense of powerlessness families feel when they lack autonomy over relocation decisions (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:17–20).

3.3.1.4 Depression

As the reality of relocation sets in, disrupted careers, loss of friendships, and distance from extended family, feelings of sadness, detachment, and even despair may emerge. This non-clinical depression is a natural response to significant life change and reflects the mourning of what has been lost (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:21–23). Depression after loss is too often construed as an abnormality to be eliminated. A more constructive starting point is to ask whether the situation itself is genuinely depressing. Within clergy relocation, for example, the disruption of roles, routines, and belonging can constitute a real loss of identity. In such contexts, depressive affect is a common, understandable response rather than pathology; it signals the weight of what has been lost and invites compassionate, paced accompaniment (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:20–21).

According to “Depression is a state of low mood [and] dislike to activity that can affect a person’s thoughts and behaviour” (2022:24). In clergy families, this may manifest in withdrawal from church life, reluctance to engage with the new community, or passive resistance to settling in. Depression may also be particularly acute for spouses who have given up meaningful work or social standing due to relocation. While not pathological, this stage must be recognised and supported, especially through empathetic pastoral care.

3.3.1.5 Acceptance

Acceptance in the context of relocation does not imply full contentment but rather a coming to terms with the new reality. Families begin to re-establish routines, build new relationships, and adjust to the current placement. Acceptance may include embracing the spiritual meaning of their journey, seeing the relocation as part of their ministry calling, even if it remains emotionally complex.

Importantly, acceptance enables adaptation, allowing clergy families to invest in their new community without denying the pain of transition. Over time, they learn to find meaning in the disruption and move forward with resilience (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:25). Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s model offers valuable insight for pastoral caregivers supporting clergy families. It validates the emotional impact of relocation and encourages empathetic, non-judgmental accompaniment through each phase of

transition. When contextualised appropriately, the model becomes a tool not only for grief support but for navigating the spiritual and emotional terrain of ministerial life.

The work of Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) provides a valuable framework for understanding the stages of grief and the emotional processes individuals often experience during loss. However, while their model describes these stages effectively, it does not offer a pastoral or therapeutic methodology for accompanying grieving individuals on their journey toward healing. It is at this point that Pollard's (1997) model of Positive Deconstruction becomes particularly relevant. His approach offers a structured and redemptive framework through which those experiencing grief, such as clergy families affected by relocation, can begin to examine, reconstruct, and find meaning in their experiences of loss.

3.3.2 Pollard's Positive Deconstruction Model

Frequent relocations experienced by clergy families often result in a series of cumulative losses, leading to profound emotional grief. In many cases, these families endure sorrow in silence, lacking the appropriate platforms for expressing their pain. While the Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) model of grief is foundational to this study, Nick Pollard's (1997) model of *positive deconstruction* offers a complementary framework, particularly as a healing model for journeying with grieving clergy families.

Pollard's conceptualisation of positive deconstruction emerged from his personal experience as a student. He purchased two damaged cars of the same make and model, one with mechanical issues and another wrecked in an accident. By dismantling both vehicles and critically evaluating each part, he reassembled a functional car using only the best components (Pollard 1997:44–45). He likens this to a process of engaging with human beliefs: disassembling assumptions, identifying what is valuable, and reconstructing a more resilient worldview. This metaphor provides a profound analogy for pastoral care, particularly when engaging with clergy families who are experiencing trauma due to relocation. Just as Pollard reconstructed a functioning vehicle from broken parts, grieving individuals can reconstruct a more resilient faith framework by identifying, retaining, and integrating the most life-giving aspects of their beliefs.

In applying this model to the relocation context, the clergy families' stories of loss, sadness, and confusion are not merely to be heard but also dissected and re-evaluated. The model enables a process of self-reflection and healing by examining deeply held beliefs, as Pollard notes: "I ask them what they believe, why they believe it and what difference it makes to their lives. Ultimately, I'm trying to help them discover the inadequacies of the ideas they've adopted" (Pollard 1997:44).

The concept of *deconstruction*, from the Latin vocabulary "de" (removal or separation) and "struere" (to build), suggests the intentional dismantling of existing frameworks to rebuild stronger foundations (Dlamini, 2016:44). This aligns with the aim of this study: to enter into the stories of grieving clergy families and examine the meanings they attach to loss due to relocation, thereby facilitating healing through narrative and reflection. As Winter and Hawthorne contend, stories mirror the entirety of human experience, integrating fact and feeling (1999:405).

Pollard cautions, however, that errors in deconstruction may occur, such as discarding valuable beliefs or over-relying on the model without considering the role of divine grace (1997:47). He insists that deconstruction alone is insufficient: "Without Christ, you can do nothing" (cf. John 15:4, NRSV). Thus, positive deconstruction must be accompanied by prayer, sound theology, sincere relationships, and pastoral sensitivity.

Pollard outlines four critical elements of the deconstruction process as follows:

1. Identifying the Underlying World view

This step involves discerning the implicit worldviews held by individuals, which often shape behaviour and thought unconsciously (Pollard, 1997:18). Clergy families impacted by grief may not be fully aware of the beliefs shaping their reactions to loss. These worldviews may stem from religious instruction, cultural contexts, or institutional influence (e.g. denominational traditions, Christian schooling, media). The pastoral task is therefore to create safe spaces where grieving individuals can name and explore their underlying assumptions.

2. Analysing the Underlying Worldview

Pollard critiques relativism for its internal inconsistency: asserting that "there is no absolute truth" is itself an absolute claim. He further contends that, despite its surface

appeal, relativism fails to account for the presence of genuine absolutes in human experience and reasoning (Pollard, 1997:65). Clergy families believe that sharing their inner trauma will have a negative impact on the role of the clergy family member and might affect his ministry. Therefore, they choose to be silent and keep the pain to themselves, leading to the ongoing grief.

Once a worldview is identified, it must be examined against three philosophical criteria (Pollard, 1997:52–54):

- Coherence: Does the worldview make logical sense?
- Correspondence: Does it align with reality?
- Pragmatic Value: Does it work in practice?

For instance, families affected by clergy relocation may initially hold on to beliefs that no longer serve them in their new reality. Examining their assumptions, such as the belief that their spiritual community will always be present, can reveal where disillusionment has occurred. Pollard's (1997:54) story of the politician using a backpack instead of a parachute illustrates the dangers of misplaced belief: no matter how strongly one believes in an idea, it must correspond to reality to be effective.

3. Affirming the Elements of Truth

Pastoral carers must be prepared to recognise elements of truth even within non-Christian or alternative worldviews. Pollard examines whether relativism works and concludes that relativists have been able to derive personal truths from propositional truths. He emphasises the importance of experiencing truth in addition to knowing truth (Pollard 1997:67). It is essential to understand that hiding the struggles of relocation can adversely affect clergy families and the clergy member and may result in the congregation being the victims of this trauma. By speaking up and sharing their own experiences, the clergy families can help themselves by getting the support and healing needed in their situations. The researcher notes that clergy families often felt abandoned by the Church during despite their previous experiences of it as a supportive community. The aim is to journey with clergy families toward healing by affirming their perceptions while gently guiding them toward more sustainable and life-affirming truths.

4. Identifying Error

Through this reflective process, errors or harmful beliefs can also be revealed (Pollard, 1997:56). This can be an uncomfortable but necessary step. As an example, the researcher recalls the worldview in the Methodist Church that women cannot lead, a belief she herself once held. Whenever elections were held and a woman's name was nominated, the researcher would vote for the male contestant. Theological education allowed her to deconstruct this assumption and adopt a more inclusive, and informed view. Likewise, clergy families may hold onto unexamined views, about God, suffering, or identity, that hinder healing and need to be gently deconstructed.

Pollard's Positive Deconstruction Model, used alongside the Kübler-Ross and Kessler's grief framework, forms the dual-theoretical foundation of this study. Together, they offer both a diagnostic and healing lens through which to understand the lived emotional and spiritual experiences of clergy families navigating the upheaval of relocation.

The researcher is certain that both Kübler-Ross and Kessler and Pollard's methods would be helpful in assisting the clergy families who are enduring pain due to relocation. The two theories will still require a process of gathering information from the clergy families who are impacted by relocation. The researcher seeks to use the qualitative approach as a method of data collection and to support the ideas of Kübler-Ross & Kessler and Pollard in order to accomplish this. The qualitative research method will be presented in the section that follows.

3.4 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The researcher employed a **qualitative research methodology** for this investigation. As Bazeley aptly asks, "When you have decided upon your goal, the question becomes: how are you going to get there?" (2013:8). This question marks the beginning of methodological reflection. She goes on to describe research methods as "tools employed by a researcher to investigate a problem, to find out what is going on there" (Bazeley 2013:8). This insight is particularly helpful in illuminating the complex and deeply personal experiences of clergy families affected by relocation.

Qualitative methodology is well-suited for this study, as it seeks "to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves. The primary goal of studies using

this approach is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining, human behaviour” (Babbie & Mouton 2001:270). Bazeley reinforces this perspective by stating that qualitative researchers focus on “observing, describing, interpreting, and analysing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them.” (2023:4). Swinton and Mowat highlight the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research designs (2006:56), (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Designs

Aspect	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Philosophical Assumptions	Positivist or post-positivist worldview	Interpretivist or constructivist worldview
Purpose	To test hypotheses, identify cause-effect relationships, and generalise findings	To explore meaning and context and human experience
Nature of Reality (Ontology)	Reality is objective, measurable, and exists independently	Reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed
Researcher’s Role	Detached and objective observer	Involved, reflexive, and co-constructs meaning with participants
Data Collection Methods	Structured instruments (e.g., surveys, experiments, statistical tools)	Unstructured or semi-structured methods (e.g., interviews, observations)
Type of Data	Numerical and quantifiable data	Textual and descriptive data
Data Analysis Approach	Deductive reasoning and statistical analysis	Inductive reasoning and thematic analysis
Expected Outcomes	Generalisable, measurable, and predictive results	In-depth, contextual, and nuanced understanding

Validity and Reliability	Emphasis on objectivity, reliability, and replicability	Emphasis on credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity
Generalisability	Aims for broad generalisation of results	Context-specific insights, not typically generalisable

Source: (Adapted from Swinton & Mowat, 2006:56)

While quantitative research seeks statistical generalisations, qualitative research interprets meaning through narratives and observable behaviour, particularly as experienced in lived human contexts. Qualitative research is thus not simply a method of inquiry but a set of interrelated strategies for data collection and analysis. These include methods such as purposive sampling, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and narrative analysis, each of which facilitates access to the participant's inner world (Babbie & Mouton 2001:270). In this study, **purposive sampling** was used to select clergy families with direct experience of relocation, a strategy to be discussed in further detail in the following section.

To gain a deeper understanding of the trauma experienced by clergy families in the context of relocation, a qualitative research approach has been selected. This methodology is particularly appropriate, as it facilitates an exploration of the inner emotional landscapes, including trauma, psychological wounds, and unspoken experiences that often accompany frequent clergy relocations. Quantitative methods, by contrast, may not adequately capture these complex and nuanced dimensions of human experience. Understanding the emotional and relational dynamics at play is essential for shedding light on the broader implications of clergy relocation for the family unit. When rigorously applied, the qualitative approach serves as a powerful tool for investigating questions of meaning, emotion, and lived experience. The central research question guiding this study is: *Why does the church disrupt clergy families by reappointing clergy every three to five years to different locations?* While relocation directly affects the clergy member, it arguably has an even more profound and lasting impact on their family.

Swinton and Mowat assert that qualitative research “assumes that the world is not simply ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered. Rather, it recognises ‘the world’ as a locus of complex interpretive processes within which human beings struggle to make sense of their experiences, including their experiences of God” (2016:30). This view aligns

with the theological underpinnings of this study, which takes seriously the spiritual dimensions of grief, loss, and faith within the context of clergy relocation. Entering the lived space of clergy families who have experienced relocation-related trauma allowed the researcher to listen attentively to their pain and perspectives. Through in-person, semi-structured interviews, the researcher had direct and meaningful contact with participants. Best affirms the value of this approach, noting that “one of the most common ways of getting people to give information is to ask them for it”, especially when exploring emotional states, beliefs, and witnessed events (2012:78). In this study, the interviews became sacred spaces where some participants, the wives and children of clergy, were able to name their pain and brokenness, often for the first time.

This deeply relational and emotionally charged process allowed participants to speak in their own words, expressing their lived experiences and interpretations without imposition from the researcher (Duffy, Wong, & Moritsugu 2010:45). Each narrative was inherently subjective and deeply contextual, shaped by unique histories of loss. Such subjectivity is not a limitation but a strength, one that offers a rich and meaningful alternative to the objectivity sought in quantitative research (Creswell 2013). It gave voice to those who had previously remained unheard and allowed for a therapeutic encounter within the research itself.

The clergy families selected for this study included spouses and adult children (18 years and older) who are members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), specifically within the Limpopo District. Their contributions, alongside a review of the literature, formed the core data for this investigation. This qualitative methodology was particularly appropriate because it allows for the study of attitudes, behaviours, and emotions within their natural settings, rather than artificial or controlled environments (Babbie & Mouton 2001:270). The experiences of pain and grief related to relocation are best understood not through abstraction but through direct engagement and empathetic observation within the participants’ homes. Asking questions in these contexts allowed participants to share not only their views, but also their feelings, sometimes revealing their struggles indirectly, through tone, silence, or emotional expression.

Ultimately, the narratives of clergy families are central to this research. Their stories offer a theologically rich and emotionally authentic perspective on how relocation

impacts identity, belonging, and spiritual well-being. This study embraces a holistic, pastoral approach to the research process, guided by a belief system that values relational truth, incarnational presence, and the healing power of storytelling.

3.5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGNS

Creswell identifies five main qualitative research designs: case study, narrative inquiry, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (2013:69). These designs are forms of inquiry within the qualitative paradigm that offer specific direction for research procedures. This study critically considered each of these traditions and selected the most suitable approach for addressing its aims and context. The designs will now be discussed.

3.5.1 Case Study

A case study focuses on the in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple bounded cases within a defined time and space. Stake defines a case as a “bounded system,” meaning the case is constrained by context, participants, and period, (1995:2 as cited in Creswell (2013:97). A case study seeks to understand the complexity and uniqueness of a particular phenomenon through varied data sources, including interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials.

However, this design is not appropriate for the current study. The aim is not to focus on a unique or bounded case of clergy relocation, but rather to explore the broader, lived experiences of multiple clergy families affected by repeated relocations. These experiences are not uniform or generalisable, nor are they restricted to a single context, period, or culture. Thus, a case study approach would unnecessarily limit the depth and variation of experiences captured in this research.

3.5.2 Narrative Approach

Narrative inquiry involves collecting and analysing individuals' stories, whether as a method or as a phenomenon itself (Creswell 2013:70–75; Bloomberg & Volpe 2016:50–51). It focuses on how people recount their lived experiences and is often used in biographical or life history studies. Narrative inquiry values voice, memory, and

meaning, elements which can be therapeutic for participants, particularly in the context of loss and trauma.

While narrative methods are compatible with the pastoral concern of this research, the primary aim is not just to gather stories, but to understand the underlying structures of grief and loss experienced by clergy families due to relocation. Phenomenology is therefore more appropriate, as it allows for the emergence of shared themes and meanings across multiple narratives. Nevertheless, the narrative process, the telling and retelling of stories, remains an important healing component in this research. As Hamman (2000) notes, storytelling can function as a “work of mourning,” creating space for brokenness to be named and shared.

3.5.3 Ethnography

Ethnography is rooted in anthropology and sociology and focuses on studying shared patterns of behaviour, language, and actions of an intact cultural group over time, within their natural setting (Creswell 2013:90–96). It relies heavily on prolonged engagement, participant observation, and immersion in a particular cultural context.

While clergy families may share some theological values, they differ in ethnicity, culture, denomination, and context. The diversity of participants’ backgrounds across various circuits and districts of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) makes ethnography unsuitable for this study. The goal is not to study a unified cultural group, but rather the common emotional and spiritual impact of relocation across diverse pastoral families.

3.5.4 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory aims to develop theory that is inductively derived from participants’ data. It employs systematic, iterative procedures, coding, categorising, and constant comparison, to generate explanatory accounts of processes or patterned actions (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013:83–89). Charmaz describes it as “systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories grounded in the data themselves” (2014).

Although grounded theory was considered, the purpose of this study is not to build a new theory, but to deeply explore and interpret the lived experiences and meaning-

making processes of clergy families who have experienced grief through repeated relocation. The primary intent is pastoral and interpretive, rather than theoretical. However, the insights from grounded theory, particularly the constant comparative method and attention to emerging patterns, will inform the data analysis process later in the study.

3.5.5 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the qualitative design selected for this research. Rooted in philosophy and psychology, phenomenology seeks to describe and understand the essence of lived experience as perceived by individuals such as, (Giorgi 2009; Moustakas 1994). The goal is to uncover shared meanings and essential structures that underlie personal experiences of a given phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon is grief and loss experienced by clergy families due to repeated relocation. The phenomenological method allows the researcher to listen empathetically and theologically to these experiences, giving voice to the spiritual and emotional disruptions caused by uprooting. It also recognises the subjectivity and intentionality of human experience, essential for a pastoral theology that honours narrative, trauma, and spiritual formation.

This study adopts a hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenological research design, located within a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. While phenomenology traditionally includes the practice of epoché or bracketing, this study does not pursue transcendental phenomenology in the strict Husserlian sense. Instead, it follows an interpretive phenomenological approach that acknowledges that lived experiences are always understood within particular social, cultural, historical, and theological contexts. within particular social, (Creswell 2013:76–77).

Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the researcher enters the life-worlds of clergy wives and children and seeks to interpret the meanings they attribute to relocation, grief, resilience, calling, and identity. Reflexivity is maintained through critical self-awareness rather than complete bracketing, recognising that the researcher's pastoral and theological positioning forms part of the interpretive process.

This approach is congruent with the study's pastoral-theological aim: not merely to describe experiences, but to accompany clergy families in naming their pain, making

meaning of loss, and contributing to a healing model that can support others navigating similar journeys. The study therefore prioritises meaning-making, interpretation, and contextual understanding over phenomenological reduction.

In this study, clergy wives and children from different circuits within the Limpopo District are interviewed to explore their lived experiences of relocation resulting from the stationing of clergy family members. Below is a summary the paradigms with justifications on the chosen one.

3.5.6 Summary of Recommendations:

- **Case Study:** Rejected, too restricted for the study's broader aim.
- **Narrative Inquiry:** Valuable but secondary stories are a part of the healing process, but the study is not focused only on story analysis.
- **Ethnography:** Rejected, participants do not form a single cultural group.
- **Grounded Theory:** Considered but not selected, focus of study is not on theory generation but experience interpretation.
- **Phenomenology (interpretive hermeneutic):** Chosen, best suited to deeply explore the lived, spiritual, and emotional experiences of clergy families.

3.6 EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING

This study is grounded in a constructivist epistemological stance, which aligns with its interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach. Epistemology, in this context, refers to the researcher's assumptions about how knowledge is acquired and understood. Constructivist epistemology holds that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed through human interaction, experience, and interpretation within a specific context (Scotland, 2012:9).

In examining the relocation of clergy and its impact on the family, this study recognises that the realities experienced by clergy families are not uniform or objectively measurable. Instead, these realities are shaped by personal, relational, cultural, and ecclesial factors that influence how individuals perceive and respond to relocation. As such, the knowledge produced in this study emerges from the lived experiences of participants and the meanings they attach to those experiences. Guba and Lincoln

assert that from a constructivist position, “realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based.” (1994:113)

This epistemological perspective places emphasis on the voices and experiences of clergy families as valid sources of insight into the psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual consequences of relocation. It further acknowledges the relational dynamic between the researcher and the participants. Rather than remaining a detached observer, the researcher enters into a reflective and interpretive engagement with participants, co-constructing meaning through dialogue and empathetic listening.

By embracing this epistemological position, the study creates space for depth, nuance, and complexity, allowing for a faithful representation of the clergy family’s narratives. These narratives are situated within broader ecclesial and cultural frameworks, acknowledging both individual and communal dimensions of meaning-making. This approach affirms the theological and pastoral significance of lived experience, particularly in times of transition, grief, and adaptation.

The epistemological underpinning of this study therefore supports the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, as these are best suited to exploring the subjective realities and rich personal stories of clergy families navigating the challenges of relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA).

3.7 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, define a population as “the study object and [it] consists of individuals, groups, organizations, human products and events or the conditions to which they are exposed”(2003:52). Understanding the population is vital because “a research problem relates to a specific population, and the population encompasses the total collection of all units of analysis about which the researcher wishes to make specific conclusions” (Welman et al. 2003:52). In qualitative research, the population is not used for statistical generalisation but rather to provide access to individuals with rich, contextualised experiences that illuminate the central phenomenon being studied.

For this study, the population comprised wives and children of clergy serving in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), specifically within the Limpopo District. These individuals were purposefully identified based on their direct experience with repeated relocations due to the stationing and redeployment of the clergy family member. Their experiences are central to understanding the emotional, social, and spiritual impact of such relocations on family dynamics.

The population was selected with the aim of gaining insight into how recurrent moves disrupt relationships, personal identity, and family cohesion, and to explore how pastoral care structures, or the lack thereof, either ease or compound the grief experienced by these families. By focusing on clergy families within the MCSA, the study engages with a clearly defined group whose experiences, though context-specific, are reflective of broader issues faced by ministry families within itinerant systems.

This choice of population also reflects the researcher's commitment to journeying with those affected by ministry-related transitions in a way that is pastorally sensitive, theologically grounded, and methodologically sound.

3.8 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

Babbie and Mouton, define sampling as "the process of selecting observations," (2001:154), a crucial step in qualitative research that ensures participants are well-positioned to offer insight into the phenomenon under study. Creswell clarifies that the aim of qualitative inquiry is not to generalise to an entire population but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of a central phenomenon, (2013:206). In the context of this study, the central phenomenon is the impact of clergy relocation on the clergy family, particularly from a pastoral and emotional perspective.

The research was conducted within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), specifically in the Limpopo District. This region was chosen for its accessibility to the researcher, who is serving in the Pretoria Central Circuit, one of the circuits within this district. This proximity enabled the researcher to engage meaningfully with participants while maintaining appropriate ethical boundaries. Recognising that the researcher is known to some of the clergy families, the principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent were strictly upheld.

Prior to data collection, an information document was provided to all identified participants. It outlined the study's aims, affirmed confidentiality, and explained that pseudonyms would be used to protect participants and their congregations. The document clarified that participation was entirely voluntary; individuals could decline to answer any question and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. It further stated that no monetary compensation or gifts would be offered. Data would be stored securely, accessible only to the researcher (and, where necessary, the supervisor) for research purposes and reporting in anonymised form.

3.8.1 Purposive sampling

In qualitative research, sampling is not intended to achieve statistical generalisation to a wider population; rather, it seeks rich, in-depth insight from participants who are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002:230). Aligned with this study's epistemological and methodological orientation, purposive sampling was employed to identify participants able to provide detailed, contextually grounded accounts of relocation as it is lived within clergy families.

Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgemental or criterion-based sampling, is a non-probability technique widely used in qualitative inquiry. It involves the intentional selection of participants based on characteristics, experiences, or knowledge that directly serve the study's aims (Palinkas et al., 2015:534). For this project, inclusion criteria centred on clergy families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) who had undergone one or more relocations because of ecclesiastical decisions. Priority was given to families who had experienced multiple moves and who were willing to reflect on the personal, relational, and spiritual implications of these transitions. This ensured that participants could speak meaningfully to both the immediate disruptions and the cumulative effects of repeated relocation across the family life course.

Using purposive sampling directed attention to "information-rich" cases. Participants were not randomly chosen but deliberately selected for their capacity to articulate experience and perspective with nuance. This approach is particularly appropriate here, as the study aims to illuminate complex emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual dynamics associated with clergy relocation—matters that require thoughtful

reflection and subjective interpretation rather than statistical representativeness. In this way, purposive sampling privileges depth over breadth, enables inclusion of diverse yet relevant trajectories, and supports comparative insight across spouses and adult children, thereby strengthening the credibility and transferability of the study's findings within similar ecclesial contexts.

Other qualitative sampling methods were considered but deemed less suitable for the aims of this study. For instance:

- **Snowball sampling**—which relies on participant referrals, could have expanded the sample but risked limiting diversity or reinforcing particular perspectives.
- **Theoretical sampling**, often used in grounded theory, involves sampling driven by emerging concepts during data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014:96). While valuable in theory-building, it was not fully appropriate here since this study did not follow a grounded theory approach.
- **Convenience sampling**, which selects participants based on accessibility, was also unsuitable, as it may compromise the depth and relevance of the data gathered.

In contrast, purposive sampling aligns with the study's goal to gain meaningful insights from those who have first-hand knowledge of the relocation process and its effects. This sampling method also honours the voices of clergy families, ensuring that their narratives are centred as legitimate and valuable sources of knowledge within both pastoral and theological reflection.

Ultimately, this sampling strategy ensured that the participants' lived realities, especially those marked by loss, transition, adaptation, and resilience, were captured with depth, empathy, and contextual sensitivity.

3.8.2 Sample Size and Justification in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalisability; instead, it seeks depth, richness, and complexity of understanding (Mason, 2010:1). As such, sample size in this paradigm is determined not by numerical representativeness but by the

potential to yield sufficient insight into the research questions through information-rich cases.

In this study, a total of 24 participants were selected through purposive sampling. These participants included wives of clergy and children who had experienced relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The decision to limit the sample size to a manageable number was influenced by both practical considerations and methodological rigour. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006:61), data saturation in qualitative research can be reached with as few as 6–12 interviews, particularly when participants are relatively homogeneous and the focus of inquiry is specific.

Furthermore, data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerge, served as a guiding principle. During data collection and early analysis, it became evident that the key themes surrounding emotional stress, family disruption, vocational strain, and spiritual interpretation were consistently recurring. This suggested that a sufficient depth of understanding had been reached with the selected sample. A smaller, focused sample size also allowed for in-depth engagement with each participant's narrative, in keeping with the study's interpretivist/constructivist orientation. In qualitative inquiry, the goal is not to cover a broad population but to "understand how participants make meaning of their experience in context" (Creswell & Poth, 2018:160). This approach honours the subjective realities of clergy families and ensures that their unique stories are analysed with the sensitivity and attention they deserve.

Therefore, the sample size in this study is justified by the richness of the data collected, the attainment of thematic saturation, and the epistemological commitment to depth rather than breadth.

3.9 DATA COLLECTION

In qualitative research, a range of strategies is employed to acquire rich, in-depth data. Bazeley states that "researchers engaging in a qualitative study focus on observing, describing, interpreting, and analysing the way people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them (2013:4)." Similarly, Creswell and

Creswell, note that qualitative researchers typically gather data through multiple sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual material, rather than relying on a single source of evidence (2023:193).

This process of triangulation, as Bloomberg and Volpe affirm, enhances the credibility and dependability of a study. They maintain that “triangulation strengthens the study by combining methods and is an important strategy for enhancing the quality of data from multiple sources” (2019:193). Therefore, in this study, the researcher employed multiple strategies to gather data, namely: document analysis, observation, and interviews. These were complemented by insights drawn from the literature review.

As Bloomberg and Volpe further highlight, qualitative interviews offer a means to “capture a person’s perspective on an event or experience” (2019:193). The researcher concurs with this understanding, particularly in light of the deeply personal, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of clergy family relocation. As such, the lived experiences and narratives of participants are vital in portraying the underlying issues connected to grief, identity loss, adaptation, and healing. Each method employed is briefly discussed below.

3.9.1 Document Analysis

Bloomberg and Volpe define a document as broadly encompassing written records, visual images, artefacts, and archival material (2019:196). Babbie and Mouton (2001:5–6) emphasise that document analysis allows the researcher to engage with what has already been theorised and empirically discovered in their field, and to draw from the tools and frameworks used by other scholars.

According to Welman *et al*, reviewing relevant documents is essential for identifying research gaps, validating existing knowledge, and discerning new perspectives on the topic at hand (2005:38). This is particularly important in pastoral theological research, where church policies, denominational records, historical narratives, and theological reflections provide foundational insights into both context and praxis.

Strengths of Documents (Christensen, Burke Johnson & Turner 2015:77):

- They provide insight into what people think and do;
- They can include historical data, useful for longitudinal analysis;

- They offer background on people, groups, and institutions;
- They support triangulation and corroboration;
- They are rooted in specific local settings and contexts;

Weaknesses of Documents:

- They may be incomplete or biased.
- They may represent only a single perspective.
- Access can be limited or restricted.
- They may not fully reflect participants' personal or emotional perspectives.
- Their findings may not be generalisable.

In this study, document analysis was employed to examine scholarly literature and ecclesiastical material related to clergy relocation, pastoral care, grief, and family systems. These sources were analysed to uncover both academic understandings and pastoral implications, and to support the development of a pastoral model of healing and support for clergy families in transition.

3.9.2 Interviews

Interviews are widely recognised as a central method of data collection in qualitative research because they enable close exploration of perceptions, emotions, and lived experience (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Bloomberg and Volpe highlight their value for capturing participants' "perceptions, attitudes, emotions, [and] perspectives" regarding the phenomenon under inquiry (2019:153). Brinkmann further notes that interviews, being naturally conversational, allow participants to engage in meaning-making within familiar social processes (2012; 2013, in Leavy, 2017:139). In-depth, face-to-face formats are especially apt for sensitive themes, such as grief, loss, spiritual disorientation, and adaptation, because they provide a safe space for participants to speak openly.

The interviewer's role is therefore pivotal. Babbie and Mouton (2001:249) stress that the interviewer guides a structured conversation toward the research purpose, while Gillham defines an interview as "a conversation where one person, the interviewer, is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person, the interviewee"

(2000:1). Consistent with this, unstructured interviews are designed to elicit deep insight into how individuals experience their world (Welman et al., 2005:198), and the interviewer initiates, facilitates, and draws out meaningful responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:193). Questions should be directed to the participant's experiences, feelings, and convictions on the theme at hand (Welman et al., 2005:198).

Interviews can be conducted in several formats. **Structured** interviews follow a standardised guide, often with predominantly predetermined questions (including closed-ended items), to enhance comparability across respondents and minimise interviewer influence (Fontana & Frey, 1994:361; cf. Grix, 2010:127–128; Bless et al., 2013:194; see Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:155). **Unstructured** interviews are open, conversational, and respondent-led, supporting discovery of participants' meanings in their own terms (Welman et al., 2005:198). Between these, **semi-structured** interviews employ a flexible topic guide with largely open-ended prompts, balancing consistency across cases with the freedom to probe emergent themes (Seidman, 2006:9; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). Given the study's phenomenological orientation and the sensitive, meaning-laden nature of clergy relocation, in-depth **semi-structured** interviews were used to elicit rich, first-person accounts while allowing responsive, ethical engagement with participants' narratives.

Practically, interviews were conducted in a quiet, private setting, in participants' preferred language, and audio-recorded with consent. Conversations typically lasted 60–90 minutes. Field notes captured contextual and nonverbal cues, and brief reflexive memos were written afterward to support trustworthy, context-sensitive interpretation.

3.9.2.1 Structured vs. Unstructured Interviews

Structured interviews are guided by a fixed set of questions and often include closed-ended options, aiming for uniformity across respondents. They serve the purpose of standardisation, comparison, and neutrality (Fontana & Frey 1994:361; Grix 2010:127–128; Bless et al. 2013:194; Bloomberg & Volpe 2016:155). The intention of the structured questions is to help compare the reactions of the participants on the same set of questions asked in the same way. It is also to avoid deviation from standard questions so that the researcher remains neutral and does not influence the respondents by giving the impression of whether they are agreeing or disagreeing with

them. However, given the deeply personal and emotionally complex nature of relocation, grief, and pastoral identity, such rigidity was deemed unsuitable.

Clergy relocation is emotionally demanding it entails releasing the known past and stepping into an uncertain future. It closes a familiar chapter and opens one that is largely uncharted. This act of relinquishment evokes grief and a sense of loss that needs to be named and expressed (Bridges & Bridges 2016:7). Hamman, similarly, stresses the importance of creating space to mourn losses experienced during such ministry-related transitions (2005:12). Structured interviews, with their limitations, could not adequately support participants in articulating grief or processing disruption.

Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, provide space for open-ended, conversational dialogue. The interviewer may use guiding themes but allows the participant to shape the conversation through personal reflections, feelings, and insights (Haralambos & Holborn 2008:826; Lee & Lings 2008:218). The researcher may probe specific issues that emerge, while remaining attuned to the participant's narrative flow.

While unstructured interviews allow for depth and discovery, their weakness lies in the potential to drift off topic. If the conversation lacks a guiding framework, it may fail to answer the core research questions (Lee & Lings 2008:218). To mitigate these concerns while retaining flexibility, the study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection.

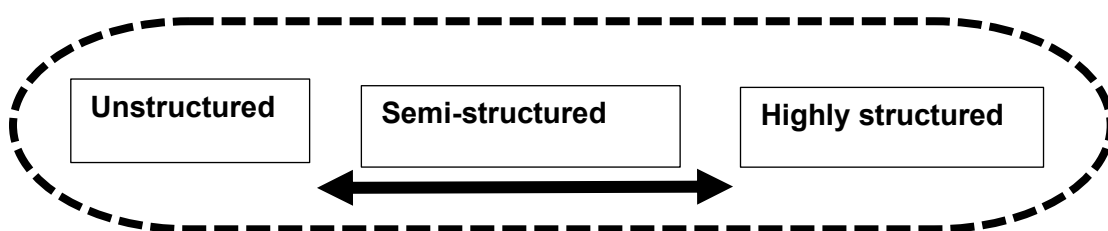


Figure 3.1: Continuum of level of structures in interviews

SOURCE: (Adapted from Leavy 2017:139)

3.9.2.2 Use of Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research for their ability to balance consistency with openness. Unlike structured interviews, which rely on a rigid

set of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews use a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions that allows for probing, clarification, and adaptation to the participant's responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006:315). This method is particularly suited to research that seeks to explore subjective experiences in depth, as it allows the researcher to follow up on significant themes as they emerge organically during the conversation.

In the context of this study, semi-structured interviews provided a framework for eliciting rich, narrative accounts from clergy spouses and adult children about their experiences of relocation. The interview guide was developed around key themes informed by the research questions and theoretical framework, including emotional stress, identity disruption, family dynamics, vocational challenges, and spiritual resilience. While these themes offered structure, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to express themselves in their own words and to foreground issues that they perceived as most significant.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews helped to create a more relaxed and relational interview environment, which is particularly important in pastoral and emotionally sensitive research settings. Clergy families discussing issues such as grief, uncertainty, or relational strain may be more forthcoming in a conversation that is guided but not rigid. The method also afforded the flexibility to adapt follow-up questions to the unique experiences of each participant, thus capturing the complexity and nuance of their relocation journeys.

All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and later analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the study's objectives.

To collect data for this research, the researcher conducted interviews with a set of participants. The interviews took place in the Limpopo District and the researcher dealt with one participant at a time, one story at a time, because even though this study dealt with the relocation of clergy and the impact this had on their families, their experiences differed and so did some of the losses they experienced. According to Denscombe, "The researcher's role is to be as unobtrusive as possible, to start the ball rolling by introducing a theme or topic and then letting the interviewee develop his or her ideas and pursue his or her train of thought" (2003:167). Although there were

formally structured questions written down, follow-up questions were asked for clarity purposes.

Barbour argues that semi-structured interviewing is beneficial because “it refers to the capacity of interviews to elicit data on perspectives of salience to respondents rather than the researcher dictating the direction of the encounter, as would be the case with more structured approaches” (2008:119).

All interviews were conducted in environments chosen to ensure comfort, privacy, and openness. In many cases, participants opted to be interviewed in their own homes, which provided a familiar and relaxed setting conducive to open dialogue. For others, neutral venues were selected in consultation with the participants, including church offices or quiet public spaces where confidentiality could be maintained. These decisions respected the participants’ autonomy and were aligned with the ethical principle of minimising distress and enhancing the quality of engagement.

The interviews were conducted in English, as it was the preferred language for both the researcher and the participants, and it allowed for ease of communication and accurate data capture. Each interview was scheduled for a duration ranging between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the depth and pace of the conversation. This flexibility accommodated the participants’ comfort levels and ensured that they had adequate time to share their experiences without feeling rushed or constrained.

Prior to each interview, informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the participants’ permission, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and reflective insights that enriched the interpretive process. This data collection approach reflects a commitment to both methodological rigour and pastoral sensitivity in engaging clergy families around a potentially emotive topic such as relocation.

3.9.2.3 Piloting of the semi-structured interview guide

Prior to the commencement of the main data collection process, the semi-structured interview guide was **piloted** with a small group of participants whose context closely resembled that of the study population. This group consisted of women and adult

children from clergy families who were not included in the final sample. The purpose of the pilot was to test the interview questions for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness, and to assess whether they were capable of eliciting rich and meaningful narratives related to experiences of clergy relocation.

Piloting the interview guide before the main interviews is considered good qualitative research practice, as it enables the researcher to identify problems related to question wording, sequencing, and sensitivity, as well as to anticipate potential challenges during data collection (Creswell, 2014:162; Gillham, 2005:23). This process also provides an opportunity to explore how participants interpret and respond to the questions, thereby reducing the risk of collecting unfocused or superficial data (Seidman, 2013:39).

Feedback from the pilot process revealed minor issues related to the phrasing and ordering of certain questions, particularly in areas dealing with emotional loss, identity disruption, and family transitions. As a result, the interview guide was refined through the rewording of some questions and the adjustment of their sequence to enhance conversational flow. These refinements contributed to a clearer, more focused, and contextually sensitive interview guide, thereby strengthening the credibility and trustworthiness of the data collection process.

3.9.3 Observation

Observation, including participant observation, is recognised as a central method in qualitative research, particularly when seeking to discern the depth of human experience within a natural and pastoral context. In pastoral theological research, this method enables the researcher to listen with both the “ears of the heart” and the “eyes of the spirit” (Nouwen, 1971), in order to better understand the lived realities of those under study. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2019:195) assert, observation allows the researcher to encounter a phenomenon directly rather than depending solely on participants’ accounts or interpretations.

In this study, the researcher entered into the life spaces of clergy families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), creating a pastoral presence that fostered trust and mutual respect. In such sacred encounters, the act of observation became a ministry of presence, attentively witnessing patterns of behaviour, verbal

and non-verbal interactions, and relational dynamics as they unfolded naturally within the participants' home environments.

By being physically present, the researcher was able to perceive repeated emotional cues and spiritual themes that would not necessarily emerge through verbal communication alone. Particular attention was paid to body language, facial expressions, pauses, and the inflection of participants' voices, each serving as embodied texts conveying unspoken grief, resilience, and theological struggle. In line with pastoral theological practice, such observation was not simply analytic but empathetic, grounded in a commitment to understand the personal and spiritual impact of relocation from within the lived experience of clergy families.

This first-hand engagement enriched the data by adding an interpretive layer rooted in incarnational theology, recognising the researcher's presence as both observer and co-sojourner. This method aligns with the pastoral care imperative to bear witness to suffering and transformation in concrete human experiences (Doehring 2015:21). Therefore, observation functioned not only as a research tool but also as a pastoral act, contributing both to the integrity of the data and the ethical responsibility of the researcher to be spiritually attuned to the participants' realities.

3.10 PROCEDURE OF DATA ANALYSIS

To address the study's research questions, the data were analysed through a systematic, interpretive process consistent with qualitative inquiry. As Flick observes, qualitative studies aim to offer "a more thorough description of phenomena... [including] the personal experiences of a particular person or group" (2014:5). In this study, the focal phenomenon comprised the trauma, loss, and adaptation associated with clergy-family relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), with particular attention to the Limpopo District.

The purpose of analysis was to illuminate the participants and discern how they interpreted, internalised, and navigated repeated relocations. Babbie and Mouton (2001:101) note that qualitative research "interpret[s] the collected data for the purpose of drawing conclusions that reflect on the interests, ideas, and theories that initiated the inquiry." Accordingly, an interpretive thematic analysis was employed to identify salient patterns, meanings, and themes across narratives. The procedure

involved: verbatim transcription and immersive familiarisation; line-by-line, inductive coding; constant comparison within and across interviews; clustering codes into candidate themes; iterative review against the dataset; and defining, naming, and evidencing themes with illustrative extracts. Reflexive memos documented analytic decisions, and an audit trail was maintained to enhance transparency and trustworthiness. Throughout, attention was paid to context (ecclesial structures, family life cycle) and to the affective and spiritual nuances of participants' accounts, ensuring that themes remained grounded in their words while responsive to the study's pastoral focus (cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001:101).

Following the guidance of Bazeley who affirms that qualitative research is concerned with "seeing, describing, interpreting, and analysing how individuals perceive, act with, or think about themselves and their surroundings," (2013:4), the researcher engaged in a multi-step process of thematic analysis. First, all interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to gain familiarity with the data. This stage was followed by the process of initial coding, where meaningful units of text were highlighted, categorised, and labelled based on emerging ideas. Codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected recurring issues such as *grief and loss*, *identity disruption*, *vocational strain*, and *spiritual reorientation*.

Importantly, each research question was treated as a discrete thematic lens, as advised by Bloomberg and Volpe who suggest that researchers should "treat each question as a distinct topic that guides the analytical lens used to interrogate the data." (2019:233). This allowed for a focused yet holistic interpretation of the participants' experiences across emotional, spiritual, and relational domains. In some cases, participant quotes were revisited multiple times during the analysis to ensure accuracy, consistency, and contextual sensitivity.

Additionally, the analysis was enriched through reflexive memo-writing, field notes, and triangulation with relevant documents and pastoral records, which provided further insight into the institutional context of clergy relocation. While the primary mode of analysis was manual, Microsoft Word was used to facilitate organisation, annotation, and cross-referencing of themes during the interpretive process.

To safeguard trustworthiness and the integrity of the findings, the study applied the qualitative criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The

specific strategies employed under each criterion are detailed below. By anchoring the analysis in rigorous methods (e.g., systematic coding, reflexive memoing) and maintaining sensitivity to participants' theological, emotional, and social realities, the study aims to offer findings that are both authentic and pastorally meaningful within the MCSA context.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility concerns the degree to which the findings authentically reflect participants' experiences and perspectives. As Bloomberg and Volpe put it, the core question is: "Has the researcher accurately represented what the participants think, feel and do?" (2019:202). To enhance credibility, the researcher engaged reflexively by acknowledging and disclosing potential personal biases that might shape interpretation and maintained a transparent analytic trail. Participant validation (member checking) was also employed: preliminary interpretations and thematic summaries were returned to participants to confirm accuracy and invite corrections or clarifications where needed. The participants were satisfied with the findings as there were a true reflection of their narratives. There were no changes required as part of validation. Credibility was further strengthened through peer debriefing. Field notes, coding decisions, and emerging themes were examined by academic peers and the study supervisor, with constructive critique informing iterative refinements. Feedback from both the supervisor and an appointed mentor supported careful calibration of claims, helping to ensure that interpretations remained faithful to participants lived realities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:204).

3.10.2 Dependability

Dependability is concerned with the consistency and stability of the research process and outcomes. Bloomberg and Volpe explain that dependability is demonstrated when similar results could be obtained if the study were repeated under the same conditions ((2019:204). To establish dependability, the researcher maintained a clear and comprehensive documentation of the research process. All methodological decisions and analytical steps were discussed with the academic supervisor to ensure coherence and avoid omission or misinterpretation of data. This audit trail facilitated internal consistency and allowed for an evaluation of the rigor with which the study was conducted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Davis 2021).

3.10.3 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which findings are grounded in participants' accounts rather than researcher predispositions. As Bloomberg and Volpe note, although qualitative researchers do not claim full objectivity, confirmability reflects transparency and neutrality in interpretation (2019:204–205). To uphold this standard, a comprehensive audit trail documented how data were generated, coded, and interpreted, including codebooks, versioned theme maps, and analytic memos capturing emergent insights and decision points. Verbatim excerpts were systematically linked to codes and themes, enabling a clear evidentiary chain from raw data to claims. Reflexive notes recorded potential assumptions and how they were bracketed during analysis. Justifications for coding choices, code merges/splits, and thematic naming were retained so interpretations could be traced back to their original sources, thereby sustaining confirmability.

3.10.4 Transferability

Transferability concerns the extent to which findings may be applicable in other contexts or populations. Although statistical generalisability is not the aim of qualitative inquiry, researchers can facilitate transferability by providing rich, “thick” description of the study setting, participants, and conditions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019:205). In this study, detailed contextual information is offered regarding the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), the Limpopo District setting, and the lived experiences of clergy families navigating relocation. The sample was purposively selected to include individuals who had experienced one or more ecclesiastically mandated moves, ensuring relevance to the research questions. Purposive sampling, as Etikan, Musa and Alkassim note, enables the deliberate inclusion of participants who can provide rich and pertinent data (2016:2). By clearly outlining inclusion criteria, participant characteristics, and ecclesial context, as well as the circumstances surrounding relocation, the study equips readers to judge the similarity of their own settings to this one. Such transparency supports reasoned, context-sensitive transfer of insights to comparable ministerial and congregational environments.

3.11 DELIMITATIONS

In any qualitative inquiry, it is essential to identify the parameters that shaped the scope and applicability of the study. Bloomberg and Volpe assert that study limitations refer to aspects of the research design or implementation that may affect the interpretation, transferability, or practical application of findings (2019:207). In contrast, delimitations pertain to the intentional boundaries set by the researcher to define the scope of the study.

3.11.1 Delimitations

This study focused specifically on the families of male clergy within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), located in the Limpopo District. Participants were drawn from various societies and circuits within the district. The study was further delimited to include only wives of clergy and adult children aged 18 years and above who had experienced at least more than one relocation event related to pastoral stationing.

A total of 12 clergy wives and 12 children, 18 years and above, were purposively selected based on their lived experience of relocation. The decision to focus solely on these categories of participants was guided by the need to explore the ways in which clergy relocation impacts immediate family members who are often directly affected by pastoral transfers. Consequently, this delimitation excludes unmarried clergy, female clergy and their families, as well as clergy families from other denominations or independent church movements. Therefore, the findings may not be applicable to families within other religious traditions, ecclesiastical structures, or denominational contexts beyond the MCSA and similar mainline churches.

3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues are integral to all phases of qualitative research and must be anticipated during the planning and design stages, not merely during data collection. Creswell highlights this point, stating that, "During the process of planning and designing a qualitative study, researchers need to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and to plan how these issues need to be addressed" (2013:56). A common misconception is that ethical concerns only emerge during the fieldwork

phase; however, they may arise at any stage, including data analysis and dissemination. As Creswell further observes, ethical issues are “ever expanding in scope as inquirers become more sensitive to the needs of participants, sites, stakeholders, and publishers of the research” (2013:56).

In line with these ethical imperatives, this study adhered to the guidelines and principles of the University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee, (Ethics clearance number T142/24). The letter of approval from the Ethics committee is attached as Appendix A. The research was conducted in full compliance with institutional regulations, and the following ethical measures were implemented to protect participants and ensure research integrity:

1. Protection from Harm:

The primary ethical obligation in research involving human participants is to "do no harm." This principle, adapted from the biomedical field, requires that no emotional, physical, or psychological harm should come to the participants or to the research setting (Leavy, 2017:32; Welman et al., 2005:201). Participants were reassured that every effort would be made to avoid distress or discomfort.

2. Informed Consent:

All participants were fully informed about the purpose, process, and scope of the research prior to their involvement. An information sheet outlining the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the intended use of the data was provided. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before any interviews were conducted (Welman et al., 2005:201).

3. The Right to Privacy and Confidentiality

Participants' identities and responses were treated with the utmost confidentiality, (POPI Act of 2013). Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity in transcripts and subsequent publications. Coding procedures were employed during data analysis to safeguard identity and privacy.

4. Self-determination and Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Individuals were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, refuse to answer questions, or withhold any

information without any negative consequences. This principle was clearly outlined in the consent documents provided to participants.

5. Honesty in Reporting

The researcher committed to honest and transparent reporting of findings, regardless of whether the outcomes aligned with expectations. Integrity in presenting both favourable and unfavourable results is essential for academic credibility and ethical responsibility.

6. Age of Consent

Only participants aged 18 years and above were included in the study to ensure legally informed consent.

7. Data Ownership and Storage

The data collected remains the property of the University of Pretoria and will be securely stored for a minimum period of five years in accordance with institutional policies and research data management standards.

Ethical research practice also involved appropriate authorisations and permissions. Ethical clearance was formally obtained from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Theology Ethics Committee prior to data collection. In addition, a letter of permission to conduct research within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Limpopo District) was obtained from the Office of the Presiding Bishop, under whose jurisdiction the district falls. These steps ensured that the research was conducted in alignment with both institutional and denominational ethical standards. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, arrangements were also made for referral to a registered psychologist, should participation in the interviews evoke emotional distress or unresolved trauma.

The following procedures were followed to reinforce adherence to ethical requirements throughout the research process:

- Ethical clearance was requested and obtained from the University of Pretoria Ethics Committee, and all institutional requirements were met prior to commencing interviews

- Permission to engage Methodist Church members in the Limpopo District was granted by the Presiding Bishop's Office.
- Participants received an information sheet and consent forms in advance, allowing them to make informed decisions regarding their participation.
- Participants who wished to withdraw at any stage were free to do so without pressure or coercion, as stipulated in the consent documentation.

Collectively, these measures safeguarded participants' dignity and welfare while supporting the production of rigorous, ethically sound findings (Leavy, 2017:32; Welman et al., 2005:201).

3.13 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the research methodology adopted for the study. It outlined the research design, population, sampling strategy and size, data-collection methods, procedures to ensure trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability), analytic approach, and ethical safeguards. It also introduced the theoretical models that frame the study's conceptual lens, Pollard's Positive Deconstruction and Kübler-Ross & Kessler's grief framework, as tools for interpreting the emotional and theological dimensions of clergy-family experiences during relocation.

The purpose of this chapter was to clarify the strategy the researcher intends to use to achieve the study's objectives and to ground the research process in both methodological and theological integrity. The next chapter will focus on understanding the phenomenon of clergy relocation in greater depth, exploring its causes, implications, and broader contextual significance.

CHAPTER 4: THE IMPACT OF RELOCATION ON CLERGY FAMILIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter outlined the methodology employed in this study, which adopted a qualitative research approach. Central to the interpretation of participants' experiences were Pollard's (1997) theory of Positive Deconstruction and Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) model of the Five Stages of Grief. These frameworks provided insight into the emotional and spiritual responses of clergy families facing the challenges of relocation, offering a foundation for developing a compassionate pastoral response.

Clergy relocation is a longstanding practice within many Christian traditions, particularly in hierarchical and connectional structures such as the Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches. While these moves are typically necessitated by pastoral, missional, or administrative demands, they often result in significant emotional, psychological, and relational strain for clergy families. As noted in Chapter 2, relocation across diverse contexts, such as migration, military, and corporate assignments, can generate trauma and silence, as families struggle with disrupted roles, identity loss, and unacknowledged emotional burdens. In the specific case of clergy families, however, these dynamics are compounded by theological expectations and institutional cultures that spiritualise suffering and often mute the voices of spouses and children.

At the heart of this inquiry lies the often-overlooked reality that, as Wimberly and Wimberly observe, "*Clergy move. That's a fact*" (2007:69). This mobility is not merely anecdotal but is a well-documented feature of ministry life, particularly in connexional traditions such as Methodism where itinerancy is embedded in ecclesiastical structures (Heitzenrater 1995:214; Collins 2007:152). The Methodist Church of Southern Africa makes this explicit: "*Ministers are received into Full Connexion on the understanding that they will be available to itinerate and serve wherever the Church appoints them*" (MCSA Book of Order 2016:20). The *Yearbook* reinforces this principle, affirming that "*Stationing remains a Connexional responsibility exercised in the interests of mission and the needs of the Church rather than personal preference*" (MCSA Yearbook 2025:112). Scholars such as Carroll similarly note that, clergy are among the few professionals whose vocational trajectory is marked by frequent,

institutionally mandated relocations (2006:53). Yet the deeper trauma arises from the recognition that such moves rarely affect the minister alone. They invariably disrupt the entire family unit, spouses and children alike, whose emotional and practical needs are not always adequately considered in institutional decision-making (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:70). The cumulative emotional toll of repeated relocations, particularly when insufficiently supported, therefore raises critical questions about the long-term sustainability of ministry life and the ethical responsibility of the Church to provide intentional care for those entrusted with its leadership.

Many clergy find themselves wrestling with the impact of these moves on their families, often questioning whether the sacrifices demanded in the name of service are justifiable. Narratives from ministers across denominational contexts are frequently marked by grief, confusion, and a deep yearning for guidance, particularly on how to support family members who are silently hurting (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:70). These lived experiences provide the foundation for this chapter's critical examination of clergy relocation as both an institutional practice and a profound pastoral concern.

To contextualise this discussion, the chapter will begin by outlining the theological and ecclesiastical rationale for clergy relocation, commonly referred to as *stationing* in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). In this study, the terms *relocation* and *stationing* will be used interchangeably to denote the movement of a minister and their family from one pastoral charge to another. This will ground the reader in the denominational framework within which the study is located.

The chapter will proceed by first examining the historical and theological rationale for clergy relocation in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, then exploring the role of ecclesiastical authority in relocation decisions, before turning to the psychological, emotional, social, relational, financial, and vocational impacts on clergy families, concluding with an integrative reflection on grief, meaning-making, and pastoral care.

4.2 THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF CLERGY RELOCATION IN THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (MCSA)

The practice of clergy relocation, or *stationing*, is historically rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, where itinerancy was instituted as both a practical necessity and a theological conviction. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, established the itinerant system to ensure that preachers reached diverse and dispersed communities with the gospel, thereby avoiding the risk of ministers becoming overly settled or aligned with local interests (Collins 2007:152). The itinerant principle reflected Wesley's conviction that the world itself was his parish, and that Methodist preachers were to embody mobility and adaptability for the sake of mission (Heitzenrater 1995:209).

Within early Methodism, itinerancy also carried a strong theological symbolism. It represented the minister's obedience to God's call through the Church and emphasised that the gospel must never be confined to one place or one people (Heitzenrater 1995:209; Rack 2002:344–345). The annual Conference was thus given authority to deploy ministers across circuits and societies, reinforcing the conviction that itinerant ministry was both an act of faith and a means of sustaining the spiritual vitality of the Church (Collins 2007:152; Davies 1963: xxiv).

The itinerant system was also a safeguard for Methodist identity and mission. By moving preachers regularly, Wesley sought to prevent localism, ensure accountability, and maintain a consistent doctrinal and pastoral witness across societies. As Rack (2002:345) observes, itinerancy required a distinctive spirituality of sacrifice and self-denial, where preachers were reminded that their ultimate loyalty was to the mission of Christ through the Church, rather than to personal comfort or geographical stability. This conviction, deeply embedded in the Methodist DNA, continues to shape the theology and practice of stationing today.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) inherited this practice and contextualised it within the socio-political realities of Southern Africa. Stationing remains a central mechanism of pastoral deployment, underpinned by theological commitments to service, obedience, and mission. The *Laws and Discipline* affirms that ministers are "*stationed to Circuits by the Conference through the guidance of the Holy Spirit*" (MCSA 2016:312). This principle is reinforced elsewhere in the same text, which declares that "*Ministers are received into Full Connexion on the understanding that*

they will be available to itinerate and serve wherever the Church appoints them” (MCSA 2016:20). Furthermore, it states that *“every minister shall be subject to stationing by Conference and shall proceed to the Circuit or appointment to which they are stationed”* (MCSA, 2016:315), emphasising the requirement of obedience to the authority of Conference. Stationing is therefore not merely an administrative exercise, but a spiritual process rooted in discernment, divine authority, and the mission of the Connexion, exercised *“in the interests of the Church’s witness rather than personal preference”* (MCSA, 2016:318).

Theologically, clergy relocation is viewed as an expression of covenantal ministry. Ministers are expected to trust that the Church, acting under divine guidance, places them where their gifts are most needed (Kretzschmar 2002:41). The covenant into which ministers enter at ordination entails a willingness to serve wherever appointed, even at personal or familial cost. This is noted during the examination of candidates as they enter ministry as well as at ordination. The candidate or newly ordained minister is required to make the following undertaking amongst others, “I will go to whichever Circuit or Station I am appointed” (Methodist Book of Order 2016:36). In this sense, itinerancy embodies a radical trust in God’s providence and reflects the Methodist ethos of sacrifice for mission.

Yet this covenantal expectation has historically generated pastoral and ethical tensions. The MCSA, like many other Methodist churches, such as the United Methodist Church (UMC), assumed for much of its history that ministers would be male, mobile, and fully devoted to the Church, supported by a wife and family whose primary role was to adapt silently to the demands of frequent relocation. This was not an explicit clause in Methodist law but rather a cultural and institutional assumption that shaped the practice of itinerancy until the ordination of women was formally recognised in 1976. Such assumptions overlooked the lived realities of spouses and children, who often experienced repeated disruptions in education, employment, social relationships, and emotional well-being (Pali, 2016:8). In today’s context, where dual-income households and shared parenting responsibilities are normative, the traditional model of itinerancy appears increasingly strained.

Recent discussions within the MCSA reveal a growing awareness of these challenges. While itinerancy continues to be upheld as a theological principle, its practical

implications for family stability and holistic pastoral care are being questioned. The 2025 report of the Committee on Divorce and Remarriage to the MCSA Conference, for instance, raised concern over the rising number of clergy spouses who choose not to relocate with the appointed minister. This separation, the report noted, contributes to marital strain and is frequently cited as a factor in relationship breakdown. The report further highlighted the tension between ministers' vows of obedience to serve wherever stationed, and the complex realities of modern family life that may hinder full compliance (MCSA Yearbook, 2025:329). The committee therefore urged the Church to reconsider the cultural and institutional pressures placed on ministers and their families within the stationing system.

Itinerancy, then, stands at a crossroads within the MCSA. On one hand, it continues to affirm the Methodist heritage of mobility, obedience, and mission; on the other, it raises urgent pastoral questions about sustainability, fairness, and the ethical responsibility of the Church to care for clergy families whose sacrifices are often unseen. The tension between theological conviction and pastoral practice thus remains central to understanding the historical and theological basis of clergy relocation within the MCSA.

4.2.1 Stationing of Ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) practices itinerancy, a system in which clergy are frequently assigned to different circuits or districts. This approach, rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, reflects the Church's commitment to collective ministry and to the service of the broader body of Christ (Cragg, 1991:67). Within this framework, stationing fulfils both theological and organisational functions: it addresses the varying needs of congregations while also providing clergy with opportunities to engage in diverse ministry contexts that contribute to their spiritual and pastoral development.

The *Book of Order* outlines the formal regulation of this system. It states:

“The Connexional Executive reviews all appointments annually and appoints all Ministers, as published in the Annual Directory, for 12 calendar months from the 20th December following their appointment, subject always to the Laws and Discipline. Any invitation of a Minister or recommendation at the instance of the Church about any

appointment, shall not derogate from the authority of the Connexional Executive to decide the annual appointments of all Ministers. Before making such annual appointments, notwithstanding any provision contained in the Laws and Discipline or any practice or usage of the Church and without derogating from the Connexional Executive's sole discretion as to the process it may choose to follow before any specific appointment is made, no Minister shall have the right to be heard by the Connexional Executive". If a suitable appointment is not found for a Minister due to their family circumstances, as in the case of a wife refusing to go with the husband, such Minister may apply to be classified as 'without appointment', (*Methodist Book of Order* 2016:45). This is commonly known as, 'foot of station'.

This provision highlights the deeply centralised nature of clergy deployment within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. While congregational invitations and local recommendations may be acknowledged, they remain subordinate to the authority of the Connexional Executive. The explicit exclusion of ministers from being heard in the decision-making process not only underscores the asymmetry of power within the stationing system but also reflects broader patterns of institutional control that resonate with systems of oppression and coloniality of power. Authority is exercised vertically, privileging compliance over dialogue and reinforcing hierarchical decision-making structures that leave little room for relational negotiation or contextual discernment. Such a framework normalises unquestioned obedience, marginalises the lived realities of clergy families, and perpetuates power dynamics inherited from colonial ecclesial governance models, rather than embodying a participatory or justice-oriented ecclesiology (Quijano 2000:533–534).

In practice, ministers may be relocated within Circuits, Districts, or even across national borders into neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Eswatini. The movement of clergy is initiated either by congregational invitation in Circuits, through local and District stationing committees, or by Connexional authority. Terms typically last three to five years depending on the nature of the appointment (Ntlha, 2010:94). In determining appointments, the Connexion's stationing committee considers factors such as pastoral suitability, language compatibility, and strategic needs. While this system fosters a sense of shared mission and ecclesiastical unity, it simultaneously creates challenges for clergy

families, particularly due to the frequency of relocation and its attendant personal disruptions.

For spouses of clergy, relocation often entails disrupted or curtailed employment prospects, resulting in economic instability or long periods of separation when careers cannot be easily transferred. Children, too, face repeated disruptions as they are uprooted from schools and peer networks, with consequences for their emotional wellbeing and academic stability. These stresses can accumulate into broader pastoral consequences, including family fragmentation, strained marriages, and clergy burnout. The researcher's own pastoral observation captures this reality: my memory recalls some of the dark sides in the lives of clergy. For example,

“In a couple of years, I have seen families of clergy break down, I have seen divorce occurring in the Methodist Church, I have seen ministers' children turning to substance abuse, and I began to see that this needs to be pastorally attended to.”

Such realities call for a serious reassessment of the pastoral support structures that accompany stationing. While itinerancy remains both theologically defensible and organisationally efficient, its implementation often fails to adequately address the lived experiences of painful memories of clergy families. This disjunction has been prophetically named within the Church itself. In her 2024 Conference Address under the theme *“Awakening Prophetic Urgency and Agency,”* the Presiding Bishop urged the Methodist people to “Become an alternative community.” She lamented the Church's inward-looking tendencies, warning that “... the conversations in the Church remain disconnected from the lived realities of God's people. People are enslaved by oppressive systems and structures. The world is weeping around us, and we do not see, do not judge, do not act” (Nzimande 2024).

Although directed at the Church's wider witness, her words resonate acutely with the struggles of clergy families. Bearing the weight of itinerancy and relocation, these families embody both the gifts and the costs of the system. The prophetic call thus exposes a theological tension within the MCSA: while itinerancy is upheld as a mark of obedience and service, the persistent silence around the impact on clergy families undermines the Church's commitment to justice, care, and holistic ministry (Winter & Hawthorne 1999:54; Gerkin 1997:112; Oduyoye 1995:89).

This structural silencing of ministers within the stationing process does not exist in abstraction; it reverberates deeply into the lives of clergy households. The lack of agency leaves many clergy families vulnerable to psychological and emotional burdens, as explored in Section 4.4, where experiences of anxiety, bitterness, and relational strain are often rooted in the unpredictability of relocation. Likewise, as shown in Section 4.6, the financial insecurity caused by irregular stipends, disrupted pensions, and the instability of circuit finances demonstrates how institutional decisions directly compromise the wellbeing of ministers and their dependants. Unless the Church begins to embody healing within its own structures, its vision of “*A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of nations*” risks being undermined at its very foundation.

4.2.2 The Silent Voice of Clergy Wives and Children in Relocation Decisions

Despite being directly impacted by ministerial relocations, the voices of clergy spouses and children often remain unheard in the processes that shape their lives. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), as in many denominations, the decision to relocate a minister is largely ecclesiastical, driven by institutional needs, pastoral availability, and missional priorities. While such moves are often framed as a “call to serve,” they rarely account for the lived experiences, emotional readiness, or practical concerns of the clergy family. The wife and children, who are most affected by these transitions, are frequently marginalised in formal consultation (O’Brien 2010:83). This perpetuates injustices towards the clergy families.

Clergy wives inhabit a paradoxical position: deeply embedded in the life and ministry of the Church yet largely excluded from its decision-making structures. The laws of the Church leave them with no formal voice, even as they are expected to commit fully to the life of being a minister’s wife. This is evident in the clause: “*The Superintendent of a married candidate shall satisfy Synod that the candidate’s spouse has accepted the implications and demands of being married to a Minister*” (MCSA Book of Order, 2016:36). To the surprise of the researcher, these “implications and demands” are not explicitly documented in the Church’s laws and are therefore left to subjective interpretation by individuals and congregations. This lack of clarity reinforces the silence of clergy wives, who are required to assent to a covenant they did not help to shape, with expectations that shift from one context to another.

Their sacrifices, abandoning careers, rebuilding social networks, adjusting to new cultural environments, and navigating ambiguous church expectations, are seldom acknowledged or factored into relocation deliberations (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:264). Many internalise a theology of silent submission, rooted in traditional gender roles and sacrificial models of support, leading them to accept exclusion from the relocation process as normative rather than problematic (Frame & Shehan 1994:32). This assumption will be tested in interviews, chapter 5

Children, too, experience the consequences of frequent moves but often lack the emotional vocabulary, agency, or safe platforms to express their dissent. Studies show that repeated pastoral relocations contribute to feelings of instability, identity confusion, and emotional distress among clergy children, yet these impacts are rarely addressed in ecclesial forums (Bromley & Pitts, 1982:268; Oden 2009:93). Educational disruptions, the loss of friendships, and the constant need to adapt to new peer groups and cultural expectations often lead to a hidden grief that is minimised or spiritualised in the language of “obedience to God’s call.”

Edward Wimberly affirms this silencing of children through his own childhood experience of relocation: *“During my childhood, I remained silent about what I observed and experienced surrounding the issue of moving. I did not approach my parents or anyone about the situation of moving or my own anxieties about it and how my parents were handling it. Children were simply not part of the conversation in that day and time”* (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:75). His testimony illustrates how children often bear the emotional costs of relocation in silence, with little opportunity to voice their fears or shape the decisions that profoundly affect their lives.

This silencing of spouses and children creates a sense of powerlessness, where their wellbeing becomes subordinated to institutional authority and ministerial duty. Theological perspectives that emphasise mutuality, relational integrity, and family vocation challenge such dynamics, urging a more inclusive and dialogical model of relocation. As Nouwen observes, genuine ministry begins with deep listening, a listening that must extend to those who bear the weight of ministerial transitions without the power to shape them (1971:91).

4.3 THE ROLE OF ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY IN CLERGY RELOCATION DECISIONS

Clergy relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is fundamentally shaped by ecclesiastical authority. From its inception, Methodism vested the responsibility for pastoral appointments in the annual Conference, thereby centralising decision-making as a safeguard against localism and as a means of ensuring the fair distribution of ministerial resources (Collins 2007:152; Davies 1963: xxiv). In the MCSA, this authority is exercised through a carefully layered structure, beginning with circuit and district stationing committees and culminating in the Connexional Stationing Committee, which makes final recommendations to Conference. The Presiding Bishop, as spiritual head of the Connexion, holds a pivotal role in guiding and confirming these decisions.

Theologically, such authority is justified by the conviction that the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, discerns where ministers should be deployed. This ecclesial discernment is seen as an extension of the covenantal relationship ministers enter into at ordination, wherein they vow obedience to serve wherever the Church requires (Kretzschmar 2002:41). Authority in this sense is not merely administrative but spiritual, grounded in the belief that God works through the Church's structures to advance mission and pastoral care.

Yet the exercise of ecclesiastical authority is not without complexity. While intended to promote fairness and unity, stationing decisions often generate feelings of powerlessness among clergy and their families. Many ministers and their spouses report experiencing these decisions as unilateral, with little opportunity for dialogue or consideration of family circumstances. As Gerkin observes, pastoral authority divorced from sensitivity to lived realities can inadvertently foster alienation and erode trust (1997:112). In the context of relocation, this dynamic becomes particularly acute, as families are compelled to uproot their lives in obedience to decisions made at higher levels of the Church's hierarchy. According to the *MCSA Book of Order*, decisions of Conference regarding stationing are final and "*shall not be subject to appeal*" (MCSA, 2016:312). This means that where family circumstances make a move particularly difficult, ministers and their households have little recourse; declining a station often results in being left without an appointment for that Connexional year. Such rigidity

underscores the ethical tension between institutional authority and pastoral care, raising urgent questions about how the Church can exercise authority with justice and compassion while maintaining its commitment to itinerancy.

Recent scholarship in practical theology has highlighted the ethical dimensions of such authority. Oduyoye, argues that ecclesiastical power, when inattentive to the voices of those most affected, risks replicating oppressive systems rather than embodying the liberating presence of Christ (1995:89). For clergy families, this raises the critical question of whether ecclesiastical authority, as currently practised, adequately reflects the pastoral and prophetic vocation of the Church. Reports from recent MCSA Conferences suggest a growing awareness of this tension, particularly as more clergy spouses resist relocation due to career, educational, or familial commitments (MCSA Yearbook, 2025:329).

In light of these realities, ecclesiastical authority in clergy relocation must be viewed not only as a theological principle but also as a pastoral responsibility. Authority that is truly Spirit-led must balance institutional needs with compassion, justice, and care for those whose lives are most disrupted by relocation. To ignore the human cost is to undermine the very mission the Church seeks to advance. Thus, the challenge facing the MCSA is how to exercise ecclesiastical authority in ways that remain faithful to its Wesleyan heritage of itinerancy while also embodying pastoral sensitivity in a changing social context.

4.3.1 Theological Basis of Ecclesiastical Authority in Relocation

The theological rationale behind ecclesiastical oversight of clergy deployment is rooted in the conviction that the Church is both a spiritual organism and an institutional body, guided by the Holy Spirit through its appointed leadership (Acts 13:2–3; Ephesians 4:11–12). Clergy, as servants of Christ through the Church, are therefore subject to the discernment and authority of governing bodies entrusted with stewarding the mission and pastoral care of congregations. Relocation decisions are thus not viewed merely as administrative tasks but as spiritual assignments, undertaken within prayerful processes of discernment (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:41).

Within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), this theological conviction finds expression in the annual stationing process. Clergy appointments and

relocations are managed through district and connexional leadership, who are charged with ensuring that ministers are deployed where their gifts can best serve the wider mission of the Church. While factors such as pastoral performance, family needs, language compatibility, and strategic priorities are considered, the final decision rests with the Connexional Stationing Committee (Ntlha 2010:94). Although clergy may indicate preferences, the emphasis on collective discernment reflects a Methodist belief that the Church, acting as the Body of Christ, exercises authority on behalf of God's mission rather than individual autonomy.

- This theological principle of obedience to ecclesiastical authority is not unique to Methodism. In the Anglican Church, for instance, clergy are licensed to parishes by their bishops, who weigh pastoral effectiveness, parish needs, and diocesan priorities. Like Methodist ministers, many Anglican clergy are married, and thus relocations can impact not only the minister but also their spouse's employment, children's education, and family stability. While bishops consider both pastoral and personal factors, the final decision rests with ecclesiastical authority, reflecting a shared conviction that the Church, acting as the Body of Christ, places ministers where their gifts best serve the wider mission (Doehring, 2015:87). Key spiritual gifts and related qualities considered during the Anglican discernment and stationing process include:
 - **Pastoral and Shepherding** The capacity to care for the spiritual welfare of a congregation, providing guidance, protection, and nurture. This often involves pastoral care, counselling, and leading worship effectively.
 - **Teaching** The ability to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God so that others can learn and grow in their faith. This is considered a fundamental gift, often linked with the pastoral gift.
 - **Leadership and Administration** The capacity to lead, inspire, and manage the affairs of the church, including vision casting, planning, organizing, and delegating responsibilities.
 - **Mission and Evangelism** A personal commitment to sharing the Gospel effectively with others, engaging with contemporary culture, and enabling the church community to participate in God's mission to the world.

- **Wisdom and Discernment** The ability to apply spiritual truth to specific life situations, distinguish between truth and error, and make wise, righteous judgments.
- **Relationships and Collaboration** The capacity to build healthy personal, professional, and pastoral relationships, manage conflict appropriately, and work effectively with others, including lay and ordained colleagues from diverse backgrounds.
- **Preaching and Proclamation** The ability to communicate God's word in a timely and relevant manner, which is a key part of the public ministry.
- **Faith and Spirituality** Evidence of a deep, personal commitment to Christ, a disciplined spiritual life (prayer, Bible study, worship), and a robust faith that can sustain the demands of ministry.

These gifts have their foundation in the Biblical passages such as, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

This highlights that across traditions, ecclesiastical authority in deployment must balance obedience to the call of mission with sensitivity to family well-being.

This reflects a growing awareness across traditions that ecclesiastical authority must be exercised in ways that safeguard both the mission of the Church and the well-being of those called to serve it. Although this study focuses specifically on married clergy with children, it is important to acknowledge that relocation also affects single, widowed, or divorced ministers in distinct ways. Their experiences, though significant, fall outside the scope of this research, which is centred on the family dynamics of clergy households.

Theologically, then, ecclesiastical authority in relocation serves as both a gift and a responsibility. It embodies the conviction that the Church acts under divine guidance when placing ministers, yet it also demands a pastoral ethic that honours the dignity and humanity of clergy families. Where authority is exercised without such sensitivity, the Church risks undermining its own witness by replicating structures of burden rather than embodying Christ's care.

4.3.2 Pastoral and Institutional Implications

The authority of the Church to station ministers is not only an administrative matter but also a profoundly ethical one. Decisions about relocation have direct consequences for the wellbeing and health of clergy families, yet too often this authority is exercised with limited regard for pastoral responsibility. Theological ethics requires that institutions which claim to embody the care of Christ must ensure that their structures and practices reflect justice, compassion, and dignity (Gerkin, 1997:56). The *MCSA Book of Order* explicitly affirms that while Conference is the final authority in all matters of stationing, such decisions must be exercised “*With pastoral sensitivity to the circumstances of ministers and their families*” (MCSA 2016:312). When clergy are uprooted with little consideration for their families’ needs, or when spouses and children are excluded from decisions that profoundly shape their lives, the credibility of the Church’s pastoral witness is compromised. This raises urgent questions about how the MCSA might more faithfully balance institutional order with pastoral care, ensuring that authority is exercised in ways that do not undermine but rather strengthen the vocation and wellbeing of clergy households.

Comparisons with other professions highlight the disparity in institutional support provided to families experiencing relocation. In contexts such as the military, where relocation is a well-established reality, structured support systems are put in place to minimise family disruption. Housing allowances, relocation benefits, counselling services, and educational support for children are routinely provided to ensure that families are not left vulnerable. Similarly, mission organisations that send workers across national or cultural borders often prepare both ministers and their families through orientation programmes, cultural and language training, and structured accompaniment processes before, during, and after relocation (Cox 2008:41). Ongoing pastoral support in such contexts typically includes scheduled pastoral check-ins, access to counselling services, peer support groups for spouses, family debriefing sessions, and practical guidance during transitional periods.

By contrast, clergy families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) often face relocation with minimal preparation and limited follow-up support. In many instances, families are expected to adapt independently to new social, cultural, financial, and congregational environments, bearing the emotional and relational cost

of transition without corresponding institutional care. This absence of structured pastoral accompaniment heightens vulnerability and contributes to the cumulative stress, loss, and dislocation experienced by clergy families during repeated relocations.

In addition to professional comparisons, lessons can also be drawn from other denominations that practise itinerancy. For example, the United Methodist Church in the United States has developed structured spousal support networks and transition workshops to ease the stress of pastoral moves (Seaman 2014:102). Similarly, in some Anglican dioceses, relocation is accompanied by relocation grants and intentional consultation with clergy families before appointments are finalised (Percy 2010:87). While these measures are not flawless, they reflect an acknowledgment that relocation is not merely a ministerial adjustment but a whole-family transition requiring institutional care. The relative absence of such provisions in the MCSA underscores a gap between its theological commitments to care and justice and its practical policies of stationing.

This disparity raises a fundamental ethical question: if secular institutions and peer denominations that demand mobility recognise the importance of supporting families, why does the church, an institution grounded in pastoral care, lag behind? The answer lies partly in the historical assumptions of itinerancy, which placed ministry above family life and assumed silent compliance from spouses and children. Yet such assumptions are increasingly incompatible with contemporary understandings of family wellbeing, gender equity, and pastoral integrity.

The pastoral implications are therefore clear: the church cannot continue to demand obedience to relocation without also shouldering the responsibility of Pastoral care upon clergy families. The Parsonage thus becomes a paradoxical space: while it provides housing security, it simultaneously embodies the intrusion of institutional authority into the intimate sphere of family life. It symbolises the minister's calling but at the cost of rootedness and privacy for the family. As one study observes, "the minister's house is both a sanctuary and a showcase" (Cattich & Knudson-Martin 2009:255). The home, rather than shielding the family from congregational pressures, can amplify the sense of living in a perpetual public eye.

This blurring of boundaries between public and private life contributes significantly to the stress of relocation. Each move not only uproots the family socially and emotionally but also places them in a new house that is immediately loaded with expectations from the receiving congregation. The parsonage, therefore, is not simply a residence but a site where institutional demands, symbolic identity, and family life intersect, often in ways that compromise the family's sense of stability and autonomy.

This ongoing blurring of public and private life not only places constant pressure on clergy families but also deepens their sense of transience. Each relocation involves adjusting not only to a new congregation but also to a new parsonage whose meanings and expectations are imposed from outside. In this way, the parsonage becomes a powerful symbol of the family's lack of rootedness, reinforcing the instability that characterises itinerant ministry. Institutional policies must move beyond abstract authority to embody practical and relational support for clergy families. Without this, the stationing system risks becoming not only a source of spiritual formation but also of deep pastoral harm.

4.3.3 Balancing Authority and Care

Across many denominations, there is a growing recognition of the need to balance ecclesiastical authority with pastoral sensitivity in relocation decisions. This balance requires careful attention to the well-being of clergy families, the vocational development of ministers, and the missional needs of congregations. Increasingly, churches are adopting practices such as psychological assessments, family consultations, and intercultural training as part of relocation processes, to promote healthier transitions and more sustainable ministry (Lartey 2003:61). Such initiatives reflect an emerging consensus that pastoral effectiveness is inseparable from the holistic care of those who serve.

Ecclesiastical authority therefore remains central and theologically grounded in the relocation of clergy. While it safeguards mission alignment, equitable resource distribution, and ecclesial order, it simultaneously carries the responsibility of ensuring that relocation processes are just, transparent, and responsive to human realities. As Gerkin observes, "Authentic pastoral leadership must not only guide the mission of the Church but also attend to the dignity and flourishing of individuals within it" (1997:42). Authority that fails to integrate care risks becoming a burden rather than a blessing. In

the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, this tension is especially evident. While stationing affirms the Church's heritage of itinerancy and its commitment to serving diverse communities, the absence of consistent mechanisms for pastoral consultation and family care has often left ministers and their households vulnerable.

Reports from recent Conferences show that spouses increasingly resist relocations that undermine family stability, while children often struggle with the repeated upheaval of schooling and friendships (MCSA Yearbook 2025:329). Nzimande, in her Conference Address, acknowledged these strains, urging the Church to "Awaken prophetic urgency and agency, in ways that take seriously the lived realities of ministers and their families" (2024:4). Scholars have also observed that without intentional pastoral support, ecclesiastical authority risks being perceived as rigid and impersonal, fostering resentment rather than trust (Carroll 2006:53; Pali, 2016:8). These realities highlight the urgency for the MCSA to reframe its exercise of authority in ways that embody not only obedience and order but also compassion and justice.

Thus, balancing authority and care is not a peripheral concern but a theological imperative. The Church's credibility in exercising ecclesiastical authority depends on its capacity to integrate pastoral sensitivity into structural decision-making. As the global church navigates cultural complexity and evolving ministry contexts, relocation practices must be continually refined so that they uphold the integrity of mission while also nurturing the flourishing of those called to serve within it.

4.4 CLERGY FAMILY LIFE

Clergy families occupy a distinctive social and spiritual location within both church and society. Unlike most families, whose domestic life is largely private, the lives of clergy households are often *"lived in the public eye, closely tied to the rhythms, expectations, and demands of congregational life"* (Lee 1999:14). Their identity is shaped not only by the vocational calling of the minister but also by the symbolic role the entire family plays in embodying the values and witness of the church community. In this sense, clergy family life constitutes what Doehring describes as a "relational ministry," (2015:87). in which the minister's household becomes both a site of pastoral presence and a reflection of the church's own communal identity.

This unique positioning brings both privileges and pressures. On the one hand, clergy families often enjoy a deep sense of spiritual purpose, belonging, and communal support. On the other hand, they are subject to “Heightened expectations, constant visibility, and limitations on personal privacy” (Carroll, 2006:53). The parsonage or manse, often provided as a symbol of pastoral presence, can become both a blessing and a burden, reinforcing the sense that the family itself is part of the congregation’s life and property.

Understanding clergy family life is therefore crucial to any discussion of relocation, as the mobility of clergy is never merely an individual vocational shift but a collective experience affecting spouses, children, and extended networks. Relocation intersects with the family’s emotional stability, social integration, and sense of rootedness, thereby amplifying the complexities of ministry. Situating the family within this broader framework helps to illuminate the unique challenges and opportunities that relocation brings and underscores the need for ecclesiastical institutions to balance their mission-driven objectives with the pastoral care of those who serve within the minister’s household.

4.4.1 A Unique Context

Clergy families live within a context that is unlike that of most households. Their family life is not only shaped by the usual dynamics of marriage, parenting, and relationships, but also by the vocational calling of the minister and the expectations of the church community. As Lee observes, “This dual identity situates clergy households at the intersection of the private and the public sphere. The home of the minister is not simply a domestic space but also a pastoral and symbolic one, frequently serving as a venue for church gatherings, pastoral counselling, and hospitality” (1999:14). This blurring of boundaries often produces ambiguity around where ministry ends and private life begins.

The uniqueness of this context becomes particularly visible in times of relocation. For most families, moving may be a matter of professional advancement or personal choice; for clergy families, however, relocation is often mandated by ecclesiastical authority. This means that mobility is not merely an individual career decision but an ecclesiastically imposed reality with spiritual justification. Such circumstances highlight how clergy families embody what Doehring describes as a “liminal existence,”

(2015:90), suspended between the expectations of congregational life and their own search for rootedness and stability.

4.4.2 The Pastor's Family as a Public and Spiritual Symbol

The family of a minister is frequently regarded as a public extension of the minister's pastoral identity. In congregational life, the spouse and children are often perceived as role models whose behaviour and participation symbolise the health of the minister's spiritual leadership. Carroll argues that clergy families thus serve as "living symbols" (2006:53), of the Church's ideals, representing fidelity, hospitality, and moral integrity. The pastoral household becomes an embodied parable of the faith community, carrying symbolic weight that extends far beyond ordinary domestic expectations.

This symbolic role, however, often generates pressure and invisibility. While congregations may idealise the minister's family as an exemplar of Christian virtue, they may fail to recognise the ordinary struggles of marriage, parenting, or adolescent development that occur within the household. For children of clergy, in particular, the expectation to "live up" to congregational ideals can lead to feelings of scrutiny and alienation" (Holmes & Walton 2012:74). The family thus becomes both a locus of witness and a site of vulnerability, constantly negotiating the tension between authenticity and imposed identity.

4.4.3 Role Expectations of the Clergy Wife and Children

The roles assigned to clergy spouses, most notably clergy wives, are often heavily gendered, informal, and unremunerated. Despite evolving gender roles in wider society, many church contexts continue to expect clergy wives to function as unpaid co-ministers, leading women's groups, teaching Sunday school, offering hospitality, and providing emotional support to congregants (Darling, Hill & McWey, 2004:262). Such expectations are frequently implicit, grounded in tradition rather than formal appointment, which can leave spouses feeling caught between their own personal vocations and institutional obligations.

Relocation amplifies these tensions. Each new station brings fresh congregational expectations that spouses will immediately assume leadership of women's

organisations, regardless of their personal gifts, inclinations, or professional commitments. For those who pursue careers of their own, frequent moves disrupt employment continuity and make it harder to balance vocational aspirations with the pressures of congregational life. Wives who live apart from their husbands due to career or family commitments face a further challenge: when they visit the circuit where the minister is serving, they are still expected to fulfil organisational obligations, often at the expense of precious family time. In this way, relocation perpetuates a cycle of re-negotiating roles, identities, and boundaries in each new context.

From a theological perspective, these dynamics raise important questions about the nature of Christian vocation and freedom. Scripture emphasises that gifts for ministry are given by the Spirit according to God's will, not by institutional tradition or cultural assumption (1 Corinthians 12:4–11). Reducing clergy spouses, particularly women, to predetermined roles risks undermining their God-given identity and calling. As Gerkin (1997:56) reminds us, pastoral care must affirm the dignity of each person and guard against forms of leadership that impose unrealistic or unjust demands. A more faithful ecclesial approach would therefore not only respect the individuality of clergy spouses but also recognise how repeated relocations compound the pressures of gendered expectations. Such an approach would value contributions where they are freely offered, while ensuring that ministry demands do not compromise family life or personal vocation. The Women's Manyano Constitution speaks of formal orientation and mentorship for new minister's wives through special retreats. Among this orientation is reference to the doctrines of the Church, the Constitution of the Women's Manyano and any information which may be necessary to prepare the new minister's wife for Circuit work (Methodist Publishing House 2018:7). This is however contradictory to the report from the MCSA Marriage and Divorce Committee to Conference which states that, "Some ministers' wives are not equipped or gifted for the tasks that are expected from them and that some ministers' wives have their own careers and do not wish to fulfil those roles," (Methodist Yearbook 2025:329), citing this role ambiguity as a cause for marital strain among clergy.

Children of clergy are similarly subject to what has been termed the "Pastor's Kid, PK" phenomenon. They are expected to model exemplary behaviour, often under intense congregational surveillance, which can distort their sense of identity and autonomy (Bromley & Pitts 1982:29). Their friendships, schooling, dating, and even online

presence may be policed as reflections of the clergy household's spiritual authority. This pressure is amplified during relocations, where children are uprooted from familiar support systems and must quickly adjust to new environments while maintaining the "model child" persona (Oden 2009:88). In turn, the family's collective identity is not organically formed but shaped by a confluence of externally imposed expectations and symbolic representations.

These dynamics reveal that the expectations placed on clergy spouses and children are not neutral but deeply shaped by gendered assumptions. To understand the wider implications of such patterns, it is necessary to consider how relocation reinforces these unequal roles and how women, both as clergy spouses and as ordained ministers, bear a disproportionate share of the burden.

4.4.4 Gendered Expectations in Clergy Relocation

The expectations placed on clergy families are not merely functional but deeply gendered. Historically, the model of itinerant ministry assumed that the minister was male and supported by a non-working wife who could devote herself to unpaid domestic, congregational, and community responsibilities. This expectation effectively conscripted clergy wives into roles such as leading women's organisations, offering hospitality, managing church-related events, and providing emotional support to parishioners, regardless of their own vocational identity or personal gifting (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:262). Their labour, while essential to congregational life, is often invisible and unremunerated, leaving many spouses feeling marginalised and undervalued.

In modern contexts, these gendered dynamics are increasingly untenable. Women not only constitute an active part of the laity but also serve as ordained clergy within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). For women in ministry, relocation creates a double burden: they must navigate the same pastoral expectations as their male counterparts while simultaneously managing the gendered assumptions of family care and congregational support. Such pressures reflect a persistent patriarchal subtext in church life, in which women's roles, whether as spouses or as clergy, are shaped by institutional patterns that undervalue their agency and contributions (Phiri & Nadar, 2006:12).

African women theologians, particularly Mercy Amba Oduyoye, have long critiqued the silencing and marginalisation of women within the church, which emerged because of relocation of clergy argues that, “The church cannot claim to embody the gospel of liberation while perpetuating structures that disregard the voices and wellbeing of women” (1995:89). From this perspective, the itinerant system must be interrogated not only for its pastoral effectiveness but also for its complicity in reinforcing gender inequality. The failure to account for the vocational aspirations of clergy spouses, or the unique challenges faced by women clergy, undermines both family wellbeing and the credibility of the church’s prophetic witness.

Relocation, therefore, is not a gender-neutral process. Its impact is disproportionately borne by women, whether through the unpaid labour of clergy wives or the compounded burdens of women in ministry. Addressing these dynamics requires both structural reform and a theological re-imagining of ministry that affirms mutuality, equity, and the dignity of all members of the clergy household.

4.4.5 The Parsonage as a Public Space

The parsonage commonly known as the manse or mission house, often provided by the church, is more than a family dwelling; it functions as a symbol of ministerial identity and a space of congregational expectation. Unlike most households, the clergy home is rarely private. Members of the congregation frequently view the parsonage as an extension of church property, blurring the boundaries between the minister’s family life and pastoral duties. This dynamic often results in clergy families living under constant observation, with limited control over their domestic environment.

For spouses and children, this lack of privacy can be deeply unsettling. Congregants may drop in unannounced, expect the home to be open for meetings or hospitality, or interpret family routines as reflective of the minister’s spiritual devotion. Such expectations place pressure on spouses to maintain a standard of hospitality and moral example that is often unspoken but strongly felt. Children, in turn, may struggle with the sense that their home is not truly theirs, but belongs first to the church and only secondarily to the family. This adds a burden to their lives

The parsonage thus becomes a paradoxical space: while it provides housing security, it simultaneously embodies the intrusion of institutional authority into the intimate

sphere of family life. It symbolises the minister's calling but at the cost of rootedness and privacy for the family. As one study observes, "*the minister's house is both a sanctuary and a showcase*" (Cattich & Knudson-Martin 2009:255). The home, rather than shielding the family from congregational pressures, can amplify the sense of living in a perpetual public eye.

This blurring of boundaries between public and private life contributes significantly to the stress of relocation. Each move not only uproots the family socially and emotionally but also places them in a new house that is immediately loaded with expectations from the receiving congregation. The parsonage, therefore, is not simply a residence but a site where institutional demands, symbolic identity, and family life intersect, often in ways that compromise the family's sense of stability and autonomy.

This ongoing blurring of public and private life not only places constant pressure on clergy families but also deepens their sense of transience. Each relocation involves adjusting not only to a new congregation but also to a new parsonage whose meanings and expectations are imposed from outside. In this way, the parsonage becomes a powerful symbol of the family's lack of rootedness, reinforcing the instability that characterises itinerant ministry.

4.4.6 Lack of Rootedness

A recurring theme in the experiences of clergy families is the difficulty of establishing long-term rootedness. *Rootedness* refers to the experience of stability, belonging, and attachment to a particular place or community. Psychologically, it describes the sense of being "at home" in one's environment, where social ties, friendships, and routines provide continuity and security. Sociologically, rootedness reflects the process of embedding oneself in community networks, schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods that sustain identity and relational life (Pali 2016:8). Theologically, rootedness may be linked to the incarnational dimension of Christian faith, where discipleship is lived out in concrete, local relationships of mutual care and accountability (Nouwen 1975:78; Lartey 2003:24). Brueggemann notes that, biblical faith itself is deeply tied to land and place, with displacement often threatening both identity and vocation (1977:5).

Frequent relocations, driven by ecclesiastical authority and denominational needs, continually disrupt these processes of attachment. Clergy families often experience

life as a series of beginnings and endings, rarely enjoying the stability necessary for deep social integration (Pali 2016:8). This lack of rootedness can lead to feelings of isolation, particularly for spouses and children who must repeatedly rebuild friendships, adjust to new schools, and seek fresh vocational opportunities.

The absence of long-term stability has profound emotional and spiritual implications. For spouses, constant uprooting can erode a sense of personal identity and professional growth, as career paths are interrupted or abandoned with each move. For children, it may disrupt formative experiences, resulting in challenges with adaptation, identity formation, and academic continuity (Lawson & Brossart 2013:232). Erikson's psychosocial theory underscores that adolescence is a critical stage for negotiating *identity versus role confusion*; frequent relocation can fragment this process by repeatedly dislodging young people from peer groups, mentors, and familiar cultural environments (Erikson 1968:128). As a result, clergy children may struggle longer with questions of belonging and self-definition, carrying these uncertainties into adulthood. Ministers themselves may internalise the strain, experiencing guilt for the costs imposed on their families by their obedience to ecclesiastical authority.

Yet this lack of rootedness also exposes a theological paradox. On one hand, itinerancy reflects the Methodist conviction that "*the world is our parish*," affirming mobility as intrinsic to faithful ministry. Conversely, the gospel is profoundly incarnational, grounded in specific communities and relationships (Nouwen, 1975:78). When clergy families experience only the dislocation without the compensating support of community, itinerancy risks undermining the very pastoral presence it intends to embody. This tension calls for a more holistic pastoral ethic within the MCSA, one that affirms mobility as mission while also cultivating stability, continuity, and care for those who bear its heaviest burdens

A recurring theme in the experiences of clergy families is the difficulty of establishing long-term rootedness. Rootedness refers to the experience of stability, belonging, and attachment to a particular place or community. Psychologically, it describes the parsonage commonly known as the manse or mission house, often provided by the church, is more than a family dwelling; it functions as a symbol of ministerial identity and a space of congregational expectation. Unlike most households, the clergy home

is rarely private. Members of the congregation frequently view the parsonage as an extension of church property, blurring the boundaries between the minister's family life and pastoral duties. This dynamic often results in clergy families living under constant observation, with limited control over their domestic environment.

For spouses and children, this lack of privacy can be deeply unsettling. Congregants may drop in unannounced, expect the home to be open for meetings or hospitality, or interpret family routines as reflective of the minister's spiritual devotion. Such expectations place pressure on spouses to maintain a standard of hospitality and moral example that is often unspoken but strongly felt. Children, in turn, may struggle with the sense that their home is not truly theirs, but belongs first to the church and only secondarily to the family. This adds a burden to their lives

The parsonage thus becomes a paradoxical space: while it provides housing security, it simultaneously embodies the intrusion of institutional authority into the intimate sphere of family life. It symbolises the minister's calling but at the cost of rootedness and privacy for the family. As one study observes, "*the minister's house is both a sanctuary and a showcase*" (Cattich & Knudson-Martin 2009:255). The home, rather than shielding the family from congregational pressures, can amplify the sense of living in a perpetual public eye.

This blurring of boundaries between public and private life contributes significantly to the stress of relocation. Each move not only uproots the family socially and emotionally but also places them in a new house that is immediately loaded with expectations from the receiving congregation. The parsonage, therefore, is not simply a residence but a site where institutional demands, symbolic identity, and family life intersect, often in ways that compromise the family's sense of stability and autonomy.

This ongoing blurring of public and private life not only places constant pressure on clergy families but also deepens their sense of transience. Each relocation involves adjusting not only to a new congregation but also to a new parsonage whose meanings and expectations are imposed from outside. In this way, the parsonage becomes a powerful symbol of the family's lack of rootedness, reinforcing the instability that characterises itinerant ministry.

The sense of being "at home" in one's environment, where social ties, friendships, and routines provide continuity and security. Sociologically, rootedness reflects the

process of embedding oneself in community networks, schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods that sustain identity and relational life (Pali 2016:8). Theologically, rootedness may be linked to the incarnational dimension of Christian faith, where discipleship is lived out in concrete, local relationships of mutual care and accountability (Nouwen 1975:78; Lartey 2003:24). Brueggemann notes that, biblical faith itself is deeply tied to land and place, with displacement often threatening both identity and vocation (1977:5).

Frequent relocations, driven by ecclesiastical authority and denominational needs, continually disrupt these processes of attachment. Clergy families often experience life as a series of beginnings and endings, rarely enjoying the stability necessary for deep social integration (Pali 2016:8). This lack of rootedness can lead to feelings of isolation, particularly for spouses and children who must repeatedly rebuild friendships, adjust to new schools, and seek fresh vocational opportunities.

The absence of long-term stability has profound emotional and spiritual implications. For spouses, constant uprooting can erode a sense of personal identity and professional growth, as career paths are interrupted or abandoned with each move. For children, it may disrupt formative experiences, resulting in challenges with adaptation, identity formation, and academic continuity (Lawson & Brossart 2013:232). Erikson's psychosocial theory underscores that adolescence is a critical stage for negotiating *identity versus role confusion*; frequent relocation can fragment this process by repeatedly dislodging young people from peer groups, mentors, and familiar cultural environments (Erikson 1968:128). As a result, clergy children may struggle longer with questions of belonging and self-definition, carrying these uncertainties into adulthood. Ministers themselves may internalise the strain, experiencing guilt for the costs imposed on their families by their obedience to ecclesiastical authority.

Yet this lack of rootedness also exposes a theological paradox. On one hand, itinerancy reflects the Methodist conviction that "*the world is our parish*," affirming mobility as intrinsic to faithful ministry. On the other, the gospel is deeply incarnational, rooted in particular communities and relationships (Nouwen, 1975:78). When clergy families experience only the dislocation without the compensating support of community, itinerancy risks undermining the very pastoral presence it intends to

embody. This tension calls for a more holistic pastoral ethic within the MCSA, one that affirms mobility as mission while also cultivating stability, continuity, and care for those who bear its heaviest burdens.

4.4.7 Harmonising Ministry Demands and Family Well-being

Clergy families, particularly in itinerant systems like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), face compounded stressors when relocation intensifies the tension between ministry and family life. Frequent moves disrupt household routines, uproot children from schools and friendships, and place additional emotional burdens on spouses who must adjust to new congregational cultures, social settings, and domestic responsibilities. These transitions often occur with minimal preparation or institutional support, leaving spouses to carry the invisible load of adaptation while ministers themselves are preoccupied with leading a new congregation (Grosch & Olsen 2000:616). From my perspective as both researcher and practitioner, this disharmony reveals one of the most significant gaps in the Church's pastoral ethic of care. While clergy are absorbed in the immediate demands of a new appointment, their families often bear the hidden cost of instability and emotional strain. In my view, the well-being of clergy households must be recognised as integral to faithful ministry rather than treated as secondary to institutional priorities. Without intentional strategies to safeguard family life during relocation, the MCSA risks perpetuating cycles of silent suffering among the very families who sustain the Church's mission.

The sacrificial ethos of ministry can inadvertently foster neglect of the family unit. Research indicates that clergy often experience role overload, where competing obligations to congregation and home generate chronic stress and diminish marital satisfaction (Morris & Blanton 1994:193). This strain frequently leads to what family systems theorists describe as role strain spill over, where emotional exhaustion in one domain (e.g., pastoral ministry) negatively affects functioning in another (e.g., family life), in short burn out. Children are especially vulnerable, sometimes internalising feelings of abandonment or resentment when parental attention is disproportionately directed toward ministry responsibilities.

Moreover, the vocational identity of clergy is often tightly enmeshed with the institutional church, which may tacitly endorse overwork as a sign of devotion. Within such contexts, burnout is easily reframed as a "badge of faithfulness," masking

systemic shortcomings in pastoral care and institutional responsibility (Rediger 1997:71). Consequently, clergy families may suffer in silence, suppressing their needs in deference to the perceived greater good of ministry.

In light of this, pastoral care literature increasingly calls for intentional efforts to create healthier patterns of balance. Strategies such as boundary management, Sabbath practices, and family-inclusive models of ministry are emphasised as essential for sustaining long-term wellbeing. Nouwen's (1971:93) notion of the "*wounded healer*" reminds ministers that authentic pastoral care begins with attentiveness to their own healing, including the nurturing of relational and familial wellness. When clergy families are emotionally supported, spiritually nourished, and afforded stability, they are more likely to flourish and, by extension, contribute positively to the life of the church.

For this reason, denominations such as the MCSA are encouraged to institutionalise support structures, such as clergy family retreats, counselling services, spousal mentoring, and relocation adjustment programmes. Such initiatives help to mitigate the toll of ministry demands and enhance the sustainability of both the minister and the family unit. Ultimately, balancing ministry and family wellbeing is not simply a matter of time management; it is a theological and ethical imperative, grounded in the conviction that ministry must begin at home (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

4.5 THE IMPACT OF THE DARK SIDE OF RELOCATION ON CLERGY FAMILIES

Relocation affects clergy families in ways that extend far beyond logistical adjustments of moving households. It penetrates the core of family life, influencing marital relationships, parenting roles, children's development, and the household's overall sense of stability. These transitions often manifest not only in psychological and emotional strains, such as stress, grief, and burnout, but also in social and relational disruptions, including marital tension, friendship losses, and challenges in community integration. The family, as both a private unit and a public symbol within congregational life, is compelled to renegotiate its identity with each move. Scholars emphasise that frequent relocations generate compounded stressors that disrupt intimacy, heighten role conflict, and strain resilience within the family system (Darling Hill & McWey 2004:265; Frame & Shehan 2005:47). At the same time, children bear the weight of

repeated school transitions, friendship losses, and identity struggles, which may also impact their spiritual formation (Goodman 2010:92; Stokes 2009:54).

Understanding the impact of relocation on clergy families therefore requires a holistic perspective, recognising that the experiences of spouses and children are deeply interconnected. While ministers and their partners grapple with marital strain, shifting congregational dynamics, and emotional burnout, children simultaneously navigate educational disruptions, peer instability, and spiritual uncertainty. This section explores these multi-layered dynamics under two primary dimensions: the marital and spousal impacts of relocation, and the distinctive experiences of clergy children.

4.5.1 Clergy Marriages

Relocation places considerable strain on clergy marriages by intensifying pressures associated with frequent transitions. Ministers and their spouses must continually renegotiate household roles, financial responsibilities, and expectations of congregational involvement. Research shows that geographical mobility, even outside church contexts, can unsettle marital stability, especially when one partner feels a loss of autonomy or control (Frame & Shehan 2005:47). Within clergy families, these tensions are magnified by the symbolic role the marriage plays as a model for congregational life (Lee 1999:23). A healthy marital relationship can serve as a protective buffer during transitions, offering emotional stability to the family, while fragile marriages may deteriorate under the weight of constant dislocation (Darling Hill & McWey 2004:266).

The tension between itinerant ministry and marital stability is not a new phenomenon but can be traced back to the very origins of Methodism. John Wesley himself struggled profoundly in this regard. His frequent travels and relentless devotion to the Methodist societies left little room for his wife, Mary Vazeille Wesley, whose deep dissatisfaction with his prolonged absences and divided loyalties contributed to a deeply troubled marriage (Rack, 2002:331). Scholars have often noted that Wesley's commitment to itinerancy, while spiritually fruitful, came at the expense of his marital relationship, leaving lasting scars on both his wife and him (Heitzenrater 1995:214).

By contrast, John's brother Charles Wesley made a different choice after his marriage. Recognising the strain that constant itinerancy placed on family life, Charles gradually

withdrew from the rigours of itinerant travel to establish a more stable domestic life with his wife, Sarah Gwynne Wesley (Tyerman 1870:501). This decision, though it limited his public ministry compared to his brother, enabled him to preserve his marriage and provide a more settled environment for his children.

These early leaders' examples demonstrate that the tension between clerical vocation and marital wellbeing is embedded in the DNA of itinerant ministry itself. John Wesley's experience underscores how ministry demands can overwhelm family life when the institution places relentless emphasis on mission over domestic needs. Charles Wesley's example, however, suggests that adaptation and a willingness to prioritise marriage can preserve relational stability, even within the constraints of ministry. For clergy marriages today, the legacies of the Wesley's illustrate both the risks of neglect and the possibilities of intentional balance in navigating the competing demands of faithfulness to ministry and care for family.

In the current context of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, clergy couples face similar struggles as they navigate frequent relocations, disrupted family life, and institutional expectations. The experiences of John and Charles Wesley serve as historical precedents that continue to echo in the present, reminding the Church that decisions about itinerancy inevitably shape not only ministerial effectiveness but also the wellbeing of clergy marriages.

4.5.2 Stressors of Adapting to New Congregational Dynamics

Every relocation introduces a new congregational culture, with unique expectations, traditions, and interpersonal dynamics. Ministers must rapidly build trust and rapport, while spouses often face implicit assumptions about their roles in congregational life (Olsen 1985:65). This constant adjustment has been described as a "revolving door of adaptation" (Goodman 2010:95), requiring the family to repeatedly navigate the uncertainties of belonging. The stress of adaptation may be particularly acute for spouses who feel underprepared or unwelcome, resulting in feelings of isolation. Conversely, supportive congregations can mitigate these pressures by actively facilitating inclusion and recognising the family's contribution (Frame & Shehan, 2005:49).

Leaving behind these pastoral relationships can also evoke grief not only in clergy households but among congregants, who may feel abandoned or unsettled by the departure of a ministerial family (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:262). Entering a new congregation requires renegotiation of roles and trust, a process that may take years to establish (Kay 2000:56). This constant rebuilding of relational capital places additional strain on clergy families and accentuates their sense of being “perpetual outsiders” (Lee 1999:14).

4.5.3 Changes in Intimacy, Time Together and Spousal Support

Relocation disrupts patterns of intimacy and togetherness within clergy marriages. The demands of establishing oneself in a new ministry setting often intrude into family life, leaving limited time for couples to nurture their relationship. Studies highlight that clergy spouses frequently experience feelings of emotional neglect, as ministers dedicate long hours to congregational work (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:267). This imbalance may erode marital satisfaction, reducing opportunities for spousal support and companionship. Relocation can also provoke grief over the loss of prior networks of extended family and friends, further straining intimacy (Goodman 2010:93). However, in some cases, clergy couples intentionally strengthen their bond during transitions, treating relocation as an opportunity to renew commitment and deepen reliance on each other (Lee 1999:28).

4.5.4 Role Conflict and Emotional Burnout

The experience of relocation intensifies role conflict for both ministers and their spouses. Ministers are often torn between fulfilling congregational obligations and safeguarding family wellbeing. This dual pressure may create emotional exhaustion, a phenomenon widely recognised as burnout in pastoral ministry (Olsen 1985:68). Spouses, too, experience role conflict when balancing personal careers, childcare, and the implicit duties imposed by congregational expectations (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:269). Prolonged exposure to these conflicting demands can diminish resilience and result in stress-related health problems (Frame & Shehan 2005:51). Yet, role conflict is not universally destructive; when clergy families engage in open communication and maintain clear boundaries, these challenges may catalyse growth in emotional resilience and deepen spiritual reliance (Doehring 2015:89).

4.5.5 Identity and Role Negotiation in Clergy Families

Alongside the strains of role conflict, clergy families are constantly engaged in negotiating multiple and sometimes competing identities. Spouses and children of ministers frequently find themselves positioned not only as family members but also as symbolic extensions of the minister's public role. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in smaller congregations or rural circuits where the minister's household is highly visible and subject to close scrutiny. In such contexts, individuality is often overshadowed by the expectation that the family collectively embody the moral and spiritual values of the church community (Goodman 2010:92).

For spouses, this dual identity manifests in both subtle and explicit ways. Congregational members may assume that a minister's wife or husband is automatically available to lead church groups, host gatherings, or provide informal pastoral support, regardless of the spouse's personal vocation or capacity. These expectations often leave spouses negotiating the tension between their own sense of identity and the tacit role of "co-minister" assigned to them by the congregation (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:262). Where these negotiations are successful, spouses may experience a sense of shared calling; where they fail, frustration, resentment, and feelings of invisibility often result.

Children of clergy also face identity negotiations that are both burdensome and complex. They are frequently perceived as representatives of their parent's ministry, expected to model exemplary behaviour even in ordinary social settings (Olsen 1985:71). This symbolic role can erode their individuality, as their personal struggles or failures are interpreted not simply as adolescent development but as reflections of their parent's pastoral effectiveness.

While some children internalise these expectations and seek to live up to them, others resist or rebel, attempting to carve out an identity distinct from the "minister's child" label (Bromley & Pitts, 1982:268). From my perspective, the experience of relocation magnifies this identity struggle. Every new appointment places clergy children in unfamiliar schools, congregations, and neighbourhoods where they must once again introduce themselves under the shadow of their parent's vocation. For those who resist the label, the repetition of relocation can deepen resentment, as the opportunity to establish an identity apart from ministry is continually interrupted. For those who

embrace the role, the constant pressure to live up to expectations in each new setting can become emotionally exhausting. In both cases, relocation functions as a recurring disruption that compounds the challenges of identity and role negotiation, leaving children vulnerable to frustration, confusion, and, at times, withdrawal from church life.

Clergy families, particularly in itinerant systems like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), face compounded stressors when relocation intensifies the tension between ministry and family life. Frequent moves disrupt household routines, uproot children from schools and friendships, and place additional emotional burdens on spouses who must adjust to new congregational cultures, social settings, and domestic responsibilities. These transitions often occur with minimal preparation or institutional support, leaving spouses to carry the invisible load of adaptation while ministers themselves are preoccupied with leading a new congregation (Grosch & Olsen, 2000:616). From my perspective as both researcher and practitioner, this imbalance reveals one of the most significant gaps in the Church's pastoral ethic of care. While clergy are absorbed in the immediate demands of a new appointment, their families often bear the hidden cost of instability and emotional strain. In my view, the well-being of clergy households must be recognised as integral to faithful ministry rather than treated as secondary to institutional priorities. Without intentional strategies to safeguard family life during relocation, the MCSA risks perpetuating cycles of silent suffering among the very families who sustain the Church's mission.

The negotiation of these roles, though challenging, is not always wholly negative. In some cases, spouses and children develop resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of collective family identity as they navigate congregational scrutiny. Yet more often, the pressure of balancing personal authenticity with public expectation leaves clergy families vulnerable to emotional strain and relational breakdown. These tensions, when unresolved, frequently evolve into deeper struggles of identity confusion and crisis, as explored in the following section.

4.5.6 Identity Crisis

When the ongoing negotiation of roles within clergy families becomes too burdensome or fails altogether, the result is often a crisis of identity. Clergy children, in particular, are vulnerable to these struggles due to the dual pressures of familial mobility and the symbolic expectations placed upon them as "the minister's child." The repeated

experience of relocation intensifies this sense of rootlessness, leaving many children questioning where they truly belong (Frame & Shehan 2005:45).

This instability frequently leads to what Erikson terms, “*identity diffusion*”, (1968:165), where the formation of a coherent and stable sense of self is undermined by constant social and cultural disruption. Some clergy children attempt to cope by internalising congregational expectations, seeking to embody the role of the “exemplary Christian child.” Others, however, respond with resistance or rebellion, rejecting church norms as a way of carving out a distinct identity (Olsen 1985:71). Both responses reflect the depth of the identity crisis: one rooted in the absence of safe spaces for authentic self-expression and compounded by the high visibility of life in the minister’s household.

Such crises are not limited to children. Spouses, too, may experience identity loss when their own careers, aspirations, or sense of self are repeatedly subordinated to the demands of itinerancy and congregational expectation. Over time, this can manifest in feelings of invisibility, disempowerment, or even alienation from the church that they nonetheless continue to serve.

Ultimately, identity crises within clergy families are both relational and systemic. They arise not only from individual struggles but also from institutional cultures that equate ministerial faithfulness with family sacrifice. Without intentional support and pastoral care, the costs of such crises may reverberate into adulthood for clergy children and may erode marital stability for spouses.

4.5.7 Impact on Clergy Children

4.5.7.1 School Transitions

Relocation frequently disrupts the educational stability of clergy children. Moving schools often entails adapting to new curricula, teaching styles, and social environments, creating academic stress and performance anxiety (Goodman 2010:92). Children may struggle to re-establish routines, especially if the timing of the move coincides with critical educational stages such as examinations or transitions between schooling levels. Studies on mobility emphasise that frequent school changes negatively affect both academic achievement and self-esteem, as children expend

considerable energy adapting socially and academically rather than consolidating learning (Tucker et al., 2012:187).

4.5.7.2 Friendship Loss

Another significant consequence of relocation is the loss of established friendships. For clergy children, peers often provide emotional grounding amidst the pressures of living in a ministerial household. Relocation severs these ties, leaving children to grieve the absence of trusted social support (Goodman 2010:93). The cycle of repeatedly forming and losing friendships can engender feelings of instability and loneliness, particularly in adolescents who rely heavily on peer affirmation for identity development (Hertlein & Wetchler 2013:142). While some children develop resilience by learning how to adapt socially, others may withdraw emotionally, limiting their capacity to integrate into new peer groups.

This rupture is not limited to children. Clergy couples also lose supportive networks of friends, neighbours, and congregants, which often provide both emotional and practical support (Frame & Shehan 2005:42). The repeated cycle of departure and resettlement may cultivate resilience, yet it also fosters a persistent sense of impermanence and displacement for the entire family (Walrond-Skinner 2005:119).

4.5.7.3 Identity Crisis

For clergy children, the pressures of relocation often intensify into identity struggles unique to their situation. The dual expectations of constant mobility and being publicly recognised as “the minister’s child” create a sense of rootlessness, leaving many uncertain about where they truly belong (Frame & Shehan 2005:45). Unlike their peers, whose identities are often grounded in stable communities and long-term friendships, clergy children frequently face disrupted attachments and shifting cultural contexts.

This instability can hinder the formation of a coherent self, leading to what Erikson (1968:165) describes as *identity diffusion*. In such circumstances, some children cope by internalising congregational expectations, striving to embody the image of the “exemplary Christian child.” Others resist these pressures, asserting independence through rebellion or by distancing themselves from church life, often resulting in tension within the family or conflict with congregants (Olsen 1985:71). With the above

in mind, it is not surprising that some of the children of clergy, becomes rebellious, because of neglect.

Ultimately, these crises highlight the vulnerability of clergy children to external pressures they neither choose nor control. Their struggles serve as a reminder that relocation affects not only ministers but also profoundly shapes the developmental trajectories of their families.

4.5.7.4 Spiritual Confusion or Disengagement

Relocation also impacts the spiritual formation of clergy children. Moving between congregations exposes them to differing theological emphases, worship styles, and community dynamics, which may generate confusion or scepticism (Stokes 2009:54). When children feel pressured to participate in ministry activities without personal conviction, this can contribute to disengagement or even rebellion against the faith tradition (Lee, 1999:32). On the other hand, some children develop strong spiritual resilience, drawing on the diversity of experiences to shape a broader and more flexible faith identity. The outcome often depends on the extent to which parents and congregations provide safe spaces for children to voice their questions and doubts without fear of judgment (Doehring 2015:90).

These child-specific identity struggles also become even more pronounced when relocations occur across cultural and national borders, where unfamiliar languages, customs, and social expectations introduce an added layer of disorientation, as explored in the next section on cultural shock in cross-border relocation.

4.5.7.5 Intergenerational Impact of Relocation

The consequences of frequent relocation do not end in childhood but often shape clergy children well into adulthood. Repeated uprooting during formative years influences how they develop a sense of identity, belonging, and faith. Some clergy children emerge from these experiences with remarkable resilience. Having learned adaptability, cross-cultural fluency, and interpersonal skills, they may carry into adult life a strong capacity for empathy and leadership, qualities that can enrich their professional and spiritual vocations (Goodman 2010:95).

For others, however, the instability associated with constant mobility leaves lasting scars. Feelings of rootlessness in childhood may develop into struggles with commitment in adulthood, difficulty in sustaining long-term relationships, hesitancy to settle in one place, or scepticism toward institutions. Several clergy children grow into adulthood with deep-seated alienation from the church, resenting the institution they perceive as having taken priority over their family's wellbeing (Olsen 1985:72). This alienation is often compounded by the "PK" (Pastor's Kid) experience, in which high expectations and close scrutiny during youth leave lingering feelings of judgement and disillusionment.

Comparative insights reveal two broad trajectories. Some clergy children remain deeply engaged in church life as adults, often inspired by their parents' commitment and their own experience of ministry. Others withdraw entirely, carrying into adulthood a sense of unresolved grief and ambivalence toward faith communities (Baker 2000:118). Both outcomes underscore that the impact of relocation is not limited to temporary disruption but carries intergenerational consequences that shape adult faith, identity, and belonging.

These long-term patterns highlight the urgent need for denominations such as the MCSA to consider not only the immediate logistics of relocation but also its formative legacy across generations. By attending to the voices and needs of clergy children during relocation, the church can play a proactive role in shaping healthier outcomes for the future adult disciples it seeks to nurture.

4.5.8 Cultural Shock in Cross-Border Relocation

Cross-border relocation often involves transitioning into societies with unfamiliar cultural, linguistic, religious, and social norms, leading to what is widely termed culture shock. Oberg (1960:177) defines culture shock as the emotional and psychological disorientation experienced when individuals are confronted with a new cultural environment, for example, when the family is relocated from Zimbabwe to South Africa. This process typically unfolds in stages, including the honeymoon phase, the crisis or negotiation phase, gradual adjustment, and eventual adaptation or mastery (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001:86). For clergy, these cultural transitions are further complicated by their spiritual leadership responsibilities, which are inherently relational and reliant on context.

From a pastoral ministry perspective, relocating clergy across national and cultural borders often encounter stark differences in religious expression, ecclesiastical structures, social expectations, and cultural codes of conduct. For example, clergy from Evangelical or Charismatic traditions in Nigeria who relocate to mainline Protestant churches in South Africa or Europe may find themselves in tension with more formal, liturgical, and less emotionally expressive modes of worship. Similarly, ministers from Western denominations relocating to African contexts often struggle to adapt to communal worldviews, extended relationship ties, and the holistic integration of religion with daily social life (Lartey 2003:49).

In the South African context, clergy from neighbouring African countries such as Zimbabwe or the Democratic Republic of Congo may find the local church culture more hierarchical, gender-sensitive, and linguistically diverse, particularly in multicultural denominations like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). A Zimbabwean minister stationed in a rural Xhosa-speaking congregation, for instance, may face linguistic barriers, traditional authority dynamics, and expectations of communal pastoral presence that differ markedly from urban Zimbabwean congregational models (Ntlha 2010:92). Such realities result in culture shock not only in interpersonal interactions but also in the execution of pastoral duties and theological articulation.

Clergy relocating to Western countries from African or Asian contexts often experience reverse challenges. Within traditions such as the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom or the Evangelische Kirche in Germany, clergy are expected to function within bureaucratic ecclesial systems, emphasising individualism and structured pastoral care. This can create dissonance for clergy whose ministerial formation emphasised collective spirituality, extended family engagement, and spontaneity in worship (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:33). Cultural misunderstanding in such contexts frequently leads to feelings of marginalisation, ineffectiveness, or even theological isolation (Kraft 2005:25). The other issue wives face is the problem of securing a work permit in the foreign country.

From a family systems perspective, such culture shock is not confined to the minister but extends to spouses and children, especially in cross-border relocations. In South Africa, for example, clergy spouses from other African countries may struggle with navigating local gender norms, housing discrimination, or educational challenges for

their children, particularly in communities with strong ethnic or linguistic identities (McGoldrick, Giordano & Garcia-Preto 2005:198). In such cases, the clergy family becomes an extension of the ministerial identity and may bear the brunt of cultural mismatch, resulting in emotional exhaustion and family stress.

To mitigate these challenges, churches involved in transnational clergy deployments must adopt robust intercultural training, ongoing pastoral supervision, and psychosocial support mechanisms. Theological education institutions also have a responsibility to prioritise contextual theology and cultural fluency as core components of ministerial formation (Lartey 2003:51). These cross-border realities highlight that clergy relocation cannot be reduced to logistical or institutional decisions alone; they carry deep social, emotional, and cultural consequences for the entire family, whose wellbeing must be considered integral to effective ministry.

Integrative Reflection: Grief, Meaning-Making and Pastoral Care

The varied experiences of marital strain, disrupted intimacy, congregational adjustment, and children's instability can also be interpreted through the lens of grief models. Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) Five Stages of Grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, provide a framework for understanding the inner turbulence clergy families endure during transitions. Spouses may initially deny the toll, rationalising it as "part of the calling," only to later experience resentment, depression, or spiritual fatigue. Over time, if such grief remains unacknowledged, families risk becoming emotionally stuck, resulting in long-term psychological wounds that weaken marital relationships, cohesion, and ministry engagement.

Relocation also challenges a core aspect of identity, belonging. Clergy spouses frequently report feelings of invisibility, loneliness, and emotional isolation, particularly in congregations where their own vocational or social identities are not recognised (Morris & Blanton 1994:191). Hart (2000) describes this experience as a "perpetual liminal space": a condition of being constantly in transition, never fully rooted, yet expected to maintain spiritual and emotional balance. This form of emotional labour is both exhausting and largely unaddressed by church leadership in any sustained or intentional way.

Pollard's (1997) Positive Deconstruction model offers an important pathway for reconstructing meaning amidst such experiences of loss. By acknowledging the

emotional and theological dissonance caused by relocation, and guiding families through processes of hope, reorientation, and renewal, the church can better equip clergy families to navigate mobility. Intentional pastoral interventions are therefore essential. Pre-relocation counselling, post-relocation check-ins, and access to mental health professionals are practical measures that can mitigate the psychological costs of stationing.

The emotional consequences of relocation are further amplified by the lack of choice often involved in these transitions. Clergy families are rarely consulted in decision-making, which reinforces feelings of powerlessness and erodes trust between ministers and the institution. While theological language may frame relocation as divinely ordained, the absence of transparent communication and pastoral sensitivity risks turning relocation into a traumatic event, especially when it coincides with critical life stages such as adolescence, bereavement, or illness.

Overall, relocation creates ripple effects that permeate the fabric of clergy family life. Marriages are tested through disrupted intimacy, shifting congregational dynamics, and the constant negotiation of roles, while children experience instability in their schooling, friendships, and spiritual formation. Beyond these visible disruptions, relocation also generates profound grief, identity struggles, and feelings of disempowerment that, if unsupported, may lead to burnout, loss of vocational joy, or even withdrawal from ministry altogether. These pressures are not isolated but interwoven, collectively shaping the family's social identity and relational wellbeing. Relocation therefore constitutes more than a change of residence; it produces complex psychological, social, and relational disruptions that redefine how clergy families understand themselves, their ministry, and their place within both church and society.

Recognising and addressing these realities is not only a pastoral necessity but also an ethical obligation of the Church. By integrating grief frameworks and models of meaning-making, and by offering intentional pastoral care, the Church can better support clergy families through these transitions. This recognition provides the foundation for exploring the financial and vocational challenges that relocation also imposes, which will be examined in the following section.

4.5.9 Resentment and Silent Grief in Clergy Families

Beyond the visible disruptions of relocation lies a deeper, often unacknowledged grief carried silently by clergy families. Every move entails multiple losses: uprooting from familiar environments, severing friendships, leaving behind support systems, and abandoning the sense of belonging carefully built over years. While such transitions are framed as obedience to God's call, they frequently leave spouses and children bearing the hidden cost of dislocation.

For many spouses, this grief manifests in the quiet resentment of curtailed careers, fractured social networks, and the constant demand to rebuild identity in new congregational contexts. These frustrations are rarely voiced publicly, as they are spiritualised within a theology of sacrifice and submission. Opposing relocation may be viewed as a challenge to divine authority or institutional power, leading many clergy spouses to internalise their pain in silence.

Children, too, absorb this unspoken grief. The loss of friendships, schools, and stable environments leaves emotional scars that may not be recognised or validated by the church. Instead, their pain is often minimised in the language of resilience, encouraged to "adjust quickly" and "be strong" as an extension of their parents' ministry. In this way, both spouses and children learn to spiritualise their suffering, interpreting endurance as faithfulness rather than giving voice to lament.

This silent grief, however, does not dissipate; it accumulates over years of itinerant ministry. For some, it transforms into quiet bitterness toward the Church, while for others it results in disengagement from faith communities altogether. From a pastoral perspective, the lack of safe spaces for clergy families to name their pain and express lament is itself a form of spiritual neglect. As the psalmists remind us, authentic faith is not found in denying suffering but in bringing grief honestly before God (cf. Psalm. 13:1–2; Psalm. 42:3–5). The Psalms of lament provide a biblical model for voicing sorrow, frustration, and even protest, while still holding onto the hope of God's presence. In this light, creating spaces for clergy families to articulate their struggles is not a sign of weakness, but an expression of faith that mirrors Israel's own prayers of anguish. To silence lament is to silence part of the biblical witness; to honour it is to open pathways for healing, resilience, and renewed trust in God.

Recognising the presence of resentment and silent grief is therefore crucial to any theological reflection on clergy relocation. It highlights the need for pastoral care that validates loss, creates space for lament, and affirms that healing begins with truth-telling. This emphasis provides a natural transition into a broader integrative reflection on grief, meaning-making, and pastoral care in the life of clergy families.

4.5.10 Theological Paradox of Obedience vs. Justice

One of the deepest tensions within the practice of clergy relocation lies in the paradox between obedience and justice. Ministers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) accept itinerancy as an expression of obedience, both to God's call and to the authority of the Church. This obedience is rooted in Wesleyan tradition, where willingness to serve "wherever appointed" symbolises humility, discipline, and devotion to the wider mission of the Connexion. John Wesley clearly stated that itinerant ministry necessitated the willingness to being sent: "*Go not only where you will, but where you are sent, and do that which is enjoined upon you*" (Wesley, 1872:299).

Yet this same system of obedience can perpetuate injustice against clergy families, particularly against women. Relocation decisions are often made without meaningful consultation, and the voices of spouses, most often women, are seldom included in decision-making processes. This pattern reflects gendered power dynamics that resonate with the concerns raised in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for gender equality, women's full participation in leadership and decision-making, and the dismantling of structures that silence women's experiences (United Nations 2015). Within the ecclesial context, the marginalisation of clergy spouses highlights a theological and ethical contradiction: women bear significant emotional, vocational, and relational costs of itinerancy while remaining largely invisible within formal ecclesial structures. When the church, a powerful and influential global institution, fails to address its own internal injustices, it undermines its moral authority to advocate for reduced inequalities on a global scale (SGD 10: United Nations 2015).

The prophetic tradition within Scripture challenges such contradictions. The prophets consistently denounced systems that maintained religious order while neglecting justice and mercy: "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice*" (Hosea 6:6). Mercy Amba Oduyoye similarly insists that "the Church cannot claim faithfulness to God while disregarding

the wellbeing of women and families within its structures” (1995:89). This prophetic critique resonates strongly with the commitments articulated in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for gender equality and the full inclusion of women in decision-making processes that affect their lives (United Nations 2015). Moreover, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) itself affirms justice and service as one of its mission imperatives (MCSA Yearbook 2025:3), rendering its limited attention to the gendered impact of clergy relocation on spouses and families a particularly pressing theological and ethical contradiction.

This paradox therefore calls the Church to a more integrated theology of obedience, one that does not put loyalty to the institution against justice for the family but recognises that genuine obedience to God includes care for the vulnerable within the minister’s household. Only when obedience and justice are held together can itinerancy truly serve the gospel it seeks to embody.

This paradox of obedience and justice brings the discussion of clergy relocation to a theological crossroads. On the one hand, ministers and their families embody remarkable faithfulness in enduring repeated dislocations. On the other, the silent grief, resentment, and systemic inequities they bear expose deep fractures in the Church’s pastoral integrity. To move forward, it is necessary to reflect on these experiences not merely as sociological realities but as sites of grief and sense-making. Only through a pastoral-theological lens can the pain of relocation be acknowledged, interpreted, and transformed into pathways of healing and care.

4.6 FINANCIAL AND VOCATIONAL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CLERGY RELOCATION

In addition to the psychological, social, and relational strains discussed above, clergy families also face significant financial and vocational challenges because of relocation. While the Methodist Church of Southern Africa provides housing and covers the direct costs of moving, relocation still disrupts long-term financial security, career stability, and vocational identity. These challenges shape not only the wellbeing of ministers but also the stability and prospects of their families.

4.6.1 Housing and Financial Pressures

In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, ministers are typically accommodated in church-owned manses, and the Church assumes responsibility for the costs of physical relocation. While this arrangement relieves the immediate burden of rent and transport expenses, it introduces longer-term challenges for clergy families. Life in a manse often limits a family's ability to personalise their space and reinforces the sense of living temporarily, tied to ecclesiastical appointments rather than personal choice (Lee 1999:35). For families who choose to reside in their own homes, a housing allowance is provided, but this often falls short of the rising economic demands of maintaining a household in contemporary contexts. The disadvantage comes when the family is relocated away from their own home to another faraway place, who takes care of their house?

4.6.2 Spousal Employment Disruptions

Another significant consequence of relocation is its impact on the vocational lives of clergy spouses. Frequent moves often hinder spouses from establishing stable careers, disrupting professional development and limiting opportunities for advancement (Goodman 2010:97). For spouses with qualifications and professional ambitions, relocation may result in loss of seniority, pension benefits, and professional networks. These vocational sacrifices can contribute to frustration, diminished self-esteem, and feelings of being overlooked within both the household and the wider church (Darling, Hill & McWey 2004:272).

For the clergy household, such vocational disruptions have wider emotional and relational implications. When spouses are unable to secure stable employment, families may struggle to meet financial needs beyond the minister's stipend, thereby intensifying stress and insecurity within the household. Over time, the cumulative experience of vocational loss, repeated sacrifice, and diminished agency may give rise to emotional withdrawal, hopelessness, and persistent sadness. These responses resonate with the depression stage of the grief process, in which individuals internalise loss and experience a sense of resignation, powerlessness, and diminished motivation. In this context, depression does not necessarily manifest as clinical

pathology, but rather as a prolonged emotional response to unresolved loss, disrupted identity, and unacknowledged sacrifice ((Kübler-Ross & Kessler 2005:20).

The emotional toll of vocational displacement may also place considerable strain on marital relationships. Persistent financial pressure, coupled with feelings of marginalisation and emotional fatigue, can erode communication and relational resilience within clergy marriages. This concern is not merely anecdotal but is recognised institutionally within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The Committee on Divorce and Remarriage has noted the “dark side” of clergy relocation, observing that “With the stationing of a Minister, many Ministers’ spouses do not move to the new Circuit with the Minister. This creates serious issues within the marriage and is often claimed as a reason for the breakdown of the marriage” (MCSA Yearbook, 2025:329). This acknowledgment underscores how prolonged vocational disruption and physical separation, when left pastorally unaddressed, may contribute to marital fragmentation and, in some cases, divorce.

4.6.3 Congregational Financial Viability and Stipend Insecurity

Moving from one circuit to another has significant implications for the monthly income, commonly referred to as the stipend, of a minister. In circuits where financial resources are unstable, clergy often experience irregular or reduced stipends, leading to ongoing financial insecurity (William 2015:79). This situation is particularly distressing as it not only affects the immediate livelihood of clergy families, such as their ability to meet basic household expenses, children’s educational needs, and medical care, but also compromises their long-term financial security by negatively impacting pension contributions.

Ministers frequently express a sense of grievance when stationed in financially struggling circuits, as the irregular stipend payments are experienced not merely as an economic burden but also as a form of institutional neglect. The frustration is compounded by the fact that, even after helping to stabilise the finances of a circuit through their leadership and pastoral efforts, clergy are often moved on to another appointment without reaping the benefits of the improved situation. In many cases, they receive no compensation for stipends withheld during periods of financial difficulty, leaving families feeling both exploited and disheartened (William 2015:79). These dynamics underscore the ethical and pastoral responsibility of the church as an

institution to ensure that the financial wellbeing of its ministers is safeguarded, regardless of the economic disparities between circuits.

Edward Wimberly recounts his childhood experience when his father's ministerial appointment was unexpectedly altered on the final day of an annual conference. Although initially promised a move to a larger congregation, which would have ensured a more secure stipend, his father was instead reassigned to a much smaller church still reeling from the moral indiscretions of its previous pastor. For Edward's mother, who was pregnant at the time, the reversal was devastating. She had anticipated the financial relief that the larger appointment would provide during her maternity leave, and its withdrawal left her disillusioned and anxious. While she faithfully complied with each subsequent relocation, she later confessed to family members that she was merely "going with the program." Her lingering bitterness toward the system endured until her death, (2007:75-76), illustrating how financial instability within the itinerant system not only burdens ministers but can also leave enduring emotional scars on their spouses. This resonates with the stages of grief, particularly the depression stage, when a profound sense of loss and hopelessness for the clergy wives stem from the loss of security, control, and future aspirations (Kübler-Ross & Kessler 2005:20).

This example demonstrates how decisions about congregational appointments are not simply administrative matters but have profound financial and emotional consequences for clergy families. When stipend insecurity combines with the already heavy burdens of relocation, it magnifies stress, resentment, and long-term disillusionment with the itinerant system.

Financial insecurity caused by relocation is therefore not only a matter of personal hardship but also reflects broader systemic inequities within the Church's stationing system. Edward Wimberly's account of his mother's deep disappointment when a promised move to a larger congregation was reversed underscores the enduring emotional toll such financial disruptions leave on clergy spouses (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:75–76).

It is also important to recognise the gendered economic implications of these challenges. Historically, clergy relocation has assumed the presence of a non-working or flexible spouse, most often a woman, who supports the minister's calling by

sacrificing her own career. In modern contexts, however, where women increasingly serve both as clergy and as primary providers, such assumptions no longer align with social and economic realities. Relocation systems that fail to take gender equity and economic inclusion into account not only perpetuate inequality but also place disproportionate burdens on women in ministry and on clergy households (Hendriks 2004:114).

4.6.4 Career Progression and Vocational Identity of Ministers

Frequent relocations may also disrupt the minister's own vocational development, with significant consequences for family stability. Moves to smaller or more challenging congregations can sometimes be perceived as setbacks rather than opportunities, creating anxiety about career progression within the denomination (Olsen 1985:76). Such uncertainty inevitably affects the family, as spouses and children share the weight of vocational instability and its financial or emotional consequences. Ministers may also experience vocational fatigue when the demands of constant transition overshadow opportunities for skill development and sustained pastoral vision.

Over time, this fatigue can diminish emotional availability within the home and heighten family stress. In some cases, relocation erodes a minister's sense of vocational identity, leaving them questioning their place within the church's broader mission (Doehring 2015:92). For clergy families, this vocational uncertainty translates into parallel struggles, as their collective sense of purpose and belonging is deeply tied to the minister's calling and career trajectory.

Financial and vocational challenges compound the broader emotional and relational strains of relocation. Housing arrangements, while easing immediate burdens, create long-term insecurities and reinforce a sense of rootlessness. Spousal employment disruptions hinder professional growth and reduce household income, while stipend insecurity in financially struggling congregations can leave families vulnerable to poverty and resentment. Ministers themselves face career uncertainty and vocational fatigue, which inevitably ripple into family life. Collectively, these challenges demonstrate that relocation is not merely a logistical adjustment or an institutional necessity but a disruption of the entire fabric of family stability.

These financial and vocational strains reveal a critical tension within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's vision of "*A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of nations*" (MCSA Yearbook 2025:2). Unless the Church attends to the justice, equity, and wellbeing of its own ministers and their families, its prophetic witness risks being compromised at the very point where healing should begin, within its own household.

4.7 PASTORAL-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON CLERGY RELOCATION

The preceding discussion has shown that clergy relocation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is not only an administrative process but a profoundly pastoral issue, one that disrupts marriages, children's development, financial stability, and emotional wellbeing. While these realities have been acknowledged descriptively, a deeper pastoral-theological reflection is required if the Church is to respond faithfully to the hidden griefs and injustices borne by clergy families.

4.7.1 Pastoral Care and the Call to Support Clergy Families

At its core, pastoral care is the embodiment of Christ's compassion within the life of the Church. Ministers and their families, often celebrated as "servants of the Connexion," are themselves members of the Body who require care, affirmation, and healing. If pastoral care is to remain faithful to its theological roots, it must extend not only outward to congregations but inward to those who carry the weight of itinerant ministry. Clergy families should not be viewed as instruments of service alone but as recipients of the same justice, mercy, and dignity that the Church proclaims to the world (Gerkin 1997:56).

4.7.2 Gaps in Literature and the Need for a Pastoral-Theological Response

Existing scholarship on clergy relocation tends to focus largely on Western contexts, with an emphasis on psychological stressors, congregational dynamics, or vocational strain. Studies that address the African or South African context remain limited, particularly those that integrate theological reflection with pastoral praxis. This gap points to the urgent need for a robust pastoral, theological response that accounts for the spiritual and emotional cost of relocation. Relocation should not be viewed solely as a bureaucratic requirement; it needs to be recognized as a space for experiencing

loss, demonstrating resilience, and creating meaning, necessitating deliberate pastoral support for ministers, their spouses, and their children.

4.7.3 Limited African Contexts: The Case for Contextual Models

The African and South African contexts bring unique challenges to clergy relocation. Ministers are often appointed across cultural, linguistic, and even national boundaries, where dynamics of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic disparity are deeply felt. For instance, a minister from a rural, isiZulu-speaking background appointed to an urban, predominantly English-speaking congregation may not only struggle with language barriers but also with differing expectations of worship, gender roles, and community engagement. Similarly, cross-border appointments within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (such as to Lesotho, Namibia, or Mozambique) expose clergy families to different educational systems, immigration requirements, and socio-political pressures.

4.7.4 Toward a Contextually Relevant Pastoral Care Framework

The African and South African contexts bring unique challenges to clergy relocation. Ministers are often appointed across cultural, linguistic, and even national boundaries, where dynamics of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic disparity are deeply felt. For instance, a minister from a rural, isiZulu-speaking background appointed to an urban, predominantly English-speaking congregation may not only struggle with language barriers but also with differing expectations of worship, gender roles, and community engagement. Similarly, cross-border appointments within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (such as to Lesotho, Namibia, or Mozambique) expose clergy families to different educational systems, immigration requirements, and socio-political pressures. As Nzimande cautions in her Conference Address, “The Church cannot ignore these contextual realities if it is to awaken prophetic urgency and agency” (2024:4), that speaks to the lived struggles of its people. While Western pastoral models provide some helpful insights, they cannot adequately address the complexities of African communal life, extended relationship structures, and postcolonial realities. Scholars such as Lartey (2003:51) and Oduyoye (1995:89) remind us that pastoral care in Africa must emerge from within its cultural and theological soil, attending to local expressions of grief, storytelling, and communal

healing. The absence of such contextualised approaches leaves clergy families vulnerable to cultural alienation and pastoral neglect.

What is needed, therefore, is the development of pastoral care models that are contextually grounded, theologically robust, and practically responsive. Such frameworks must recognise relocation as both a site of disruption and an opportunity for growth. They must affirm the voices of spouses and children, create space for lament and grief, and provide structures of support that uphold the dignity of clergy families. Contextual models should draw on African traditions of communal solidarity, storytelling, and mutual care, while also engaging critically with ecclesiastical structures that perpetuate silence and injustice. Only through such intentional theological re-imagining can the MCSA embody its mission of justice and service in ways that are faithful to both clergy families and the wider body of Christ.

4.8 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the multifaceted impact of clergy relocation on family life within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It has traced the historical and theological roots of itinerancy, examined the authority structures that govern stationing, and considered the profound social, emotional, financial, and vocational disruptions experienced by ministers, spouses, and children. These realities reveal relocation as more than an institutional process: it is a lived experience that generates grief, dislocation, and, at times, resentment, while also demanding resilience and faithfulness. Through pastoral-theological reflection, the chapter has argued for the need to listen to the silenced voices of clergy families, to interrogate the paradox of obedience and justice, and to reimagine relocation in ways that affirm dignity, equity, and pastoral care. The limited African scholarship on this subject underscore the urgency of developing contextually grounded frameworks that respond to the unique challenges of clergy families in the MCSA.

The following chapter, 5, therefore presents the interviews which will be followed by the healing model in chapter 6 and the concluding chapter 7. This chapter will outline the qualitative approach adopted, the theoretical paradigms that inform the research, and the strategies employed to capture and interpret the lived experiences of clergy families. In doing so, it seeks to give voice to those who have borne the hidden costs

of relocation and to contribute toward the development of pastoral-theological models of care that are faithful to the African context.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and interprets the data that was collected from the clergy families in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). The participants had directly experienced relocation because of the clergy family member being moved from one circuit or district to another. A semi-structured interview approach was used, guided by open-ended questions that explored the participants' experiences of relocation, the impact of relocation on family life. These interviews also sort to find out from the clergy families how relocation affected their identity, financial wellbeing, and coping strategies. This method allowed consistency across interviews while providing flexibility for participants to share their unique stories in their own words.

The purpose of this chapter is to give voice to the lived experiences of ministers' wives, and children who have been directly impacted by relocation and analyse these experiences thematically. This analysis will be linked to existing literature and pastoral theories used in this study. The data presentation prioritises the voices of participants, highlighting their stories through direct quotations that reflect both individual experiences and shared themes. These narratives are then interpreted in light of the broader theoretical and theological discussions outlined in earlier chapters, particularly those concerning identity, role expectations, financial pressures, cultural transitions, and pastoral care.

Given the qualitative and interpretivist paradigm of this study, the analysis does not seek statistical generalisation but rather contextual insight into how relocation shapes the dynamics of clergy family life. The chapter is structured thematically, with each section addressing a particular aspect of relocation as articulated by participants. Through this process, the chapter aims to surface both the challenges and coping strategies of clergy families, thereby laying the groundwork for the theological reflections and recommendations that will follow in subsequent chapters.

For convenience of reference and confidentiality reasons, the researcher grouped the clergy families into the following categories: Participants CW_01 to CW_07 are the clergy wives who participated in the study and were interviewed. Participants PK_01 through PK_08 denote the adult children of clergy. To surface the key concerns arising

from their interviews, the data are presented by clustering common themes and reflective insights, and by noting the relative prominence of responses across participants. This presentation enables a clear view of convergent patterns and salient divergences, thereby strengthening the credibility of the study's interpretations.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The initial section of this chapter offers background information about the participants. The researcher successfully gathered critical details about the study participants through the background data. All individuals involved in this research were considered appropriate, as each had undergone relocation. The study group specifically included ministers' wives who had experienced more than two relocations due to their husbands' assignments. Furthermore, adult children of clergy were incorporated to obtain their distinct viewpoints on the effects of frequent relocations. The demographic information was organized into two distinct categories reflecting the participants interviewed by the researcher: the wives of clergy and the adult offspring of clergy, all of whom were over 18 years old. The subsequent table presents this demographic data in detail.

Table 5.1: Profile of Clergy Wives

Pseudonym	Age Range	Years in Ministry	Number of Children	Academic Qualification	Employment Status
CW_01	41-50	18	3	Diploma	Employed Full-time
CW_02	51-60	38	2	Diploma	Employed Full-time
CW_03	41-50	13	2	Diploma	Employed Full-time
CW_04	51-60	38	2	Postgraduate degree	Employed Full-time
CW_05	51-60	18	3	Diploma	Employed Full-time
CW_06	41-50	19	2	Matric	Employed Full-time
CW_07	31-40	8	2	Student	Unemployed

Table 5.1 presents the demographic data of the clergy wives interviewed for this study. All participants had experienced more than two relocations because of their husbands

being stationed by the church in different circuits or districts. Their ages ranged from 31 to 60 years. Five out of the seven participants held academic qualifications and six employed full-time in various organisations. This confirms the changing dynamics of families where both husband and wife are working and supporting the family together, dual career families. One of the clergy wives was unemployed but currently busy with diploma studies. All participants had children, between two and three per family, a picture that is in keeping of the nuclear families, which though close in family relationships may struggle due to lack of extended support (Bengtson et al, 2002:115), Extended support during relocation becomes a very important pastoral response. The data further indicates that the participants had been in ministry long enough to experience frequent relocations. The wives have served alongside their husbands in ministry for years ranging from 8 to 38. It is worth noting from this data that, the husband of one of the participants was currently without a station. In this case, the wife, who is working, has taken over the role of supporting the family financially.

The demographics of the children of clergy will now be presented in table 5.2 below:

Table 5.2: Profile of Children of Clergy

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Academic qualification	Employment Status
PK_01	Female	51-60	Bachelors	Employed Full-time
PK_02	Male	19-30	Matric	Tertiary student
PK_03	Female	19-30	Diploma	Employed Full-time
PK_04	Male	41-50	Postgraduate Degree	Employed Full-time
PK_05	Female	51-60	Postgraduate Degree	Employed Full-time
PK_06	Female	19-30	Matric	Tertiary student
PK_07	Male	19-30	Bachelors	Employed Full-time
PK_08	Female	31-40	Diploma	Employed Full-time

Table 5.2 provides the demographic profile of the clergy children who participated in the study. All the participants were adults, with ages ranging from 18–30 through to participants in their fifties. This ensured that they were able to give informed consent and, in many cases, to reflect not only on their childhood experiences of relocation but also on how these shaped their adult identities, relationships, and faith journeys. The

viewpoints of these participants were influenced by factors such as age, level of education, and employment status. Except for two participants in this group (PK_02 and PK_06), the rest of the participants had a qualification ranging from a diploma to a postgraduate degree and were working full-time. Three of the participants (PK_01, PK_4, and PK-05), were now parents themselves. This data provided intergenerational insight into the long-term effects of itinerant ministry, which brings about the relocation of clergy families.

These demographic details provide the contextual background for understanding the narratives that follow in the next section.

5.3 FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF CLERGY WIVES AND CHILDREN

The following section presents the key findings that emerged from the interviews with the wives and adult children of clergy. Building on the demographic profiles presented in the previous section, it becomes evident that clergy relocation affects families within the context of increasingly complex and changing household dynamics. Many clergy families today reflect the reality of dual-career families, where both partners pursue professional or academic ambitions along with ministry commitments. Relocation frequently disrupts these goals, leading to interrupted career pathways, periods of unemployment, and the challenge of re-establishing oneself in new contexts. For clergy children, frequent moves complicate their educational progress and disrupt stability in peer relationships. These demographic facts align with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which highlights how shifts in roles and settings influence a person's ability to adjust (Schlossberg 1981:5). They also reflect Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, which emphasizes how individuals and families encounter and react to stressors resulting from significant life transitions (1984:141).

The findings are presented in two sections, distinguishing the voices of clergy wives and clergy children. This division allows for a more nuanced analysis of their experiences while also highlighting the interconnected nature of family life under relocation. While the guiding interview questions provided the initial framework for discussion, the themes that emerged extended beyond the questions themselves. Clergy wives offered insights into the challenges of balancing ministry expectations with family responsibilities, aspirations, and personal well-being. Clergy children, on

the other hand, reflected on how repeated relocations shaped their educational pathways, friendships, faith development, and adult identities.

The following are summaries of the interviews with the participants from the MCSA in the Limpopo District. The interview summaries are presented in two sub-sections: wives of clergy (5.3.1) and children of clergy (5.3.2).

5.3.1 Interviews with Clergy Wives

The following questions guided the interviews with the bereaved widows:

1. Did you meet your husband before he became a minister?
2. Were you prepared for the role of being a minister's wife? If the answer is yes, by whom?
3. In your family, whose career takes precedence.
4. What are your roles and responsibilities in the church?
5. How many times have you relocated because of your husband's appointment to another circuit?
6. What has been your experience of relocation because of your husband's appointments to different circuits?
7. What changes occurred in your family because of the relocation from one church to another.
8. How did your family receive support during the relocation process and who provided the support?
9. In your view, what can the Church do to make the clergy relocations easier for families?

The summary of the responses for each participant will be presented in the next section. The responses are grouped according to the questions.

Table 5.3: Did you meet your husband before he became a minister?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	This participant met her husband when he was a Youth Pastor.

CW_02	This participant's husband was already a minister. Her father tried to talk her out of the relationship, though he did not give her much basis to do so. She went ahead and married her clergy husband because she was " <i>young and in love</i> ".
CW_03	This participant met her husband before he became a minister. He was called into ministry in their 4 th year of marriage.
CW_04	This participant met her husband when he was already a minister, though still in college. She was still in high school then.
CW_05	This participant met her husband before he became a minister. They were in a relationship for 10 years before the call into ministry.
CW_06	This participant met her husband when he was still at seminary.
CW_07	This participant met her husband, and they got married before he became a minister.

From the above responses, 4 of the wives of clergy met their husbands whilst they were already in ministry. Getting married to a minister was a choice that they made, whether they knew the challenges of being a minister's wife or not. The remaining 3 wives found themselves being part of a vocation that they had not expected as part of their marriage. Becoming a minister's wife, therefore, for these 3 participants (CW_03; CW_05; CW_07), became part of the covenant of marriage that they had committed to.

Table 5.4: Were you prepared for the role of being a minister's wife? If the answer is yes, by whom?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	There was a minister's wife at the society where this participant's husband was serving as a youth pastor who told her, " <i>A bit about what will be expected from me as a minister's wife</i> ". The participant added that though this conversation was helpful, it did not prepare her for what she had to deal with as a minister's wife.
CW_02	This participant acknowledged that there was some preparation she got from one minister's wife. However, the preparation was more on how she should behave as a minister's wife and how to

	take care of her husband. The information she received did not include her role in the church as a minister's wife. She described the preparation she got from this minister's wife as, "... more like a mother who is preparing her daughter for marriage."
CW_03	This participant was a member of the Methodist Church who belonged to the youth organisation known as "Wesley Guild." She indicated that she was not prepared for the role of being a minister's wife. When her husband shared his call to ministry with her, she was scared. She kept on asking him for affirmation, "Do you see me as Mamoruti?" (minister's wife). She did highlight, though, that her husband was very instrumental in shaping her for the role of being a minister's wife. He taught her how to lead the Women's organisations in the church, from his studies at the seminary. This participant highlighted that, later in her journey as a Probationer minister's wife, the MCSA Women's Manyano Connexional Executive introduced an annual workshop for the wives of probationer ministers. During this workshop, the prospective ministers' wives are taught how to carry themselves as "ministers' wives and how to take care of their husbands.
CW_04	This participant had no idea what it meant to be a minister's wife. She got a lot of support in this role from her husband.
CW_05	This participant let out a laugh, as if to say, " <i>Do you really want to know?</i> ", then went on to say that she was "scared, scared of the unknown." She explained that her fear was from how she had experienced ministers being treated in the church. The participant highlighted that her husband took time to prepare her for the journey of ministry. He also kept checking with her if she was happy with this change in their marriage. This participant was " <i>fortunate</i> " to have the wife of the senior minister in their circuit, the Superintendent, who had sessions with this participant and her husband. During these sessions, she shared the challenges that

	one would encounter in ministry. According to this participant, <i>“Most of the preparation was on being a modest woman.”</i>
CW_06	According to this participant, her husband prepared her for the role of a minister’s wife. The Bishop from the District where her husband was serving sent some ministers’ wives to go and speak to her as a prospective minister’s wife. To the participant’s surprise, these ministers’ wives only advised her, like any mother would advise a daughter who is getting married. They spoke to her about taking care of her husband and his family. They did not share anything with the ministry.
CW_07	This participant’s husband took her to an older minister’s wife....name provided, who became her mentor for the role of being a minister’s wife. Before going to seminary, the participant’s husband said to her, “I am leaving you with this woman. She will teach you everything that you need to know about the journey that we are about to take.” when he was going to the seminary. She stayed with this woman until her husband finished seminary and was placed in their first circuit. The participant continued with the relationship of mentor and mentee that was initiated by her husband. She was silent for a moment and then said, “She is now late, may her soul rest in peace.”

The above responses show that preparation for the role of a minister’s wife was either for most participants, was either minimal, informal, or narrowly focused. A recurring theme is that preparation often came not through structured church programmes but through personal relationships such as conversations with other ministers’ wives, mentoring arrangements, or guidance from the participants’ husbands. For some participants, this preparation was more towards the expectations of being a wife, (how to support one’s husband, how to be modest, how to take care of the family) rather than equipping them for active participation in church leadership or congregational life.

Participants CW_01, CW_02, and CW_06 noted that the guidance they received from the wives of senior ministers was often like the advice typically given by a mother or

aunt. This guidance focused more on to the responsibilities of a wife in a marriage and on how to behave as a wife of a minister rather than on the expected roles of a minister’s wife in the church.

Participants CW_03, CW_05, and CW_07 mentioned their husbands as fundamental to their preparation by teaching them church practices, affirming them in the role, or identifying mentors for them. Participant CW_03 pointed out that the Women’s Manyano Connexional Executive (this is the highest leadership platform for the Women of Prayer’s organisation in the MCSA), introduced an orientation program for probationer ministers’ wives. However, this program too focuses on the conduct of a minister’s wife and how to take care of the husband.

Across the responses, there is a strong sense of fear and uncertainty at the onset. Participants CW_03 and CW_05 both spoke of being “scared”, followed with the uncertainty of having to rely on informal support systems rather than an intentional organised orientation from the church. This suggests that the MCSA’s preparation of clergy wives has historically been inconsistent and heavily dependent on individual initiative, either from husbands or from older ministers’ wives, rather than on institutional responsibility.

Table 5.5: In your family, whose career takes precedence.

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	For this participant, her husband’s career was a priority in the family because it is not an ordinary career but a calling. The participant also acknowledged that her career was also important as it augments the income in their home as the husband’s stipend alone was not enough.
CW_02	This participant noted that there was an equal respect for both careers in their family. She added that, <i>“It is because of this respect that my husband allowed me to work even if it means staying separate.”</i>
CW_03	This participant valued her husband’s career as she saw it as “a calling from God.” She noted that her husband’s career was about taking care of God’s people and providing pastoral care to those

	<p>who are in need. She was clear, though, about the role her career played in the family, “But <i>when it comes to supporting the family financially, I also need to work. I cannot just stay at home because the money from the church is not enough.</i>”</p>
CW_04	<p>This participant was clear from the beginning that her career took precedence in the family. Through her career, she was able to provide for her family and “even get a bond to secure a home for the family.”</p>
CW_05	<p>For this participant emphasized the importance of spending time in a relationship, getting to know each other. For her, both her husband and her own career were equally important. Her husband was very influential in her becoming a career woman. He encouraged and supported her. This participant’s husband always shows his appreciation for the extra income the wife brings as seen in this statement, “I do not know how we would survive if you were not working”.</p>
CW_06	<p>This participant made it very clear that her career took precedence in their family. The decisions they made as a family always looked at whether she would be able to continue working. She had heard from a minister that the ministers’ stipend is not guaranteed. From this information, the participant made sure that she had a secure job. She chose to stay behind at their home, with her children, whilst her husband moved around where the church sent her. The participant became emotional and started crying.....a long pause followed by, “<i>It is hard, Deacon. My husband has been without a station for almost 2 years now. I am the sole breadwinner now. Thank God I have a job, and we have a house of our own.</i>”</p>
CW_07	<p>This participant was retrenched when her husband went to seminary. She is currently unemployed and busy studying. For her, the husband’s career takes precedence as he is providing for the family, including her studies.</p>

The responses above illustrate a nuanced discussion of career priorities in clergy families, influenced by theological beliefs as well as practical realities. For participants CW_01, CW_03, and CW_07, the husband’s ministry career was seen as taking precedence, with strong emphasis on its nature as a divine calling rather than an ordinary profession. These participants acknowledged, however, that the financial risk that comes with non-payment of stipends required them as wives to have a secure job that would contribute significantly to the household’s survival. This is seen in the response from CW_03, “But *when it comes to supporting the family financially, I also need to work. I cannot just stay at home because the money from the church is not enough.*”

Participants, CW_04, CW_05, and CW_06 demonstrated a shift toward dual-career households where the wife’s career sometimes offered greater financial stability than the minister’s stipend. In these cases, the wife’s professional contribution was not only valued but actively encouraged by their husbands as a vital source of security and resilience for the whole family. Where ministers faced uncertainty in stationing or loss of stipend, the wife’s employment often became the anchor that safeguarded the family’s welfare. This is noted in CW_06’s response, “*It is hard, Deacon. My husband has been without a station for almost 2 years now. I am the sole bread winner now.*” This reflects the conflict between the theological notions of ministry as a calling and the economic realities that clergy families must address.

These responses, therefore, point toward an emerging dual-career model within clergy families, where ministry and secular employment are negotiated alongside each other.

Table 5.6: What are your roles and responsibilities in the church?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	This participant provided support to her husband in his mission work and contributed to various women’s programs she found in place in each circuit or society where her husband served. As a white minister’s wife, she was not expected to lead the Manyano’s, as this was optional.
CW_02	This participant led the Women’s Manyano and the Young Women’s Manyano in the Society and Circuit. She also got an opportunity to lead the Women’s Manyano as a President at

	District level.
CW_03	For this participant, priority number one was supporting her my husband and ensuring that there was growth in his ministry. She achieved this by being his support structure whenever he was experiencing emotional stress from his work. She also leads the Young Women’s Manyano and the Women’s Manyano as the Society chairperson.
CW_04	Besides leading the women’s organisations, Women’s Manyano and Young Women’s Manyano, this participant also played a role as a “mother’ of the congregation. She made time for the female members who needed to share their challenges and seek counsel.
CW_05	This participant saw her leadership in the Women’s organisations as support to the ministry of her husband. She acknowledges that she is aware that her husband is the shepherd of the congregation and therefore she keeps him informed about the activities of these organisations. She also got an opportunity to lead the Women’s organisation as President at the District level. Though this was an opportunity for growth in her leadership, she had to first make sure that her husband was okay with this, as it meant that she would be away from home frequently as she attended meetings.
CW_06	This participant described her roles and responsibilities as “Looking after the mothers in the Women’s Manyano and leading the Young Women’s Manyano.” She offered pastoral support to the women who felt that they could not go and speak to the male minister. She got affirmation of her role of caregiver when a woman stood up during the service and thanked her for being there to offer a listening ear when she needed it. This participant remarked on this role as follows, “It is then that I realised that I have a role of pastoring alongside my husband, a very important role which I never took seriously.” She also shared the frustration of attending meetings and where at times the women disrespected her.
CW_07	This response is deliberately presented as it was transcribed to

	<p>capture the different aspects of the response. <i>“I lead the women’s organisations in the society. I will always cherish the conversation between my husband and me. Though I was raised as a Methodist, my grandmother was a member of the Manyano. My husband always says to me, being a minister’s wife, it does not mean you must lead or become a member of the organisation, it is your choice. You remain, my wife, the minister’s wife, even if you are not a member of the women’s Manyano. For me, it was a choice that I took alongside him. I told him that I think I love this, and I would like to grow alongside you in ministry. I also understand that, in that organisation, being a minister’s wife, I am representing my husband as he is the caretaker of all the organisations. I feel that it is better for me to share this caretaking in the women’s organisation to protect him and give the women a safe space to deal with women’s issues openly. I keep him informed of what is going on in the Manyano’s</i></p>
--	--

The responses above indicate that the roles of clergy wives within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa are both deeply traditional and relationally negotiated. A dominant pattern across participants (CW_02, CW_03, CW_04, CW_05, CW_06, CW_07) is the expectation that they will provide leadership within the Women’s Manyano and Young Women’s Manyano at various levels of the church hierarchy, from society to circuit and, in some cases, district. This reflects a longstanding Methodist tradition in which ministers’ wives are viewed as natural leaders of women’s organisations.

Beyond formal leadership, participants also highlighted pastoral and supportive responsibilities. Many saw themselves primarily as support systems for their husbands (CW_01, CW_03, CW_05), offering encouragement, emotional care, and partnership in ministry. Others described pastoral functions toward congregants, noting that women often reached out to them for care in cases where they felt they could not approach the minister directly (CW_04, CW_06). These accounts suggest that clergy

wives, by virtue of their relational positioning, occupy a parallel pastoral role alongside their husbands, even when not formally recognised as such.

At the same time, the data also show an awareness of boundaries and choice. CW_05 emphasised drawing limits around her involvement in church affairs, distinguishing between supporting her husband and taking on leadership roles in women’s organisations. Similarly, CW_07 described her decision to embrace Manyano leadership as a conscious choice, supported by her husband, rather than an imposed expectation. This highlights the ongoing negotiation between institutional tradition and personal agency in shaping the roles of clergy wives.

Taken together, the responses suggest that clergy wives’ responsibilities extend well beyond informal support: they involve leadership, pastoral care, and symbolic representation within the congregation. However, the extent and nature of these roles vary, depending on personal conviction, spousal support, and the balance between institutional expectation and individual autonomy.

Table 5.7: How many times have you relocated because of your husband’s appointment to another circuit?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	This participant has moved 8 times and is currently preparing for another move to a different circuit at the end of the year.
CW_02	“Yoh, 6 times”
CW_03	From the 4 times that her husband was relocated, this participant moved with him 3 times and on the 4 th relocation, she stayed behind at their family home for work reasons.
CW_04	<i>“My husband was stationed in 6 Circuits during his time in active ministry. I only went with him and the kids only at the beginning of his term just to settle him and meet the congregation. Other than that, I stayed at our family home with the children.”</i>
CW_05	This participant experienced 4 relocations, which she referred to as “big moves.” The other 2 relocations were within the same circuit, just different societies. She was excited about the first relocation as <i>“It signified the reality of our journey in ministry.”</i>

CW_06	The participant's husband was relocated 8 times. She did not move with him but rather stayed at home with the children. She only travelled to the circuit for the general meetings of the women's organisations as well as during significant services of the church like the Covenant service and Easter Friday.
CW_07	This participant relocated 3 times.

The above information confirms that all the seven participants had experienced relocation due to the stationing of their husbands by the MCSA. This justifies the purposive sampling method, which was used in this study. This sampling method assisted the researcher to select individuals that could provide the needed information which assisted in understanding the experiences of the clergy families and, responding to the research questions, as well as addressing the purpose of the research (Bloemberg & Volpes 2019:186). For most participants, the frequency of moves ranged from three to eight times, with some currently preparing for yet another transition. This pattern illustrates how itinerancy is not a once-off event but an ongoing process that shapes the rhythm of family life throughout ministry.

The accounts also highlight differing family approaches in response to these relocations. Some wives (CW_01, CW_02, CW_05, and CW_07) consistently moved with their husbands, adjusting repeatedly to new circuits and contexts, though often with significant strain. Others (CW_03, CW_04, CW_06) described instances where they stayed behind, either to provide stability for children, to maintain a family home, or because separation was deemed more manageable than constant disruption. Participant CW_05 noted that their first relocation as a family was filled with excitement, as this marked the reality of the beginning of their journey in ministry.

Table 5.8: What was your experience of relocation because of your husband's appointments to different circuits?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	This participant described her experience as <i>"a very painful one,"</i> explaining that it felt as though her family was "forever moving." Her three children were all born in different districts, each shaped by cultures unlike their own. This cultural variability left them struggling

	<p>with identity. She illustrated this confusion with an emotional example: when visiting friends, her children were expected to eat with their hands, yet at home they were taught to use utensils. Such contrasts left them unsure of who they truly were.</p> <p>The most devastating experience came when her husband received notice of a transfer. At the time, she held a secure, well-established job. Unable to transfer within her company, she secured new employment elsewhere, resigning from her post just before the move. However, at the Conference, her husband's station was changed at the last minute, leaving her suddenly unemployed. She recalled feeling <i>"devastated and angry"</i>, noting that the transition period was too short for her to secure alternative work. In frustration, she confronted the Bishop, <i>"I gave him my piece of mind, not that it made a difference, but yah, I needed somewhere to release my frustrations."</i></p> <p>Her employment in the private sector added further strain. She explained that repeated relocations stood in the way of her career growth, as she was constantly the "new person" rebuilding her professional reputation. She also noted that her husband's health made separations especially difficult, as she was his main support structure. Yet her story ended with a note of gratitude. She acknowledged at least two or three Bishops who had offered exceptional support to her husband, one of whom has since passed away. Her account reveals the dual reality of repeated loss and ongoing resilience: anger at the system's disruptions, but appreciation for moments of pastoral care when they came.</p>
CW_02	<p>This participant opened her narrative bluntly: <i>"My experience was very bad, bad, bad, bad."</i> At the time of marriage, she was a student nurse, and her husband was already in ministry. Four days after their wedding, he returned to his circuit, leaving her behind at the Nurses' College. Pressured by her mother, she abandoned her training to join her husband, becoming a housewife at an incredibly</p>

	<p>young age. Later, she resumed nursing studies closer to the circuit, but after qualifying, her first job was 300km from the manse. Her daily routine began at 4 a.m. with long commutes, which soon became unsustainable.</p> <p>Conflict within the circuit added further strain, forcing her to relocate back to Gauteng with her two young children, where she stayed in a nurses' residence. The challenges of raising children alone while working full-time resulted in stress ulcers and recurring illness. Her husband, stationed far away, could visit only every few months. Reflecting on this, she stated quietly: <i>"I really did not enjoy my marriage."</i> Her sense of isolation was compounded by exclusion from other ministers' wives, who treated those not stationed in the same circuit as outsiders. She recalled one traumatic incident when, travelling with her children aged five and two, a bus broke down, forcing them to sleep overnight in a police station. Following this incident, she and her husband decided that the children would remain with their father. This was the start of her children's moving with their father between circuits and being raised by congregations. This decision created a painful memory for her children. Her one son occasionally reminds her up till now, <i>"You were not there for us. Other people raised us."</i></p> <p>Relocation brought separation between this participant and her husband. This separation also created trust issues in her marriage. When she visited her husband at his station, he often continued with his ministerial duties as if she were absent, leaving her feeling neglected. Her story captures the compounded pain of vocational sacrifice, family separation, and emotional isolation.</p>
CW_03	<p>Relocation for this participant was not by choice. She moved because she was aware that she was married to a minister and therefore she must support him. She resigned from her job because she could not get a transfer within her company to the circuit where he was moved. She was young and the women that she led looked down upon her because she was not working. The participant sighted how difficult it is to rely on one</p>

	<p>salary these days. She was frustrated as she struggled to get a job. With her husband's latest move, she remained behind in the other circuit because she had a secure job there and was not willing to resign this time. She is now raising their one child alone, and the older one is in campus at the University. Her husband comes home every Sunday and goes back to the circuit on Tuesdays, but the relationship is not the same.</p>
CW_04	<p>This participant reported that she moved twice before choosing to remain in the family's own house to avoid further instability. She highlighted recurring issues such as damage to household furniture without compensation, loss of friendships, and the postponement of her academic ambitions. As a teacher, her career prospects were challenged by language barriers in new communities, while her children struggled academically, leading to costly private schooling. She also described a lack of privacy in the mission house, where congregants intruded into family space.</p>
CW_05	<p>This participant narrated how relocation was emotionally and physically exhausting for her. She got a job after a long stretch of unemployment. She was comfortable and was beginning to settle as a family in the circuit where her husband was serving. Her husband was then moved to a circuit which she describes as, "A circuit that did not receive him well. They did not even have a manse." This forced them to stay in the house that they had occupied in the previous circuit, as it was not being used. This meant that she had to travel every weekend to support her husband at the circuit, and they would come back home after the Sunday service. This circuit was also struggling financially, and this left them in financial strain because her husband's stipend was not always guaranteed. This participant's husband was relocated to another circuit the following year. They had to move into the manse there and this was the start of her physical and emotional strain as she was now commuting 80km one way, daily to work. She narrates how she woke up at 4am every day and got back home after 6pm even</p>

	<p>during pregnancy. Despite her resilience, she admitted to fear of the unknown during subsequent moves and deep emotional attachment to congregations she left behind.</p>
CW_06	<p>This participant shared the burden of raising their children alone whilst the husband was moving around the circuits. She emphasised that, “I have two boys who needed a father figure in the house to mentor them,” Her one son displayed behavioural issues that prompted the teachers at the school inquiry where the father of the child was. Though the Bishop was informed about the child’s behavioural concerns, the next relocation for her husband was still her husband was relocated again to a circuit far from his family. She recalled intense anxiety whenever her husband travelled and would stay awake to stay connected with him until he arrives at the circuit. Her husband was attacked while staying alone at the manse and there was no support to her as the wife from the church. Instead, the Bishop instructed the Treasurer of the circuit to stop paying her husband the travelling allowance on the basis that he was on sick leave and is not doing pastoral or ministry related visits.</p>
CW_07	<p>The first three years of ministry seemed like any normal work appointment. Things changed when her husband was relocated during their son had started attending school and settled. The child had made friends and looked forward to going to school each day. The most painful part was to sit with her child and inform him that he was going to change schools. For this participant, the relocation always leaves her questioning, “Whether they will be forced to stay at some stations in order to protect their children from the frequent change imposed by relocations, which might affect them as they grow up?” She added that as a family, they do not want to their current decisions to affect their children’s future. While acknowledging the strain of frequent moves, she described herself as a willing partner and “cheerleader” for her husband, emphasising the role of supportive spousal commitment in navigating the</p>

The responses reveal that relocation was overwhelmingly experienced as disruptive, painful, and destabilising for clergy wives. For many, the repeated moves meant constant uprooting from established careers, loss of financial stability, and missed opportunities for career growth (CW_01, CW_03, CW_04). Others described the emotional burden of separation from their husbands, often having to raise children alone while managing the stress of distance, insecurity, and lack of support (CW_02, CW_06).

- Family life emerged as a main area of strain. Participants repeatedly mentioned the adverse effects of relocation on children, from difficulties adjusting to new schools and cultures, to identity confusion, to behavioural challenges linked to the absence of a stable parental presence (CW_01, CW_04, CW_07). The mothers themselves were left navigating guilt, isolation, and grief as they balanced their own roles with the well-being of their children.

The data also highlight a strong sense of institutional neglect. Two participants expressed frustration and anger at church leadership for failing to provide adequate pastoral and structural support in the relocation process, leaving families to cope on their own. Participant CW_01 was left without a job after her husband's station was changed at the Conference. She had resigned and planned for new employment at the previously assigned station. Her frustration was echoed as follows: "The Bishops don't care; the church does not care." In the same breath, she also acknowledges three Bishops who supported her family. Participant CW_06 sobs when she narrates how her husband was assaulted and that there was little care from the church. Instead, "The treasurer was instructed by the bishop to stop my husband's travelling allowance as he was sick and at home."

At the same time, there were indications of resilience and commitment. A few participants (CW_05, CW_07) described moments of emotional attachment to congregations or framed their experiences as part of a journey of supporting their husbands' calling. Yet, even in these cases, the strain of constant transition was evident, underlining the tension between personal sacrifice and spiritual duty.

Overall, the experiences associated with relocation involved feelings of loss, sacrifice, and disconnection, balanced by moments of resilience and loyalty, frequently driven by the determination of women to assist their husbands and protect their children in the absence of institutional support.

Table 5.9: What changes occurred in your family because of the relocation from one church to another?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	This participant explained that relocation repeatedly stalled her career growth, as she was always the “new person” at work and missed opportunities for advancement. Her husband’s chronic illness meant they could not live separately, forcing the family to survive at times only on his stipend—an income dependent on the congregation’s giving and not always reliable. The repeated disruptions had profound consequences for her children, with one child now living with mental illness. To mitigate further trauma, the family decided to leave the child with trusted friends until he completes high school, rather than move him again.
CW_02	The participant described how, when her husband was stationed in a rural circuit, she and the children found the environment unsuitable. The family decided she would remain in town with the children, where she could continue working, while her husband travelled nearly 800km to visit them occasionally. This physical separation placed a heavy burden on the family’s cohesion.
CW_03	Participant shared that her eldest child struggled academically because of language barriers following relocation, prompting the family to send him to boarding school. Even later, at university, he was placed in residence for stability. With her husband’s most recent move, the family again chose to split. She remained behind for her job while he served in the new circuit, visiting on weekends. She acknowledged that this arrangement was “not a healthy situation in marriage,” underscoring the relational strain of enforced separations.

CW_04	This participant reflected on the long-term impact of earlier decisions, admitting that her children grew up without their father, as she stayed behind in one place while he moved between stations.
CW_05	Participant explained that their upcoming relocation prompted them to finally purchase a house of their own. Moving into a mission house would disrupt the child's school routine as she will have to wake up at 5a.m to prepare for school. This would be a major adjustment for this child who has been in a comfortable routine for almost 14 years.
CW_06	This participant reiterated that the relocation left her to raise the children alone, while her husband moved around circuits, which placed the burden of family life entirely on her shoulders.
CW_07	Changes made by this participant were based on career choice. The frequent relocations influenced her career path. Initially pursuing teaching through UNISA, she realised after the second move that her limited patience with learning new languages would hinder her as a teacher. With her husband's support, she switched her studies to Human Resource Management, reflecting the need to adapt career choices to the realities of relocation.

Relocation brought profound and varied changes to clergy families, reshaping careers, relationships, and children's wellbeing. For some wives, repeated moves meant ongoing career disruption. One participant (CW_01) lamented that she kept missing opportunities for professional growth, as she was always the "new person" at work. Another (CW_07) altered her career path entirely, moving away from teaching into Human Resource Management after realising that her difficulty with local languages would hinder her in the classroom. Relocation also precipitated family separations. CW_02 described living in town with the children while her husband served in a rural circuit, visiting only occasionally due to the 800km distance. Similarly, CW_03 reported that she and her husband now live apart so that she can retain employment and their child can remain in school, though she admitted this arrangement was "not healthy for

marriage.” CW_04 echoed these struggles, noting that her children grew up without a father present because she stayed behind while her husband moved from station to station.

The impact on children was a recurring theme. CW_01 recounted that one child developed mental illness linked to the repeated disruptions, prompting the family to arrange for him to stay with friends until finishing high school. CW_03 shared that her eldest son was placed in boarding school after struggling with language at a new school, while CW_05 explained that their daughter, now in her final years of high school, would have to endure early mornings and long commutes rather than face another change of school. Financial pressures compounded these difficulties. Families often relied solely on the minister’s stipend, which was sometimes irregular (CW_01), or faced added costs for commuting and private education (CW_05).

Despite these hardships, wives demonstrated resilience by adapting to their circumstances. CW_05 described the decision to purchase a house to secure greater stability for the family, while others, like CW_01 and CW_03, made deliberate choices to limit the disruption to their children’s education, even at the cost of family unity. Together, these accounts highlight the emotional, relational, financial, and vocational adjustments that relocation forced upon clergy households, showing how deeply family life was reshaped by ecclesiastical decisions beyond their control.

Table 5.10: How did your family receive support during the relocation process and who provided the support?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	When reflecting on the support they received during relocation, this participant recalled that beyond the furniture removal truck, there was no personalised support for her family. She highlighted the stress of her husband driving around in his clerical collar, desperately seeking school placements for their children.
CW_02	This participant explained that while living with her children in a nurses’ hostel, she felt entirely unsupported. The only support she got was from her husband’s friend who occasionally helped them to the bus station, when she was going to visit her husband.

CW_03	<p>” When it’s time for a minister to move out of the circuit, the support that is available is on how to get to the next station. No one bothers to check whether the “Mamoruti” (minister’s wife), “will get a job at the new circuit, or whether the children will find suitable schools.” This was an observation from this participant. She expressed her disappointment for the lack of support from the church during relocation, a time when the family of clergy is going through a lot of anxiety. t this stage, we are having lots of anxiety.</p>
CW_04	<p>This participant was brief and to the point as if labouring on this issue brought her some pain. <i>“Just the truck that moved our furniture around. Besides that, I don’t remember anyone checking on us to find out how we were doing, how we were feeling about the move.”</i></p>
CW_05	<p>According to this participant, there is no one preparing you for relocation. They had to find a way as a family to deal with the move. This also included how to adjust to the realities of the new place.</p>
CW_06	<p>There was no support for this participant and her family during relocation. She highlighted that, “There is no structure in the church that takes care of ministers’ wives when their husbands are not at home.” She noted that not much is known about the challenges faced by clergy families as there are no platforms to talk openly about them. It is only those who are close to the ministers who understand their pain.</p>
CW_07	<p>This participant reported staunch support from her extended family, particularly through prayer. She also described how, in their last move, the secretary of the society proactively helped them to secure school placements for their children. However, she was clear that such gestures came from individuals, not institutional systems. For her, the church as an organisation showed little concern for the family’s emotional wellbeing, simply assigning placements without regard for personal fit or pastoral gifts. This</p>

	lack of discernment, she explained, left her husband frustrated and broken in his ministry, which in turn affected her as his spouse.
--	---

The responses reveal that clergy families received minimal to no support from the church during the relocation process. For most participants, the only form of assistance provided was transportation of their furniture, with no pastoral, emotional, or practical guidance (CW_01, CW_03, CW_04, CW_05). Wives expressed disappointment that no one considered the family's broader needs, such as job opportunities for the wives, children's schooling, or the emotional toll of uprooting. As CW_03 noted, this was a time when counselling or accompaniment would have been most valuable, yet such care was absent.

Several participants (CW_02, CW_06) highlighted the sense of isolation they experienced, particularly when left alone with children while their husbands were stationed elsewhere. Without institutional structures for support, families were forced to develop their own coping strategies or rely on occasional gestures of kindness from individuals, such as friends who assisted with travel (CW_02) or a society secretary who helped with school placement (CW_07).

One participant acknowledged support from her extended family through prayer (CW_07). Participants voiced frustration that the church appeared more concerned with administrative logistics than with the well-being of ministers' families, often ignoring the emotional and cultural challenges of relocation.

Overall, the data suggest that clergy families go through relocation unsupported and unseen. They rely on personal resilience, extended family, or isolated acts of kindness rather than structured, intentional care from the institution that appoints them.

Table 5.11: In your view, what can the Church do to make the clergy relocations easier for families?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
CW_01	Emphasised that the church should consider not only the minister but also the minister's family during stationing decisions. She suggested greater communication with wives, especially regarding their employment and the educational stage of the children. While

	ministers are expected to move without question, she noted, families experience disruption and loss that must not be ignored.
CW_02	This participant reflected on how earlier generations of ministers' wives were not employed, which made relocation less complicated. Today, however, many spouses are working, and their careers are not considered in stationing decisions. She observed that this often forces wives either to live apart from their husbands or to give up their jobs. She urged the church to ask about the wife's occupation and check the availability of work opportunities when assigning ministers.
CW_03	This participant recommended that the church develop stronger relationships with government institutions, private companies, and schools. These networks could help facilitate the placement of clergy wives in suitable jobs and ensure that children are accommodated in schools during relocation.
CW_04	This participant highlighted the need for pastoral support throughout the relocation process. She described the anxiety of waiting for up to two years before knowing where the family would be sent. Having someone journey with families during this uncertain period, she suggested, would alleviate emotional strain.
CW_05	This participant shared a more positive recent experience, where her husband's Bishop consulted with him and encouraged him to seek her views before finalising a move. This inclusive process, she explained, made the transition smoother and allowed for better mental preparation. She urged the church to involve all family members in discussions, not just the minister, noting that although clergy wives had once agreed to follow wherever the church sent their husbands, "times are changing."
CW_06	The participant stressed that Bishops should listen to ministers before assigning them to stations, ensuring that placements are viable. She noted that in her experience, some circuits could not afford to pay a stipend, placing families under financial strain. She argued that stationing decisions should take financial sustainability

	into account to protect clergy households. Most of her husband's stations were not financially viable.
CW_07	This participant admitted uncertainty about what the church could do but insisted that families must be considered more intentionally in relocation decisions. She observed that while the church preaches family values, it often neglects ministers' families, resulting in separations when wives cannot move due to work. She urged the church to include the circumstances of clergy wives during stationing decisions in order to prevent family separation.

The responses suggest that clergy wives see a clear need for the church to reform its approach to relocation by giving greater recognition to the realities of family life. A recurring concern is the lack of consultation with spouses and families during the stationing process. Participants (CW_01, CW_05, CW_07) called for the voices of wives and consideration of children's schooling and spouses' employment before decisions are finalised. While CW_05 described one positive instance of being indirectly consulted through her husband, most emphasised that such practices remain rare and should become standard.

Economic and vocational realities were also highlighted. Several participants (CW_02, CW_03, CW_06) noted that the church often overlooks the fact that modern clergy families are typically dual-career households, with wives contributing significantly to family stability. They argued that the church should actively engage with schools, businesses, and government to help secure placements for spouses and children and ensure that ministers are not sent to circuits unable to pay a stipend.

The responses also revealed the emotional burden of uncertainty during stationing. CW_04 described the long waiting period before Conference decisions as "emotionally draining," underscoring the need for pastoral support and accompaniment for families during transitions. Many participants voiced the need for a more family-centred approach to itinerancy, where care, preparation, and consultation replace anxiety, neglect, and unilateral decisions.

Overall, the participants urged the church to embrace a more holistic and family-sensitive model of stationing. Such a model would balance the minister's calling with

the wellbeing of spouses and children, thereby preventing unnecessary family disruption and strengthening the overall witness of the church.

5.3.2 Interviews with Children of Clergy

Also interviewed in this study were the adult children of the clergy in the MCSA’s Limpopo District. The interviews with four of the clergy’s children were conducted virtually via the Zoom platform due to the distance between them and the researcher. The Limpopo District is spread over 33 Circuits, ranging from Nelspruit, Tshwane Metropolitan, North West province, to the Limpopo province. Four of the interviews were face- to- face. The following questions were utilized to obtain this information:

1. What was it like growing up as a minister’s child?
2. Do you remember how many times you relocated as a family because of your father being stationed by the church?
3. What was your experience of these relocations?
4. What is your advice to the children of ministers who find themselves struggling due to relocations?

Below are the responses from the interviews with the children of the clergy.

Table 5.12: What was it like growing up as a minister’s child?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
PK_01	The participant described early childhood as exciting, with many adults treating them as their own children. However, around Standard 5, the perception of being a minister’s child for this participant shifted. She began to realise that being a minister’s child was not as enjoyable as she once thought, as awareness of the burdens of ministry life started coming to light. The moving around was stressful. My identity was “the minister’s child.” I did not have a name.
PK_02	This participant bluntly described the experience as something that “sucks.” He spoke of the heavy expectations placed on the pastor’s child to behave better than others. When doing wrong is seen as

	<p>bringing shame to the family. Although his parents were supportive and allowed him to be a child like any other children. He acknowledged that his parents ensured that the children went to the best schools despite the financial challenges they would occasionally face.</p>
PK_03	<p>Relocation was initially exciting for this participant as it provided an opportunity to meet with people from different backgrounds. The only challenging aspect was the expectations from the church and the community. The participant had to fit into an identity that was defined by the church and community as the “PK” (Pastor’s Kid). A child that is holier than other kids. This meant dressing up differently, choosing which parties to go to and not to go to. Her mother supported and protected her from expectations. She allowed her to be a child and live her live like any other child but with discipline.</p>
PK_04	<p>This participant is married and has two children. He remembered the excitement of meeting diverse people, but also the constant challenge of living under church and community expectations. He noted that, “The special treatment afforded to a minister’s child was good. They got served food first at church gatherings and received gifts from some congregation members who cared. He cited the challenges of growing up as a minister’s child as follows, <i>“I acted better than other kids, and we were not allowed to do anything wrong at home and in the community. The challenge of growing up as a minister’s child is that it shapes who you become as an adult. I am realizing this now as a grown-up man who has children.”</i> This participant now realises the value of family as his father put his calling before anyone else. He felt robbed of the time to experience a father as he puts his growing up in his own language, “Sikhuliswe ngomfundisi, not uThata” meaning, we were raised by a minister and not a father. His father spent most of his time working. As the children of a minister, they were taught to always serve others. He spoke with deep pain about how the family</p>

	<p>was abandoned by the church after their father's death. His mother was abruptly removed from the manse. And had to find shelter in a house offered by a family friend. For days, the family stayed in an empty house, the furniture they had in the manse belonged to the church. This experience left them feeling betrayed and resentful toward the church.</p>
PK_05	<p>Both parents of this participant were working. Her father was a minister, and the mother was a teacher. To her, ministry was just like any other career. Having a father who was clergy provided for this participant an early spiritual formation as "the church was at home "They took turns to pray as a family. As she grew older, the conflict in church began to affect her, especially if it was between the church leaders and her father. Her mother was very strict and therefore the participant and her siblings had to live according to her values that portray the image of a minister's children. My mother was very strict. We had to portray an image of the children of a minister. The participant struggled with education at secondary level and her parents had to send her to a boarding school for stability.</p>
PK_06	<p>This participant described her childhood as a "roller coaster," with occasional positives but mostly difficulties. She emphasised the heavy expectations from the community and how her father's treatment by church leaders directly affected her emotionally, given her close bond with him. She could sense when her father was "troubled" and that hurt her also.</p>
PK_07	<p>This participant shared that growing up as a minister's child was socially difficult. It was marked by constant expectations, loss of freedom, and lack of space to form his own identity. He described this as emotionally draining, always having to "be right" and avoid mistakes. The participant acknowledged that his father prioritised his calling. "I did have a problem with it at first because I did not understand but later, I realised that dad had to prioritise his ministry. It was through this that we got so much support from the congregation members in the absence of our parents- dad serving the people and mum away at work."</p>

	With his father always travelling to his congregation members, the Women's Manyano members in the circuits took care of this participant and his brother due to the good relationship their mother had with them.
PK_08	This participant described her experience as lonely, especially before the other sibling arrived. She recounted being alone while both parents worked or served. She referred to her experience in the manse as "a nightmare" with little privacy as the congregation members came in and out as they wished. She also spoke of how the congregation judged her when she failed to behave according to their expectations. She was to be an example to others as a minister's child. She recalled frustrations at being told, " <i>Why can't you be like your father?</i> " For her, this denied her the right to simply be a child.

The experiences of growing up as a minister's child were marked by a mix of privilege, pressure, and pain. On one hand, several participants recalled positive aspects such as exposure to different people (PK_01, PK_03), early grounding in spirituality and prayer (PK_05), and the small privileges afforded by congregational life, like gifts or special treatment in church (PK_04). These experiences shaped their sense of discipline, service, and spiritual identity.

However, the dominant thread across the responses is the heavy burden of expectations. Many participants (PK_02, PK_03, PK_06, PK_07, PK_08) described the pressure to behave better than other children, to uphold a "holier" image, and to embody the role of the model PK. This left them with little freedom to make mistakes or express individuality, producing feelings of frustration, loneliness, and even resentment. They were judged harshly when they did not live up to congregational standards, often being reminded that their behaviour reflected on their fathers' ministry.

The participants highlighted the emotional cost of ministry on family life. Four of the participants (PK_04, PK_05, PK_07, PK_08) lamented the absence of their fathers, who prioritised the calling over family presence. Some linked this to long-term

struggles with identity, loneliness, and even trauma. PK_01 and PK_04's accounts of being displaced after their father's death illustrates how quickly the church's care and recognition of the family can vanish, deepening feelings of abandonment and bitterness.

Overall, the data suggest that while being a minister's child can nurture resilience, discipline, and early spiritual growth, it often comes at the cost of childhood freedom, family unity, and personal identity. The dual experience of being both "privileged" and "pressured" is a defining feature of growing up as a PK.

Table 5.13: Do you remember how many times you relocated as a family because of your father being stationed by the church?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
PK-01	This participant reported experiencing two relocations. The first occurred while she was still a baby and therefore does not remember. The second, however, was formative, as the family remained in the circuit for 21 years, only moving between societies. The third relocation was a cross-border one, the family was moved from their home country, Swaziland to the Eastern Cape, in South Africa.
PK_02	This participant explained that relocation had been a defining feature of their life. While his father recalled five moves in total, he vividly remembered three, which took place when he was old enough to understand, "What was going on."
PK_03	<i>"Some of the moving happened before I was born and when I was still a small child. But I can remember us moving 4 times."</i>
PK_04	The participant remembered moving five times before his father's death, which occurred while he was still serving in ministry."
PK_05	The participant stated that her family relocated many times but remembered four significant moves. She explained that her father often remained in circuits for longer periods, sometimes up to ten years, before being moved again.
PK_06	This participant recounted four relocations. Notably, two of these were within the same circuit. Her father was moved to a station for

	three years, only to return to a previous station where he then served for another five years.
PK_07	The participant carefully recalled moving six times, counting all the circuits and districts, which reflected the extensive mobility of his father's ministry.
PK_08	This participant reported six relocations during her father's career. She expressed relief that he is now retired and that the frequent moving has come to an end.

The responses reflect the number of relocations experienced by clergy children, ranging from as few as two moves (PK_01) to as many as six (PK_07, PK_08). For some participants, particularly PK_01 and PK_05, the impact of relocation was made lighter by longer stays in certain circuits, often ten years or more, which provided a sense of stability and continuity.

For others, relocation was a constant feature of their childhood. Participants like PK_02, PK_07, and PK_08 recalled repeated moves that shaped their memories of family life, with "being on the move" described as the norm rather than the exception. Even where the exact number of relocations was difficult to recall, the impression left was one of uncertainty and disruption.

The frequency of moves not only reflects the itinerant system of ministry but also highlights its uneven impact: while some families benefited from extended invitations in one circuit, others endured ongoing transitions that defined their formative years. Across the narratives, relocation was understood less in terms of numbers and more in terms of its lasting impact on stability, continuity, and belonging.

Table 5.14: What was your experience of these relocations?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
PK_01	This participant described relocation as deeply unsettling, uncomfortable, and frightening because of the fear of the unknown. Leaving behind familiar friends, culture, and home life was painful, while adapting to a new language and environment added to the distress. The move across national borders to the

	<p>Eastern Cape brought further trauma, as immigration permits were not arranged for the family, separating them from their father. The church only sorted out the work permit for her father, and he had to arrange permits for the rest of the family. This participant was at the university at the time of this cross-border move. She was left alone whilst the rest of the family moved.</p> <p>The participant recalled feeling displaced and abandoned by the church's lack of sensitivity. The relocation coincided with her father's sudden death, which she attributed to the stress of the move, leaving the family devastated and resentful towards the church. She recalls, "My father died in December at the age of 53, the same year that he was relocated, and that was very devastating, that was worse, that was the worst. That for me was very painful. I was very hurt; I was very hurt. That was what broke me to say as a child of this person, you robbed my dad of his life. I did not see it as God's calling, stationing and what, what" they robbed my dad of his life. For me that was the breaking point. If he had not been moved, he would still be alive. Our lives wouldn't have been messed up to an extent of not knowing whether we were coming or going. As if it was not enough, my mother was instructed to leave the manse as a new minister was coming. The participant emotionally said, "<i>I was devastated, I hated the Methodist Church.</i>"</p>
PK_02	<p>This participant explained that each relocation came with its own challenges. His father was always moved to cross-cultural circuits and this brought constant re-adjustment to culture, language and socialisation. The participant struggles to make friends, but if he does, he treasures these. Relocation was challenging for him because he had to continuously leave his friends behind. The most painful relocation forced the participant to end a romantic relationship because of the distance. The relocation found him being placed in a school where he lost both identity and belonging. He was forced to play a musical instrument which was not his</p>

	<p>preference because the school did not his preferred instrument. His brother was in the same school, instead of the peers calling him by his name, he was always referred to as, “Klein Kruger.”(not his real surname), “meaning the younger version of his brother” This led to an emotional breakdown and the participant had to undergo therapy, after which he transferred to a new school where they he settled nicely. Despite this recovery, the participant is faced with an upcoming relocation. He indicated that his family have planned better this time, they are leaving him behind with family friend so that he can complete his studies in the familiar school.</p>
PK_03	<p>The participant noted that relocation repeatedly disrupted schooling. Moving for her meant starting all over again. She had to find new friends and go to a new school. Schooling was the biggest challenge for this participant. Her progress was affected with each move as the learning approaches were not always the same.</p>
PK_04	<p>The participant reflected on the cultural dislocation of growing up between Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu contexts. While multilingualism was an outcome, it also destabilised his sense of identity. He described never keeping close friends, struggling with language barriers, and hating the month of December as this was linked to relocations. The effects of relocation followed into adulthood, as frequent relocations left the participant restless and unable to settle in one place. This is straining his marriage and prompting him to seek counselling.</p>
PK_05	<p>The participant explained that relocations disrupted her high school education, eventually leading her parents to place her in boarding school for stability. She recalled her father’s conflicts with church leaders and how these affected the family emotionally. Frequent moves, the constant packing, and her mother’s struggles to secure employment left the family tired. Boarding school gave her longer-lasting friendships, but she avoided forming deep emotional attachments, to avoid the pain of separation.</p>

PK_06	This participant described relocations as a mix of emotions, but mostly very difficult. She recalled being bullied at school for speaking Zulu with an accent, which made her feel alienated. Constantly losing friends created a pattern of detachment that followed her into adulthood, making lasting relationships difficult. She admitted having pleaded with her father to consider a better station, not a rural one, but he chose to remain in his current circuit until retirement.
PK_07	This participant reflected on the socio-environmental upheaval of relocations, describing the pain of leaving behind friendships, dreams, and familiar routines. Moving between communities, such as from a Black township school to a multi-racial private school brought intense cultural disorientation and feelings of not belonging. Over time, he drew on values instilled by his parents, such as respect and service, to adapt. However, separation from his mother, who remained behind for work, added to his pain. He missed her presence deeply, even though his father tried to fulfil both parental roles.
PK_08	Relocation severely disrupted this participant's education, as frequent language changes sometimes forced her to repeat grades. One particularly difficult move came just as she began high school, making her more frustrated. The cycle of losing and remaking friends every three years generated anxiety and left the participant uncertain about future relationships.

The stories of children of clergy indicate that relocation was often experienced as disruptive, painful, and unsettling, with repeated themes of anxiety, grief, and a sense of separation. Most of the participants described the process as disruptive and intimidating, marked by the uncertainty of entering new environments, learning new languages, and leaving behind established friendships and routines (PK_01, PK_02, PK_03, PK_07, PK_08).

Education emerged as a major area of impact. Several participants (PK_02, PK_03, PK_05, PK_08) highlighted the disruption caused by frequent changes of schools,

which often led to struggles with language, repetition of grades, or diminished academic progress. Boarding schools were sometimes used as a strategy to provide stability (PK_04, PK_05), though this introduced new forms of separation from family. The cultural and language adjustments associated with moving between different communities (Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, multi-racial) also destabilised identity and contributed to feelings of marginalisation and bullying (PK_04, PK_06, PK_07).

The emotional toll of these relocations was profound. Participants described loneliness, loss of identity, anxiety, and resentment toward the church for its insensitivity to family realities (PK_01, PK_02, PK_06, PK_08). For some, the effects of repeated relocation were carried into adulthood, shaping struggles with attachment, stability, and even marriage (PK_04). Others spoke of trauma linked to church neglect, particularly in contexts where the father died in service and the family was quickly displaced from the manse (PK_01 and PK_04).

Despite these difficulties, some responses also reflected resilience. A few participants acknowledged developing adaptability, multilingual skills, and values of respect and service that were instilled by their parents during transitions (PK_04, PK_07). However, these positives were overshadowed by the dominant narrative of relocation as a source of disruption, grief, and broken childhood experiences.

Table 5.15: What is your advice to children of ministers who find themselves struggling due to relocations?

PARTICIPANT	RESPONSE
PK_01	<i>“I would just say- If only there was space for us as pastors’ kids to open up and share our pain, this would help. Its only God who knows our lives. Find a space of healing even if it means going to a psychologist, your life is waiting for you, your family needs you. There is still life after the pain.”</i>
PK_02	<i>“Relocation can be traumatic and will leave you hating the church. Take care of yourself. Find someone to talk to before you get a mental breakdown.”</i>
PK_03	<i>“Not to give up. It is difficult but they must remain as they are, be yourself. The pressure gets too much as you meet many people</i>

	<i>with different cultures and expectations for the pastor's child. Remain focused on your future as a person and not as the pastor's kid. I know you want to hear my advice to the PKs, but I think it would be nice if the church can give moral support to the PKs, especially the school going ones."</i>
PK_04	<i>"I am still struggling myself."</i>
PK_05	<i>"It depends on the age and where they are going. The best thing is to go to a boarding school and have a stable place where you can form for your future. Issues in the church affect you as an individual and this trauma may affect your spirituality. Do not leave the church. Hold on to God. Many children of ministers"</i>
PK_06	<i>"This is a cross that we carry as the pastors' kids. I strongly believe that one needs counselling to deal with these issues. Moving around, following your father might seem like a minor thing but it is a big problem. There is a need for the church to talk to the pastors' kids and involve them in the relocation. Hear from the kids themselves."</i> <i>"Also, to the ministers, try and keep the kids in one place as you move around. Consider boarding school. I really don't know what to say."</i>
PK_07	This participant acknowledged that "Every Pastor's kid has a unique journey that they go on with their father's occupation in ministry." He believes that there is a need for the ministers' children to get to know each other. That way they can share their challenges and help each other to deal with the pain issues they face by being children of clergy. He suggested gathering for social events or creating a "chat" group where pastors kids can share their stories. His final advice to clergy children was to <i>"Embrace the fact that their father is a minister who will always be on the move, though it is challenging but it brings a lot of respect to your family name once people know that your father is a Pastor. It is just</i>

	<i>a life lesson.</i> "
PK_08	"To focus more on their studies and not put too much thought on the moving. To remember that their father is a minister and that he will be required by the church to move. To support each other as a family. It is important to have open discussions as a family where each one shares their pain and frustrations. That way you support each other better."

The responses reveal a strong awareness among clergy children of the psychological and spiritual toll of relocation, but also a deep commitment to resilience, healing, and mutual support. Some participants emphasised the importance of seeking help and a safe space to process pain. PK_01 and PK_02 recommended counselling or talking to someone trusted, highlighting how silence and isolation can lead to breakdowns. PK_06 similarly called for counselling and greater involvement of children in the relocation process, stressing that their voices must be heard.

Participants encouraged their peers to remain true to themselves and focus on their future, rather than being consumed by congregational expectations (PK_03, PK_08), Education was seen as an anchor, with some recommending boarding school as a way of creating stability amid constant moves (PK_05, PK_06). At the same time, PK_05 warned against abandoning faith altogether, urging children not to let negative church experiences break their relationship with God.

The theme of community support among pastors' kids emerged strongly. PK_07 suggested building networks and social spaces where ministers' children can share experiences, strengthen one another, and reduce the isolation that often comes with relocation. This collective sharing was viewed as a way to cope with challenges, prevent destructive choices, and reframe the PK identity positively.

Overall, the advice reflects both the wounds and wisdom of growing up as clergy children. The participants advocate for emotional honesty, mental health support, family unity, educational stability, faith, and peer networks as vital resources in navigating the struggles of relocation.

5.4 INTERPRETATION OF THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH CLERGY WIVES AND CHILDREN

The previous section (5.3) presented the summaries from the interviews that were conducted with 7 clergy wives and 8 adult children of clergy who have experienced relocation in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The analysis of interviews with clergy wives and clergy children yielded five central themes that capture the lived experiences of relocation.

5.4.1 Theme Selection and Framing

The data analysis process generated a wide range of categories and sub-themes from the interviews with clergy wives and clergy children. While these reflected the richness of participants' experiences, not all categories carried the same weight in terms of frequency, significance, or pastoral relevance. Some issues appeared only once or twice, while others surfaced repeatedly across participants, cutting across both groups in ways that revealed their centrality to the lived experience of relocation.

To arrive at the final themes for analysis, the researcher applied two guiding principles: prioritisation and integration. Prioritisation meant that themes that appeared consistently and resonated strongly with participants' narratives were given greater prominence. Integration involved combining categories that overlapped in meaning to avoid fragmentation and present broader, more coherent themes. For example, narratives about disrupted friendships, jobs, and family life were integrated into the broader theme of Social Disruption, while stories of cultural displacement and institutional role expectations were brought together under Loss of Identity.

The final six themes selected, therefore, represent not only the most prominent findings but also the most pastorally significant struggles faced by clergy families. These themes provide the framework for the discussion that follows and will later serve as a foundation for constructing a pastoral response in Chapter 6.

The six themes and their categories are presented in table 5.16 below

Themes	Categories
1. Emotional Stress	Fear of the unknown
2. Social Disruption	Friendships, Jobs, and Family

3. Loss of Identity	Cultural and Language Challenges
4. Personage Life	Privacy, Ownership, and Belonging
5. Unspoken Pain	Hidden Grief and Silent Struggles
6. Financial Challenges	Disrupted Stipends and Spousal Employment

Table 5.16 Themes from interviews with clergy wives and children

Each theme is explored in relation to the two categories of participants, clergy wives and adult children of clergy, highlighting both their shared and unique experiences. This dual analysis not only strengthens the credibility of the findings but also reveals the multifaceted ways in which relocation shapes family life. The voices of the participants revealed not only patterns of grief, loss, and dislocation, but also resilience, adaptability, and faith, which align with the frameworks of this study, Grief Theory proposed by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), and Nick Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction Model (1997). By integrating these perspectives, this interpretation highlights both the challenges of relocation and the potential for healing, resilience, and transformation within clergy families.

5.4.2 Theme 1: Emotional Stress (Fear of the Unknown

Theme 1 explores the emotional stress experienced by clergy families as a direct consequence of relocation. This theme highlights the psychological and emotional uncertainty that accompanies repeated moves, particularly in relation to anxiety, insecurity, and anticipatory fear. It is composed of one category, namely: Fear of the unknown. This category captures participants’ emotional responses to uncertainty surrounding new congregations, unfamiliar environments, and unpredictable expectations. The discussion that follows focuses on how fear of the unknown manifests emotionally and shapes the lived experiences of clergy spouses and children.

5.4.2.1 Clergy Wives

The emotional stress of clergy wives was not limited to the act of relocation itself but was also connected to how they entered into the ministerial journey. Approximately 47% of the wives met their husbands before they became ministers, which meant that the call to ministry came as an unexpected life shift. For many, this was experienced

as a “secondary calling”, they had not anticipated the lifestyle changes that ministry would demand of them, and the sudden adjustment created deep emotional strain. One wife explained that her husband’s calling “felt like a calling imposed on me,” (CW_02), with relocation being one of the most disruptive manifestations of this transition.

Even among the remaining 53% who married men already in ministry, there was still considerable emotional stress. Many entered the role of “minister’s wife” with apprehension, shaped by what they had heard or observed in the church. The anticipation of being scrutinised, carrying unwritten expectations, and facing an uncertain future in different congregations produced a constant sense of anxiety.

In both cases, wives described feelings of fear and restlessness in the months leading up to a move, uncertain about how they would be received in a new community or whether they would find employment. The disruption of routines, social networks, and vocational stability made each move a source of emotional strain.

This experience resonates with Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, which emphasises that transitions generate stress when individuals lack adequate support or predictability (Schlossberg, 1981:6). Similarly, Lazarus and Folkman’s Stress and Coping Theory highlights that uncertainty heightens perceptions of threat, leaving individuals vulnerable when facing uncontrollable changes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984:21). Pastoral literature echoes these struggles: Darling, Hill and McWey (2004:265) note that clergy wives often experience anticipatory grief with each relocation, as they prepare to leave behind familiar friendships and community roles. Within the Methodist context, the connectional system intensifies these anxieties, as relocation decisions are made by church authorities with minimal consultation (MCSA, 2016:42).

5.4.2.2 Clergy Children

For clergy children, emotional stress was closely tied to disruptions in education and peer relationships. Participants spoke of the anxiety of entering new schools, adjusting to different curricula, and forming new friendships while grieving the loss of old ones. These repeated cycles of adjustment generated a lingering sense of instability and emotional exhaustion.

Research supports these findings. Goodman (2010:92) observes that children experiencing frequent relocation often express emotional distress through behavioural changes, withdrawal, or academic difficulties. Similarly, Olsen (1985:63) emphasises that clergy children face unique stressors because their parents' moves are not family decisions but institutional requirements. This lack of agency amplifies feelings of powerlessness and anxiety.

From a pastoral care perspective, these emotional burdens highlight the need for intentional accompaniment of clergy families during transitions. Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model (1997:54) suggests that such stress can be reframed as an opportunity for growth when families are supported to find meaning and resilience in their experiences. However, without adequate support, the fear of the unknown risks becoming a chronic emotional wound that undermines family stability.

5.4.3 Theme 2: Social Disruption (Friendships, Jobs, and Family)

Theme 2 addresses the social disruption experienced by clergy families as a result of relocation. This theme focuses on the destabilisation of established social networks and support systems that previously provided continuity and a sense of belonging. It is composed of three interrelated categories, namely: friendships, jobs, and family.

Together, these categories illustrate how relocation disrupts relational ties, employment stability, and extended family connections, resulting in social dislocation and increased vulnerability for clergy spouses and children. The discussion that follows is structured according to these three categories, examining each in turn to highlight their impact on the lived experiences of clergy families.

5.4.3.1 Clergy Wives

Relocation consistently disrupted the social fabric of clergy wives' lives. Many spoke about the pain of leaving behind deep friendships and established support systems, which often took years to build in a community. Each move meant beginning again, rebuilding networks of trust, re-establishing routines, and re-negotiating their place in the congregation. This constant uprooting led to feelings of isolation and fatigue.

Employment and career development were also affected. Several clergy wives highlighted how relocation interrupted professional opportunities, forcing them to resign from jobs or delay their studies. Dual-career families were particularly strained,

as one spouse's career was often subordinated to the church's decision. As one wife expressed, "By the time I settle into a job, it's time to move again." (CW_03). Such disruptions reinforced a sense of instability in both family life and personal identity.

This resonates with wider literature on mobility. Goldenberg and Goldenberg note that "Families function as interconnected systems, where disruption in one domain (employment, friendships) inevitably affects emotional and relational wellbeing" (2013:16). Similarly, Frame and Shehan argue that "Constant disruption erodes family cohesion and social capital, leaving clergy households vulnerable to stress." (2005:45). Within the Methodist context, these struggles are exacerbated by the stationing system, where decisions prioritise congregational needs over family stability (MCSA, 2016:44).

5.4.3.2 Clergy Children

For clergy children, social disruption was particularly visible in the loss of friendships and peer networks. Many participants described the pain of saying goodbye to close friends, only to arrive in unfamiliar environments where they were outsiders. Forming new friendships often took time, leaving children feeling lonely and disconnected. This cycle of repeated separation and adjustment became a recurring source of grief.

Educational disruption further deepened these challenges. Children often moved between schools with different curricula, teaching styles, and extracurricular opportunities. One participant recalled: "*By the time I adjusted to a new school system, we had to move again. I felt like I never belonged anywhere,*" (PK_03). The other participant pointed out that "*I repeated grades with each relocation.*" (PK_08). Some participants noted that they struggled academically after relocation, while others found it difficult to maintain continuity in sports or cultural activities. These educational and social breaks contributed to a sense of dislocation, which lingered long after the move.

Research supports these experiences. Goodman (2010:92) highlights that relocation disrupts children's developmental tasks, particularly peer bonding and identity formation. Similarly, Darling, Hill and McWey emphasise that clergy children face compounded challenges because their moves are dictated by ecclesiastical structures rather than personal choice. The result is an intensified sense of "rootlessness," where children feel they belong everywhere and nowhere (2004:265).

From a pastoral perspective, these findings underscore the need for churches to provide stronger relational and educational support systems for clergy families. Congregations that intentionally welcome and integrate clergy families can mitigate some of the disruption. Without such support, however, the repeated loss of friendships, jobs, and stability risks becoming a recurring wound in both spouses and children.

5.4.4 Theme 3: Loss of Identity (Cultural and Language Challenges)

Theme 3 explores the loss of identity experienced by clergy families in the context of relocation. This theme focuses on how repeated movement and cross-context placements disrupt individuals' sense of self, belonging, and continuity. It is composed of two interrelated categories, namely: cultural challenges and language challenges.

Together, these categories illustrate how relocation into unfamiliar cultural environments and linguistic contexts contributes to feelings of alienation, marginalisation, and identity erosion among clergy spouses and children. The discussion that follows is structured according to these two categories, examining each in turn to show how identity is negotiated, disrupted, and reshaped within new contexts.

5.4.4.1 Clergy Wives

For many clergy wives, relocation was also met with role expectations that overshadowed their personal identity. Participant CW_07 captured this tension when she recalled her husband's words: "*Before being a minister's wife, you are still my wife, the mother of my children.*" While this recognition affirmed her personal identity within the family, the wider church did not always see her this way. Instead, she was primarily defined through the institutional role of "the minister's wife."

This is reinforced by church tradition. During the collaring service, wives are ceremonially robed in a red cape that sets them apart from other women in the *Manyano* organisation. This symbolic act positions them as associate clergy, irrespective of their personal calling or vocational identity. While intended as an honour, this ritual effectively collapses their individuality into their husband's office,

making it difficult to be recognised simply as women, mothers, or professionals in their own fields.

As Doehring reminds us, “This merging of role and identity diminishes the individuality of spouses, reducing them into mere extensions of the ministerial position (2015:87). For wives of clergy, relocation intensifies the feeling of losing one's identity, as it involves not only cultural and language barriers but also institutional expectations that silence individuality.

From a systemic perspective, Goldenberg and Goldenberg remind us that, “Disruptions in cultural and linguistic belonging can destabilise the family system, as individuals lose familiar anchors of meaning.” (2013:16). Within the itinerant Methodist system, the emphasis on serving diverse communities is often pastorally enriching for the church, but it may inadvertently marginalise clergy spouses whose cultural and linguistic identities are repeatedly displaced (MCSA, 2016:44).

5.4.4.2 Clergy Children

For clergy children, the loss of identity was even more pronounced. Many reported difficulties fitting into new schools where the language of instruction or the dominant culture differed from what they were accustomed to. Several children felt self-conscious about their accents or cultural background, which sometimes made them targets of teasing or exclusion. One participant shared: *“I always felt like the new kid who spoke differently, and it was hard to belong,” (PK_07).*

Frequent relocation also disrupted their ability to form a consistent sense of self and belonging. Adolescents, in particular, who are in the critical stage of identity formation, struggled with feeling rootless. As Goodman (2010:92) points out, repeated cultural transitions during adolescence can hinder the development of a stable identity, leaving young people feeling as if they belong everywhere and nowhere.

Scholars such as Olsen (1985:63) further highlight that clergy children often feel invisible in the relocation process, as decisions are made without their input. This lack of agency compounds their struggle to develop a coherent identity, leading to what some researchers term “cultural homelessness,” a condition where repeated moves prevent the establishment of a stable cultural and personal identity.

From a pastoral perspective, these findings emphasise the importance of identity-sensitive care. Churches and clergy networks must intentionally affirm the cultural and linguistic heritage of relocating families, ensuring that neither spouses nor children feel erased in the process. Without such affirmation, relocation risks becoming not only a geographic displacement but also a displacement of self.

5.4.5 Theme 4: Parsonage Life (Privacy, Ownership, and Belonging)

Theme 4 examines the lived experiences of parsonage life among clergy families following relocation. This theme focuses on how church-provided housing, while intended to offer stability and support, often becomes a source of tension, vulnerability, and insecurity. It is composed of three interrelated categories, namely: privacy, ownership, and belonging.

Together, these categories illustrate how limited privacy, lack of ownership, and an ongoing sense of impermanence shape clergy families' experiences of home and identity. The discussion that follows is structured according to these three categories, exploring each in turn to highlight how parsonage life affects dignity, security, and emotional wellbeing.

5.4.5.1 Clergy Wives

Clergy wives repeatedly described life in the manse as both a privilege and a burden. While they appreciated the provision of housing by the church, many felt that parsonage life deprived them of privacy and created a sense of being constantly under watch. Congregants often assumed that the minister's home was open for visits, meetings, or church gatherings at any time, leaving families with little control over their personal space. One participant recalled: *"Even in our living room, I felt like I was in the church,"* (CW_04).

Another recurring concern was the inability to build long-term stability and ownership. Because parsonages are owned by the church, families moved frequently and could not invest in or personalise their homes. Wives expressed a deep sense of rootlessness, describing parsonage living as "temporary" and "borrowed." This eroded their sense of belonging and security.

Lee points out that, “Clergy families live much of their private lives in public view, blurring the boundary between home and ministry.” (1999:4). Similarly, Doehring describes clergy households as embodying “relational ministry,” where the family itself becomes a symbol of the church, leaving little space for private identity, (2015:87). Within the Methodist itinerant system, these pressures are particularly acute, as parsonages are central to relocation policy (MCSA, 2016:48)

5.4.5.2 Clergy Children

For clergy children, the parsonage was often experienced as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it symbolised the family’s role in ministry and sometimes provided housing security in new places. On the other hand, children felt deprived of the normal experience of “home ownership” and continuity. Each move meant leaving behind a parsonage they could not call their own, reinforcing the temporary nature of their housing.

Children also noted the lack of privacy in parsonage life. Many recalled congregants entering their homes freely or expecting their presence at church activities because of their proximity. This blurred the boundary between personal and communal life, making children feel they never truly had a space of their own. One participant shared: *“It was like we were always living in a glass house,”* (PK_03). The researcher empathises with these feelings as she has experienced this setting of a manse within the church premises. The different organisations in the church have activities regularly at the church. Sometimes these activities are conducted in the evenings when the lay employees of the church have gone off duty. The clergy family then takes on the role of opening the gates and ensuring that the church doors are locked. This is an infringement of their personal space.

Frame and Shehan agrees with these findings in their argument that, “The minister’s residence is rarely a private domain, but rather an extension of the church’s public life.” (2005:45). For children, this lack of separation can interfere with identity formation and foster resentment toward the church.

From a pastoral perspective, the challenge of parsonage life highlights the need for intentional clergy family care policies that respect the privacy and belonging of clergy

families. Without such support, the parsonage becomes not a sanctuary but a symbol of displacement.

5.4.6 Theme 5: Unspoken Pain (Hidden Grief and Silent Struggles)

Theme 5 captures the unspoken pain experienced by clergy families in the context of relocation. This theme focuses on the emotional suffering that remains largely invisible within church structures and congregational life, often carried in silence. It is composed of two interrelated categories, namely: hidden grief and silent struggles.

Together, these categories reveal how emotional loss, unresolved grief, and ongoing distress are frequently internalised due to expectations of resilience, obedience, and faithfulness. The discussion that follows is structured according to these two categories, examining each in turn to illuminate the depth and consequences of unacknowledged suffering among clergy families.

5.4.6.1 Clergy Wives

For clergy wives, unspoken pain was also linked to the silencing of their voices in the relocation process. Decisions about where their families would live and serve were made by the church hierarchy, without consultation or acknowledgment of the profound impact these moves had on their lives. Several wives described feeling excluded and invisible, silenced by the very church that proclaims, “*a Christ-healed Africa for the healing of nations.*” As one participant lamented, “*How can the church preach healing, when its own families are hurting in silence?*”

This silence echoes Doehring’s (2015:92) reminder that clergy spouses often carry “hidden wounds” within the pastoral system, as their suffering is overlooked in favour of congregational expectations. Lartey (2003:84) also highlights how silence within pastoral contexts can reinforce suffering, making it more difficult for individuals to seek healing.

The result was often a burden of unacknowledged grief, not necessarily linked to bereavement but to the repeated losses brought by relocation: friendships, careers, stability, and belonging. Without intentional pastoral accompaniment, such pain remains suppressed, affecting both emotional wellbeing and spiritual vitality.

This contradiction between the church's public theology of healing and its private silencing of clergy families reflects what Lartey describes as the failure of pastoral systems to address internal wounds (2003:84). Theologically, it raises critical questions about authenticity: can the church truly embody healing for society if it ignores the suffering within its own household?

From a pastoral care perspective, breaking this silence is essential. As Pollard (1997:54) notes, healing begins when pain is named, deconstructed, and reframed within a supportive community. A church that listens to and honours the voices of clergy wives would take a decisive step toward embodying its own prophetic vision.

5.4.6.2 Clergy Children

For clergy children, unspoken pain was most vividly expressed in the experience of loss through death or neglect by other remaining family members. Some participants shared stories of fathers who died while in ministry, leaving their children with unresolved grief. In these situations, children felt that the church quickly moved on, reducing their father's legacy to a line in the stationing book, with little pastoral support for the family. One participant lamented, *"My father became just a statistic to the church. No one cared about us after he was gone."* (PK_04).

Even outside of bereavement, many children spoke of the hidden grief of repeated goodbyes, to friends, to schools, and to communities they loved. These losses were rarely acknowledged by congregations, who often celebrated the arrival of a new minister without recognising the pain of the departing family. Such silence deepened feelings of neglect and invisibility.

Goodman observes that children frequently grieve relocation losses in ways that adults overlook, and without recognition, their pain remains unresolved (2010:94). Wimberly and Wimberly likewise stress that the church often neglects the pastoral care needs of clergy families, particularly in times of crisis." (2007:112).

From a pastoral perspective, unspoken pain represents a profound challenge for the church. Pollard's Positive Deconstruction suggests that healing begins when silence is broken and suffering is named within supportive communities (1997:54). Recognising and addressing the hidden grief of clergy families is therefore not optional but integral to a theology of care.

5.4.7 Theme 6: Financial Challenges Associated with Relocation (Int

Theme 6 focuses on the financial challenges experienced by clergy families as a result of relocation. This theme highlights economic instability and financial insecurity as significant stressors that accompany itinerant ministry, often compounding emotional and relational strain. It is composed of two interrelated categories, namely: disrupted stipends and spousal employment.

Together, these categories illustrate how delayed or inconsistent stipends and the loss or interruption of spousal employment opportunities undermine financial stability and family wellbeing. The discussion that follows is structured according to these two categories, examining each in turn to show how financial disruption intensifies the broader challenges faced by clergy families.

Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews with clergy wives was the financial strain caused by frequent relocations. Many participants highlighted how relocation disrupted not only their husbands' stipends but also their own employment opportunities, resulting in ongoing household insecurity. For clergy spouses, repeated relocation often necessitated resignation from employment, loss of professional continuity, and the erosion of long-term career aspirations. One participant articulated her frustration candidly: *"Each time we move, I have to resign and start over. It feels like the church does not care that I also have a career and dreams. I get so angry because I work hard to build something, and then it's gone"* (CW_01). This expression of anger reflects a recognised stage within the grief process, where feelings of loss, injustice, and powerlessness are voiced emotionally. In this context, anger emerges as a response not only to financial loss but also to the repeated disruption of identity, agency, and vocational meaning experienced by clergy wives during relocation. Another wife, who had been unemployed since her last relocation, described the toll on her self-worth: *"I am studying for a diploma now because I lost my job when we moved. Sometimes I feel I am being punished for being married to a minister,"* (CW_07).

These voices reveal the deep resentment and grief that accompany the loss of income, independence, and professional identity. For dual-career families, relocation created ongoing cycles of sacrifice, where the wife's career was repeatedly subordinated to the husband's ministry. The resulting frustration often spilled over into family life, compounding the emotional and relational pressures already experienced during

transitions. Financial uncertainty was further exacerbated when ministers were appointed to smaller, struggling congregations where stipends were delayed or irregular. As one participant observed: *“It is not just the move; it is the fear that next month we might not even be paid on time,”* (CW_05).

The intensity of these experiences resonates with Lazarus and Folkman’s Stress and Coping Theory, which emphasises the strain created when individuals perceive that the demands placed upon them exceed their available resources (1984:141). In this context, relocation represents not only a practical disruption but also an assault on financial security, identity, and dignity. The anger expressed by clergy wives highlights the cumulative effect of these stressors, as repeated job losses and stipend inconsistencies erode resilience and trust in the institutional processes of the church.

Scholars have noted similar dynamics in their studies of clergy families. Darling, Hill and McWey (2004:265) observe that spouses often face curtailed career prospects, leading to feelings of frustration and isolation. Carroll likewise points out that clergy households experience heightened stress when financial concerns are left unaddressed by denominational structures (2006:53). The account shared by Edward Wimberly of his father’s whose promised appointment to a larger church with a better salary was reversed in favour of a small church with much less salary, leaving a bitterness on his mother towards itinerancy congregation highlights how relocation decisions can have devastating economic consequences for families.

Although the clergy children in this study did not raise financial concerns directly, it is clear that the economic instability of their households affected them indirectly, whether through disrupted schooling, fewer resources, or the anxiety of watching their parents struggle to make ends meet. These financial pressures therefore form a critical part of the lived reality of relocation, reminding the church that decisions about stationing must consider not only pastoral and missional needs but also the economic well-being of clergy families.

The financial challenges associated with relocation thus emerged as a particularly painful dimension of clergy family life. Beyond the emotional and social strains, the loss of employment opportunities, irregular stipends, and disrupted career trajectories left many wives feeling angry, undervalued, and unsupported. These frustrations point to the urgent need for the church to consider the broader socio-economic realities of

clergy households in its stationing practices. Having presented the voices of both clergy wives and children across six themes, the chapter now turns to a conclusion that draws these findings together, highlighting their collective significance for understanding the lived experiences of relocation.

5.5 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

The interpretation of themes from the interviews with clergy wives and children reveals that the experience of relocation is both deeply disruptive and profoundly formative. For clergy wives, relocation often brought grief in the form of lost careers, instability, and the burden of unchosen roles within the church. Yet within this disruption, many began to reframe their identities, setting boundaries and calling for a more family-centred approach to itinerancy. For clergy children, relocation was experienced as the loss of friendships, continuity in education, and ordinary childhood freedoms. Their voices testify to the emotional cost of absent fathers, identity struggles, and recurring loneliness, while also pointing to resilience, adaptability, and the anchoring power of faith.

Taken together, these narratives reveal a pattern of repeated losses that require acknowledgement and healing. Both wives and children long for recognition, stability, and support, naming the gaps in the church's current practices while also imagining healthier possibilities. The grief they describe is not static but cyclical, re-emerging with each move, and yet within this cycle lie seeds of resilience and hope. Interpreting their experiences through the lenses of grief and positive deconstruction shows that healing begins when pain is named honestly, when destructive assumptions are dismantled, and when new patterns of care and support are envisioned.

This interpretive work therefore not only illuminates the challenges of clergy relocation but also opens the way toward reconstructing a more compassionate and holistic approach to ministry. Chapter 6 will build on these insights by proposing a healing model that draws on both Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) grief theory and Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction Model (1997).

CHAPTER 6: DEVELOPING A HEALING METHODOLOGY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a pastoral intervention model designed to address the grief, disruption, and identity struggles experienced by clergy families in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) because of relocation. Building on the findings of Chapter 5, the purpose here is to propose a healing approach that can guide the church, clergy, and lay leadership in supporting both ministers' spouses and children during times of transition.

While relocation is often framed as part of the minister's calling, the lived experiences of participants revealed that it frequently imposes repeated losses on families, ranging from disrupted careers and schooling to fractured relationships and emotional strain. This intervention, therefore, seeks to provide a theological and pastoral response that acknowledges these realities, validates the voices of clergy families, and offers pathways toward resilience and healing.

The findings of this study highlighted that most clergy wives entered marriage with little or no awareness of the hardships linked to ministerial relocation. Apart from one, none had previously encountered stories of relocation challenges, which confirms the silencing of clergy wives' experiences. In practice, they often carried the pain of relocation quietly, protecting their husbands' vocations at the expense of their own peace and fulfilment. According to Wimberly and Wimberly, "Often the tendency on the part of clergy and family is to endure challenge in silence, either for fear of complaining, or because there is no place or time to translate into words the realities of everyday life" (2007:11).

A further theme was the vocational sacrifices of clergy wives. Approximately 86% pursued careers, yet many were forced at different stages to choose between their profession and their marriage. This left some raising children largely on their own, as frequent moves disrupted family stability and paternal presence. Their testimonies reveal a strong call to be heard by the church during relocation processes.

Similarly, adult children of clergy voiced a deep sense of loss, of friends, familiar environments, and even of personal identity. Both groups emphasised a lack of

meaningful support from MCSA leadership, underscoring the urgent need for an intentional pastoral response.

This chapter therefore proposes a pastoral care model aimed at responding to the circumstances of repeated uprooting from the known to the unknown. The central aim is to equip the church to care for clergy families in ways that help them acknowledge loss, foster resilience, and find strength to cope with the impact of relocation.

The proposed model draws primarily on Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) grief framework and Pollard's (1997) Positive Deconstruction. These complementary lenses allow for an approach that both honours the cycles of grief and opens space for reconstructing healthier patterns of identity, belonging, and family support within the itinerant system.

6.2 APPLICATION OF THE PASTORAL CARE THEORIES

Before outlining the proposed pastoral intervention, it is important to consider the theoretical frameworks that inform and support it. This section draws on Grief Theory proposed by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), complemented by Nick Pollard's Positive Deconstruction Model (1997), to show how relocation evokes experiences of loss, disruption, and resilience. These theories provide the theological and psychological grounding for the healing method that will be introduced later in the chapter. Each theory will be discussed in the section that follows.

6.2.1 The Five Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler: 2005)

Relocation, while not a physical bereavement, evokes processes of loss that mirror the stages of grief. By applying Kübler-Ross and Kessler's model, clergy families' emotional journeys can be understood more fully, allowing the church to respond with sensitivity and care.

- **Shock/Denial:**

The first stage of grief is often marked by shock and denial, a physiological and psychological response designed to protect individuals from being overwhelmed by sudden change (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:7). Denial provides temporary insulation, giving the body and mind time to gather strength

to process unexpected realities. Although usually short-lived, this stage can involve numbness, disbelief, anxiety, or fear.

For clergy families, shock and denial frequently accompany the abrupt announcement of relocation. The lack of prior consultation or preparation often intensifies this experience, as families are uprooted from familiar surroundings with little time to adjust emotionally or practically. The situation can be further compounded when relocation plans are altered at short notice, such as during the reading of final stations at Conference.

One clergy wife shared:

“I resigned from my job when we were close to moving only for my husband’s station to be changed to a different district, not the one that we had emotionally and socially prepared our minds to. I was devastated.” (CW_01)

A clergy child described the same sense of upheaval:

“It was very unsettling, it was very uncomfortable, very daunting and very scary as well because of the fear of the unknown. This place we were about to leave was home.” (PK_01)

These narratives show how the initial shock of relocation disrupts both personal stability and family cohesion, highlighting the need for pastoral care that acknowledges and validates this first, disorienting stage of grief.

- **Anger**

The second stage of grief is often characterised by anger, which arises as the protective numbness of denial fades and the reality of loss becomes unavoidable (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:15). Anger is a natural response to the disruption of life patterns, surfacing as resentment, frustration, or blame directed at others, oneself, or even God. While often uncomfortable, this stage is crucial because it gives expression to the pain that lies beneath grief.

For clergy families, anger frequently emerges in relation to the perceived lack of agency in relocation decisions. Spouses may resent the loss of careers or social networks, while children may direct their frustration toward the church or

their parents for agreeing to the move. In some cases, anger is exacerbated by feelings of betrayal when ecclesial structures fail to acknowledge the cost borne by families.

A clergy wife reflected on the bitterness of such displacement:

“I gave up a career I loved because we were told to move. No one asked me what it meant for me. I felt invisible and angry that the church could just decide for us.” (CW_04)

A clergy child described similar emotions:

“I was furious that my parents agreed to move again. I lost my friends, my school, everything that mattered. I thought, why does the church get to decide our lives?” (PK_03)

These testimonies reveal that anger, though painful, is an essential stage of grief. For pastoral carers, the task is not to suppress such feelings but to create safe spaces where they can be expressed honestly and transformed into constructive dialogue and eventual healing.

- **Bargaining**

The third stage of grief, bargaining, reflects the human attempt to regain control in the face of loss (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005:27). It often takes the form of “if only” statements, negotiations with God, or hopes that circumstances might change. While bargaining rarely alters reality, it provides temporary relief by imagining ways the pain could be lessened or reversed.

Within clergy families, bargaining often surfaces during relocation as spouses and children attempt to make sense of their losses. Spouses may wonder whether sacrifices could have been avoided had different choices been made, while children may fantasise about returning to their old schools or communities. Sometimes bargaining is directed toward God, with prayers for stability or promises of greater service in exchange for fewer disruptions.

One clergy wife recalled her desperate negotiations:

“I prayed, ‘Lord, if you let us stay just a little longer, I promise I’ll do more in the women’s ministry.’ I thought maybe if I sacrificed more, God would spare us the move.” (CW_02)

A clergy child expressed a similar longing for reversal:

“I kept hoping something would happen to cancel the move—like maybe the church would change its mind at the last minute. I even begged my parents to ask if we could stay.” (PK_08)

These voices illustrate how bargaining provides families with a temporary sense of agency in a process where they often feel powerless. For pastoral carers, recognising this stage means accompanying families with compassion, affirming their longing for stability while gently guiding them toward acceptance and resilience.

- **Depression**

The fourth stage of grief is characterised by deep sadness, withdrawal, and a sense of helplessness as individuals confront the full weight of their loss (Kübler-Ross & Kessler 2005:39). Unlike anger or bargaining, which are outward or future-oriented, depression draws the grieving person inward. This stage often involves feelings of isolation, despair, and a loss of motivation, yet it represents an important step in acknowledging the depth of pain.

For clergy families, depression may arise as the reality of relocation settles in, when the excitement of arrival fades and the loneliness of adaptation sets in. Spouses may grieve the loss of careers, friendships, and independence, while children may mourn their disrupted schooling or the absence of long-term friendships. Depression in this context is often compounded by the expectation that clergy families should model resilience and faith, leaving little space for vulnerability.

One clergy wife described her struggle in this stage:

“I would smile at church, but when I got home, I would cry myself to sleep. Everyone thought I was strong, but inside I felt broken and alone.” (CW_05)

A clergy child echoed this sense of hidden despair:

“I stopped talking about how sad I was because no one wanted to hear it. I felt like my sadness was a burden, so I just kept it inside.” (PK_06)

These testimonies reveal how relocation can precipitate profound feelings of disconnection and hopelessness. For pastoral carers, acknowledging depression is crucial: rather than rushing families toward positivity, carers must create spaces where grief is validated, where silence is broken, and where lament can be expressed as part of faithful living.

- **Acceptance**

The final stage of grief, acceptance, is not about erasing pain but about finding a new equilibrium in which loss is acknowledged and integrated into ongoing life (Kübler-Ross & Kessler 2005:63). Acceptance allows individuals and families to embrace the reality of change while discovering renewed strength, purpose, and even growth. It is marked by a readiness to adapt and move forward without denying the cost of what has been left behind.

For clergy families, acceptance emerges when relocation is no longer experienced only as disruption but is also reframed as part of their ongoing journey of faith and ministry. Spouses may find new ways to use their gifts, children may gradually establish friendships and routines, and families may cultivate resilience by drawing on both faith and community support. Acceptance does not mean that grief disappears; rather, it means that loss and hope can coexist in a way that sustains life.

One clergy wife reflected on reaching this point:

“I finally stopped fighting the move and started asking, ‘What can I build here?’ It wasn’t easy, but once I did that, I found peace and even joy again.” (CW_03)

A clergy child described a similar shift: *“At first, I hated everything about the new place. But over time, I made friends, joined the youth group, and realised I could belong here too.”* (PK_02)

These stories illustrate how acceptance creates space for adaptation, resilience, and renewed identity. For pastoral carers, the task is to support clergy families in this movement—helping them to acknowledge their pain while also affirming God’s presence in the possibilities of each new beginning.

This model aligns closely with Worden’s (2009) tasks of mourning, which emphasise that adaptation requires: (1) acknowledging the reality of the loss, (2) processing the pain, (3) adjusting to a new environment, and (4) finding enduring ways of reinvesting in life. When applied to clergy relocation, these tasks remind pastoral carers that relocation is not merely an administrative shift but an ongoing cycle of grieving and adaptation that touches every member of the family.

While the grief model powerfully illustrates how clergy families experience loss, it does not fully account for how these experiences might be transformed into resilience and renewed identity. For this reason, complementary frameworks are needed that move beyond describing grief toward enabling constructive re-storying. Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction model provides such a framework, offering a pathway for dismantling harmful assumptions and reconstructing hopeful narratives.

6.2.2 Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction (1997).

While grief models describe the pain of loss, Pollard’s Positive Deconstruction offers a framework for moving beyond despair toward renewal. This model empowers clergy families not only to name their pain but also to reframe and reconstruct their experiences in ways that foster resilience and growth.

- **Identifying the Underlying Worldview**

This stage requires uncovering the implicit worldviews that shape how individuals think, feel, and act, often without their conscious awareness (Pollard, 1997:18). Such worldviews may arise from religious teachings, cultural values, or institutional influences, including denominational traditions, Christian education, or even societal narratives reinforced through media. For families of clergy experiencing grief through relocation, these worldviews may deeply influence their responses to loss without being explicitly recognised.

The pastoral task at this stage is to provide safe and supportive spaces where such underlying assumptions can be named and voiced. Within these secure environments, families can begin to articulate the beliefs that inform their pain—beliefs that might otherwise remain hidden. For example, one clergy wife recalled:

“For the first time I said out loud, ‘this move has broken me.’ Just saying it lifted a weight.” (CW_05)

In this way, identifying the underlying worldview allows the grief of dislocation—whether disrupted careers, children’s struggles, or the absence of pastoral care, to be brought into the open. Naming these realities becomes the first step toward understanding how deeply embedded convictions shape the experience of relocation.

- **Does it correspond?**

The second stage involves analysing the underlying worldview in order to test its correspondence with reality. Pollard illustrates this with a parable of mistaken belief: when a politician mistook his haversack for a parachute, his conviction could not alter the outcome, belief that does not match reality ultimately collapses (1997:54). In pastoral care, the task of analysis is therefore to examine deeply held assumptions and discern whether they are consistent with lived experience and faithful truth.

Within the context of clergy relocation, this stage challenges harmful beliefs that distort reality, such as the silencing of clergy spouses’ voices or the invisibility of children’s experiences within ecclesial decisions. By testing these assumptions against lived reality, their inadequacy is exposed. One clergy wife explained:

“I realised the unspoken rule was that my career didn’t matter. Once I named that, I could start pushing back.” (CW_07)

Through such analysis, destructive worldviews lose their power. Families begin to see that certain convictions, once accepted as normative, do not hold true, and pastoral space is created to imagine healthier alternatives.

- **Affirming the Truth**

The third stage of Positive Deconstruction involves affirming what is true, constructive, and life-giving within a worldview. Pollard stresses that the goal is not to dismantle belief entirely but to identify and preserve what aligns with reality and faith (1997:59). Affirmation provides continuity and stability, ensuring that the process of deconstruction does not leave individuals without anchors of meaning.

In the context of clergy relocation, affirming truth means recognising the strengths and resources that clergy families carry with them. These may include faith in God's sustaining presence, the resilience developed through previous transitions, or the support of trusted peers within the church. By affirming these truths, families can reframe relocation not only as a disruption but also as evidence of endurance, adaptability, and God's faithfulness.

One clergy child reflected on this strength in the midst of loss:

"Even though I hated moving, I realised it also made me stronger. I learned how to make new friends and start again." (PK_05)

Such affirmations do not erase the pain of relocation, but they highlight resilience and hope within it. Reframing therefore enables families to interpret their stories in ways that sustain dignity, faith, and belonging.

- **Reconstructing:**

The final stage of Positive Deconstruction involves identifying false or destructive elements within a worldview and reconstructing healthier alternatives. Pollard (1997:61) explains that this process does not leave individuals in a vacuum but enables them to replace distortions with truth that nurtures resilience and faith. Reconstruction is therefore both a critical and a hopeful act: what is harmful is unmasked, and what is life-giving is re-established.

For clergy families, this stage means recognising and rejecting assumptions that undermine their dignity, such as the belief that spouses' careers are irrelevant, or that children's struggles are marginal to ministry. In their place,

new narratives are constructed that affirm the family's value, resilience, and shared vocation within the life of the church.

One clergy wife described this movement of reframing:

"I stopped believing the lie that my pain didn't matter. I realised I could speak up, and that God still had purpose for me beyond being a minister's wife."
(CW_02)

Through such reconstruction, families begin to live into healthier convictions: that their voices matter, that their struggles are legitimate, and that God's presence accompanies them through each transition. In this way, Positive Deconstruction becomes a pastoral tool not only for dismantling damaging beliefs but for cultivating new hope and renewed identity amid relocation.

Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model goes beyond simply acknowledging grief to offering a structured approach for creating meaning. By identifying underlying worldviews, analysing their correspondence to reality, affirming what is true, and reconstructing healthier narratives, clergy families can begin to cope with relocation in ways that foster resilience and renewed identity. In practice, this movement enables families not only to reinterpret their experiences but also to challenge ecclesial assumptions that have silenced their voices. Yet, as with the grief model, Positive Deconstruction remains largely conceptual unless embodied in concrete pastoral practices. The following section discusses the grieving tasks that emerged from the study.

6.3 GRIEVING TASKS EMERGING FROM THE STUDY

Drawing on Hamman's insights and the findings of this study, five key grieving tasks have been identified as central to the experiences of clergy families. These tasks, acknowledging loss, creating safe spaces, adjusting together, reconstructing identity, and sustaining support, provide a roadmap for pastoral intervention in the context of relocation.

Letting go of the past can only happen when people are invited to converse about the past so that they can interpret the future in light of their loss (Hamman 2005:74). The work of mourning therefore can be facilitated by creating life giving conversations around grief. For these conversations to be fruitful, there must be sufficient, time

provided for listening attentively. Those leading the conversations must have the skills of narrative inquiring, where they make the time to listen to the stories of the clergy families concerning their past, present and future. This is emphasised by Gerkin who states that, "To care for persons is to inquire them, search with them, question with them about what the events of their lives mean at the deepest level. It also means to inquire with them into the ways in which their questions and experiences have been presented in the past and how those questions have been answered, most particularly with the people in the Bible" (1997:125). This engages the narrative approach where the clergy family "Reckons and recounts as it relates and narrates, and it considers, judges and evaluates all parts of the process of finding identity" (Hamman 2005:76). There is a loss of identity when the clergy families move from one circuit to another during relocation.

Moving forward requires clergy families to give voice to the real stories of everyday life. It requires persons daring to tell the stories of challenge in a caring environment and an audacious anticipation of God's hope-building, purpose-revealing and sustaining presence and guidance, as well as discovery of personal capacities needed actions (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007: 30). It is only when clergy families tell and retell their stories as they confront the unique challenges of their lives that they discover resilient protlines (Wimberly & Wimberly 2007:31). Protlines give direction, meaning and purpose for those called into ministry

The stories shared by the clergy families in this study are replete with experiences of grief and loss, a sense of powerlessness or loss of control, anger, fear about an unknown future and continued transience, strain on family life and profound loneliness. Though the issue of relocation is not new but what is new is an exacerbated sense of loss of viable support networks through which families experience belonging, a haven to tell stories that nurture them and caring others to give them guidance. As one clergy wife participant put it "*There is no structure in the church that takes care of ministers' wives when their husbands are not at home,*" (CW_06).

The study revealed that the church needs an appropriate strategy that can assist her in providing pastoral care to the clergy families who are experiencing the various losses related to relocation. Thus, the pastoral intervention focuses on responding to the circumstances surrounding the frequent relocation of clergy which leaves the families

who are not called into ministry, with a lot of pain and resentment for the church. The aim of the caring model is to assist the clergy families to be able to accept and cope with the challenges brought onto them by relocation.

Hamman (2005:12) reminds us that “grief is the normal emotional, spiritual, physical and relational reaction to the experience of loss and change.” Models of grief identify how individuals and communities adjust when faced with unfamiliar or destabilising circumstances. Grief, like wind, water, or fire, demands enormous amounts of energy to navigate and can easily remain silent or “mute” if not given a voice (Hamman, 2005:13). Within pastoral care, the presence of a caregiver creates a safe context in which mourning can bring to speech the unmentionables of people’s lives.

Building on these insights, this study identifies five key grieving tasks that are particularly relevant for clergy families affected by relocation. These tasks provide a framework for understanding how grief is experienced and, more importantly, how healing can be facilitated through pastoral care. They include:

1. Acknowledging the losses of relocation
2. Finding safe spaces for expressing grief
3. Adjusting to the new context together
4. Reconstructing hope and identity
5. Sustaining ongoing support

The following subsections will explore each of these tasks in greater detail, showing how they emerge from the findings of this study and how they can be applied in pastoral practice.

6.3.1 Story-Sharing as a Pastoral Healing Method

While the previous five strategies highlight the essential dimensions of grieving and adaptation for clergy families, the chosen pastoral healing model for the MCSA is story-sharing. This approach addresses the silence that so often surrounds the grief of relocation. Story-sharing creates intentional spaces where clergy spouses and children can voice their pain, name their losses, and externalise their internalised emotions (Wimberly, 2003:17).

Wimberly and Wimberly (2007:37) identify five key practices within story-sharing: unmasking, inviting catharsis, relating emphatically, unpacking the story, and discerning and deciding the way forward. Each practice enables clergy families to confront, articulate, and reinterpret the grief of relocation within a pastoral environment.

6.3.1.1 Unmasking – Acknowledging Losses

Relocation, while often framed as a vocational duty within the MCSA, frequently generates hidden grief among clergy families. These losses, of friendships, careers, stability, and personal identity, are seldom named, much less processed. Instead, families carry them in silence, embodying what Wimberly and Wimberly describe as “the unmentionables of everyday life,” where pain is internalised for fear of appearing disloyal to the minister’s calling or ungrateful toward the church (2007:11).

In facilitating the process of *unmasking*, it is helpful to employ guiding questions that allow clergy families to explore their memories and emotions surrounding relocation. Such reflective prompts create space for both adults and children to articulate their experiences in ways that surface underlying grief, excitement, or anxiety. Examples of questions that can be posed to adults include:

- Can you recall your first experience of moving, or a particular relocation that was especially positive, exciting, challenging, or difficult?
- From which congregation did you move, and to which were you appointed?
- Where were these churches located, and what was the distance between them?
- How did you and your family learn about the move, and what was the process of preparing to leave one place and settling into another?

To ensure the voices of younger children and preteens are also acknowledged, Wimberly and Wimberly propose age-appropriate prompts that engage their memory and imagination (2007:81). These include:

- What do you remember about our last move, or what do you think might happen if we were to move again?

- What did you leave behind when we moved, or what would you expect to leave behind if we moved in the future?
- What did you take with you, or what would you want to take if another move occurred?
- Can you tell a story or draw a picture of a house we once lived in, including the people, church, and school experiences you remember?

Such questions not only invite storytelling but also affirm the lived reality of relocation, enabling children as well as adults to process their experiences in ways that are both concrete and meaningful.

Theological Depth

The process of *unmasking* finds resonance within the biblical witness, where lament often becomes the first step toward healing. The Psalms frequently give voice to grief and frustration before God: *“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”* (Psalm. 13:1–2). Such laments do not weaken faith but rather legitimise the expression of sorrow as part of covenantal relationship. In the New Testament, Jesus’ anguished cry on the cross, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Mark. 15:34), further illustrates that voicing pain is not contrary to faith but integral to it.

Within a pastoral framework, therefore, the act of unmasking through lament allows clergy families to acknowledge the reality of their losses, be it disrupted relationships, loss of home, or fractured routines, while also encountering God’s compassionate presence. In this way, theological depth enriches the practical exercise of questioning, affirming that unmasking is both a human and sacred act.

Participant Voices

The narratives emerging from this study reveal the silenced grief carried by many clergy families. One clergy wife reflected:

“I always had to smile at church, but deep down I was crumbling. Every time we moved, I left behind colleagues, friends, and even my sense of self. No one ever asked me what it was costing me.” (CW_05)

An adult child expressed a similar sentiment:

“We lost friends again and again. But because everyone said it’s part of ministry, I just kept it inside. I didn’t want to burden my parents. But inside, I felt angry and abandoned.” (PK_03)

These testimonies demonstrate the emotional silencing that the process of unmasking seeks to counter. Hamman cautions that facilitators of healing conversations must first attend to their own grief, lest they project avoidance or denial onto others (2005:38). Unmasking therefore calls for pastoral leaders who embody honesty, vulnerability, and theological openness. Similarly, Gerkin argues that inquiry into life’s events must move beyond surface retellings to probe for deeper meaning (1997:125).

In this sense, unmasking is not merely about disclosure but about theological excavation: creating space where hidden grief, long carried in silence, can be voiced, interpreted, and held within God’s compassionate presence. For clergy families negotiating the repeated dislocations of relocation, such a process becomes essential for affirming both their pain and their resilience.

Pastoral Theory

Within pastoral theology, unmasking is understood as the deliberate act of naming hidden grief so that it can be brought into the light of communal recognition and divine presence. Wimberly and Wimberly argue that unmasking interrupts the silence that so often surrounds loss, creating space for families to acknowledge their pain without fear of judgement (2007:79). This is particularly significant for clergy households, where institutional expectations can encourage suppression rather than disclosure.

Gerkin reminds us that pastoral inquiry must move beyond surface-level stories to engage the deeper meanings of lived experience (1997:124). When families are invited to speak honestly about what relocation has cost them, whether friendships, stability, or a sense of identity, they begin to reclaim agency over their own narratives. In this sense, unmasking is not simply a psychological exercise but a pastoral act of truth-telling, in which silence is broken, and grief is dignified.

Practical Application

Unmasking, when approached as a pastoral practice, can be fostered in a variety of intentional ways. One effective method is through structured story-sharing sessions facilitated by trained pastoral carers. In these spaces, clergy spouses and children are invited to voice losses, such as career disruptions, friendships left behind, or struggles with identity, that often remain unspoken. A further practice involves the incorporation of ritual acts of farewell within congregational life. Prayers of release, symbolic gestures such as the lighting of candles, or the laying down of stones can provide tangible acknowledgment of the family's sacrifice and facilitate communal support.

Finally, the role of facilitator vulnerability is crucial. When pastoral leaders are willing to share their own experiences of loss and transition, they model authenticity and help to create an environment of trust in which participants feel safe to unmask their own grief. In these ways, unmasking moves from being a theoretical construct to a lived pastoral intervention, offering clergy families pathways to name their hidden pain within spaces of faith and compassion.

Advantages

Unmasking fulfils the essential grieving task of acknowledging loss and carries several distinct advantages. First, it breaks the culture of silence that so often isolates clergy families, allowing their experiences to be spoken and heard. Second, it validates hidden grief as legitimate, affirming that voicing pain is neither selfish nor disloyal to the church. Third, unmasking provides the necessary first step toward healing, for losses that remain unnamed cannot be transformed. Finally, it creates a theological bridge by situating personal lament within the broader faith tradition, reminding families that God's people have always expressed grief as part of their covenant journey.

The process of unmasking thus lays a vital foundation for healing by giving clergy families permission to name their hidden grief. Yet acknowledgement alone is not sufficient. Once loss has been brought to light, it must also be expressed, released, and worked through. The next pastoral task, Inviting Catharsis, builds upon unmasking by creating safe spaces where emotions can be openly voiced and symbolically enacted. In this way, the movement continues from silence to speech, and from speech to transformative release.

6.3.1.2 Inviting Catharsis – Finding Safe Spaces

Catharsis provides the emotional release necessary for healing. When clergy spouses and children are given permission to express emotions such as anger, sadness, or loneliness without fear of judgement, they are engaging the second grieving task: finding safe spaces for grief (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:83). In this way, story-sharing becomes more than a recounting of events; it creates a structured yet compassionate environment in which unspoken pain can surface and be validated.

Wimberly and Wimberly (2007:83) emphasise the importance of ensuring that children are not overlooked in this process. Because their experiences of moving are often shaped by both the transition itself and the emotional responses of their parents, it is crucial that they are given opportunities to articulate their own thoughts and feelings.

To facilitate catharsis, pastoral carers can use guiding prompts such as:

- Can you elaborate on parts of your moving experience that you did not share earlier?
- What thoughts and feelings are you experiencing as you tell your story of relocation?
- How did you respond to these feelings at the time? What actions did you take, and what was the outcome? Conversely, were there actions you wished to take but did not, and why?
- For children and preteens: What words would you use to describe your feelings about moving? (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:83).

Such prompts provide pathways for participants to name and release the emotional weight of relocation, transforming hidden grief into a shared narrative that can be held within a caring community.

Theological depth

The experience of catharsis, the release of long-suppressed emotions—finds strong resonance in the biblical tradition of lament and communal mourning. The Psalms frequently embody unrestrained expressions of sorrow, as in the cry of the exiles: *“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion”* (Ps. 137:1). Such

laments were not whispered in isolation but shared aloud in the presence of God and community, affirming grief as both sacred and communal.

Similarly, the Gospels testify that Jesus Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35), demonstrating that faithful living includes moments of open lament. Hamman (2005:13) notes that pastoral care which encourages catharsis makes space for God's people to "weep, cry, and groan their way to healing." Within the context of clergy relocation, this theological grounding affirms that releasing grief is not a sign of weakness or lack of faith, but an essential part of healing within the journey of discipleship.

Participant voices

The silence surrounding relocation often prevents clergy families from releasing their emotions in healthy ways. One clergy wife reflected:

"There was no space to cry. I had to hold it together for my children and for the congregation. If I broke down, who would take me seriously as the minister's wife?"
(CW_02)

An adult child shared a similar experience:

"I would sit in my room and cry quietly when my friends moved on without me. I couldn't tell my parents because they were already stressed about the move. So, I bottled it up." (PK_06)

These testimonies highlight the profound emotional cost of silence and the tendency for grief to be internalised. They also underscore the healing potential of cathartic expression when safe and affirming spaces are provided. In the context of pastoral care, catharsis becomes a means of transforming private suffering into shared lament, where pain is validated and held within a community of faith.

Pastoral theory

Wimberly and Wimberly describe catharsis as the release that occurs when families are given permission to tell and retell their stories of loss (2007:30). Within pastoral theology, this process extends beyond emotional venting to become a form of sacred storytelling, an act through which grief is externalised and dignity restored. Gerkin similarly emphasises that cathartic storytelling enables individuals to weave

fragmented experiences into coherent narratives that can be carried forward with meaning (1997:126).

Applied to the context of clergy relocation, catharsis thus creates space where spouses and children can release the hidden weight of repeated transitions. By naming and releasing their pain in communal settings, families move from silent endurance to a renewed sense of shared humanity, where their stories are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into the life of faith.

Practical Application

Within the MCSA, catharsis can be fostered through intentional practices that provide both communal and individual opportunities for release. One such practice is the formation of support groups for clergy spouses and children, facilitated by pastoral carers trained in empathic listening. These groups create protected spaces where emotions such as tears, frustration, and anger are welcomed rather than suppressed.

Pastoral counselling at district level can further complement this process by offering confidential, one-on-one support for those who may be reluctant to share in group settings. In addition, retreats and camps can provide clergy families with temporary distance from congregational scrutiny, affording them the opportunity to process their grief both collectively and privately.

Finally, liturgical practices such as lament services or prayer vigils can give spiritual language and ritual form to the cathartic release of pain. In these ways, the MCSA can move beyond silent endurance to affirm catharsis as a sacred and transformative act within its pastoral care tradition.

Advantages

Catharsis fulfils the grieving task of finding safe spaces for the expression of pain and offers several important benefits. First, it provides emotional release that prevents suppressed feelings from hardening into long-term bitterness or resentment. Second, it offers communal validation by recognising that relocations are not merely organisational moves but deeply personal disruptions that affect family life and identity. Third, catharsis reduces the sense of isolation, as participants discover that others share similar struggles and losses. Finally, it opens a pathway toward resilience, since grief that remains unexpressed can fester, whereas grief that is released creates

space for healing and renewed strength. The grieving task of finding safe spaces is fulfilled through catharsis offering.

The release of pent-up emotions through catharsis is a vital step in the healing journey, yet emotional expression alone does not complete the process. Once grief has been voiced, families need to encounter others who will hear their stories with genuine care. This movement from expression to listening is what makes healing communal rather than solitary. The next task, Relating Empathically, builds on catharsis by affirming that the pain of relocation is not borne in isolation. Through empathic presence and attentive listening, clergy families and congregations alike are invited to adjust together, transforming relocation into a shared journey of faith and resilience.

6.3.1.3 Relating Empathically – Adjusting Together

As stories of relocation are shared, a wide range of emotions inevitably emerges. For this reason, it is essential that participants are listened to with care, without judgement, and affirmed in both their willingness to speak and their hesitancy to share. Wimberly and Wimberly (2007:84) stress that empathic listening allows individuals to voice their feelings fully, thereby validating their experiences and reducing the sense of isolation. This corresponds to the third grieving task: adjusting to a new context together. Through mutual empathy, clergy families recognise that they are not alone in their struggles, and relocation is reframed from a solitary burden into a shared journey of adjustment.

To facilitate this process, pastoral carers can draw on reflective questions such as:

- What difficulties did you encounter in finding someone with whom you could share your thoughts and feelings during relocation?
- How important was it for you to be able to share these thoughts and feelings at the time? What difference might such sharing have made?
- What difference does it make now that you have told your story?
- For children and preteens: What would it feel like if you had no one to share your story with? What else would you like to say? (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:84).

These prompts guide families to recognise the significance of empathy in their adjustment and highlight the transformative power of communal listening. By entering one another's stories with compassion, clergy households begin to adjust not in isolation, but as companions in a shared narrative of faith and resilience.

Theological depth

At the heart of Christian community lies the call to *“rejoice with those who rejoice, [and] weep with those who weep”* (Rom. 12:15). Empathy is therefore not an optional virtue in pastoral care but a theological mandate. To relate empathically is to embody the ministry of presence, where pain is not explained away but acknowledged as real and worthy of being heard.

Jesus' encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13–35) offers a profound model of such presence. He walked alongside them in their confusion, listened attentively to their grief, and only later helped them reframe their experience in light of hope. In the same way, empathic presence within relocation contexts enables clergy families to adjust together by ensuring that they do not walk their journey of loss and transition in isolation.

Participant voices

Many participants in this study expressed a deep longing for someone simply to listen without judgement. One clergy wife recalled:

“People always said, ‘you’ll be fine, it’s part of ministry,’ but no one really heard me. I just wanted someone to listen and understand how hard it was.” (CW_07)

An adult child shared a similar experience:

“I never told anyone at church how lost I felt, because I thought they wouldn’t get it. But when I finally shared my story with another clergy kid, I felt seen for the first time.” (PK_01)

These testimonies illustrate that empathy itself can be profoundly healing. By creating spaces where clergy families feel heard and understood, empathic presence transforms relocation from a lonely disruption into a shared journey of companionship and adjustment.

Pastoral theory

Empathy is a central component of narrative pastoral care. Gerkin insists that to “inquire with” others require more than analysis, it requires genuine solidarity (1997:129). Doehring expands this by highlighting how pastoral empathy validates experiences without rushing to resolution, thereby creating the conditions for growth (2015:54). Wimberly and Wimberly argue that empathy is what transforms story-sharing into a healing practice, as it confirms to participants that their struggles are neither trivial nor solitary (2007:31).

Practical applications

In the MCSA context, empathic relating can be nurtured through intentional practices that affirm shared experience and foster solidarity.

- Peer mentoring can pair newly relocated clergy families with those who have already lived through multiple relocations. Such relationships normalise the challenges of transition and provide firsthand empathy.
- District-level pastoral carers trained in empathic listening can offer a ministry of presence, focusing less on prescriptive solutions and more on accompanying families in their grief and adjustment.
- Children and youth networks within the church can provide safe spaces where clergy children meet peers who understand their struggles, reducing isolation and fostering belonging.
- Congregational orientation sessions can move beyond logistical introductions to relational ones, encouraging empathy from congregants toward the newly arrived family.

By embedding such practices into the life of the church, empathic relating transforms relocation from an isolating experience into a communal process of adjustment, ensuring that no clergy family bears their burden alone.

Advantages

Relating empathically fulfils the grieving task of adjusting to the new context together and offers several important benefits. First, it reduces feelings of alienation for both spouses and children, affirming that their experiences are recognised within the wider

community. Second, it provides a communal context in which relocation is not endured in isolation but shared as part of a collective journey. Third, empathic relating enables mutual adjustment: families discover they are not alone in their struggles, while congregations are invited to appreciate the personal cost of relocation. Finally, it fosters an atmosphere of trust, which is essential for engaging in deeper healing processes such as unpacking grief and discerning the way forward.

Empathic relating enables clergy families to feel less isolated and more connected, as their experiences are heard and affirmed within a community of care. Yet empathy alone is not the endpoint of healing. Once trust has been established through listening and shared adjustment, families can begin the deeper work of exploring the meanings behind their experiences. The next task, *Unpacking Your Story*, builds on empathic presence by inviting clergy families to reflect more intentionally on the layers of their narratives, moving from immediate feelings to deeper patterns of identity, faith, and resilience.

6.3.1.4 Unpacking the Story – Reconstructing Hope and Identity

Once empathy has been extended and trust established, the next step in the healing process is *unpacking*. The purpose of examining narratives is to achieve a deeper understanding of participants' emotions, thoughts, and reactions to relocation, while also identifying signs of resilience that can be affirmed and strengthened. Wimberly and Wimberly (2007:85) note that assessing one's experiences of moving enables individuals to reinterpret the dislocations of grief in ways that can restore meaning. This fulfills the fourth grieving task: reconstructing hope and identity.

Guided by Gerkin's pastoral approach, unpacking situates personal stories within broader biblical and theological narratives of exile, pilgrimage, and new beginnings (1997:125). In this way, relocation is reframed not only as disruption but also as an opportunity for growth, resilience, and renewed purpose.

Practical guides for unpacking include reflective prompts such as:

- Return to your earlier story of moving and recall the moments that carried the strongest emotions. For younger children and preteens, this may simply be phrased as: *What was hardest for you to talk about?*

- Identify the most intense thoughts and feelings that surfaced both during the move and in retelling the experience. For younger children: *Is there something more you would like to say about what made you sad, afraid, angry, or excited about moving?*
- Reflect on what it means to belong to a clergy family subject to decisions made outside the household, and how this shapes your sense of self and future identity.
- Use a metaphor, image, or phrase to capture your convictions about moving (e.g., *God never promised me a rose-garden or when you are given lemons, make lemonade*).
- Name the plotline that best reflects your beliefs about moving. Is it tragic or hope-filled? Does it strengthen your capacity to continue as part of a clergy family, or does it undermine it?

Through such reflection, clergy families are able to move beyond surface-level storytelling toward reinterpreting their journeys in ways that generate hope, affirm resilience, and open new possibilities for faithful living.

Theological depth

The act of unpacking a story is central to Christian discipleship, where believers are continually called to “remember” God’s saving work and reinterpret their experiences in light of faith. The Israelites repeatedly returned to the story of the Exodus, not only as a historical event but as a framework for present identity and future hope (Deut. 6:20–25). In the same way, unpacking relocation stories enables clergy families to revisit their own journeys of loss and transition through the lens of God’s enduring faithfulness.

Pollard’s (1997) Positive Deconstruction model further illuminates this process. By dismantling harmful narratives, such as “*my suffering is invisible*” or “*my vocation has no value*”, families can begin to reconstruct hopeful alternatives: “*my story matters*” and “*God works through my resilience.*” In this way, unpacking moves beyond recounting past pain to reinterpreting it as part of a larger story of grace, resilience, and renewed purpose.

Participant voices

Participants frequently described confusion and identity struggles arising from repeated relocations. One clergy wife reflected:

“Every move felt like another piece of me was taken away—my job, my friendships, my independence. I began to wonder who I was beyond being a minister’s wife.”
(CW_03)

Similarly, a clergy child recalled:

“I didn’t know where I belonged anymore. Each place was temporary, so I stopped letting myself get attached. It was like I lost part of myself each time.” (PK_07)

These narratives reveal the fragmentation of identity that relocation can produce, highlighting the urgent need for reconstructive processes. Unpacking allows such stories to be revisited and reinterpreted, enabling clergy families to move from disorientation toward renewed identity and hope.

Pastoral theory

Gerkin (1997:125) frames pastoral care as guiding individuals to discern the deeper meanings of their lives. In this light, unpacking becomes more than retelling events; it is a process of theological reflection in which lived pain is interpreted within the framework of biblical and communal narratives. Hamman (2005) describes this movement as families “reckoning and recounting” their stories, critically evaluating how experiences of loss shape their identity.

Wimberly and Wimberly (2007:37, 76) add that unpacking helps individuals to examine their narratives for internalised distortions, such as guilt, feelings of unworthiness, or perceptions of invisibility, and opens space for re-storying with dignity and hope. Applied to the experience of clergy relocation, unpacking enables families to move beyond fragmented memories of disruption toward renewed identity, resilience, and theological meaning.

Practical applications

Within the MCSA, the practice of unpacking stories can be facilitated through several intentional interventions. Narrative workshops can provide structured opportunities for clergy families to reflect on what relocation has meant for them and how it has shaped

their faith journeys. Theological framing can then link these personal stories to biblical accounts of displacement, such as Abraham leaving his homeland, Israel's experience of exile, or Paul's missionary travels, thereby situating individual narratives within the wider story of God's people.

In addition, vocational reflection sessions can affirm the identities of clergy spouses in relation to their professional aspirations and acknowledge the belonging of clergy children within the life of the church. Finally, practices of journaling or creative expression, whether through art, poetry, or drama, offer alternative avenues for externalising and reinterpreting stories of grief.

Together, these practices ensure that unpacking is not only a reflective process but also a constructive one, enabling clergy families to reinterpret their experiences in ways that foster resilience, renewed identity, and hope.

Advantages

Unpacking fulfils the grieving task of reconstructing hope and identity and carries several important benefits. First, it enables clergy families to move from fragmented narratives of repeated relocation toward more coherent and integrated life stories. Second, it allows grief to be reframed not as a sign of weakness but as part of a shared faith journey in which loss is held within the story of God's people. Third, unpacking helps restore personal and family identity beyond the limiting label of "*the minister's family*," affirming the dignity of spouses and children in their own right. Finally, it cultivates resilience by integrating past losses into a renewed sense of meaning and purpose, equipping families to face future relocations with deeper faith and strength.

Unpacking fulfils the grieving task of reconstructing hope and identity and carries several important benefits. First, it enables clergy families to move from fragmented narratives of repeated relocation toward more coherent and integrated life stories. Second, it allows grief to be reframed not as a sign of weakness but as part of a shared faith journey in which loss is held within the story of God's people. Third, unpacking helps restore personal and family identity beyond the limiting label of "*the minister's family*," affirming the dignity of spouses and children. Finally, it cultivates resilience by integrating past losses into a renewed sense of meaning and purpose, equipping families to face future relocations with deeper faith and strength.

6.3.1.4.1 Discerning and Deciding the Way Forward – Sustaining Ongoing Support

The final practice of story-sharing moves families from reflection to active discernment and decision-making. In this stage, families begin to chart pathways of resilience and agency, moving beyond mere survival toward thriving. This corresponds to the fifth grieving task: sustaining ongoing support. Crucially, decision-making does not occur in isolation but within a supportive pastoral environment, ensuring that healing continues beyond the immediate encounter.

Central to this discernment is the uncovering of biblical stories, theological resources, and doctrinal foundations that can sustain clergy families as they respond to the challenges of relocation. Wimberly and Wimberly emphasise that reflection on Scripture enables families to evaluate their convictions, test their responses to relocation, and make space for God’s promise of hope and guidance (2007:87).

To facilitate this process, pastoral carers can guide participants with questions such as:

- What biblical story helps you to evaluate your beliefs and convictions about moving?
- How do these convictions shape the way you respond to the challenges of relocation?
- In what ways do your beliefs make room for God to act in your life, bringing hope and direction during times of transition?
- How do your convictions allow you to experience God’s promise and guidance during relocation?

Through such reflection, families discern not only practical strategies for coping but also theological anchors that sustain them in the ongoing journey of ministry and mobility.

Theological depth

Christian hope is always oriented toward the future, calling God’s people to discernment and forward movement. The prophet’s declaration, “*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*” (Isa. 43:19), reminds believers

that even in disruption God opens possibilities for renewal. Within pastoral theology, discernment is understood as the prayerful process of seeking God's direction during change.

Story-sharing provides a pathway for clergy families to move beyond grief into a space of decision, where they can discern new ways of belonging and sustaining life together. Yet discernment is not a one-time event. As Doehring (2015:87) observes, sustaining support requires that the insights of discernment be continually nurtured by the body of Christ. In the context of relocation, this means that clergy families are accompanied not only in their immediate transitions but also in the ongoing journey of hope and resilience.

Participant voices

Participants repeatedly highlighted the lack of ongoing support following relocation. One clergy wife observed:

“When the move happens, everyone is there on the first Sunday to welcome you. But after that, you’re on your own. The church doesn’t check in to see how the family is adjusting.” (CW_06)

A clergy child echoed this experience:

“It felt like once the boxes were unpacked, we were forgotten. There was no one to help us figure out how to build a new life there.” (PK_04)

These testimonies reveal that when pastoral care is limited to initial gestures of welcome, families are left vulnerable to ongoing grief and isolation. They underscore the need for sustained accompaniment, ensuring that relocation support extends beyond arrival and into the long process of adjustment and belonging.

Pastoral Theory

Wimberly and Wimberly describe discernment as the point at which individuals begin to recognise choices and possibilities that extend beyond grief (2007:37). Story-sharing facilitates this movement by enabling families to imagine new ways of coping and belonging in the midst of disruption. Gerkin, reminds us that pastoral care must not only walk alongside people in their grief but also accompany them into

discernment, where they are supported in making constructive decisions for living faithfully (1997:131).

Hamman (2005:13) further observes that pastoral presence has the capacity to transform mute grief into hopeful action. For clergy families, this means that the silence and invisibility often surrounding relocation can be reshaped into agency and resilience. Sustaining such support requires that care be embedded within church structures, ensuring it does not rely merely on individual goodwill but becomes an intentional expression of the church's pastoral responsibility.

Practical applications

Within the MCSA, discernment and ongoing support can be sustained through intentional practices that embed care into the fabric of church life.

- Regular follow-up visits by district or circuit leaders within the first year of relocation can provide practical assessment of how families are adjusting, ensuring that care extends beyond the initial welcome.
- Annual reviews in Synod reports could include not only evaluation of the minister's work but also the wellbeing of the minister's family, making holistic support a formal expectation.
- Peer support networks, whether through WhatsApp groups, retreats, or regional gatherings for spouses and children, offer continuous encouragement and shared discernment.
- Mentorship programmes can help spouses and children explore personal goals and vocational pathways, enabling them to frame relocation not only as disruption but as an opportunity for growth.
- Structured feedback loops would allow clergy families to voice challenges and propose improvements to the relocation process, ensuring that lived experiences inform pastoral policy and practice.

Together, these practices move discernment beyond an individual exercise to a communal and structural commitment. By embedding support in the life of the church, the MCSA can help clergy families sustain resilience and thrive in the ongoing journey of ministry and mobility.

Advantages

Discerning and deciding the way forward fulfils the grieving task of sustaining ongoing support and offers several important benefits. It prevents families from being forgotten once the initial relocation is complete, strengthens trust between clergy households and church leadership, and encourages families to adopt proactive strategies for adapting rather than passively enduring transition. Most importantly, it reinforces resilience through long-term networks of care rather than one-off interventions.

The exploration of grief models, positive deconstruction, and story-sharing has provided a theological and pastoral framework for understanding and addressing the impact of relocation on clergy families. For this model to move from theory into practice, however, it must be translated into concrete strategies within the structures of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The proposed integrated healing model therefore offers the MCSA a means of accommodating clergy families at their different points of need while addressing the systemic hindrances to pastoral care that emerged in this study's interviews.

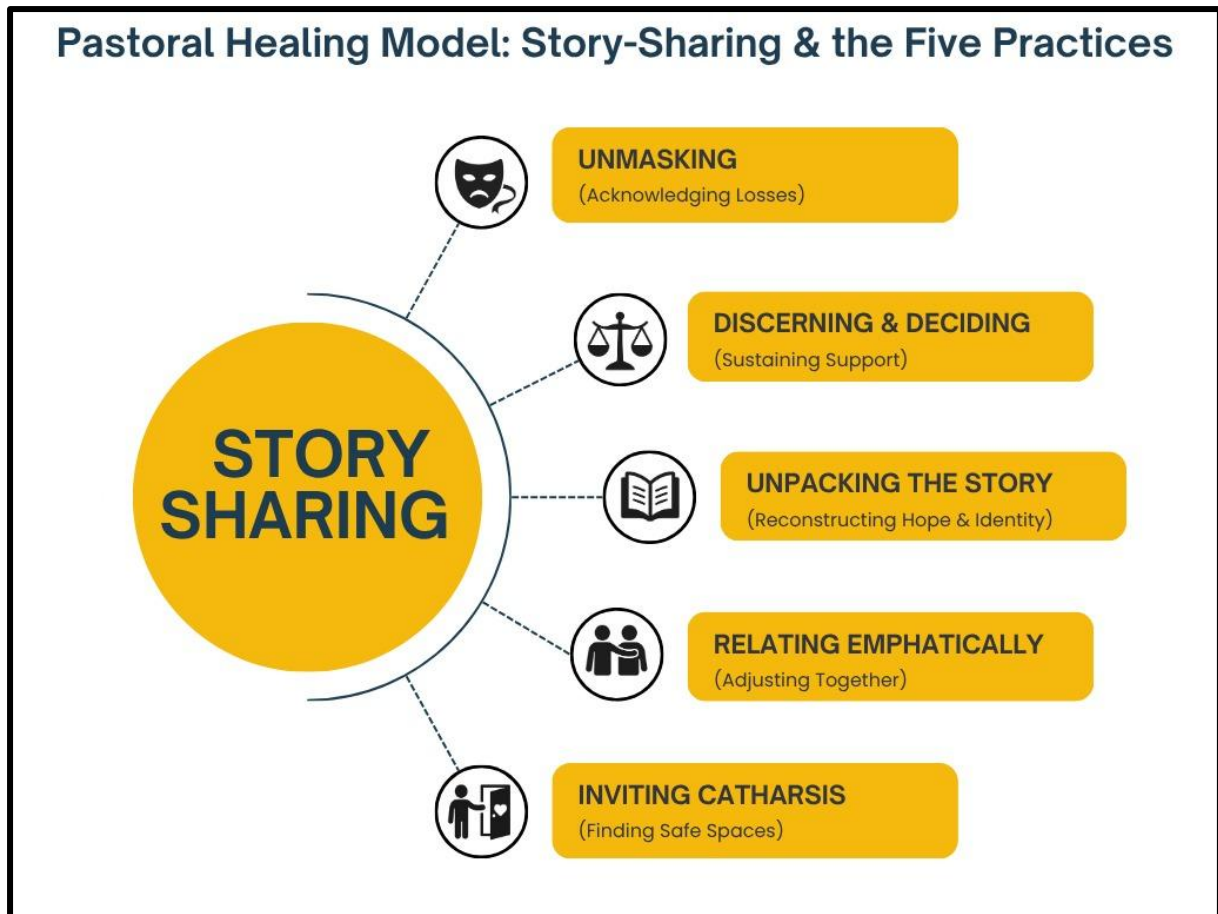


Figure 6.1: Adapted from Wimberly and Wimberly (2007).

The five grieving tasks outlined above provide a structured framework for accompanying clergy families through the emotional, spiritual, and relational challenges of relocation. Yet healing is not confined to formal pastoral encounters alone; it must also be nurtured in the daily life of the household. Children, in particular, experience relocation in ways that are often overlooked, and their capacity for resilience depends greatly on how they are included in family processes of meaning-making and support. To complement the broader model, the next section offers pastoral resources for families with children in transition, highlighting simple yet powerful practices that help households process grief, foster resilience, and discover hope together.

6.4 PASTORAL RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN TRANSITION

Resilience is built and sustained as clergy families acknowledge the different ways relocation impacts each family member. With children, it is vital to recognise their emotional responses and to intentionally include them in processes that help them

address the difficulties of moving. Rituals and shared practices can provide stability and meaning, enabling families to traverse the journey of relocation together. Examples include:

- **Creating a family historical resource:** A family storybook can be developed at each station, with entries of special events, activities, and key experiences. Drawings, photographs, and written reflections, capturing both expectations before a move and experiences afterward, can be added. When relocation becomes likely or imminent, the storybook can be revisited as a tool for processing feelings, discerning what to carry forward, and naming what can be left behind. Ideally, each entry closes with hopeful reflections framed within the context of relocation (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:88–89).
- **Developing family talk times:** Mealtimes and other routine moments can provide opportunities to share daily events as well as thoughts, feelings, and concerns about moving. Such conversations allow anxieties to be voiced before, during, and after relocation.
- **Planning pre-move strategies:** Practical preparations, such as visiting the new location, exploring schools, and identifying both opportunities and losses, help children anticipate change. Integrating prayer into this process allows space for lament while also opening pathways to hope.
- **Ensuring nurturing moments:** Small but consistent gestures, such as words of reassurance and daily hugs, reinforce love and solidarity with the message: *“We care about one another. We love one another. We’re in this journey together”* (Wimberly & Wimberly, 2007:89).

By weaving such practices into family life, clergy households can help children navigate transitions more constructively, turning relocation into a shared rather than isolating experience.

The next section therefore turns to the *implementation* of the pastoral healing model, outlining practical steps that church leadership, circuits, and districts can take to embed story-sharing and the five grieving tasks into the life of the church. Implementation ensures that the model does not remain an abstract ideal but becomes an embodied expression of pastoral care within the daily realities of itinerancy.

6.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STORY-SHARING MODEL

For the story-sharing model to be effective, it must move beyond theory into practice. Its implementation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa requires intentional planning, training, and systemic commitment. Without such structures, the model risks remaining an abstract ideal rather than an embodied pastoral response. The following areas are proposed for implementation:

6.5.1 Training of Facilitators

Effective story-sharing begins with trained facilitators. Pastoral carers—including superintendents, circuit leaders, and lay counsellors—should be equipped in narrative care methods that emphasise vulnerability, empathic listening, and theological framing. Hamman (2005:38) cautions that facilitators must first attend to their own grief journeys to lead with authenticity and integrity.

6.5.2 Integration into Church Structures

For sustainability, story-sharing must be embedded within existing church structures. This could include annual family retreats hosted at circuit and district levels, combining spiritual renewal with group therapy principles to help families reframe relocation as part of a shared journey. Synod sessions could incorporate testimonies from spouses and children, while relocation processes should include family care plans alongside ministerial appointments.

6.5.3 Support Networks for Spouses and Children

Peer support networks are vital for reducing isolation. Retreats, WhatsApp forums, and mentoring programmes can connect spouses across circuits, while youth fellowships provide clergy children with spaces to share their experiences and strengthen identity. Pairing newly relocated families with those more experienced can further normalise transition and foster resilience.

6.5.4 Liturgical and Ritual Practices

Rituals and liturgy can give spiritual expression to the pain and hope of relocation. Farewell and welcome services that acknowledge family sacrifices, prayers of lament and blessing in circuit worship, and symbolic acts such as lighting candles or laying stones can provide meaningful closure and affirmation.

6.5.5 Accountability and Evaluation

Sustained implementation requires mechanisms for accountability. Annual reviews of family wellbeing could be incorporated into Synod reporting, complemented by confidential feedback channels for spouses and children. Ongoing monitoring through testimonies and evaluation reports would ensure that pastoral care remains responsive to evolving needs.

6.5.6 Resource Considerations

Finally, implementation requires resourcing. Budgets should be allocated for retreats, counselling, and training, while pastoral carers with expertise in narrative care should be identified in every district. Time must be intentionally prioritised for family care alongside mission and administration, ensuring that wellbeing is not marginalised in favour of institutional demands.

Implementation therefore ensures that story-sharing becomes more than a one-time intervention. By embedding it as a systemic practice within the MCSA, pastoral care is woven into the very rhythms of itinerancy, providing sustained accompaniment for clergy families as they navigate the challenges of relocation.

6.6 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

This chapter has proposed and elaborated a pastoral healing model to address the silent grief and identity struggles experienced by clergy families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Grounded in the findings of this study, the model acknowledged the profound emotional, relational, and vocational losses borne by spouses and children through the process of relocation. By integrating the five grieving tasks with Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing practices, the framework offers a structured yet compassionate approach to grief: *Unmasking* (acknowledging

losses), *Inviting Catharsis* (finding safe spaces), *Relating Empathically* (adjusting together), *Unpacking the Story* (reconstructing hope and identity), and *Discerning and Deciding the Way Forward* (sustaining ongoing support).

To ensure that the model does not remain theoretical, the chapter also outlined strategies for its implementation within the MCSA. These included the training of facilitators, integrating family care into church structures, establishing peer support networks, developing liturgical and ritual practices, creating systems of accountability, and securing the necessary resources for sustained pastoral care. Such measures are essential for embedding the model into the ethos of the church rather than leaving it as a temporary intervention.

Taken together, the model and its implementation envision relocation not merely as an administrative necessity but as a pastoral moment that requires recognition, accompaniment, and ongoing support. By institutionalising story-sharing and embedding care for clergy families into its structures, the MCSA can become a church that not only sustains ministers in their calling but also honours and strengthens the families who share in the burdens of itinerancy.

This chapter therefore contributes both a theological-pastoral framework and a practical roadmap for care. It affirms that the wellbeing of clergy families is not peripheral but integral to the flourishing of ministry itself. The following chapter will consolidate the findings of this study, present recommendations, and offer practical directions for the MCSA as well as for the wider field of pastoral care.

CHAPTER 7

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter brings the study to its conclusion by drawing together the central findings, interpreting their significance, and offering recommendations for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), clergy families, and the wider field of pastoral theology. The chapter also reflects on the contribution of the study, its limitations, and the researcher's own journey through the process. In doing so, the conclusion does not merely restate what has been written but demonstrates how the research aim has been achieved and how its outcomes may inform pastoral practice, policy, and future scholarship.

This study set out to explore the impact of clergy relocation on families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, with a particular focus on clergy wives and adult children. The central research aim was to investigate how repeated relocations shape the emotional, social, vocational, and spiritual experiences of these families, and to propose a pastoral response that acknowledges their grief while also nurturing resilience and hope. Relocation, as the findings of this study have consistently shown, is not merely an administrative decision or an institutional tradition. For clergy families it represents an ongoing cycle of loss, disruption, and adaptation that affects every dimension of family life.

The methodology employed, qualitative research situated within an interpretivist and phenomenological framework, proved particularly appropriate for this study. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were able to narrate their lived experiences of relocation in their own voices, revealing the unspoken pain, identity struggles, vocational disruptions, and relational losses that accompany each move. By approaching these narratives phenomenologically, the study was able to attend closely to the essence of participants' experiences without imposing external assumptions. The interpretivist paradigm further allowed the researcher to engage deeply with meaning-making, recognising that relocation is not experienced uniformly but is interpreted within the unique contexts of each family, congregation, and community.

In Chapter 5, the analysis of narratives from clergy wives and adult children revealed recurring themes of grief, silence, disrupted identity, and the lack of sustained institutional support. These findings were interpreted through the lens of established theoretical frameworks, such as Kübler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief, Worden's tasks of mourning, Schlossberg's transition theory, Pollard's Positive Deconstruction model each of which highlighted that relocation can be understood as a repeated cycle of grieving and adaptation. At the same time, these frameworks also highlighted the importance of constructing new meaning and pathways of resilience in the face of loss.

Chapter 6 responded to these findings by developing a pastoral intervention model rooted in Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing approach. This model emphasises the healing power of telling and hearing stories, enabling clergy families to voice their grief, reclaim silenced experiences, and discover renewed meaning through communal reflection. By creating safe spaces where stories of relocation can be shared, reframed, and integrated into a larger faith narrative, the intervention offers clergy families pathways toward resilience and hope. The model is both theological and practical, positioning story-sharing as a central practice of pastoral care within the MCSA.

Chapter 7 builds upon these earlier insights and contributions. It begins by summarising the key findings of the study (Section 7.2), before highlighting its academic, theological, and practical contributions (Section 7.3). Section 7.4 then sets out concrete recommendations for the MCSA, clergy families, and future researchers. 7.6 provides the researcher's own personal reflection on the journey, noting both limitations and the ways in which the research has shaped pastoral-theological outlook. Finally, the chapter concludes (Section 7.7) with a theological reflection on relocation as a form of loss and pilgrimage, and a call for the church to embody credible care for its own families.

In this way, the conclusion serves not as an endpoint but as an invitation to ongoing dialogue, practice, and reflection. The experiences of clergy families reveal the urgent need for a church that attends not only to its mission in the world but also to the well-being of those who carry that mission within their households.

7.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that clergy relocation in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is not a neutral or administrative act but a deeply disruptive experience that impacts clergy families at multiple levels. The narratives of clergy wives and adult children uncovered themes of grief, silence, disrupted identity, strained relationships, and inadequate institutional support. These themes confirm earlier literature on the effects of relocation but also extend the conversation into the African Methodist context, where cultural, theological, and ecclesiastical dynamics create a unique set of challenges.

7.2.1 Clergy Wives

7.2.1.1 Vocational and identity disruption

The experiences of clergy wives pointed consistently to vocational and identity disruption. Many wives had to leave behind established careers, professions, and support networks whenever a new stationing was announced. Because of relocation by the Church, they had to follow their husbands to the new station. This created financial strain, curtailed aspirations, and fostered feelings of invisibility within the church's structures. Echoing the work of Darling, Hill and McWey, clergy wives were expected to function as unpaid co-ministers, carrying significant congregational responsibilities despite the lack of formal recognition (2004:262). The silence surrounding their needs, both in decision-making processes and pastoral care, left many women struggling with unacknowledged grief.

7.2.1.2 Protective Stance

Another key finding was the protective stance many wives adopted to shield their husbands' ministry. Several participants chose not to voice their pain or frustration, fearing that doing so would jeopardise their spouses' reputations or careers. This silence, however, often came at personal cost, manifesting in emotional exhaustion, loneliness, and, in some cases, resentment. Here, Hamman's (2005:12) insight into grief as an often "mute" reality was confirmed, showing that silence can be as burdensome as spoken lament.

7.2.1.3 Loneliness

Another central theme was loneliness, which surfaced in many forms. Several wives shared that they effectively raised children alone, as their husbands were consumed by the demands of new congregational responsibilities. Others described living with a deep sense of isolation, separated emotionally from spouses who were present in the home but absent in attention. Relocation often intensified this loneliness, as established networks of support were left behind and new ones formed slowly. This resonates with findings from Frame and Shehan, who observed that the demands of ministry often create emotional distance within clergy households, leaving spouses feeling unsupported and alone (2005:45).

7.2.1.4 Lack of preparation for roles of clergy wives

The findings also revealed that many wives felt unprepared for the expectations of their role. Few had received formal orientation for life as a minister's spouse, and most reported that their only preparation came from their husbands' explanations or from observing other clergy families. This lack of structured support became especially evident when congregations assumed that the wife would automatically take on leadership of women's groups. While some wives embraced these roles, others felt inadequate, resentful, or pressured into responsibilities that did not align with their own skills or callings. This unspoken demand highlights the dissonance between institutional expectations and personal vocation, leaving many wives to navigate their roles in silence and uncertainty.

7.2.2 Clergy Children

7.2.2.1 Loss of identity and belonging

The voices of adult children highlighted the loss of identity and belonging associated with frequent moves. Each relocation meant leaving behind friendships, schools, communities, and sometimes even cultural and linguistic familiarity. For many, this produced a sense of rootlessness, echoing Goodman's observation that pastoral children often grieve the loss of friendships and stable environments (2010:92). Some

children described behavioural struggles during adolescence, while others reflected that their faith journey was negatively affected by the instability.

7.2.2.2 Lack of rootedness

In addition, adult children expressed a lingering sense of being outsiders, within congregations, schools, and even peer groups. For some, this contributed to feelings of isolation and uncertainty about where they truly belonged. Schlossberg's transition theory, which highlights the stress of losing a "home base" of stability, proved particularly helpful in framing this reality (2011:33). Unlike the clergy wives, children had even less voice in relocation decisions, further intensifying their sense of powerlessness.

7.2.3 Common to Both Groups

7.2.3.1 Lack of Support

Across both wives and children, a striking theme was the absence of sustained support from church leadership. While the MCSA provides orientation for probationers and expects clergy families to embrace itinerancy as part of their calling, the practical care for families during and after relocation was largely absent. Participants spoke of being left to "pick up the pieces" with little acknowledgment of the losses they carried. This gap revealed an institutional blind spot, where the needs of congregations were prioritised above the well-being of clergy families themselves.

Theologically, this finding underscores the reality that relocation functions as a repeated grief cycle. Each move requires families to grieve what has been left behind while simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar contexts. Kübler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) stages of grief and Worden's (2009) tasks of mourning provided interpretive tools for this process, while Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model highlighted the pastoral possibility of transforming these grief narratives into sources of resilience and communal healing.

7.2.4 Synthesis with Literature

The findings of this study resonate strongly with earlier research on clergy family life. Frame and Shehan (2005:45) demonstrated that ministry role expectations often

disrupt family cohesion, placing hidden burdens on spouses and children. Darling, Hill and McWey (2004:262) highlighted the gendered expectations placed upon clergy wives, who are frequently treated as unpaid co-ministers within congregations. Goodman (2010:92) observed the grief and identity struggles of pastoral children, who face repeated disruptions to friendships, education, and community belonging. More recently, Luedtke and Sneed (2018:220–222), in a phenomenological study of Wesleyan pastors' wives, identified stressors such as performance expectations, loneliness, loss of identity, low income, and sacrifice of time, alongside protective factors such as faith, calling, and social support (2018:223–225). Collectively, these studies confirm that clergy families often live with profound stressors that remain largely unacknowledged by church structures.

This study confirmed these patterns within the Southern African Methodist context but also extended the conversation in significant ways. Unlike Western contexts, where relocation is sometimes optional or less frequent, itinerancy in the MCSA entrenches relocation as a compulsory and recurring feature of ministerial life. This produces a cycle of ongoing grief that has not been adequately addressed in pastoral theology, particularly within Southern Africa.

In addition to these parallels, two further insights emerged that, while not central to the initial research aim, carry significant implications for the life and wellbeing of clergy families. First, the reality of life in the parsonage highlights how clergy housing is more than a logistical arrangement; it is a lived space where public ministry and private family life are blurred, creating unique pressures for spouses and children. Second, narratives from PKs revealed the painful experience of losing a clergy father and being displaced from the manse soon after his death. This enforced vulnerability underscores the precariousness of clergy families when personal tragedy intersects with institutional procedures. While these findings were incidental, they illuminate systemic gaps in pastoral care and invite the church to re-imagine more compassionate policies around clergy housing.

These findings, when placed in dialogue with existing scholarship, confirm much of what is already known about the hidden costs of ministry, while also offering fresh insights into the Southern African Methodist context. It is from this intersection of

resonance and originality that the study's contributions, academic, theological, and practical, emerge.

7.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study makes several important contributions to the field of pastoral theology, the life of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and the lived realities of clergy families. By focusing on the experiences of clergy wives and adult children, the research addresses a gap in both scholarship and practice, particularly within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa context where relocation remains central to ministerial life. Beyond confirming existing literature, it also surfaces underexplored realities such as the pressures of parsonage life and the vulnerabilities of clergy families during bereavement, which have seldom been examined in Southern African pastoral studies. The contributions of this study may be understood in three interrelated dimensions: academic, theological, and practical.

7.3.1 Academic Contribution

Academically, this study advances the discourse on clergy relocation by situating it within the broader field of pastoral theology and family studies. While much of the existing literature has focused on clergy stress, congregational expectations, or pastoral burnout (Frame & Shehan, 2005; Carroll, 2006), relatively little attention has been paid to the impact of relocation on clergy wives and children in the Southern African context. This research therefore contributes new knowledge by documenting the lived narratives of clergy families, offering an original empirical contribution that expands the geographical and cultural scope of scholarship on pastoral family life.

In methodological terms, the study demonstrates the value of combining phenomenology and narrative inquiry in exploring lived experiences of faith-based transitions. By privileging participants' voices, the research highlights how meaning is constructed in contexts of disruption and change. This approach contributes to qualitative research in pastoral theology by showing how deeply personal stories can reveal institutional blind spots and shape practical interventions.

Moreover, by integrating relocation with grief and transition theories, the study opens new academic avenues for understanding clergy life not only as a vocational calling

but also as a continual process of loss, adaptation, and re-storying. The incidental insights around parsonage life and the displacement of clergy families after bereavement further extend the scholarly conversation, suggesting new directions for future research into the intersection of ecclesial policy, family wellbeing, and pastoral care.

While the academic contribution establishes relocation as a fertile area of study within pastoral theology and family research, the theological dimension presses further, showing how these experiences of loss and transition carry deep spiritual significance.

7.3.2 Theological Contribution

Theologically, this study contributes new insight by reframing clergy relocation as a repeated cycle of grief and adaptation within pastoral theology. By engaging with Kübler-Ross's and Kessler's stages of grief, Worden's tasks of mourning, and Schlossberg's transition theory, the research demonstrates that relocation functions as a loss event with spiritual, emotional, and relational consequences. At the same time, by incorporating Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model, the study points toward a pastoral practice that transforms grief through communal narration and meaning-making.

This theological contribution lies in moving the conversation beyond understanding relocation as merely disruptive, to recognising it as an opportunity for pastoral accompaniment, resilience-building, and theological re-storying. Within the MCSA context, where itinerancy is central to ministerial identity, the study reveals that pastoral theology must attend not only to the proclamation of faith but also to the unspoken losses that clergy families endure. It challenges the church to see relocation not only as a structural demand of ministry but also as a pastoral responsibility that requires intentional, compassionate care.

In this way, the study strengthens an ongoing re-imagining of pastoral theology as a discipline that attends to both institutional practices and the lived realities of families. It also introduces a prophetic dimension, calling the church to embody justice and mercy in its housing policies and support systems, thereby aligning ecclesial structures with the healing mission of Christ.

If the theological insights reveal relocation as both grief and opportunity for re-storying, the practical contribution demonstrates how these insights may be translated into concrete strategies of care within the life of the church.

7.3.3 Practical Contribution

Practically, this study contributes new knowledge by offering concrete strategies for the care of clergy families, articulated in Chapter 6. These include pastoral interventions at the individual, family, congregational, and institutional levels, guided by the story-sharing approach. By creating spaces for storytelling, peer mentoring, and intentional pastoral accompaniment, the model equips the church to address the grief and disruptions of relocation in constructive ways. Importantly, the model functions not only as a response to loss but also as a proactive framework for preparing families before relocation occurs.

The story-sharing visual tool developed in the study, serve as a practical resource for clergy training, district workshops, and family preparation programmes. This diagram embodies the study's commitment to producing research that is both scholarly and directly applicable in real-life ministry contexts.

Furthermore, the study highlights the urgent need for the MCSA to develop policies and practices that take family well-being into account during stationing decisions. The incidental findings concerning life in the parsonage and the displacement of clergy families after bereavement underscore the necessity of a housing plan that safeguards dignity and stability. In doing so, the study provides church leaders with both theological rationale and practical guidance for institutional reform, ensuring that pastoral care is embodied not only in relationships but also in structures and policies.

Taken together, these academic, theological, and practical contributions demonstrate the originality and relevance of this study. By amplifying the voices of clergy families, reframing relocation as both loss and opportunity, and offering concrete pastoral tools and policy pathways, the research extends the conversation beyond description to transformation. It calls the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to embrace pastoral care not only as a spiritual practice but also as an institutional commitment that safeguards the dignity of its ministers and their families. These contributions naturally

lead into the following recommendations, which translate the study's insights into actionable steps for the church's life and witness.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for intentional responses to the impact of relocation on clergy families. The following recommendations are offered to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, clergy families themselves, and the wider academic community.

7.4.1 Recommendations for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

1. Review stationing policies to prioritise family well-being.

The MCSA's itinerant system is historically rooted in Wesleyan tradition, but the findings of this study show that its implementation often disregards the emotional, vocational, and relational costs borne by families. It is recommended that stationing committees integrate family considerations more explicitly into their deliberations. This does not imply that ministers should become "non-itinerant," but rather that family stability, children's education, and spousal employment be recognised as legitimate factors in placement decisions. Such an approach would align with pastoral theology's emphasis on holistic care and the interconnectedness of family systems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013:16).

2. Institutionalise family consultations before relocations.

At present, clergy families often experience relocation decisions as unilateral announcements. This reinforces the silence and powerlessness described by participants in this study. It is recommended that district and connexional leaders establish structured family consultation sessions before final stationing decisions are made. These conversations would allow spouses and children to voice their concerns, raise practical considerations, and receive pastoral support. Such inclusion would not only empower families but also strengthen their sense of belonging within the church.

3. Establish pastoral accompaniment and support structures.

The study confirmed that clergy families often face isolation during relocation, particularly in the early stages of transition. It is recommended that the MCSA develop district-level accompaniment teams composed of trained pastoral carers, retired

ministers, and experienced clergy spouses to walk alongside newly relocated families in their first year. At the same time, accessible pastoral supervision for ministers and intentional peer networks for spouses and children should be institutionalised across districts and the Connexion. These structures, grounded in Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model, would provide spaces of encouragement, belonging, and solidarity. By reframing relocation as a shared journey rather than a private burden, the church would embody its communal ethos and strengthen resilience among itinerant families.

4. Expand probationers' spouse orientation programmes.

Currently, orientation for probationers often includes theological and ministerial training but neglects the preparation of their spouses for the realities of itinerancy. This study found that clergy wives frequently felt unprepared and unsupported when expected to lead women's organisations or take on congregational roles. It is therefore recommended that probationer spouse orientation programmes be expanded to include sessions on relocation realities, family dynamics, role expectations, and resilience practices. These should be facilitated not only by clergy leaders but also by experienced spouses who can share their wisdom and stories.

5. Provide training and resources for congregations.

Congregations often hold unspoken expectations of clergy families, particularly spouses, without awareness of the challenges they face. The MCSA is encouraged to design training materials and workshops for congregational leaders to foster sensitivity toward relocated families. Topics could include respecting family privacy, avoiding gendered assumptions about spouses, and offering practical support (e.g., assistance with schooling, housing adjustments, or professional networking for spouses). In strengthening this, the MCSA should also draw more intentionally on the *priesthood of all believers'* principle, reminding congregations that they, too, are called to shepherd and support clergy families. Such formation would transform relocation into a shared journey of care rather than a solitary burden borne by the minister's household.

6. Develop policies addressing financial stability during transitions.

The study highlighted cases where clergy were moved from financially viable circuits to struggling ones, resulting in irregular stipends and economic hardship. The MCSA should review its financial policies to ensure that relocation does not place clergy families at risk of financial insecurity. Possible measures include emergency support funds, transitional grants, or stipends guaranteed at a minimum standard across circuits. Such provisions would safeguard the dignity of families and uphold the church's witness of justice and care.

7. Develop a compassionate clergy housing policy.

The findings revealed the vulnerability of clergy families, especially during bereavement, when widowed spouses and children were sometimes displaced from the manse soon after the death of the minister. Theological reflection suggests that such practices exacerbate grief and contradict the church's pastoral mandate to care for its members (Gerkin, 1997:35). It is therefore recommended that the MCSA formulate a housing policy that provides transitional accommodation for bereaved families and clearer guidelines for housing allocation that preserve dignity and security. This would embody the justice and mercy central to Wesleyan theology and strengthen the church's pastoral witness.

7.4.2 Recommendations for Clergy Families

1. Encourage open family conversations before and after relocation.

One of the clearest findings of this study was the silence surrounding relocation decisions. Children and spouses often felt excluded from discussions, which intensified their sense of powerlessness. Clergy families are encouraged to engage in intentional conversations before and after each move, allowing all members, including children, to express their hopes, fears, and concerns. Such dialogue helps to normalise feelings of grief and disruption, while also strengthening family cohesion. Open communication can transform relocation from an imposed burden into a shared journey of mutual support.

2. Build resilience through prayer, journaling, and spiritual practices.

Relocation places stress on both faith and identity. Families should be encouraged to nurture resilience-building practices, such as shared prayer, devotional reading, and

journaling. Journaling allows both spouses and children to process feelings privately, while prayer creates a collective space of grounding and hope. These practices do not eliminate grief, but they help families to integrate loss within the wider narrative of faith, fostering a sense of continuity with God's presence.

3. Engage in story-sharing as a healing practice.

In line with Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) model, clergy families can find healing through telling and listening to each other's stories. Story-sharing helps to break the silence, validate lived experiences, and foster empathy across generations. Families are encouraged to create intentional spaces, around the dinner table, during family devotions, or in informal gatherings, where stories of past relocations can be remembered and reframed. Such practices strengthen the family's collective memory and provide a sense of stability and continuity even during change.

4. Seek peer support and mentoring relationships.

The study revealed the value of connection with other clergy families who have lived through similar experiences. Families are encouraged to seek out mentoring relationships, where experienced clergy spouses and children can walk alongside younger families navigating relocation for the first time. Peer support groups, whether formal or informal, create networks of solidarity that reduce isolation and provide practical guidance for navigating transitions.

5. Prioritise family rituals and traditions for stability.

Relocation often disrupts a family's sense of belonging and rootedness. Families can counter this by maintaining rituals and traditions that travel with them from place to place, such as celebrating birthdays in a particular way, holding weekly family meals, or creating small home-based liturgies. These practices provide continuity across moves, reinforcing identity and belonging in unfamiliar settings and helping families to reframe each move as a new chapter rather than a rupture.

6. Address vocational concerns openly within the household.

Many clergy wives expressed frustration at the loss of career opportunities or the expectation to serve congregations in unpaid roles. Families are encouraged to hold open conversations about vocational goals, spousal careers, and role expectations,

rather than leaving them unspoken. Naming these realities can reduce resentment and foster creative solutions, such as part-time work, further study, or the pursuit of personal callings alongside ministry. By recognising these challenges honestly, families can support one another in aligning individual callings with shared ministry.

7.4.3 Recommendations for Further Research

While this study has contributed significantly to understanding the impact of clergy relocation on families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, it also highlights areas where further exploration is necessary. Future research could expand the scope and depth of inquiry in the following ways:

1. Cross-denominational studies on clergy relocation.

This research focused on the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, which has a strong Wesleyan tradition of itinerancy. Comparative studies across denominations, such as Anglican, Catholic, or Pentecostal contexts, could provide valuable insights into how relocation is practised and experienced differently in diverse ecclesiastical traditions. Such studies would enrich the global conversation on pastoral care and mobility by identifying both common challenges and unique denominational dynamics.

2. Long-term effects of relocation on clergy children (PKs).

This study engaged adult children retrospectively, offering insights into their formative experiences. Further research is needed to examine the long-term consequences of repeated relocations on clergy children's educational pathways, career development, family formation, and faith retention. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in tracing how early experiences of dislocation shape identity, resilience, and spiritual journeys over time.

3. The role of clergy husbands and dual-career families.

Although this study focused on clergy wives, the changing gender dynamics in ministry call for exploration of clergy husbands' experiences, particularly in dual-career households. Research into how male spouses navigate expectations, career adjustments, and congregational perceptions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of clergy family life in a shifting pastoral landscape.

4. Rural versus urban relocation contexts.

Participants in this study highlighted the unique challenges of adapting to different cultural and linguistic contexts, particularly in rural circuits. Further research could investigate the differential impact of relocation in rural versus urban settings, where issues such as schooling, employment, and community integration may vary significantly. Such findings would help the church tailor pastoral responses more sensitively to context.

5. Theological frameworks for resilience in relocation.

This study drew on grief theory, transition theory, and story-sharing models to interpret clergy families' experiences. Future research could expand theological reflection on relocation by integrating other frameworks, such as liberation theology, feminist pastoral theology, or intercultural perspectives. Such approaches would deepen the theological grounding of pastoral interventions and ensure that diverse voices are represented in the conversation.

Overall, these recommendations indicate a comprehensive approach to addressing the difficulties associated with clergy relocation. On an institutional level, they urge the MCSA to integrate pastoral care into its policies and practices; at the familial level, they promote intentional resilience and transparent communication; and at the academic level, they encourage continuous exploration that expands and deepens comprehension. By connecting theology, practice, and research, these suggestions aim not only to ease the burdens of relocation but also to uphold the dignity and enhance the resilience of clergy households. The subsequent section examines the study's limitations, which must be recognized to properly situate its contributions and recommendations within a suitable context.

Taken together, these recommendations point toward a holistic response to the challenges of clergy relocation. At the institutional level, they call the MCSA to embody pastoral care in its policies and practices; at the family level, they encourage intentional resilience and open communication; and at the scholarly level, they invite ongoing inquiry that broadens and deepens understanding. By weaving together theology, practice, and research, these recommendations seek not only to alleviate the burdens of relocation but also to affirm the dignity and strengthen the resilience of clergy households. The next section examines the study's limitations, which must be

recognized to properly situate its contributions and recommendations within a suitable context.

7.5 LIMITATIONS

This research also highlighted several limitations, which I acknowledge with humility. The sample size was modest, and while the voices of clergy wives and adult children were central, other perspectives, such as those of clergy husbands, younger children, or extended family members, were not included. Furthermore, the geographical scope was limited to one district of the MCSA, which may not capture the full diversity of contexts across Southern Africa. These limitations do not diminish the value of the study; rather, they point to areas where further exploration is needed.

Several additional factors may have influenced the conduct and interpretation of this study. Firstly, the researcher's position as an ordained minister in the Limpopo District provided valuable insider knowledge of the Methodist context. However, it may also have introduced subjectivity or response bias, given the respect and authority typically afforded to clergy. To minimise this limitation, participants were deliberately drawn from circuits outside the researcher's own congregation, reducing the risk of undue influence and helping to preserve the integrity of the data. At the same time, my dual identity as both minister and researcher created a complex dynamic: while it risked bias, it also allowed participants to trust me with sensitive narratives they might not have shared with an outsider.

Secondly, the study was conducted during a period of significant social and economic transition. Many clergy families today are shaped by dual-career dynamics rather than traditional single-income models. While the study illuminated important aspects of spousal and child experience, it did not explicitly focus on how relocation affects spousal employment, vocational identity, or the complexity of dual-career households. As such, the findings may be less applicable to clergy families with non-traditional configurations, or to other denominational contexts, particularly in urban or globally mobile settings.

Thirdly, budgetary constraints shaped aspects of the research design, including the limited sample size and reliance on in-depth interviews as the primary method of data

collection. While these interviews yielded rich qualitative insights, the scope of perspectives included was necessarily restricted by available resources.

A fourth limitation concerns the ethical and emotional sensitivity of the topic. Relocation experiences often carried deep pain, especially for children recalling disrupted schooling, lost friendships, or bereavement. As a researcher, I was mindful that the interview process itself could trigger distress. To mitigate this risk, I created safe interview environments, assured participants of confidentiality, and reminded them of their right to withdraw at any time. While these safeguards upheld ethical practice, they also meant some narratives may have remained partly unspoken, as participants withheld details, they were not ready to share.

Finally, as with many qualitative studies, the findings are not intended to be generalised to all clergy families. Instead, they offer what Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) call “transferability,” whereby the thick description provided enables readers and church leaders to discern parallels in their own contexts. This is both a strength and a limitation: the study provides deep insights into particular lives, but it is up to others to judge their relevance elsewhere.

Despite these limitations, every effort was made to ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, and rigour of the research, as discussed in earlier chapters. Moreover, the limitations identified here do not weaken the study’s contribution; instead, they point to areas where future scholarship may build on this work to generate deeper and broader insights into clergy family life.

7.6 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Including a personal reflection in this study is important, as qualitative research is never detached from the researcher’s own identity and journey. Conducting this study has therefore been both an academic undertaking and a personal pilgrimage. As a researcher, I entered the project with a commitment to listen attentively to the lived experiences of clergy families. Yet as a deacon in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and as a parent within the church, I also carried my own awareness of the challenges of relocation. Holding these identities in tension was not always easy, but it offered me a distinct perspective that enabled me to engage with participants’ narratives both empathetically and critically.

One of the most striking aspects of this journey was recognising the resonance between the participants' voices and my own observations of clergy life. The loneliness voiced by clergy wives, the struggles of raising children while spouses were absorbed in ministry, and the silence surrounding vocational sacrifices echoed deeply within me. At the same time, I was challenged to maintain academic rigour and avoid over-identification, ensuring that participants' narratives were interpreted on their own terms rather than through my personal lens.

On a theological and pastoral level, the process of listening to and analysing these stories reshaped my own outlook. I became more aware of the power of silence and story, silence that conceals pain, and story that liberates and heals. Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model not only informed my intervention design but also became a practice I embraced in my own ministry and family life. Story-sharing reminded me that healing begins when voices are heard, acknowledged, and woven into a communal narrative of hope.

This study has also deepened my conviction that the church's credibility is tied to how it cares for its own families. As a deacon, I have often witnessed the strain that ministry places on households, but this research provided concrete evidence of the systemic gaps that must be addressed. It has strengthened my resolve to advocate for clergy families, not only in academic forums but also within church structures and pastoral practice.

Finally, this research journey has been personally transformative. Balancing the demands of academic work with family responsibilities, professional duties, and ministry was not without its difficulties. Yet the process has affirmed for me the importance of perseverance, faith, and community support amid daunting challenges. In many ways, writing this thesis became its own form of story-sharing—a testimony to the resilience of clergy families and to the faithfulness of God, who journeys with us through every relocation, disruption, and transition.

7.7 CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that clergy relocation, while central to the Methodist tradition of itinerant ministry, carries profound consequences for the lives of clergy families. Far from being a neutral or purely administrative process, relocation is

experienced as a form of loss that disrupts careers, identities, relationships, and a sense of belonging. For clergy wives, this often-meant loneliness, curtailed vocational aspirations, and the burden of unspoken expectations. For adult children, it brought fractured friendships, disrupted education, and the persistent question of where they truly belonged. Common to both was the silence of the church and the absence of sustained pastoral support.

By engaging the narratives of clergy families through a qualitative and phenomenological approach, the study has revealed the depth of these experiences. Framed by grief theories, transition models, and Wimberly & Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model, the research confirmed that relocation functions as a repeated grief cycle. Yet it also illuminated that within grief lies the possibility of resilience when stories are shared, reframed, and integrated into the wider faith narrative. Story-sharing emerged not only as a pastoral tool but as a theological act of reclaiming voice, dignity, and hope.

The pastoral intervention model developed in Chapter 6 showed that intentional care, through listening spaces, mentoring relationships, family conversations, and institutional reforms, can make relocation less of a burden and more of a journey of faith. These strategies remind us that the credibility of the church's mission is inseparable from its care for those who embody that mission within their households.

Ultimately, this study affirms that relocation, while disruptive, does not have to be destructive. When the church acknowledges the grief it creates and responds with compassion, relocation can be transformed into an opportunity for renewed trust, resilience, and communal growth. For clergy families, story-sharing provides a way to weave together threads of pain and hope, loss and resilience, exile and belonging.

Theologically, relocation may be seen as part of the biblical motif of pilgrimage: a journey marked by uncertainty, yet also by God's abiding presence. Just as Israel discovered God's faithfulness in exile, so too can clergy families discover grace in their continual movements.

In conclusion, this thesis set out to explore the impact of clergy relocation on families within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and to propose a pastoral response that acknowledges both the grief and the resilience of those affected. Using a qualitative, interpretivist, and phenomenological methodology, the study listened

deeply to the voices of clergy wives and adult children, whose experiences of loss, silence, and disruption revealed the hidden costs of itinerant ministry. By engaging theological frameworks of grief, transition, and particularly Wimberly and Wimberly's (2007) story-sharing model, the research has shown that relocation is both a recurring grief cycle and a space where healing can emerge through shared narrative and communal accompaniment.

The recommendations offered are therefore not only institutional and practical but also theological, pointing to a church that embodies credible pastoral care for its own. It is hoped that this work will serve as both a resource and a catalyst, enabling the MCSA and the wider body of Christ to journey more faithfully with clergy families, honouring their stories as integral to the church's mission and witness. In this way, the church may embody God's promise of presence in every transition, ensuring that no story of grief is left unheard and no journey is travelled alone.

Final Closing Statement

This study has shown that while relocation remains a defining feature of Methodist ministry, it is also a source of deep grief for clergy families. Yet within this grief lies the possibility of resilience when silence is broken and stories are shared. By listening to the voices of clergy wives and adult children, this research has uncovered hidden costs but also pointed toward pathways of healing, dignity, and hope. The task before the church is clear: to embody its calling not only in proclamation but also in its care for those who serve within its households. If the church can walk faithfully alongside clergy families in every move and transition, relocation will no longer be a burden endured in silence but a journey of grace, resilience, and renewed trust in the God who is present in every place.

APPENDIX A: APPENDIX A: LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE ETHICS COMMITTEE



Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

3 December 2024

NAME: Ms P Nyandoro
STUDENT NUMBER: 23296357
COURSE: Doctoral
DATE: 3 December 2024
APPLICATION NUMBER: T142/24

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

- 1) **The Research committee:** This applies to all research proposals
- 2) **The Research Ethics committee:** This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Human'.

Prof D J Human
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tanya van Wyk'.

Prof Tanya van Wyk
Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION DOCUMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT



LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of the Study: Relocation of clergy and its impact on the family: a pastoral challenge

Researcher: Patricia Nyandoro

Student Number: 23296357

Contact Details: panyandoro@yahoo.com Cell: 0827047396

Dear Research Participant

You are hereby cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, clergy relocation and its impact on family.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to (i) investigate the impact of clergy relocation on the family and (ii) to propose a healing model that can be utilized by the pastoral care givers in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa when dealing with clergy families who are traumatised as a result of the relocations.

The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the study's findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.

Duration of the study: The study will be conducted over a period of one year and its projected date of completion is July 2025

Research procedures: The study is based on semi-structured interviews as well as review of available literature on the topic. A list of questions and key points will be drawn up in order to facilitate a useful conversation with the participants. The interview will be voice recorded to allow the researcher to concentrate on the interview rather than taking notes.

What is expected of you: An information document will be send to you as an identified study participant. You are expected to read, understand and sign this document and return to the researcher, before the start of the study. I will be contacting you to arrange interviews at a date and time that is convenient to you. The interview is expected to take 30-90 minutes of your time. You are free to contact the researcher on the provided contact details for further clarity.

Your rights: Your participation in this study is very important and this study is based on free will. No gift or payment shall be exchanged for taking part in the research. You may, however, choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative

consequences. You, as participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The participant as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.

Confidentiality: The identities of participants and their views will be treated with utmost privacy. Data collected for this study will be kept confidential and participants and congregation identity will be protected through use of coding. The relevant data will be destroyed, should you choose to withdraw.

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research. I understand that I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Contact number of the Researcher: 0827047396

VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named _____ and his/her relatives, the letter of informed consent. The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE WIVES OF CLERGY



FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Research topic: Relocation of clergy and its impact on the family: a pastoral challenge

Biographical Information

1. Age in Years

18-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
61+	

2. Highest Qualification

Primary School	
Matric/ High School	
Diploma	
Bachelor's Degree	
Postgraduate Degree	

3. Employment Status

Employed part-time	
Employed full-time	
Student	
Unemployed/ Retired	

4. Years in ministry:

5. Number of Children:

Questions:

1. Did you meet your husband before he became a minister?
2. Were you prepared for the role of being a minister's wife? If the answer is yes, by whom?
3. In your family, whose career takes precedence.
4. What are your roles and responsibilities in the church?
5. How many times have you relocated because of your husband's appointment to another circuit?
6. What has been your experience of relocation because of your husband's appointments to different circuits?
7. What changes occurred in your family because of the relocation from one church to another.
8. How did your family receive support during the relocation process and who provided the support?
9. In your view, what can the Church do to make the clergy relocations easier for families?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE ADULT CHILDREN OF CLERGY



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Research topic: Relocation of Clergy and its impact on the family: A Pastoral Challenge

Biographical Information

1. Age in years

19-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	
61+	

2. Gender

Female	
Male	

3. Highest Qualification

Primary School	
Matric/ High School	
Diploma	
Bachelor's Degree	
Postgraduate Degree	

4. Employment Status

Employed part-time	
Employed full-time	
Student	
Unemployed/ Retired	

Questions:

1. What was it like growing up as a minister's child?
2. Do you remember how many times you relocated as a family because of your father being stationed by the church?
3. What was your experience of these relocations?
4. What is your advice to children of ministers who find themselves struggling due to relocations?

APPENDIX E: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE CHURCH



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 (0)11 615 1616
+27 (0)87 056 1201
Fax: +27 (0)11 615 1511

Methodist Connexional Office
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Ave
Bruma Office Park, Bruma
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2047

5th August 2024

Deacon Patricia Nyandoro
PO Box 40660
Moreleta Ridge
0044

Per email: Patricia.Nyandoro@mediclinic.co.za

Dear Patricia

Re: Request for Permission to conduct Research for a Doctorate in Philosophy purposes

Warm Wintry Greetings

The mail from your District Bishop, Rev Dr Sidwell Mokgothu refers.

The Presiding Bishop, Rev Pumla Nzimande, following due process directs that permission be granted to you for your research towards a PHD. This permission is granted on condition that the University's rules as provided for by the ethics committee are adhered to.

Every blessing for your research and we look forward to the outcomes and findings of your given research topic.

Kind Regards and Best Wishes

Michel W Hansrod

General Secretary

cc. Rev Pumla Nzimande – Presiding Bishop
Rev Dr Sidwell Mokgothu – Bishop of Limpopo District

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

Presiding Bishop:
Rev Pumla Nzimande
E-mail: presbish@mco.org.za

General Secretary:
Rev Michel W Hansrod
E-mail: gensec@mco.org.za

Lay President:
Mr Xhanti T Mhlubulwana
E-mail: laypresident@mco.org.za

General Treasurer:
Mr Rannoi Sedumo
E-mail: rannoi@mco.org.za

Page |

APPENDIX F: PSYCHOLOGIST COMMITMENT LETTER

**Dr Diana Monama
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
MA (Clinical Psych) Unisa, PhD (Psychology) Medunsa
Practice No 0323640**

MEDICLINIC HEART HOSPITAL
Suite 311
551 PARK STREET
ARCADIA
PRETORIA. 0083

P.O BOX 39003, GARSFONTEIN EAST, 0060
Phone: 012 341 0250
Cell: 082 584 8225
Email: dianamonama@gmail.com

DIANA MONAMA
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST
MA Cl - Psych (UNISA), Pr no: 0323640
Medclinic Heart Hospital Suite 311
551 Park Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, 0103

06 May 2021

To whom it may concern,

This serves to confirm that Dr Diana Monama is involved with treating families that are bereaved.

Dr Diana Monama would be able to assist Pastor Patricia Nyandoro with counselling of the bereaved family while she does her research on the matters related to bereavement.

For any queries, kindly contact Dr Diana Monama on 082 584 8225.

Regards,


Dr Diana Monama

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ainsworth, M.D.S., 1989. Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 44(4), pp.709–716.
- Amato, P.R., 2000. The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62(4), pp.1269–1287.
- American Psychiatric Association, 2013. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: APA.
- Anderson, A., 2000. *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic Churches in South Africa*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.
- Anderson, M.L., Goodman, J. & Schlossberg, N.K., 2012. *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory with Practice in a Diverse World* (4th ed.). New York: Springer.
- Anderson, S.A., Sabatelli, R.M. & Kosutic, I., 2014. *Family Interaction: A Multigenerational Developmental Perspective*. Boston: Pearson.
- Anderson, W., 1998. *Fundamentals of Educational Research* (2nd ed.). London: Falmer Press.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J., 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Baker, D., 2000. The long-term impact of clergy relocation on pastors' children. *Pastoral Psychology*, 48(2), pp.113–125.
- Barbour, R., 2008. *Qualitative Research: A Student Guide to the Craft of Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Bazeley, P., 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis: Practical Strategies*. London: Sage.
- Bekhet, A.K., Zauszniewski, J.A. & Nakhla, W.E., 2009. Reasons for relocation to retirement communities: A qualitative study. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 31(4), pp.462–479.
- Bengtson, V.L., Biblarz, T.J. & Roberts, R.E.L., 2002. *How Families Still Matter: A Longitudinal Study of Youth in Two Generations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Benokraitis, N.V., 2005. *Marriage and Families: Changes, Choices and Constraints*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T., 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Anchor.

Berger, P.L. & Luckmann, T., 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin.

Bevans, S.B. & Schroeder, R.P., 2004. *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Biblarz, T.J. & Stacey, J., 2010. How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(1), pp.3–22.

Binstock, R.H. & George, L.K., 2001. *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (5th ed.). San Diego: Academic Press.

Black, J.S., 1992. Coming home: The relationship of expatriate expectations with repatriation adjustment and job performance. *Human Relations*, 45(2), pp.177–192.

Bloomberg, L.D. & Volpe, M., 2016. *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bloomberg, L.D. & Volpe, M.F., 2019. *Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation: A Road Map from Beginning to End* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bosch, D.J., 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Boyle, P., Cooke, T., Halfacree, K. & Smith, D., 2001. The family and migration. In: T. Champion & C. Fielding (eds.) *Migration and Residential Mobility*. London: Routledge.

Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016. *Global Mobility Trends Survey Report 2016*, pp.13–27.

Bronfenbrenner, U., 1979. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brown, B. & Perkins, D.D., 1992. Disruptions in place attachment. In: I. Altman & S.M. Low (eds.) *Place Attachment*. New York: Springer.

- Brown, L. & Holloway, I., 2008. The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students... *Journal of Research in International Education*, 7(2), pp.232–249.
- Bromley, D.G. & Pitts, R., 1982. *The Life of the Pastor's Kid*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Carroll, J.W., 2006. *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Carroll, J.W., Hargrove, B. & Lummis, A.T., 2007. *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carter, B. & McGoldrick, M., 2005. *The Expanded Family Life Cycle* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Castles, S., de Haas, H. & Miller, M.J., 2014. *The Age of Migration* (5th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cattich, J. & Knudson-Martin, C., 2009. Spirituality and relationship... *Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(3), pp.248–262.
- Charmaz, K., 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Cheal, D., 2008. *Families in Today's World: A Comparative Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Christensen, L.B., Johnson, R.B. & Turner, L.A., 2015. *Research Methods, Design, and Analysis* (12th ed., Global ed.). Essex: Pearson Education.
- Collins, K.J., 2007. *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Cooke, S.C., 1977. Ministers' wives: Marital satisfaction and the itinerant lifestyle. [Publication details not provided].
- Cooke, T.J., 2008. Migration in a family way. *Population, Space and Place*, 14(4), pp.255–265.
- Cooke, T.J. & Speirs, K., 2005. Migration and subjective well-being... *Social Indicators Research*, 74(2), pp.147–171.

- Conger, R.D. et al., 1990. Linking economic hardship to marital quality and instability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 52(3), pp.643–656.
- Cox, H., 2008. *The Future of Faith*. New York: HarperOne.
- Cragg, G.R., 1991. *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648–1789*. London: Penguin.
- Creswell, J.W., 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D., 2023. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N., 2018. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Crotty, M., 1998. *The Foundations of Social Research*. London: Sage.
- Dammak, A., 2018. Research paradigms: Methodologies and compatible methods. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/17079042/Research_Paradigms_Methodologies_and_Compatible_methods
- Darling, C.A., Hill, E.W. & McWey, L.M., 2004. Understanding stress and coping in clergy families. *Pastoral Psychology*, 52(4), pp.261–275.
- Darling, C.A., Hill, E.W. & McWey, L.M., 2004. Understanding stress and quality of life for clergy and spouses. *Stress and Health*, 20(5), pp.261–277.
- Davis, K., 2012. Friendship 2.0... *Journal of Adolescence*, 35(6), pp.1527–1536.
- Davis, E., 2021. *Healing and Ministry in Contexts of Trauma*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Denscombe, M., 2003. *The good research guide*. 2nd edition. Open University Press.
- De Vos, A.S. (ed.) et al., 1998. *Research at Grassroots*. Pretoria: JL van Schaik.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- DiCicco-Bloom, B. & Crabtree, B.F., 2006. The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), pp.314–321.
- Dlamini, T., 2016. *Pastoral Care in Times of Trauma: A Theological Reflection on the Concept of Deconstruction*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Doehring, C., 2015. *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (2nd ed.). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Erikson, E.H., 1968. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S.A. & Alkassim, R.S., 2016. Comparison of convenience and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1).
- Feldman, S.S. & Barrett, K.C., 2001. The family context of adolescent self-regulation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24(2), pp.147–161.
- Flick, U., 2014. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Foster, D., 2014. *The Parsonage Family: Emotions, Work and Place in the Church of England Ministry*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Frame, M.W., 1998. *Relocation and the Clergy Family: Managing Transitions*. New York: Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Frame, M.W., 1998. Relocation and well-being in United Methodist clergy and their spouses. *Pastoral Psychology*, 46(6).
- Frame, M.W., 2001. *The Realities of Pastoral Care: Voices from the Clergy Family System*. New York: Haworth.
- Frame, M.W. & Shehan, C.L., 1994. Work and well-being in the two-person career... *Family Relations*, 43(2), pp.196–205.
- Frame, M.W. & Shehan, C.L., 2005. *Family Ties and Clergy Lives*. New York: Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Fullilove, M.T., 1996. Psychiatric implications of displacement. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153(12), pp.1516–1523.
- Fullilove, M.T., 2004. *Root Shock*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Ganong, L.H. & Coleman, M., 2017. *Stepfamily Relationships*. New York: Springer.

- Gerkin, C.V., 1997. *An Introduction to Pastoral Care*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Gillham, B., 2001. *Case Study Research Methods*. London: Continuum.
- Gillham, B., 2005. *Research interviewing: The range of techniques*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Giorgi, A., 2009. *The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Goldberg, A.E., 2012. *Gay Dads: Transitions to Adoptive Fatherhood*. New York: NYU Press.
- Goldenberg, H. & Goldenberg, I., 2013. *Family Therapy: An Overview* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Golant, S.M., 2003. Conceptualizing time and behavior in environmental gerontology. *The Gerontologist*, 43(5), pp.638–648.
- Goodman, J., 2010. *Children of the Parsonage: Ministry and Family Life*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Goodman, J.H., 2010. The experiences of pastors' children... *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 64(2), pp.1–10.
- Green, A.E., 2004. Changing patterns of mobility and the labour market. In: D. Coyle, W. Alexander & B. Ashcroft (eds.) *New Economy Handbook*. London: Oxford University Press, pp.57–73.
- Greenhaus, J.H. & Powell, G.N., 2006. When work and family are allies. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(1), pp.72–92.
- Grosch, W.N. & Olsen, D.C., 2000. Clergy burnout. *Pastoral Psychology*, 48(4), pp.267–280.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In: N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A. & Johnson, L., 2006. How many interviews are enough? *Field Methods*, 18(1), pp.59–82.

- Hall, M.E.L., 1997. The personal functioning of pastors... *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25(2), pp.132–147.
- Hamman, J.J., 2005. *When Steeples Cry: Leading Congregations Through Loss and Change*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- Hart, A.D., 2007. *Coping with Ministry Stress*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Harvey, M., 1998. Dual-career couples during international relocation: The trailing spouse. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(2), pp.309–331.
- Healy, M. & Perry, C., 2000. Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability... *Qualitative Market Research*, 3(3), pp.118–126.
- Heitzenrater, R.P., 1995. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Hendriks, H.J., 2004. *Studying Congregations in Africa*. Wellington: Lux Verbi.
- Herman, J.L., 1992. *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hertlein, K.M. & Wetchler, J.L., 2013. *The Couple and Family Technology Framework*. New York: Routledge.
- Hill, M., 2015. *Understanding Social Statistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hochschild, A.R. & Machung, A., 2012. *The Second Shift*. New York: Penguin.
- Hogan, J., Dolan, P. & Donnelly, P.F., 2009. *Approaches to Qualitative Research*. Cork, Ireland: Oak Tree Press.
- International Organization for Migration, 2021. *World Migration Report 2022*. Geneva: IOM.
- Irshaidat, I.A., 2019. Interpretivism vs positivism in political marketing research. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 18(3), pp.236–245.
- Johnson, R.B. & Christensen, L.B., 2014. *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (5th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Johnson, R.B. & Christensen, L.B., 2008. *Educational Research* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

- Kay, W.K., 2000. *Pentecostalism*. London: SCM Press.
- Kawulich, B. & Chilisa, B., 2012. Selecting a research approach... In: C. Wagner, B. Kawulich & M. Garner (eds.) *Doing Social Research: A Global Context*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill.
- Kofman, E., 2004. Family-related migration: A critical review of European studies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30(2), pp.243–262.
- Kraft, C.H., 2005. *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Kübler-Ross, E., 1965. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Scribner.
- Kübler-Ross, E. & Kessler, D., 2005. *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner / London: Simon & Schuster.
- Lachman, M.E., 2004. Development in midlife. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, pp.305–331.
- Lamb, M.E. (ed.), 2000. *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (4th ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Lartey, E.Y., 2003. *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (2nd ed.). London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S., 1984. *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lee, C., 1999. *The Minister's Family: Shepherds or Sheep?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Lee, C.C. & Balswick, J., 1989. *Life in a Glass House: The Minister's Family in Its Unique Social Context*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Leavy, P., 2017. *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods...* New York: Guilford Press.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G., 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham, S.A. & Guba, E.G., 2011. Paradigmatic controversies... In: N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.97–128.
- Littlejohn, S.W. & Foss, K.A., 2009. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lichter, D.T. & Brown, D.L., 2011. Rural America in an urban society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, pp.565–592.
- Louw, D.J., 2000. *A Pastoral Hermeneutics of Care and Encounter*. Cape Town: Lux Verbi.
- Luedtke, A.C. & Sneed, K.J., 2018. Voice of the clergy wife: A phenomenological study. *Pastoral Psychology*, 67(2), pp.215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0792-9>
- Luzbetak, L.J., 1988. *The Church and Cultures*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Mallett, S., 2004. Understanding home. *The Sociological Review*, 52(1), pp.62–89.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B., 2015. *Designing Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martens, D.M., 2010. *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mason, J., 2013. *Affinities: Potent Connections in Personal Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mason, M., 2010. Sample size and saturation in PhD studies... *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3), Art.8.
- McConnell, D., 2013. *A Tale of Two Missions*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J. & Garcia-Preto, N. (eds.), 2005. *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford.
- McMinn, M.R. et al., 2005. Care for pastors: Learning from clergy and their spouses. *Pastoral Psychology*, 53(6), pp.563–581.

- Meek, K.R. et al., 2003. Maintaining personal resiliency... *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 31(4), pp.339–347.
- Mesch, G. & Talmud, I., 2010. *Wired Youth*. New York: Routledge.
- Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), 2016. *The Methodist Book of Order: The Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa* (12th ed.). Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House.
- Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), 2018. Constitution of the Women's Manyano. Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House.s
- Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), 2023. *Yearbook*. Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House.
- Mitchell, B.A., 2007. *The Boomerang Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Moser, C., 2009. *Ordinary Families, Extraordinary Lives*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Morris, M.L. & Blanton, P.W., 1994. The influence of work-related stressors on clergy husbands and their wives. *Family Relations*, 43(2), pp.189–195.
- Morse, C., 2020. Sacred moves: Clergy families and relocation. *Pastoral Review*, 96(3), pp.230–238.
- Moustakas, C., 1994. *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nel, M., 2000. *Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Congregational Ministry*. Pretoria: Design Books.
- Nichols, M.P. & Davis, S.D., 2020. *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods* (12th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Nouwen, H.J.M., 1971. *Creative Ministry*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Ntlha, M., 2010. Contextual challenges of ministry... In: T. Maluleke & S. Nkomo (eds.) *Ministry in Context*. Pretoria: UNISA Press, pp.89–95.

- Nzimande, P., 2023. Awakening prophetic urgency & agency: Reviving the Church of Christ. Presiding Bishop's conference address, Nondlwana Methodist Church, Mdantsane, 21–23 Sept.
- Oakley, A., 1974. *The Sociology of Housework*. New York: Pantheon.
- Oberg, K., 1960. Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7, pp.177–182.
- Oden, T.C., 2009. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. San Francisco, CA: Harper.
- Oduyoye, M.A., 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Oishi, S., 2010. *The Psychology of Residential Mobility*. Washington, DC: APA.
- Olsen, D.C., 1985. *Clergy Families in Transition*. New York: Abingdon.
- Orellana, M.F., 2009. *Translating Childhoods*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers.
- Oso, F.A., 2020. The role of parents in child upbringing. In: O.I. Ikenna (ed.) *Parenting and Nation Building in Africa*. Lagos: National Open University of Nigeria, pp.324–336.
- Palinkas, L.A. et al., 2015. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection... *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5), pp.533–544.
- Pali, K., 2016. *Pastoral Care in African Christianity: Contextual Reflections*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Pargament, K.I., 1997. *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Parsons, T. & Bales, R.F., 1955. *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*. New York: Free Press.
- Patte, D. (ed.), 2010. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Patton, M.Q., 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Peega, K.A., 2009. *Crucified Clergy: A Challenge to Pastoral Care*. Master's thesis, University of Pretoria.
- Percy, M., 2010. *Shaping the Church: The Promise of Implicit Theology*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Phiri, I.A. & Nadar, S. (eds.), 2010. *African Women, Religion and Health*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Piaget, J., 1963. *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. New York: Norton.
- Pleck, J.H., 2010. Paternal involvement... In: M.E. Lamb (ed.) *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. New York: Wiley.
- Pollard, N., 1997. *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult: How to Interest People Who Aren't Interested*. Leicester: IVP.
- Proeschold-Bell, R.J. et al., 2011. A theoretical model of the holistic health of United Methodist clergy. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 50(3), pp.700–720.
- Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. <https://www.gov.za/documents/protection-personal-information-act> (Accessed on 29 December 2025).
- Putnam, R.D., 2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Pynoos, R.S., Steinberg, A.M. & Piacentini, J.C., 2007. A developmental psychopathology model... In: D. Cicchetti & D.J. Cohen (eds.) *Developmental Psychopathology*, Vol. 2, pp.330–370. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Rack, H.D., 2002. *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (3rd ed.). London: Epworth.
- Rapoport, R. & Rapoport, R.N., 1976. *Dual-Career Families Re-examined*. London: Martin Robertson.
- Rediger, G.L., 1997. *Clergy Killers*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Sanneh, L., 2008. *Disciples of All Nations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schlossberg, N.K., 1981. A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9(2), pp.2–18.

- Scott, M., 2011. *The Fatherhood Principle*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.
- Seaman, J., 2014. *Clergy Moves and Family Support in the United Methodist Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Seidman, I., 2006. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Seidman, I., 2013. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. 4th ed. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Shaffer, M.A. et al., 2001. Struggling for balance... *Journal of Management*, 27(1), pp.99–121.
- Shauman, K.A., 2010. Gender asymmetry in family migration. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(2), pp.375–392.
- Shaw, S.D., 2001. *Storytelling in Religious Contexts: The Experience of Women Married to Ministers*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen.
- Simpson, G.A. & Fowler, M.G., 1994. Geographic mobility and children's adjustment. *Pediatrics*, 93(2), pp.303–309.
- Smart, C. & Neale, B., 1999. *Family Fragments?* Cambridge: Polity.
- Starr, M.A., 2018. The challenge of pastoral transition. *Clergy Journal*, 94(5), pp.87–91.
- Strohl, A.B., 2019. Children of clergy... *Journal of Family Ministry*, 9(1), pp.112–125.
- Suárez-Orozco, C. & Suárez-Orozco, M.M., 2001. *Children of Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Swinton, J. & Mowat, H., 2006. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press.
- Swinton, J. & Mowat, H., 2016. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: SCM Press.
- The Holy Bible (NIV), 2011. Genesis 12:1–4; Luke 9:58. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Tucker, K.; Clergy Health Initiative & Duke Divinity School, 2012. *Flourishing in Ministry: Clergy Health and Well-Being*. Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School.

Turney, K. & Harknett, K., 2007. Neighborhood disadvantage, residential stability, and perceptions of support among new mothers. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(9), pp.1117–1144.

United Nations, 2015. *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (Accessed: 29 December 2025).

Tyerman, L., 1870. *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* Vol. 3. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Van der Kolk, B., 2014. *The Body Keeps the Score*. New York: Viking.

Vatican Council II, 1964. *Gaudium et Spes*. Vatican: The Holy See. Available at: <https://www.vatican.va/>. [Accessed 24 July 2025].

Vernon, A., 1999. *Moving House: Helping Children Cope with Relocation*. London: Sheldon Press.

Villegas, A., 2013. The influence of technology on family dynamics. *Proceedings of the 70th New York State Communication Association*, 19–21 Oct 2012.

Walls, A.F., 1996. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Walrond-Skinner, S., 2005. The function and role of the minister's family in pastoral care. London: SPCK.

Ward, C., Bochner, S. & Furnham, A., 2001. *The Psychology of Culture Shock* (2nd ed.). Hove: Routledge.

Warner, R.S. & Carter, D.S., 1984. The culture of the clergy family. *Review of Religious Research*, 25(2), pp.68–85.

Welman, C., Kruger, F. & Mitchell, B., 2005. *Research Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wesley, J., 1872. *The Works of John Wesley* (Vol. 8). London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room.

Wetchler, J.L. & Hertlein, K.M., 2013. *Couple and Family Technology: Applications in Clinical Practice*. New York: Routledge.

Wiles, J., 2008. Sense of home in a transnational social space. *Global Networks*, 8(1), pp.116–137.

Wiles, J.L., Wild, K., Kerse, N. & Allen, R.E.S., 2012. Resilience from the point of view of older people. *Social Science & Medicine*, 74(3), pp.416–424.

Wimberly, E.P. & Wimberly, A.E., 2007. *The Winds of Promise: Building and Maintaining Strong Clergy Families*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources.

Winter, R. & Hawthorne, G. (eds.), 1999. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (3rd ed.). Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Zahl, H. & Flanagan, K., 2010. Clergy wives and identity. *Practical Theology*, 3(1), pp.87–101.

List of Tables and Figures

Table 3.1: Paradigms and Theological Schools of Thought.....	60
Table 3.2: Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Designs	72
Table 5.1: Profile of Clergy Wives	151
Table 5.2: Profile of Children of Clergy	152
Table 5.3: Did you meet your husband before he became a minister?.....	154
Table 5.4: Were you prepared for the role of being a minister’s wife? If the answer is yes, by whom?	155
Table 5.5: In your family, whose career takes precedence.	158
Table 5.6: What are your roles and responsibilities in the church?.....	160
Table 5.7: How many times have you relocated because of your husband’s appointment to another circuit?	163
Table 5.8: What was your experience of relocation because of your husband’s appointments to different circuits?.....	164
Table 5.9: What changes occurred in your family because of the relocation from one church to another?	170
Table 5.10: How did your family receive support during the relocation process and who provided the support?.....	172
Table 5.11: In your view, what can the Church do to make the clergy relocations easier for families?	174
Table 5.12: What was it like growing up as a minister’s child?	177
Table 5.13: Do you remember how many times you relocated as a family because of your father being stationed by the church?	181
Table 5.14: What was your experience of these relocations?.....	182
Table 5.15: What is your advice to children of ministers who find themselves struggling due to relocations?	186
Table 5.16: Themes from interviews with clergy wives and children.....	189
Figure 3.1: Continuum of level of structures in interviews	87
Figure 6.1: Adapted from Wimberly & Wimb 1Figure 6.1: Adapted from Wimberly and Wimberly (2007).	233