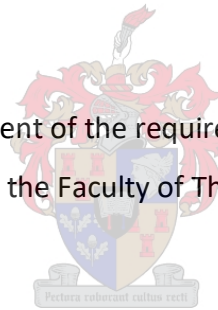


ENRICHING THE FUNCTIONING OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE IN AN URCSA CONGREGATION: AN
INTERGENERATIONAL PASTORAL STUDY

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Theology (Practical Theology) in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University



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March 2023

DECLARATION

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

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ABSTRACT

The Belgic Confession regards church discipline as one of the three marks of the true church. The other two characteristics of this true church, namely that the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered regularly, are regarded as important and not contentious at all. However, congregants are generally not concerned about whether discipline is exercised because unlike the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, this ministry does not affect all members. Consequently, this part of the ministry of a congregation is seemingly regarded as an annoying practice and a hindrance for members to enjoying their 'rights' in church.

As in the period before the 16th-century protestant reformation, church discipline has over the years become neglected in some congregations and thus the need for a refreshed approach is essential. Despite its neglect, it remains a core requirement for being the church of Christ and it is still a clear biblical responsibility of the congregation.

The congregation is the body of Christ and as such the different parts of it are connected. It brings the notion of interconnected living, which is a core concept of the Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP), to the fore. The premise of this pastoral process is that human existence involves living in relation with other human beings in vertical and horizontal relations. Vertical relations entail living interrelated in family ties while horizontal relations entail interrelated living with partners, and friends. The premise of this approach furthermore involves living intergenerational with consideration of different generations' indebted and entitled to one another.

In view that the aim of church discipline involves the well-being of the congregation, the congregation consequently takes responsibility for the spiritual well-being of its members. This means functioning as spiritual family members in the one household of God, taking care of one another. This is also the view of John Calvin that pastoral care involves living together in the body of Christ.

This study aims to explore the possibility to enrich the practice of church discipline and confirm anew its relevance for the ministry of the church. Utilizing the core principles of the DIPP in the exercising of church discipline in the congregation – which is interconnected and consists of different generations – this ministry can get new momentum and be appreciated anew as a valuable instrument in the kingdom of God. Where the sins of humanity necessitate church discipline to address them effectively, the concepts of relational justice, fairness, forgiveness for your trespasser and dealing with his/her guilt by exonerating him/her, i.e., lifting the culpability of him/her, can contribute not only to the enrichment of discipline in the church but also to the well-being of the congregant and congregation.

If the goals of this study are not completely reached, or if the church is not yet ready to adopt a new approach to ecclesial discipline, then the researcher hopes that it will at least ignite a new conversation about the relevance of church discipline in the post-modern era we live in.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

URCSA: Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

DRMC: Dutch Reformed Mission Church

DRCA: Dutch Reformed Church in Africa

DRCSA: Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa

UPCSA: Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

DIPP: Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process

Nagy: Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy

RCC: Roman Catholic Church

CCC: Catechism of the Catholic Church

IM: Integrated Ministry Model

CM: Congregational Ministries

CWM: Christian Women's Ministry

CMM: Christian Men's Ministry

CYM: Christian Youth Ministry

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to introduce the research topic to the reader and give an overview of how the researcher will go about unpacking the research problem

Since the beginning of the Reformed Church tradition, the practice of church discipline was an essential part of being a true church. According to the Belgic Confession, Article 29, "The marks, by which the true Church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin." Church discipline – also referred to as church censure – was understood by the father of the reformation, John Calvin, as an essential intervention for the spiritual health of the church (Tuininga, 2018:2).

Despite the noble purposes that were aimed at (see section 3 below), church discipline however became a stick to hit the fallen congregant with rather than a shepherd's crook to draw him/her nearer to the congregation and ultimately to God. To be placed under church discipline was considered a disgrace instead of an opportunity for repentance and healing. In general, these congregants were stigmatized as if they were the sole sinners within the congregation. Contrary to what has been taught in catechism – about what church discipline entails – congregants who fall into sin do not always experience church discipline as an act of love but rather as a punishment of the church, similar to what is regarded in a court of law. As a result, throughout the years this practice has been a very unpleasant experience for some and has even led to indifference towards the church at times.

The traditional way in which church discipline is practised fails our congregants in the sense that it is not conducted as a pastoral care and healing process, but rather as a legalistic function of the church. This study intends to contribute to a more compassionate pastoral care approach regarding the functioning of church discipline in the hope that the congregation and censured congregants will experience healing and renewed koinonia in the body of Christ.

1.2 Motivation

Since his ordination, the researcher has ministered to four congregations in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) for the last 33 years. Part of the key duties of a congregational pastor - together with the church council - is the oversight and practice of church discipline. Church discipline entails the guiding of censured congregants through (i) a process of correction and (ii) the combatting of sin. One cannot fault this aim and intervention in the church as it is indeed a biblical command that is evident throughout the whole of Scripture. In practice, it entails certain privileges, including partaking in the sacraments, are withheld from censured congregants for the duration of their church discipline.

The researcher's experience is that the current practice of church discipline does not reach the noble goals as intended, and thus has both negative and positive outcomes for different people. Some censured congregants have remorse with a visible changed behaviour or transformation, and a renewed commitment to God is evident. Others, however, go through a compulsory period of church discipline but continue with unremorseful behaviour after their censure has been lifted. The latter normally transpires in situations where pastors and church councils only consider the external obligations as met by the congregant, e.g., regular church attendance and paying of church dues, but they ignore the lack of transformation, e.g., a changed attitude. This brings the process of a 'form-religion' to mind where no real transformation takes place in the lives of these fallen brothers and sisters. Instead of being a pastoral care process that leads to the restoration of the congregant's relationships with God and his/her neighbour, it becomes a legalistic process.

Another reality is that, in some cases, the same congregants repeatedly commit the same sins after their censure has been lifted. After being in the same congregation for nearly 21 years (before the current congregation), the researcher has observed similar patterns of negative behaviour occurring amongst siblings of the same generation as well as family members of different generations. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (hereafter refer to as Nagy) calls this repetition a revolving slate, referring to how specific attitudes, expectations, and patterns of behaviour of one generation can be transferred to the following generations (Nagy & Spark, 1984: 65).

It is important to note the concept of guilt when discussing sins and the forgiveness thereof. Buber reminds us that we must distinguish between existential guilt and just having guilt feelings on a psychological level (Agassi, 1999:110). Existential guilt refers to the fact that one is not always a victim but also a perpetrator and as such guilty and needs to take responsibility for one's choices. These two issues in respect of guilt are not thoroughly dealt with in the current practice of church discipline. Concerning the researcher's experience, congregants specifically struggle to overcome feelings of guilt and are unable to accept that the Lord forgives them unconditionally if they truly confess.

Regrettably, every so often the disciplinary committee adds to the feelings of guilt experienced by the congregant who in turn may feel as though he/she is out of reach of God's forgiveness. In these instances, forgiveness, but especially the exoneration (see section 8) of us by God Himself, becomes an "unreachable possibility" for the person who is overburdened with feelings of guilt. However, our fallen brothers and sisters need to be guided to the biblical truth of God's exoneration, in other words, the fact that He lifts our burdens and removes our sins from us; He will not remember it anymore, as the Hebrew writer states:

17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."¹⁸ And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. (Hebrews 10:17-18, N.I.V.)

In this regard, when commenting on 2 Thessalonians 3:15, John Calvin says: "Excommunication does not tend to drive men from the Lord's flock, but rather to bring them back when wandering and going astray". In line with the reformed doctrine, the researcher is convinced that there is indeed merit in the continuation of the practice of the church discipline within URCSA as well as the church in general today. However, it should be applied with more pastoral compassion with the aim of healing fallen members and integrating them into the body of Christ as transformed members. In his interpretation of John Calvin's view on church discipline, Tuininga (2018) states the following: "As soon as a disciplined person repented, he or she was to be immediately welcomed into full communion. When conducted graciously and according to Christ's word, discipline ensured that the church did not proclaim a false and empty gospel of cheap grace but a gospel with power to draw human beings into genuine communion with God and one another."

In URCSA, reference is made to church discipline and admonitions. The researcher's view is that these actions entail both an educational and pastoral care aim. Showing that she cares for the congregant, the church should teach him/her to adhere to God's purpose for his/her life.

In light of what is highlighted above, this study aims to (i) evaluate the functioning of church discipline in URCSA congregations in general and (ii) look at how the application of the intergenerational focus of the Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP) can enrich the practice of church discipline to embrace backslidden members more effectively in the body of Christ.

1.3 Research problem

The Church Order and Stipulations of URCSA outline in Stipulation 85.1 that the aim of church discipline and admonitions is *the glorification of God* by:

- bringing back the lapsed church members;
- reconciling lapsed members with the Church and their neighbour; and
- removing the shame that was brought upon the congregation

(Die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika, 2018:103).

These noble intentions often remain mere words in the Church Order, but in reality, the abovementioned goals are not reached. Instead of being a stick with which to punish congregants, church discipline and admonitions should be a shepherd's crook to bring the strayed sheep back to the flock. According to the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, humans were created as social beings, i.e., in a relationship with one another. According to biblical texts such as Isaiah 43:7, 1 Corinthians 10:31, and Matthew 5:16, we as humans were

created to glorify the Lord through our existence. "Legions of the Shekina" is one of the stories of the Chassidim¹ that Martin Buber collected. It was about the indwelling glory of

the presence of God. If humans act with their whole heart toward the other, then sparks or fragments of the Shekina glory become present. The word "Shekina" is derived from the Hebrew word *shākan* which means "*to reside or permanently stay*". It does not appear in the Bible but was used in rabbinic literature to refer to the divine presence of God amongst his people and to the glory of God dwelling in the temple. In line with the aim of church discipline mentioned above, it is the researcher's opinion that the church must bring fragments of the Shekina glory to the fallen congregant.

As a social being, every human is born and grows up in a family with intergenerational connections. Intergenerational existence is a life that extends over at least three generations (Meulink-Korf & Van Rhijn, 2016:77). In this triadic family structure, each person receives from people of the previous generation and gives to them. He also gives to those of the next generation, from whom he also receives (ibid, 62). According to Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, the relationship between the first and second generation, and vice versa, has consequences for the relationship with the third party (ibid, 78). Depending on which perspective is considered, the third party can be the grandchild in the relationship of parents–children–grandchildren, or the child in the relationship of grandparents–parents–children.

About the abovementioned aims of church discipline, it is noticeable that the *well-being* of the congregation or church is considered to be one of its core elements. The congregation as the body of Christ is accountable for its members' spiritual well-being. In this regard, Emmanuel Levinas' call to responsibility for the other is applicable in that "[t]his responsibility consists in the first place of taking care not to violate or destroy ("kill") the other in his/her

¹ This was a Jewish way of living as a community with the intention of searching for ways to interact properly with one another. Loyalty was very important for the Chassidim. To study was important for the Jewish community as their way of interaction, but it excluded the poor from meeting others as they had no money to study. Buber was very attracted to this kind of community

otherness, which is to say not to reduce the other to his/her countenance, but instead to recognize, respect and do justice to him/her in his/her otherness". (Burggraave, 1999:32)

To define the research problem further, John Calvin's view of what pastoral care entails is also relevant. His definition is derived from his/her commentary on John 10 and 21. According to his interpretation, both passages focus on the correct exercising of authority in the church and therefore on the identity of the true church. In his interpretation of Calvin's definition, Willis states that pastoral care is first and foremost a matter of life together in the body of Christ over which and through which Christ Himself is the active agent by His Word and Spirit. Furthermore, he adds that Calvin's theology is a reminder that pastoral care is a matter of welcoming others as Christ has welcomed us. Pastoral care differs from psychological counselling and psychiatry in that "it focuses on the wholeness that comes about through the forgiveness of sins and how that fundamental reorientation affects every area of life. Pastoral care has explicitly to do with sharing in Christ's death and resurrection so we may walk in the newness of life. There is timing and variety to pastoral care as there is to every skilled caring; but eventually, sooner or later, in pastoral care the participants get around to the freely offered new being which is co-membership in the body of Christ." (Willis, 1992). Having mentioned the above, it is the researcher's view that church discipline is a pastoral care intervention that needs to function for the wellbeing of the individual member as well as the whole family of God, His church. Furthermore, the fact of the matter is that congregations are very selective when it comes to the application of church discipline. Synodical Stipulation 87 (VGKSA, 2018:104) clearly states:

The scope of the church discipline:

The oversight and discipline are not only about such wrong practices which the civil authority punishes, but about:

1. all misbehaviour;
2. everything that conflicts with the Word of God;
3. everything that conflicts with the Formulary of the Holy Communion;
4. everything that is in contravention of the solemn promises made at the

Baptism, Confession of Faith, and the Marriage solemnisation;

1. everything that disturbs the discipline in the Church;

2. misdemeanor of office bearers in their ministerial office;
3. gross oversight and negligence in their important service; and
4. abuse of power and bungling.

The church fails to practice church discipline as outlined above; it has been reduced to a discipline solely for unmarried parents. Church discipline has become a means to an end in URCSA. This points to the fact that it is predominantly enforced in the occurrence of extramarital relations and the procreation of a baby from these relations. Once their censure has been lifted, the unmarried parents' privileges in the church are restored and they can now participate in the sacrament of baptism. Although this sacrament is a command of the Lord that we need to adhere to, it has unfortunately become a social occasion, with photoshoots and expensive baptism parties, without a visible change in behaviour by the censured parent/s.

The researcher believes that this conduct of congregants – *extramarital relations and procreation of babies from these extramarital relations* – is an issue that can be addressed by other, more effective educational interventions, resulting in better accountability, such as sessions about responsible parenting, responsible moral behaviour, etc. In the researcher's experience, the previously mentioned phenomenon mostly occurs in households where there are other sociorelational issues at hand (and it is even intergenerational). These relational issues need to be addressed by the church because it affects the entire family and they need to be healed. Relevant in this regard is Nagy's view that family members of his patients are co-suffering under the illness of the patients. His response was to involve the family members in the therapy of his patient by trying to create trust among them, which could lead to both parties being cured (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:7).

These underlying family problems of censured congregants are not being addressed with our current way of practising church discipline and admonitions. It is the researcher's humble submission that loyalty amongst family members has an influence on the choices that individuals make and this sometimes leads to their censure. Loyalty refers to the specific nature of the irrevocable connectedness between parents and children as an existential ethical phenomenon. It is not based on choice but is an existential reality (ibid, 16).

Due to invisible loyalty² to the family of origin, an individual may feel pressured to engage in the bad behaviour of the family whilst under the impression that he/she would never be better than they would, and in doing so, stays faithful to the family. On the other hand, an individual family member can live with so much pressure due to the expectations of his/her family's legacy. In this regard, he/she is expected to be loyal to the family name and achievements by continuing to be a great achiever and not an embarrassment to them. Such an individual can succumb to the pressure and decide to make incorrect choices and become disloyal to his/her family out of frustration. In these instances, such families need to be assisted through church discipline to become loyal to one another.

An important point of departure of DIPP³ is to live *coram Deo* with other people. The church needs to be more aware of this fact when practising church discipline, trying to find ways to be more accountable for the healing of strayed brothers and sisters and by implication, the restoration of the generation of God.

Based on the abovementioned, the problem that this research seeks to address is (1) the failure of the current church discipline system to realize the noble aims of church discipline and admonitions as stipulated in the Church Order; (2) the unacceptable selective manner in which church discipline is practised; (3) the lack of approaching church discipline in a more compassionate pastoral care manner for the healing of both congregation and congregant as well as to aid the transformation of the latter; and (4) John Calvin's perspectives in respect of church discipline.

² According to Boszormenyi-Nagy, invisible, often unconscious loyalties or bonds across generations greatly influence present behaviour. For example, a scapegoated child's misbehavior may be his or her means of loyally acting out his or her parents' need for a focus of anger (a cycle that may have connections to behavioural sequences arising in generations before). This is the continuation of an invisible loyalty with the parent that initially abused the adult as a child. (Piercy, Sprenkle & Wetchler, 1996:29).

^{3 3} See Chapter 1, subsection 1.7 Keywords.

1.4 Research question

1.4.1 Aims and objectives

The primary question in this research is as follows: How can the DIPP approach, with its focus on intergenerational existence, enrich the practice of church discipline in the local congregation to experience a more compassionate pastoral care intervention?

In addressing the primary research question the researcher intends to:

- (i) give a description of relevant concepts of the DIPP approach;
- (ii) describe intergenerational existence;
- (iii) explain what the practice of church discipline entails;
- (iv) draw conclusions that are common or evident from his experience in congregational ministry;
- (v) explain why it is necessary to 'experience' more compassionate pastoral care and what the latter entails.

1.4.2 Secondary questions:

- (i) Is there any biblical evidence of church discipline? What are the historical origins of church discipline since the time of the early church and how did it develop in the universal church?
- (ii) What is the specific origin of church discipline in URCSA?
- (iii) Why is it necessary to revisit and enrich the practicing of church discipline in URCSA?
- (iv) Are there, apart from biblical references, any internal or external resources available to enhance the theology of church discipline in URCSA?
- (v) How does John Calvin view church discipline and the practicing thereof?

1.5 Methodology

1.5.1 Qualitative Research

In the absence of an empirical study, the researcher will use some methods of the qualitative research methodology in this study. (Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) define qualitative research as follow: "Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them.” The researcher will mainly use a comparative literature study in this research.

- (i) A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem under investigation. Relevant literature in the field of DIPP and the origin of the practice of church discipline will be reviewed and discussed in order to address the research problem.
- (ii) Included in this comparative literature study the method of historical research will be utilized. Maree (2007:72) define historical research as follow: “Historical research is a systematic process of describing, analyzing, and interpreting the past, based on information from selected sources as they relate to the topic under study.” In view thereof that the researcher will be researching the historical origins of church discipline in general and particularly the practice of it in URCSA, the focus of the historical research will help him to determine these aforementioned origins.
- (iii) Relevant documents about the research topic will be used. Documents are all types of written communication that will shed light on the topic under investigation. Both primary (original sources) and secondary sources (material based on previously published works) will be used (Maree, 2007:82)

1.5.2 Evaluation Research

The researcher will also use the evaluation research method in his research. Rossi and Freeman (1993:5) define evaluation research as “...the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation and utility of social intervention programmes” (Babbie & Mouton, 2007:335). This methodology is appropriate for addressing the research problem since this research intends to help with solving a specific challenge, i.e., the improvement of the current church discipline interventions of the church. Babbie & Mouton state that there are different reasons why social interventions are evaluated (ibid, 337). Michael Patton summarises these different purposes in the following three main classes: (i) “to make judgements of merit or worth, (ii) to improve programmes, and (iii) to generate knowledge” (ibid).

In line with Emil Posavac and Raymond Carey's (1992:11) four types of evaluation, i.e., the evaluations of need, process, outcome, and efficiency, Babbie and Mouton propose that one or more of the following questions should be asked:

- "Is the programme conceptualized and designed in such a way that it addresses the real needs of the intended beneficiaries (the target group)?"
- Has the programme been properly (well) implemented (and managed)?
- Have the intended outcomes of the programme materialized?
- Were the programme outcomes obtained in the most cost-efficient manner?" (Babbie & Mouton, 2007:341)

It is of utmost importance that this research investigates these questions in order to enhance the practice of church discipline in the church.

1.5.3 Practical Theology

In addition to the qualitative and evaluation research methodologies, the researcher will use the framework as indicated by Richard R. Osmer in his book, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (2008) for this study.

The following four tasks as identified by Osmer will be used:

- (i) Descriptive-empirical task: In line with the research questions, the researcher will attempt to answer the question: "What is going on?" by gathering data of the church discipline practice in URCSA congregations as well as the historical development of church discipline in general.
- (ii) Interpretive task: With the gathered information at hand, the question that needs to be answered here is: "Why is this going on?" Here the researcher will look for possible answers to the question: "How did the practice of church discipline develop into the current practices?"
- (iii) Normative task: The question to be asked here is: "What ought to be going on?" Osmer refers to this task as prophetic discernment. Prophetic discernment involves both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's Word (Osmer, 2008:134). In other words, it means helping others to hear God's Word and heed to it in their specific context. In this regard, the researcher will try to give guidelines

from the Bible with reference to the research problem. Furthermore, the contribution of John Calvin with regards to church discipline will be explored.

- (iv) Pragmatic task: Strategies of action are determined that will influence situations in ways that have a desirable outcome. The pragmatic task asks the question: "How may we respond?" Here the researcher will propose an alternative approach which could enhance church discipline practices.

1.6 Chapters

Chapter 1 gives a general introduction and overview of the research study.

Chapter 2 will look at the historical origin of church discipline and the current practice of it in URCSA. The first and second tasks of Osmer's methodology will be attended to. The historical research methodology and a comparative literature review will be used.

Chapter 3 will focus on the third task of Osmer, i.e., the normative task. The question that will be answered here is: "What ought to be going on concerning the practice of church discipline?" A literature review and the evaluation research methodology will be used.

Chapter 4 will explore DIPP and focus on the contributions of its relevant proponents. A literature review will be applied here.

Chapter 5 will propose an alternative approach to the practice of church discipline by introducing an intergenerational pastoral care approach to church discipline. The evaluation research methodology will be used in this chapter.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter in which the thesis is concluded. The research question and the objectives will be revisited here.

1.7 Key words

Church discipline

The practice of censuring church members when they are perceived to have sinned in the hope that the offender will repent and be reconciled to God and the church. It is also intended to protect other church members from the influence of sin. John Calvin states, "discipline is

like a bridle to restrain and tame those who rage against the doctrine of Christ; or like a spur to arouse those of little inclination and also sometimes like a father's rod to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of Christ's spirit those who have more seriously lapsed. Now this is the sole remedy that Christ has enjoined and the one that has always been used among the godly." (Poirier, 2006: 223)

Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP)

Thesnaar (2019:3) states that it is based on the contextual theory developed by the Hungarian psychiatrist Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, the practical theological and pastoral care theory of Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn, as well as the theologies of Mugambi, Gathogo and Magezi. The focus is to understand people within their networks of relationships (contexts), especially across different generations. Nobody exists in isolation. We are always connected to a 'significant other' and even more significant others, usually, in the first instance, our families. The DIPP approach is of special interest to family pastoral care, but it is also applicable to individuals as well as communities. It is also of great significance for resolving conflict and facilitating greater understanding between people and cultures in general. The DIPP endeavours to restore trust in human relations that have been damaged by hurt and separation caused by conflict. Within this context, hope becomes one of the important key words.

Revolving slate

This concept, applied by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy in contextual therapy, clarifies how specific attitudes, expectations, and patterns of behaviour of one generation of the family can be transferred to the following generations (Nagy & Krasner, 1984: 65).

Legacy

The ethical obligation is to take the inheritance received from previous generations and integrate it into the present in such a way that it can make a constructive contribution to future generations. The legacy functions as a bridge between the past, the present, and the future (Botha, 2014:16).

Loyalty

The specific nature of the irrevocable connectedness between parents and children is an existential ethical phenomenon. It is not based on choice...called existential loyalty. There is a difference between vertical loyalty (parents and children) and horizontal loyalty (between peers or spouses) (Meulink-Korf and Van Rhijn, 2016:16).

Responsibility and Accountability

Its first connotation is an ethical one - regardless of our psychic attitudes, we bear liability for the consequences of our actions or inaction. Accountability keeps balance with entitlement. Its second connotation is a psychological one the person's willingness or ability to accept responsibility for dialogue in both its self-delineating and self-validating phases (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:413).

Intergenerational

Every person is born into a family which extends across generations. Each person receives from people of the previous generation and gives to them. He also gives to those of the next generation, from whom he also receives. Therefore, everyone lives intergenerationally (Meulink-Korf and Van Rhijn, 2016:70). Destructive and constructive entitlement: According to Nagy "entitlement is a key concept of contextual therapy. It is an ethical guarantee that can arise only within a relationship and which can accumulate merit on the side of a deserving contributor. Constructive entitlement, the result of continuing to care about earning entitlement, and destructive entitlement, the result of refusing to care about earning entitlement, are two opposing kinds of clinical consequences" (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:416).

Justice

It is never absolute, and it is relative. What is justice today, is not justice tomorrow, or what is justice for one is not justice for another. In Micah 6 the call is to do justice. One should know that in relationships, justice is important, and one must be open to it. One should not decide beforehand that "that is justice or that should be done" (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:417).

Context

Refers to the relational ethical reality of a person within the DIPP context. In this sense, it does not refer to physical environmental circumstances. For Nagy and Krasner, context is the organic thread of giving and receiving that weaves the fabric of human reliance and interdependence. The human context extends to a person's current relationships as well as to the past and future (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:8).

Guilt and guilt feelings

Existential guilt, i.e., one must admit that one is not always a victim, but also a perpetrator, and as such guilty. Buber reminds us that we must distinguish between this existential guilt and just having guilt feelings on a psychological level (Agassi, 1999:110).

Exoneration

A process of lifting a load of culpability off the shoulders of a given person whom heretofore may have been blamed. Exoneration differs from forgiveness; the act of forgiveness usually retains the assumption of guilt and extends the forgiver's generosity to the person who has injured her or him. Exoneration typically results from an adult reassessment of the failing parent's own past childhood victimization. It replaces a framework of the blame with a mature appreciation of a given person's past options, efforts, and limits (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:416).

Multi-directed partiality

Contextual therapy's chief therapeutic attitude and method. It consists of a set of principles and guidelines that require the therapist to be accountable to everybody who is potentially affected by his or her interventions (Nagy and Krasner, 1986:418).

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research topic and provided an overview of the intended research project. In the researcher's experience in congregational ministry, it is clear that the ministry of church discipline has been neglected and under-utilized despite its importance of it to the well-being of both congregants and the church. It also highlighted how church discipline is exercised in such ways that it does not reach its intended aims of it. A thorough

investigation into the practice of this ministry, which is regarded by the Belgic Confession as one of the marks of the true church, is necessary for the well-being of the church.

The next chapter will explore the current reality of church discipline and its functioning in URCSA by focusing on the first and second tasks of Osmer, the descriptive-empirical task and the interpretive task.

CHAPTER 2: THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE AND THE REASONS WHY IT BECAME THE STATUS QUO

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the descriptive-empirical task as well as the interpretive task of Osmer's practical theological research framework. The first question that will be addressed here is the following: "What is the status quo with regards to church discipline in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)?" This research will answer this question by exploring the origin of church discipline from a reformed theological perspective. To address this question, the chapter will first look at the meaning of the expression 'church discipline'. Subsequently, a limited overview of the Old and New Testaments' references about the origin of church discipline will be provided. Thereafter the chapter will briefly explore the development of church discipline in the early church. Church discipline in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) before the reformation of the 16th Century will receive attention. Furthermore, the views of some Reformers, including Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Oecolampadius, will be highlighted as part of the development of church discipline. Additionally, the views of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, currently part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, from which our church originates, will be explored. Finally, the chapter will discuss the practice of church discipline in URCSA.

The second question that will be answered here is: "Why is this going on?" How did the practice of our church discipline develop into the current practices? In addressing the abovementioned questions, the methodologies of historical research and a literature review will be applied as well as the evaluation research methodology.

2.2 The meaning of church discipline

The word "discipline" is derived from the Latin *discipulus*, and refers to a learner, apprentice or disciple. It is a derivative of the root word "discern" (*discere*), which means to learn, and involves the process of 'inner education' (Oden, 1983:234). Packer (1993:220) agrees with Oden's view that discipline is about education and disciple-making. For Packer the focus of the Christian concept of discipline is the same as the Latin *disciplina* and it refers to nurturing, instruction and training which is necessary for disciple-making. For Duncan (2010:1-2)

discipline also has an element of chastisement and correction. It refers to approaches that emphasise character formation, the teaching of self-discipline, and acceptable behaviour.

According to Bouwman, the Dutch word *tucht* is derived from the root word *tien* and it means to pull or educate. The word *tucht* has the meanings of chastisement, correction, and punishment; it implies leading someone in order to win him/her over for the good and to keep him/her away from the evil. The ideas of education, maintaining order, and punishment of sin with a spiritual aim, are embedded in the church discipline. Discipline is practiced both through word and deed and it is applied based on the Word of God (Bouwman, 1912:16).

2.3 The origin of church discipline

2.3.1 Old Testament origin of church discipline

Church discipline does not appear in the Old Testament, as we know it today, simply because the church as a structural entity did not exist yet. Church and state were one and in that patriarchal era, the concept/idea of a church was embedded in the lives of families, generations, and tribes. The Israelites worked with a theocracy and thus all of them were under the law of God. Those in authority, i.e., kings, priests, and judges, had to execute the same law of God, which the people had to obey. All offices and people were subjected to the Law of the Lord, which arranged all relationships in Israel. The authorities had to punish both the sins of the two tables of the Decalogue and those laws that arranged the relationships amongst the people of God (Bouwman, 1912:26).

Though we do not read about church discipline in the Old Testament, there are however pointers to discipline, because Yahweh himself disciplined his people when they disobeyed his commandments. In such cases of disobedience, the sinner was removed from the nation because Israel as God's nation, had to be a holy people who were separated from the gentile nations and their sins (ibid., 26). Later, when Israel lost political independence, their religious congregation continued to exist, so they operated around the synagogue. After the exile, the elders in the congregation upheld the law by exercising a strict form of discipline. Those who did not adhere were banned from the congregation. Therefore, a form of discipline was implemented in Israel which was functioning in the time of Jesus. The Talmud differentiates between two types of the ban: (i) the *niddoei* – a temporary suspension with the possibility of a re-admittance (a lighter punishment), and (ii) the *cherem* – the ban (ibid, 28).

2.3.2 New Testament origins

One of the texts that give an indication of the practice of church discipline in the New Testament is Matthew 16:19. After Simon Peter's confession, Jesus gave him the power of the keys. He received the power to guide or judge if he, as confessor of Christ in and according to the will of Christ, can determine who belongs to the congregation and who does not, and who will enter into the kingdom of God and who will not. Jesus adds to Matthew 16: 19 when he gives the congregation and the apostles as representatives of the congregation the authority to bind and loosen, to forgive sins or keep it on the grounds of the confession of Christ in Matthew 18:15-19. Both texts are about the power of the keys. This authority is in the Word of the Lord that actually judges people. The forgiveness that someone – who listened to the gospel and accepted it – receives is not received from people, but from God. The forgiveness or the keeping of people's sins is not in the hands of human beings, but primarily in the hands of the Lord.

In Matthew 18, the right to discipline and excommunicate is given to the congregation. As is the case with the proclamation of the Word of God, so it is with discipline in the congregation. Discipline was seen as a subdivision of the power of the keys. As the body of Christ, the lifestyle of one member of the congregation reflected the rest of the congregation, and thus the individual life and the life of the congregation should be in line with each other. If the individual member deviated from the teachings of the church/congregation by his/her life and doctrine, the overseers had to act against him/her by prohibiting him/her from the use of the sacraments and removed him/her from the congregation, and God Himself locked him/her out of the kingdom of Christ. He/she could then only be re-admitted if he/she had shown remorse and an improvement in lifestyle (Bouwman, 1912: 35).

In the power of the keys and the church discipline, the three offices of Jesus are expressed, i.e., his prophetic teaching, priestly love, and royal care as king. The office of king (ruler) finds expression in the practice of church discipline (ibid). As a result, processes were put in place for organizing congregational life, such as the implementation of the offices, life of faith was prescribed, and discipline was upheld. Paul commanded the congregation of Thessalonica (2 Thes. 3:6, 14, 15) that they should retract from a brother who persevered in sin and is thus not worthy of the fellowship of the brethren. This had to be done for the public to realize that such a person is a deviant from the faith and should thus be publicly shamed. The purpose

was firstly that the sinner – who was now isolated from the communion of the saints – should acknowledge his/her sin and distance him/herself from it, and secondly, the discipline had in view to protect the congregation against pernicious influences. Paul refers to church discipline directly in 1 Corinthians 5: 2-13 when he commanded the congregation to remove from their midst the person who unashamedly fornicated. According to Bouwman, the text in 1 Corinthians 5:5 refers to an extraordinary punishment and is not an indication of the ordinary application of discipline by the congregation (Ibid, 38). In Titus 3: 10, Paul recommends that the congregation distance themselves from a person who sows division in the congregation and proclaims a heresy.

The New Testament does not provide enough evidence for us to determine precisely how the apostles exercised the discipline. The New Testament does however inform us that, in line with the will of Christ, the congregation must exercise discipline over the life and doctrine in it. The congregation should oversee the upholding of discipline and its leaders should not enforce it without cooperation from the congregation. The purpose of the discipline was threefold: upholding justice, protecting the sacredness of the congregation, and the “salvation” of the sinner.

2.3.3 Church discipline in the early church (100–500 AD)

Discipline was practiced actively in the early church. The focus was discipline for both the false doctrine and immorality. Discipline as part of congregational life was even part of the Sunday worship service where disciplinary measures were announced during the service.

The general view was that there are two kinds of repentance, i.e., when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, and then a continual (daily) repentance of sin throughout your life. Believers who sinned were expected to confess their sins before the church if they wished to be restored to fellowship. Those in need of repentance had to come to church but were excluded from participating in the Holy Communion; they also had to remain in certain areas designated for them. After a period of required penitential activities, they were restored to full membership.

2.4 Medieval era (AD 500–1500)

Although church discipline was upheld and Christians committed to it at first, it later declined in the early centuries of the church’s existence (Wills, 2012:40). After the 4th century, the system of public confession, exclusion, and penitential rigor fell into disuse. Following a big

scandal with the public discipline of a deacon at Constantinople, Nectarius, the bishop of Constantinople, abolished the office of the penitential presbyter (that was part of the disciplinary process) and abandoned public discipline of laity in practice. A new system of private confession and individual penance started to function (Wills, 2012:140). This eventual emphasis on penance largely transformed church discipline into a private affair between the priest and layperson, and as such, the communal role of church discipline dissipated. Thus, church discipline was largely dispelled; instead, private confession and works of merit were common fare in the days leading up to the Reformation.

2.4.1 Church discipline in the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church

It is noteworthy that some of the complaints the people had against the church in the time of the Protestant Reformation entailed discipline in the church. The sale of pardons or indulgences was unpopular. An indulgence provided a relaxation of penalties for sins people had committed. The idea that someone could pay for their sins with money made many Christians angry. To determine the historical development of church discipline, it is indeed indispensable not to talk about the church discipline practice of the Roman Catholic Church. To put it another way, one cannot discuss certain practices of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century without mentioning the prevailing practices of the time in the Roman Catholic Church

2.4.2 Discipline in the Roman Catholic Church

Church discipline in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) entails the sacrament of reconciliation, commonly known as the confession or penance. The sacrament of reconciliation is seen as an opportunity for renewal and can be done as often as needed. Reconciliation is a means of obtaining pardon from God for sins for which the sinner is truly remorseful; it brings the sinner back into communion with God and the church. The sacrament is an opportunity for self-reflection and requires that the person take full responsibility for his or her sins, those in both thought and action. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereafter refer to as CCC), penance consists of three actions of the penitent, along with the priest's absolution: repentance, confession of sins to the priest, and the intention to make amends by doing works of reparation (CCC, 1491). Typically, these acts of penance consist of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (CCC, 1434), but could also include acts of justice, acceptance of suffering, the Eucharist, reading Scripture, and observing seasons and days of penance in the liturgical year

(CCC, 1435–1439). It is important to note that in Roman Catholicism, only priests, successors of the apostles who “possess the ministry of reconciliation and have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church,” can forgive sins in the name of Christ (CCC, 1461, 1495). Beyond these practices, when necessary, excommunication was also upheld in the RCC. Under Catholic standards, certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe penalty the church can render. This act “impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place, or priests authorized by them” (CCC, 1463; Kimble, 2017).

2.4.3 Discipline during the Reformation

2.4.3.1 Martin Luther

As previously mentioned, one of the reasons that ignited the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was the manner in which church discipline was practiced.

Martin Luther, who had experienced the weight of the penitential system, determined that it was a non-biblical practice. His critique on the prevailing disciplinary practices in the RCC, which served as substitutes for true repentance and remorse, was an indispensable catalyst for the commencement of the Protestant Reformation. Luther discusses the issue of church discipline in three sermons: *A Sermon on the Ban* (1520), *The Keys* (1530), and *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). His view in these documents expresses his opposition to the RCC’s view of penance and the abuse of papal authority. He also encourages believers to submit to the church discipline and explains that it is a means to bear spiritual fruit if they respond to their rebuke with true repentance. Nothing extra is needed from them to be truly forgiven by God. For Luther, the power of the keys did not reside with popes or bishops, but with the congregation and its leadership. In line with the Apostle Paul and referring to Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, he argues that church members (the congregation) must practice the discipline.

2.4.3.2 Magistratical and disciplinarian views

Since the Reformation, the debate surrounding the jurisdiction under which church discipline should fall was quite an issue. Two contrasting viewpoints were advocated and should retain jurisdiction over ministers and the power to excommunicate. This view was known as the “magistratical” model. Zwingli opposed any separate ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and therefore

viewed the Ehegericht (marriage court/tribunal) as a magisterial rather than an ecclesiastical court. The magistratical view resulted in a model of discipline that considered spiritual formation and moral exhortation to be the responsibility of the church, and discipline to be the responsibility of the civil magistrate (Ballor and Littlejohn, 2018). The purpose of discipline was to control evident evil in the community – to check crime and disorder in the Christian city – not to create a pure church. This approach had the implication that, while still under discipline of the civil court, the sinner could still participate in the fellowship and Holy Communion of the church.

In contrast with the magistratical model, Reformation leaders such as Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Luther, and the Anabaptists, held what was known as a “disciplinarian” view of church authority. This approach distinguished between ecclesiastical authority and civil authority. According to these proponents, the magistracy or civil court could not have any authority in ecclesiastical matters and therefore a separate ecclesiastical tribunal should be put in place to deal with church matters inclusive of church discipline. Their view was that ecclesiastical authority, and its accompanying excommunication/ban had the purpose of “purifying” the church. Accordingly, if the magistracy was allowed to discipline civilians, they could still participate in the sacraments and the Reformers were opposed to this. This view resulted from the Two Kingdoms doctrine⁴, traditionally associated with Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Philip Melancton.

⁴Two Kingdoms doctrine: The reformers argued that Christ governs and expands His kingdom through the ministry of the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet, they reasoned, He does so in such a way as not to nullify the order of creation or the institutions that God has created to govern that order, most importantly, those of civil government and the family. Luther deemed the two kingdoms doctrine imperative to dismiss the Catholic “two swords” doctrine, which taught that the pope (who claimed to hold all power) delegates the “temporal sword” to the magistrate on the condition that the magistrate exercises it obediently to the pope. Luther realized that on this basis, magistrates were wrongly claiming the right to interfere with the Gospel by virtue of their possession of the sword in service to the pope. Only the two kingdoms doctrine, he insisted, could distinguish the secular purpose of the sword from the spiritual means by which the Gospel is to go forth

While differing on certain ecclesiological matters, these Protestant representatives repudiated the key-holding authority of popes and bishops, as well as the practice of penance. Instead, local churches exercise authority themselves as it relates to discipline, calling for repentance and not ongoing acts of reparation (Kimble, 2017).

Where the general view was that sinners who were still under discipline could not participate in the Eucharist, Bullinger argued against the ban from the Eucharist (Baker, 1985:14). The purpose of the Eucharist was for the consolation and healing of sinners. Excommunication had as its goal the constraining of the evil example and was not to be employed for the purification or the satisfaction of the church. Therefore, since excommunication and the Eucharist had separate and distinct functions, they should not be connected to each other. Moreover, once the magistrate had inflicted the punishment, the offender had fully paid his penalty. Faith in the heart could not be judged by men, but only by God. Christ did not exclude anyone from the Lord's Supper, not even Judas. Paul left participation in the Eucharist up to the individual conscience (1 Cor 11:26). Excommunication was public punishment of public crimes. It had nothing to do with a ban from the Eucharist, a celebration, which must be kept open to all who wished to participate in it.

2.4.3.3 Oecolampadius' reformed approach to church discipline

During mid-1530, Oecolampadius requested a new form of civil discipline from the Basel city council and again later in September, he presented his plan at a meeting of the Christian Civic Union at Aarau. He felt that the system of civil discipline was ineffective and rested upon erroneous assumptions. He argued that the church and civil society were separate entities, and that there was an essential difference between secular and ecclesiastical authority. Oecolampadius felt that magisterial punishment was insufficient, because the offender could still have fellowship at the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the ban must be instituted under the

into the world. In addition to the basic Lutheran two kingdoms doctrine, Calvin gradually articulated an understanding of the spiritual government of the church in distinction from the political government of this world. For Calvin, in contrast to both Luther and the Zwinglian branch of the Reformation, the church was to have its own pastors and elders who practiced church discipline ministerially and organized the basic elements of worship according to the Word of Christ

control of the church. Oecolampadius' entire argument flowed from his understanding of Matthew 18:15-18; excommunication had been "instituted by the commandment of Christ." Its use was not a matter of choice for the church. Excommunication, then, was an absolute necessity for the church. Its general purpose was to keep the evil ones in check in order to purify the church. Excommunication, as a remedy for sin, was necessary in addition to civil punishment for a crime. However, the ban must be exercised in love, for correction and spiritual edification, and only after several warnings, according to the rule of Christ in Matthew 18. The purpose of excommunication was thus twofold: to purify the church as much as possible, and to amend the ways of the individual sinner (ibid.,8).

Thus, the same individual might well be answerable to two courts – to the magisterial tribunal because he destroyed public honesty and peace and to the church's court because he profaned religion. Oecolampadius clearly felt that without such church discipline, the Reformed church was not fully reformed. The magisterial court dealt with crime in the civil community; the new ecclesiastical court would deal with sin in the church by means of the ban, with the purpose of purifying the church as much as possible. Zwingli, on the other hand, saw only one corporate community and thus a single magisterial tribunal that punished crime. For Zwingli, the purpose of magisterial discipline was not to create a pure church, but to keep evil in check in the commonwealth: it was an instrument of social control (ibid.,9). Oecolampadius advocated excommunication in the hands of a separate ecclesiastical court that could deal with sin only, not with crime and matters of a larger social policy. Oecolampadius felt that those, like Bullinger, who rejected the use of the ban, did not understand either the purpose of the Lord's Supper or the nature of the church. Like the Lutherans, Bullinger connected "consolation" with the sacrament itself, whereas Oecolampadius felt that all such efficacy must be attributed to the Spirit. It was true that the Eucharist was for sinners, but not for flagrant and public sinners, the Lord's Supper was for those who confessed Christ (Rom 10:9), not for the enemies of Christ. The purpose of excommunication for Oecolampadius was the holiness of the church. The church could not judge the heart; but if it did not judge the fruit of faith, every hypocrite would be able to break in. In the end, it was the position of Oecolampadius that became the Reformed approach to church discipline.

2.4.3.4 John Calvin's distinct contribution toward church discipline

This chapter only briefly deals with Calvin's contribution to church discipline, as the next chapter will address his contribution in more detail.

John Calvin introduced a new disciplinary system called the "consistory". The Genevan consistory initially consisted of the entire city's pastors plus a dozen elders elected from amongst the city council. During weekly meetings the consistory examined people accused of misbehaviour. In cases where there were merits, the consistory could either refer the person for counselling, or in severe cases, to the civil courts. The consistory met every Thursday and exercised church discipline by summoning and formally rebuking Genevans who had refused to repent when confronted with issues of sin by elders and pastors in private. These sins included adultery, illicit marriages, cursing, unauthorized luxury, disrespectfulness in church, bearing traces to Roman Catholicism, blasphemy, or gambling, among others. If they remained obstinate, they were temporarily suspended from the Lord's Supper. Functionally, the consistory served for "infra-judicial settlement of pastoral matters which had gotten out of hand," and as "a tribunal of first resort, sifting out those cases which should properly be passed on to the civil courts" (Ballor & Littlejohn, 2018:15). They were also too harsh on minor offences according to civil authorities. The consistory even went further and usurping unlawfully the power to excommunicate people.

Calvin portrayed the threefold function of discipline: a) to keep the church in sound condition, b) to protect its members against taint, and c) to bring the offender if possible to repentance.

Calvin acknowledged that although discipline seeks to purify the church, the latter would remain imperfect. According to him, we would not be polluted by sharing the Eucharist with the impure as they bring condemnation only upon themselves (Institutes IV, 14: 40). In fact, God is responsible for the protection of his own honour, and we need to endure these imperfections, which we cannot correct.

With regards to the reality of original sin, Calvin refers to the fact that in contrast to our calling to glorify God, "we have degenerated from our true origin" (III:vi.3). We should however respond by showing forth the glory of God and guard against the defilement of sin. For Calvin, all areas of church life are subject to discipline: "the whole jurisdiction of the church relates to discipline," which is "spiritual government" (IV: xi.1). This consists of preaching the Word, which expresses the totality of ministry: "The power of the keys is simply the preaching of the

gospel , it is not so much power as ministry. Christ did not give this power to men but to his Word, of which he made men the ministers (of it)” (Calvin, 1936: 144).

2.4.1 Discipline in the post-Reformation era

Calvin revived the practice of discipline in the church after a period during which it had nearly disappeared. One method adopted by Calvin was to practice pastoral care. Church discipline was one way in which individuals were brought to repentance and a changed way of life. Calvin’s purpose was not the punishment of people per se but he had this view of trying to ‘keep the church pure’ and reconcile and heal its members with the church (Rice, 1991:122).

Despite this ‘positive’ development, the term 'discipline' developed a negative connotation since the Reformation because the postmodern society generally rejects absolutes. Richard Foster (1980) describes discipline in contemporary use as “the path to spiritual growth” through meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, service, confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. These spiritual disciplines aim at “the total transformation of the person” (Foster 1980:54). They provide a “means of setting us before God so that He can give us the liberation we seek ... of drawing us closer to his heart” (ibid., 96-97). Discipline is “a consciously chosen action that brings us under the shadow of the Almighty” (ibid., 127), involving a willingness to:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16).

In this sense, it might be described as a “journey to wholeness” (Maddocks 1986:95) since it aims at a “higher perfection in the Christian life” (Leech 1977:69), which is reconciliation with the creator (Clinebell, 1966:223). Furthermore, it has a sacramental significance, as we have already seen in Calvin and Knox as an “anticipatory sacrament of a healed creation” (Maddocks 1986:95). It is koinonia with God: “himself who called you to share in the life of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord ...” (1 Cor 1:9) and with others (Acts 2:44-47).

Foster (1980:150) makes it abundantly clear that “Church councils and denominational decrees are not of this reality.” Pastoral and spiritual care by committees is bound to fail, because they tend to be too impersonal and fail to take the particular needs of individuals and groups into account. Their strength may be in corporate policymaking, but

implementation is not their forte: “The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons, with Himself included in that community as its prime sustainer and glorious inhabitant” (Willard in Foster, 1980:162).

Van der Water (1991:95) states that there is indeed a vast difference between Calvin’s time and contemporary South Africa. One can agree with him that the theology and practice of church discipline are quite limited in many Reformed churches. It entails mostly excluding offending congregants from the Eucharist for a specified time. However, if such discipline is not supported by and in a warm counselling context, it is unlikely to be either effective or taken seriously. If discipline resorts to exclusion, it is likely to have a long-term effect however long or short the term of exclusion may be. In this sense, it is a disintegrating force. Leaving the membership of any institution can be extremely easy – returning is not as simple, especially if the exclusion was fostered by bitterness and resentment in one or both parties. Hence, the plea for discipline to be reconceptualised to conform to its earliest forms were reaffirmed during the Reformation and still have a current relevance. Having mentioned that the church exists in a postmodern climate, which is destitute of ideas and attitudes, it is a moot point whether this should be determinative of the church's attitude towards discipline in a punitive sense.

2.5 Developments from the Netherlands in respect of church discipline

2.5.1 The Discipline in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

The Reformed Churches follow Calvin in their doctrine and their catechism. They uphold the importance of the church discipline over doctrine and life as Christ teaches it. Their view is that the discipline has a spiritual character, excludes no-one from civil punishment and does not want to punish the sinner, but heal him/her. Furthermore, the discipline wants to remove the shame from the congregation and enhance the honour of God. (Bouwman, 1912: 109).

There were some cases of discipline in respect of doctrine, which mostly took place amongst the clergy. Cases in this regard amongst the congregation members did not occur so frequently. Church discipline about lifestyle were quite prominent. The church was very strict about ‘normal’ things like dancing, acting, playing cards, etc. These ‘trespasses’ were disciplined firmly. Today it is unthinkable for us that these actions were acted against with

discipline, but those were the moral views of the early times and must be considered in light of that era. Bearing in mind that URCSA, via the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, originated from the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, it is understandable that these moralistic views about the lifestyle of believers were transferred into congregations of URCSA. These moralistic patterns of thinking are still present in the church in our post-modern era.

2.5.2 The Church Order of Dordt from 1619

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the synod of Dordt of 1619, which approved the Belgic Confession, declared in Article 29 of it that church discipline is one of the marks of the true church. However, Calvin acknowledged only the two marks of (i) the Word proclaimed and (ii) administering the sacraments. Discipline was exercised by the different church meetings, i.e., the church council and the classis (presbytery). The local church council disciplined members of the congregation, elders, and deacons. Ministers, however, were disciplined only by the classis. In agreement with Calvin, the Church Order of Dordt viewed the discipline in church to be of utmost importance for the maintenance of the church. Spiritual justice, which punishes sin according to God's Word, was regarded as the best formula for the health, order, and unity of the church. According to this church order, the discipline should be about exhortation. The church should continue to exhort and proclaim the forgiveness of sin. Instead of threats and punishment, the Word of God should be utilised to bring the worst to remorse. Article 71 states that the "Christian punishment or church discipline is spiritual and nobody – no member – is free from civil punishment." In line with this, the national Synod of Dordt in 1619 declared that church discipline does not exempt members from civil punishment. From the perspective of the Calvinistic distinction between church and state, Article 71 emphasizes the distinction between the nature of church discipline and civil punishment. In this regard, Van der Vyver (1972:189) refers to the "competency" of the church as a societal institution, to form and apply its own laws and procedures flowing forth from its spiritual management.

2.5.3 The Church Order of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands

The Church Order of 1959 of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) has been described as a contemporary version of the Church Order of Dordt (Strauss 2010:7–8). Nauta starts his commentary on this church order with Article 104, which

entails Calvin's threefold purpose for church discipline, i.e., the glorification of God, the retention of the sinner, and the removal of an annoyance from the congregation. According to Nauta, this purpose determines the spiritual character and content of church discipline. In line with Calvin, the church order also refers to the Word as *norma normans* or highest norm when it comes to deviations from the "healthy doctrine" and "God-fearing walk" (Nauta, 1971:348, 351–352). Nauta's view is this: since the church is managed in a spiritual way and church discipline is exercised as a spiritual act, this determines that decisions of the church work through conviction. The findings of church meetings in disciplinary matters bind and repent believers only through internal convictions in heart and soul (Strauss, 2018).

With reference to URCSA, the researcher believes that this is precisely why congregants repeatedly make the same mistakes and continue to attend church discipline meetings: they were not convinced of the seriousness of their trespasses, the Word as *norma normans* did not grow as a conviction in them and therefore, they just continued in their old ways without real repentance. If one looks at the Apostle Peter's response after the cock crows, it seems that the Word which became flesh has indeed convinced him of his trespasses when he denied Jesus. It is the Word and Spirit of God that convinces the sinner or the world as John 16:8 says: "*When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.*" It is a conviction based on the belief by those involved that the Word of God will expose their trespasses and that they were treated fair by the church meeting. This trust builds on the conviction that the church acts true to Scripture in the best interest of all; the church acknowledges everyone's right to justice in a Christian community of faith and that it refrains from a witch-hunt or public display of power.

2.5.4 Modern-day Netherlands

In contrast with Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, which declares that one of the marks of the true church is that church discipline, is used to punish sin, church discipline became an empty church orderly matter for many reformed Christians in an ecclesiastical plural Netherlands (Koffeman, 2009:282). The discipline is no longer a resource for the church to fulfil its calling. Ethical decisions about right and wrong are no longer based on scripture-based discipline, but rather on the current cultural situation. Their criterion is the view of human behaviour in a modern Christian society and not explicit, biblical points of departure.

For these believers, the reign of Christ in the church as a government through his Word and Spirit and together with that the church discipline, is no longer acceptable (ibid.).

2.6 A list of sins eligible for discipline

One wonders if our church tradition had a list of specific sins with different categories/degrees of aggravating or mitigating circumstances as in a court of law, it could probably help to simplify the practice of church discipline. However, reformed Christians have continuously declined to categorize sins (Kruger et al. 1966:434). Reformers have traditionally avoided the ‘cataloguing of sins’ (Engelhard and Hofman, 2001). They also avoid formulating general rules from previous disciplinary cases conducted by church meetings (called the teaching of precedents in public law) (Engelhard & Hofman 2001:442). Such a reference catalogue or manual goes directly against the nature and purpose of church discipline, i.e., “a pastoral act wanting to draw nearer and engage with love, discretion and justice with sinners – a pastoral act that wants to handle every case and sinner in its context on merits; a pastoral act that wants to uphold the honour of God and the salvation of the church, but also wants to disclose and recover the own place of the sinner in the church” (Nauta, 1971:348).

Sadler (in Strauss, 2018:7) and others argue that a list of eligible sins without context misses the spiritual purpose of church discipline which requires the biggest latitude/scope in the practice thereof. It should not be practiced with manmade, inflexible, fixed prescriptive rules. With the aim of visible and tangible remorse by the sinner in his context, for his preservation and the recovery of the church, biblical principles and living standards should be applied with love and justice in order to conduct church discipline properly (Sadler, 1979:30-34). The church order should not become a law, threatening this scope. There should be a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in the disciplinary action, especially in respect of the time and circumstances in which it is practiced. According to Sadler (Strauss, 2018:7), the reformed fathers were convinced that they should not remove the soul of church discipline by allowing a ‘volume with rules’ like the legalistic Roman Corpus Iuris Canonici.

2.7 Church discipline in the Uniting Reformed Church

2.7.1 Origin of church discipline from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has its origin in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRCSA) in South Africa. It descended from the DRC as so-called ‘daughter churches’ and was known respectively as the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) of South Africa

and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA). For years after independence the control of these two churches were in the hands of the DRC. It is therefore no surprise that the church orderly principles and the practice of church discipline were transferred from the DRC to the DRMC and the DRCA. In the case of the DRMC (established in 1881), the right to discipline the white office bearers or missionaries was the sole prerogative of the DRC without any input from the DRMC. On the other hand, the DRMC could only discipline ministers, elders, and deacons from the coloured race group. This situation in which the DRMC had limited autonomy over the affairs of the 'independent' daughter church, especially in respect of church discipline, was upheld by the DRC in a paternalistic way as recently as 1975 (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2012:6).

2.7.2 The admonitions and discipline in URCSA

The following from Chapter 6 in the Church Order is relevant for this study:

(1) The aim of the admonitions and discipline – The purpose is already mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study (section 3). It corresponds with Calvin's threefold purpose of church discipline as well as the purpose mentioned in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands' Church Order of 1959.

(2) The character of the admonitions and discipline – It also echoes the principles of our historical reformed heritage, and Synodical Stipulation 86 reads as follows:

86.1 as the ecclesiastical admonitions and discipline carry a spiritual character, so it must also be applied in a spiritual way and the overseers must avoid the tone of civil justice as well as worldly exercise of power. They must never see themselves as judges, but should as fatherly overseers, with deep humility before God and with tender love and interest, try to bring back the strayed from their wanderings without regard to person.

86.2 The exercising of the ecclesiastical admonitions and discipline will be strictly according to the prescriptions of the Word of God, the Church order articles, stipulations, regulations, and extracts of the church.

86.3 distinction must be made between a single trespass and perseverance in sin

(3) The scope of the discipline. This has already been dealt with in Chapter 1, section

3. It is noteworthy or perhaps unfortunate to mention that every fourth year during the synod, the Church Order and Stipulations are revised, but during the researcher's three decades in ministry, there were not noteworthy changes in the relevant articles and stipulations in respect of the discipline in church. This is a concern for the researcher because the context in which the church operates within communities has changed so rapidly that it indeed has implications for practicing church discipline. It is critically important that disciplinary procedures are revisited and that the church order is adapted as necessary.

2.7.3 Application of discipline on congregational level

2.7.3.1 The pew of shame (Die skandebank)

The congregants who were disciplined in URCSA were subjected to some practices, which were quite acceptable in the early days of the church. However, today these practices would constitute a gross violation of people's human rights. One such practice was the so-called pew of shame, better known as the '*skandebank*' in Afrikaans. The pew of shame was part of the disciplinary measures, which the church used to make an example of people who fell into sin, and it was supposed to be a warning to the rest of the congregation to behave according to the rules of the church. The church council officially placed the congregants who fell into sin under church discipline. A special place in the church building was then allocated for these congregants to separate them from the rest of the congregation. Usually, they had to sit at the back of the church building in the last pews. In one of the current buildings in our region, two pews were placed opposite each other at the entrance portal at the back of the building, and a wall separates it from the other pews. These brothers and sisters had to sit there during worship services. The congregation would then walk past them and enter the building. At the end of the service, the disciplined members had to stand up and remain standing until the entire congregation left the church before they could exit the building. Essentially, these congregants were disciplined on more than one level due to the functioning of the congregation within the broader community. According to the laws of the Coloured Reserves, a representative of the local control council of the reserve had to serve on the local church council. After the church council meeting, this representative had to report to the Control Council about which community members were placed under church censure. It was also the duty of those officials to report sins such as: theft and other crimes to the police who would

then punish those persons. After serving his/her sentence, the congregant must then undergo his/her church discipline and sit in the pew of shame for another period. Although it was very humiliating for these congregants, the church leadership felt that they had better success in disciplining the congregants. We can be thankful that this practice of exercising church discipline was stopped, although there are still remnants of it left in some way, e.g., disciplined members who had to stand up in church when their names are announced as those currently under discipline.

2.7.3.2 Common procedures in most congregations

The practice of church discipline on a local level differs from one congregation to another. In general, the following procedures function in most congregations:

1. Admonitions by the ward's church council members. This is supposed to be the duty of the elder, but due to vacancies or other challenges, the deacons are also performing this duty. Furthermore, the practice has been established that certain groups in the congregation like prayer groups, women's ministry and others do evangelizing work amongst those fallen brothers and sisters. This is however done in a non-formal fashion or as part of the office of the believer.
2. Admonition by the ward's church council member/s prior to the disciplinary meeting, which takes place once a quarter. The purpose is to encourage the congregant to report to the disciplinary meeting and this request can be either in writing or orally.
3. The congregant then reports to the disciplinary commission on a particular set date as per the congregation's yearly calendar. This disciplinary commission is a sub-committee of the church council, which is supposed to be a ministry that has an oversight duty over the congregation, functioning the whole quarter, but it normally only functions during this specific meeting. The congregant gathers with other brothers and sisters who have sinned. The commission conducts a private pastoral interview with the congregant about his/her sin. In some congregations, the congregants report to the full church council meeting, and needless to say, these mostly younger brothers and sisters experience this meeting to be very intimidating.
4. The disciplinary commission compiles a report for the quarterly church council meeting with recommendations for an appropriate disciplinary measure/s. The church council meeting decides to place the congregant under church censure either for a definite

period of 3 or 6 months or for an indefinite period. The latter simply means that the church discipline period lasts from one meeting to the next.

5. The disciplinary measures include the loss of rights and privileges according to General Synodical Stipulation 66. These restrictions include prohibition of taking part in the Holy Communion as well as answering on the Baptismal Form; prohibition to being elected as an office bearer or participating in such election; forfeiting the right to lodge complaints.
6. While the congregants are under church discipline, they attend compulsory disciplinary classes/catechism facilitated by the minister or in some congregations individually by the ward elder. The ward elder continues to admonish and encourage the congregant while under church discipline. After the compulsory period, the member reports to the disciplinary commission or church council meeting again where applicable. By this second meeting, a report by the ward's church council members is tabled about the conduct of the congregant for the past quarter. Responsibilities like regular church attendance, monthly offerings, and general behaviour in public and at home, are checked. The idea behind this exercise is to determine whether the congregant has remorse or not, and depending on the outcome of this, the censure either can continue or be lifted. The disciplinary commission makes a recommendation for either the lifting or continuation of church discipline at the quarterly church council meeting. This should be based on the true remorse of the congregation member. The church council meeting takes the final decision, and the disciplined member will be notified accordingly.

2.7.4 Some problems hindering the proper functioning of the admonitions and discipline

(i) Discipline is exercised very selectively in the church. The church council officially only disciplines those members who become pregnant out of wedlock. In these instances, the view is simply that the congregant has trespassed the 7th commandment, i.e., "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

(ii) In the case of a stillborn baby, the unmarried member sometimes refuses to be disciplined because he/she is of the opinion that, since there is no child to be baptized, there is no further need to continue with discipline. It is thus not about undergoing a process, which leads to

remorse by the church member, but about a compulsory act in order to get access to the infant baptism. As mentioned in Chapter 1, most of the unmarried members who report for church discipline wrongly make the connection that the church discipline is the bridge to cross in order to baptize your infant. This is indeed a view that needs to be rectified.

(iii) The personal lifestyle of those church council members exercising discipline is a big obstacle in many cases. Some of them committed a public sin but refuse to be disciplined, or the church council is afraid to act against them because of their standing in society. The congregation members are aware of the negative publicity surrounding them in the media, especially social media. They are elected on the church council and then the fallen members take a position of 'let the one who is without sin cast the first stone'. Therefore, because of their questionable moral values, the church council adds to the weak application of discipline. Yes, it is true that fallen church members refuse to take personal responsibility for their behaviour, but the personal witness of the church council is indeed a factor to be acknowledged in this regard. This makes an absolute mockery of the church discipline. It is certainly a big challenge in our church that some church council members are not elected in terms of the clear guidelines of 1 Timothy 3:1-13, and this does not help the church in properly disciplining our congregants.

(iv) In many cases, church members have a negative perception of church discipline and subsequently report to the disciplinary commission with an attitude of animosity. Adding to this negative view is the attitude of spiritual pride with which some commission/church council members enforce the discipline - they act towards the fallen sinner as if they are 'holier than Thou'. While our church order states that those practicing discipline should do it as spiritual fathers, such attitudes unfortunately do not express the notion that the discipline is a pastoral, inclusive and approaching act of love.

(v) Another challenge that complicates the practice of church discipline is the fact that certain lifestyles like extramarital cohabitation, sex, and the procreation of babies out of wedlock, are legally allowable and even 'rewarded' by the government. An example of this is the fact that young women grabbed the opportunity to become homeowners with the allocation of

the then called Reconstruction and Development Houses⁵ (RDP Houses). One of the qualifying criteria was that you need to have a child, be single, and have no or minimal income. Contrastingly, the same lifestyle would be ‘punished’ by the church. Thus, people felt that they did nothing wrong in the eyes of the law and therefore refuse to subject themselves to the discipline and admonitions of the church as promised at their public confession of faith.

(vi) Many remote rural URCSA congregations are vacant (about 50% vacant congregations). In some cases, the relieving minister only visits the congregation over a weekend every 3 or even 6 months. During these visits, everything concerning the ministry must be squeezed into this limited time, e.g., church discipline, administering of both sacraments, ordinary church council meetings. Unfortunately, URCSA still functions predominantly according to the shepherd–flock model ⁶where it is expected from the ministers to be involved in everything

⁵ The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is the South African socio-economic policy framework implemented by the ANC led government in 1994 after the democratization of the country. The chief aim with the RDP was to address the immense socioeconomic challenges brought about by the policy of apartheid. Alleviating poverty and addressing the massive shortfalls in social services across the country were the main focus. These would rely upon a stronger macroeconomic environment. Achieving poverty alleviation and a stronger economy were thus seen as deeply interrelated and mutually supporting objectives – development without growth would be financially unsustainable, while growth without development would fail to bring about the necessary structural transformation within South Africa’s deeply inequitable and largely impoverished population. The RDP housing programme was introduced to redress the imbalances of the apartheid legacy by providing decent housing to poor people who were victims of the land segregation policy by the apartheid government. The intention of this programme was to build houses for all people who could not afford their own housing.

⁶ The shepherd-flock model: In the reformed tradition a distinction is made between the special office-bearers and congregation members or the office of the believer. However, in the reformed theology both office-bearers and congregants are on the same level because office-bearers also function in the office of believer. Under the special offices distinction is made between teaching elder (Verbi Dei Minister), elder and deacon. The Dutch Reformed Church family is governed by the presbyterial system, but in the shepherd-flock model there is a built-in hierarchy of minister, elder and deacon where the minister occupies the position of leader

in the congregation. This way of doing ministry limits the development the office of the believer for the enrichment of the congregation. The result is that at vacant congregations, the proper practice of the admonitions and church discipline becomes a low priority of the activities of such a congregation.

(vi) In many instances, disciplinary committee members have a misplaced view about the purpose of the disciplinary process. For many it is about the work of the congregation as an organizational structure, where fallen members are encouraged to benefit from the process of discipline and admonitions in order to play a role in the functioning of the organism. The 'reward' of serving on the church council when his/her discipline is lifted is normally put on display for the fallen sinner instead of primarily addressing the sin and supporting the sinner to become remorseful. Thus, censured members do not always reach the point of true remorse and a renewed personal relationship with God. Instead, they are motivated to

(Heyns 1986:83). Congregants wrongly assumed that one needs to occupy one of the three special offices in order to perform special service in the church (Van Rensburg 1990:90). Over time the distinction between the special office bearers and the office of the believer increased and the importance of the special offices were overemphasized. The special office-bearers became indispensable authoritative figures without whom the church could not exist. The strong emphasis on proper training of ministers made ordinary congregants hesitant to make an own spiritual contribution to the church and congregational life, and that in turn led to the 'immaturity of members'. It furthermore resulted in the degrading of the office of the believer to a position of an immature lay person (Du Preez, 2004:154).

According to Michael Stone (2007) the two well-established models for images of the church are the 'body of Christ' and the 'Shepherd- sheep'. He refers to the warning of Nel with regards to the latter model that "to make this model in which the pastor is seen as the shepherd and the congregation as the flock, is to stretch the image beyond its meaning. That would result in the image being twisted, and ultimately in the congregation not being built up as the flock to tend one another; but rather becoming helpless sheep that can do nothing without the guidance and care of their pastor as the 'shepherd'. The meaning of the image is care, while the image itself (a shepherd and a flock of sheep) is less important. When a model is forced from this metaphor, the beautiful care imagery comes to be blown out of proportion, causing the meaning of the image to be lost." (Nel 2004:145). In contrast with this shepherd-flock model of the church is the 'body of Christ' model where each congregant is afforded the opportunity as believer to use his/her gift for the benefit of the congregation and community (Ephesians 4:7, 11-13).

complete the course of their church discipline in order to get the ‘highest prize’, i.e., become a church council member. This is totally misplaced; in many cases, this ‘romantic’ notion of becoming a church council member must be seen against the background of many congregants who live outside of the church where they are not deemed ‘important’ and now the office of elder or deacon gives them some recognition in the society.

(vii) Referring to the ‘Cataloguing of sins’ in section 6 above, the reality is that there is an unwritten list of sins functioning amongst us. Church councils and congregants categorize sins as big and smaller sins, more serious and less serious sins, what is appropriate behaviour, dress code for pastors, deacons, and elders, older people and women. The church has stagnated with manmade rules and traditions of missionaries and previous generations and struggles to apply church discipline in line with its original purpose. Church people are so opinionated about everything and everyone that the practice of the exhortations and church discipline in love and understanding became a practice of judgement. Therefore, the honour of God is not upheld and fallen brothers and sisters are not properly welcomed in the fold of the fellowship of the saints.

2.8 Conclusion

Considering what Scripture teaches about the discipline of God’s people, it is clear that the motivation for this part of believers’ walk with God is still so applicable for the church today. It is encouraging to know that the good news about God’s saving grace for sinners is still a gift that church members can embrace by submitting themselves to the admonitions and discipline of the church. By this, they can be edified collectively as the body of Christ and members individually.

The principles on which the Protestant Reformed Fathers based their understanding of ecclesiastical discipline have indeed stood the test of time. It is so encouraging to know that after centuries congregations are still upholding the same purposes with the discipline in the church. Deeply aware of the current situation of discipline in URCSA, the researcher is convinced that church discipline can and should by renewal be utilized as an indispensable tool in pastoral care to enhance the Kingdom of God on a congregational level.

Congregations need to move from power struggle to the edification/education and nurturing aspect of its members. Church discipline should be approached as a pastoral care and

counselling intervention and not as a legalistic matter. It should not be about a process of the “church” in the first place, but about the honour of God and the redemption of sinners.

It seems as though the theology about URCSA’s church discipline practice is simply misunderstood by the enforcers of church discipline. The church needs to address the “vacancy problem” as well as the “shepherd–flock model”. The latter can be addressed by developing the office of the believer so that the congregation can become more aware of their responsibility regarding church discipline.

In the next chapter, the researcher will attend to Osmer’s third task, the Normative Task. In addition to this, the viewpoints of John Calvin will also be attended to.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT OUGHT TO BE GOING ON CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE? PROPHETIC DISCERNMENT.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the third task of Osmer's practical theological methodology, i.e., the normative task. Osmer refers to this task as prophetic discernment, which is intended to capture "the interplay of divine disclosure and human shaping as prophetic discernment. The prophetic office is the discernment of God's Word to the covenant people in a particular time and place" (Osmer, 2008:133). Prophetic discernment uses three methods to discover God's Word for the present: (a) theological interpretation, (b) ethical reflection, and (c) good practice.

The overall question that will be answered here is "What ought to be going on concerning the practice of church discipline?" This chapter is necessary to provide the theological framework from which the study can put forward a proposal for the enrichment of the functioning and practice of church discipline in URCSA. To answer this important question, the researcher will firstly attend to the theological interpretation of what motivated the need for ecclesial discipline. From this discussion, the question of sin and how it relates to discipline will be dealt with in accordance with the biblical texts. The chapter will further attend to what the Bible denotes as the grounds for and ultimate goal of ecclesial discipline. Reference will be made to the contributions of some reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bullinger.

Additionally, some theoretical terms connected to discipline will be explained.

Subsequently, examples from both the Old and New Testaments will be explored to find common principles concerning the practice of church discipline. God's disciplinary acts towards his people and guidelines by authors of the New Testament will be examined.

Thereafter, the researcher will concentrate on two important Scriptures concerning the practical practice of ecclesial discipline, i.e., Matthew 18:15–20 and Hebrews 12:4–13. Since our faith tradition is based on the teachings of John Calvin, his distinct contribution will enjoy further elaboration. Moreover, the study will focus on church discipline and morality in the time of ancient Israel. The researcher regards church discipline as a pastoral intervention; hence, the study will finally highlight John Calvin's understanding of pastoral care as well as

his contributions that may be useful to practice ecclesial discipline more appropriately. Contributions of the exponents of contextual therapy and DIPP will be integrated throughout the chapter where applicable.

For the research methodology in this chapter a literature review about relevant sources will be done. In addition, the evaluation research method will be utilized to evaluate the current practice of church discipline (refer Chapter 1, sub-section 1.5).

3.2 Motivation for church discipline

What would necessitate ecclesial discipline in the church? Church discipline goes hand in hand with the reality of humanity's sin. At the beginning of humanity, the Bible records a situation of no sin, and thus no need for disciplinary action. However, this 'perfect situation' did not last long; Genesis 3 gives an account of the fall of man in paradise. Thus, the discipline of God's people can be traced back as far as the creation account in the Bible, and specifically the narrative of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. To understand God's firm action of discipline in response to sin, it is necessary to consider how these humans came into being. So how did Adam and Eve come into existence?

3.2.1 Created in the image of God and relational existence

God created human beings, i.e., Adam and Eve, in his image and likeness. The theme of the image of God appears in three texts in the Old Testament: Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2; and 9:6. In these texts, the English word "image" is translated from the Hebrew word *tselem*; and the English "likeness" from the Hebrew '*demuth*'. The Latin term *imago Dei* (*image of God*) refers most fundamentally to two things: (i) God's own self-actualization through humankind; and (ii) God's care for humankind (Piper, 1971).

To state that humans are created in the image of God is to recognize the special qualities, which God attributed to human beings; through these, God is made visible in humans. In other words, for humans to have the conscious recognition of their being in the image of God, means that they are the creatures through whom God's plans and purposes can be made known and actualized; humans, in this way, can be seen as co-creators with God.

Humans differ from all other creatures because of their rational structure – their capacity for deliberation and free decision-making. However, the freedom that allows humans to be made in God's image is the same freedom that manifests itself in estrangement from God, as the

narrative of the fall (Adam and Eve) confirms. According to this account, humans can in their freedom, choose to deny or repress their spiritual and moral likeness to God. This action of God, i.e., creating man in his image, is symbolic of the communion of God with humanity and it is a confirmation of the Old Testament belief of this fellowship. In this formulation of *imago Dei*, the relationship between God and man is indicated and the intention is to indicate the “father–child relationship” (Vriezen, 1966:187-188).

3.2.2 Man was created and exists as a relational being

Important to remember is that when God created man, He created him/her in relation to another human being. Genesis 1:27c says, “male and female he created them”. It entails that human beings were created as social beings, in relation to others. It further entails that when man falls into sin, it affects other human beings as well.

According to Polman (1970:241), God, by creating Adam and Eve, placed them in an excellent and privileged position toward creation. They had the privilege to reign over all of God’s creation, everything served them, and they had to serve God with everything. Unfortunately, when these privileged humans needed to reign and take care of creation, they failed to do so and fell into sin. Here is a relationship, i.e., an asymmetrical relationship, between man and nature (creation).

The DIPP approach distinguishes between vertical or asymmetrical relationships and horizontal or symmetrical relationships. Asymmetrical relationships refer to the vertical, intergenerational relationships between parents and children or grandparents and parents or grandparents and children. Symmetrical relationships refer to the horizontal relationships between partners, friends, colleagues or siblings (Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn, 2016:33). The father–child relationship between God and humans is always asymmetrical because God as the divine parent takes care of his children and they need to obey Him. Although this relationship is ‘unequal’, man was created as a subject and not an object of God’s actions as such.

Martin Buber’s contribution to human existence is described in his classic work “I and Thou” which is of relevance here. The basic argument is that human existence is fundamentally interpersonal. Human beings are not isolated, free-floating objects, but subjects existing in perpetual, multiple, shifting relationships with other people, the world, and ultimately God (Owen, 2018). Buber contrasted this ‘I–Thou’ relationship with an ‘I–It’ relationship, in which

the other person is experienced as an object to be influenced or used, thus a means to an end (Martin & Cowan, 2019). Such a relationship ('I-It') lacks the essential elements of human connection and wholeness that characterize the 'I-Thou' encounter. Human beings as the *imago Dei* should thus be living as one subject towards another subject, not treating each other as objects and using one another for selfish personal purposes. In the case of man's relationship with the rest of creation, one can view the relationship as an 'I-it' relation as God subjected the creation to man.

Louw (1993:97) agrees with Buber that a human being is not fully objectifiable and as such cannot be studied empirically as a phenomenon. This study shares the view of Louw that pastoral anthropology is interested in a human being as a creature, as a God-directed, sinful, redeemed, and believing being. Man can only be understood from his relationship with God. For the correct biblical-based practice of discipline, those entrusted to enforce it must be fully aware of the fact that the fallen member is not an object but remains the image of God and hence needs to be treated as a subject.

3.2.3 The fall of man

The Belgic Confession states that man did not realize his honorary position in creation but wilfully submitted himself to sin. God specifically gave a clear first commandment to man in Genesis 2:17 when He said, "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." This commandment was not meant to be a trap for Adam, rather it was a commandment intended for mankind to have life in its fulness. Adam was not forced to obey it, but out of his free will and with full consciousness he could choose to obey God. He was created to be good and in the image of God and had the innate ability to obey and choose life. He was in that special, intimate relationship with God and could therefore submit himself to Him instead of submitting to sin (Polman, 1970:242).

The researcher agrees with Polman's stance regarding a church member who is confronted with the temptation to sin – he/she always has the free will with which God created him/her and therefore has a choice whether to allow or resist the temptation.

It is thus understandable that when the *Imago Dei* (God's people) failed to adhere to their creation purpose, He disciplined them right from the beginning of man. One can say that He had enough reason to do so. He not only acted with divine discipline against humanity but

also instructed his church to discipline its members (see section 3.2 “The power of the keys”). Man had in fact failed to take responsibility for the task for which he/she was called into existence.

3.2.4 What is sin?

The concept of sin is developed through a variety of Hebrew terms that describe various aspects of it. When used in the context of contrast to God’s character and Word, one Hebrew noun in particular stands out, i.e., *Ra’*. This masculine noun means “evil”, “bad”, or “contrary to God’s nature”. This term is used as a contrast to good and it is associated with death which is regarded as the consequence of the “act” of sin. Gen. 2:16-17 confirm this view as it states as follow, “The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*ra’*) you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’”

God clearly indicates that by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve received some level of moral knowledge; thus, their sinful action enabled them to discern good from evil before the Mosaic Law was introduced. This also means that human beings were capable of discerning right from wrong when Jesus Christ makes the appeal to repent and believe (Brown C, ed., 1979).

In the Old Testament, the English word "sin" is derived from two Hebrew words. The definition of the word *chattath*, first used in Genesis 4:7, is "an offense"; the second word, *chata*, which first appears in Genesis 39:9, means "to miss". Brown–Driver–Briggs (1979) states “sin is to miss the way, goal or path of right”.

The New Testament also has two original Greek language words that are translated as "sin." The word *hamartia* denotes “the act of committing an offense (transgression)”. The second word, *hamartano*, means, "missing the mark." These terms are roughly equivalent according to Thayer, meaning, "to make an error or wander from the path of uprightness." (Brown-Driver-Briggs, 1979).

With the aim of supporting the fallen brother/sister to allow God to transform him/her, it is recommendable that they be taught that sin is not just about making a little mistake, but it first and foremost entails the above, i.e., you are missing your life’s purpose.

3.2.5 Where does sin come from?

The question surrounding the origin of sin was a highly debated subject amongst the early church fathers. The *theodizee* (theodicean) question is important in this regard. This word consists of two Greek words, i.e., *theós* (God) and *dike* (justice). They however agreed that sin/evil had its origin in the devil. The devil, named Lucifer, was originally a good angel who became a fallen angel. Different views as to the reason for his demise were upheld by the different church fathers. The most common view held by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen explains that his (devil) fall was the result of his pride and self-exaltation towards God (Durand, 1978:17).

Augustine's view is that evil exists because something went wrong in God's good creation. His definition of evil is that it arises when a creature of God does not fulfil its specific role and consequently stops being what it is supposed to be. Evil resides in an evil will. Before Adam's fall, the evil will was already been present in him. Even before man's fall evil already existed through Lucifer, the evil one (ibid., 23). In light of the church fathers' understanding, it is evident that at the basis of sin lies the breach of relations between different parties, e.g., God, Lucifer, and the other angels; God, Adam and Eve, and nature.

It is important to note that DIPP views human life as intergenerational living. This means that every human being is born into a family of origin and as such, he/she is never intended to live in solitude. Justice is at the core of DIPP because interrelational living brings the dimension of relational ethics to the fore, i.e., what is right in humans' interactions with one another? (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:403). Is what is happening amongst people just or right towards everyone, including God? People living in relationships with each other tend to be unfair towards others. When there is no justice, consequently, sin will take place and interpersonal relations will be damaged.

John Calvin is also of the view that the origin of sin is to be found in the will of the one who sins. The responsibility of the sin of Adam is to be laid at his own door. According to him, it was unfair to expect God to create a human being who could not or would not want to sin. The *possibility* to sin was indeed there for Adam, but the *necessity* to sin was not a given (Inst. 1, 15, 8) (Durand, 1978:34).

3.2.6 Sin has consequences for others, and it requires responsibility

Sin has consequences for others as we see in the fall of Adam and Eve. It not only involves an individual, but also has repercussions for the human being's relationships with God, fellow humans, and the creation at large. One can say that sin is always *relational*, i.e., you commit an offense against someone else or you trespass against others. When called to account for his sin Adam at first blamed Eve and even God by telling Him it is the fault of *the woman* that *He (God)* gave to him. Eve on her part blamed the snake for her sinful action, but neither she nor Adam took responsibility to confess that they are liable for their actions. Although the biblical account does not mention it, one can only imagine how, after this encounter with sin and the manner in which they addressed it, their future relationship as husband and wife was influenced.

Adam and Eve's relationship with God was negatively influenced and they had to leave the Garden of Eden. Their sin had *intergenerational* consequences in the sense that Eve's maternity would be accompanied with hardship, and Adam's future work would entail hardship in order to make a living. In fact, the all the earth would suffer the consequences of their sin, as God's verdict is that the earth will be doomed because of them (Genesis 3:16-17; Romans 5:12). Death because of their trespasses against God's commandment was also a consequence of their disobedience.

The current church disciplinary system does not really make provision for active involvement of the congregant's family. However, families may at times want to be involved for the wrong reasons, e.g., to put pressure on the disciplinary committee to lift the censure of the member at all costs while they are not really interested in helping him/her to reach true remorse. In line with Nagy's view that family members co-suffer with their loved one and should be involved in the therapeutical relation (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:7), the researcher deems it essential that the family of the congregant under censure should be involved in the disciplinary process in order to be healed.

Intergenerational living as well as the interconnectedness of people, especially family members have consequences for others. What an individual does or neglects to do today certainly has consequences for other family members, even for generations that still need to come. Therefore, an individual member should take cognizance of what he/she received from others as well as what he/she gives to others. Family members should also be encouraged to

take mutual care of each other for the common well-being of all (van Rhijn & Meulink-Korf, 2019:392). Thus, family members should take co-responsibility for their loved ones, even when it comes to their discipline.

Noticeable is *how fair* God is in His judgment. In fact, God's actions display what the New Testament would refer to as 'God's grace'. After the people have sinned and received their punishment, God still took care of them by clothing them and providing for their future. Even up to the point of allowing them to conceive children and so fulfilling his promise of Genesis 1:28 "God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Thus, it seems that their sin did not lead God to deviate from His promise to them. Even in the case of the wandering Israelites in the desert, where a whole generation of disobedient people had to die before entering the Promised Land, God did not allow them to be lost because of their sins. Thus, when disciplining his people, God is firm in his measures, but He never abandons them. Something of the seriousness of God as the ultimate, 'Thou' is evident here as He retains the relationship with man, even when the latter broke the trust and relationship through sin. The call for the church is to place greater emphasis on the good news of God's grace for sinners. It seems as though the current emphasis in church discipline is more on 'punishment' than on the proclamation of 'amazing grace'.

3.2.7 Original sin and intergenerational living

Following his parents' example, Cain continued with sin and killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4). Article 15 of the Belgic Confession summarizes this reality of original sin, as follows:

"We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind."

The *revolving slate*, which Nagy mentions (see Ch. 1), comes to the fore in the sense that the evil that was evident in his parents' encounter with Satan is present here. As in the case of his parents, God called Cain to account when he had to report about his brother's whereabouts ("Where is your brother Abel?" - Gen 4:9), just like Adam and Eve needed to report to God about their whereabouts ("Where are you?" - Gen. 3:9). While it seems that God's question intended to appeal to Cain's accountability, he however refused to take responsibility for his wrongdoings.

Cain denied his responsibility and accountability toward his brother. At least his parents gave an honest answer to God while hiding in the garden. To accentuate the break in the relationship between himself, his brother, and God, Cain confronted Yahweh with a counter question in Genesis 4:9b: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” (Esterhuyse, 2010:154).

Similar to Levinas’ critique on the *conatus essendi*, i.e., “the struggle to be” (Filipovic, 2011:58) in which he argues for one’s responsibility towards the other person, God expected Cain to be responsible for his brother’s well-being, even though he did not adhere to it. He had to bear the consequences of his sin and God punished him by driving him away from the land on which he resided, just as God did with his parents in Eden. God disciplined again and viewed the trespasses in a very serious light. However, God shows compassion by promising that He will protect Cain (Gen. 4:15) because even in His punishment, God is still gracious and fair towards the sinner. His discipline wants to correct, lead to repentance, and sustain the sinner. Discipline is indeed appropriate in the case where wrongdoing is committed.

Despite the fact that human beings are born as children of the first Adam, and thus with original sin, the church should utilize the disciplinary intervention to encourage congregants to take personal responsibility for their sins according to Galatians 6:4-5.

“Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” (Gal.6:4-5).

The DIPP approach is about intergenerational living and the interconnectedness of humanity. A human being is born into an existing world that was there long before he/she came into existence. Intergenerational existence refers to life that extends across more than two generations (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:77).

As an individual, I am a link between past and future generations. I am a generation between other generations. People are born into the history of other people, as a boy or a girl from other people, i.e., from parents and as such, become part of their narrative. Every person is born into a family in which different generations are connected whether they are still alive, passed on, or still need to be born. Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn state that “each generation begins during the time of the previous one, and each generation also lives during the time of the next generation” (ibid., 2016:68). Their analogy of roof tiles beautifully expresses the interconnectedness of people; each tile lies partially under the one above.

Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn refer to every human being is a “loyalty fabric” meaning that each person continues weaving in a dynamic of giving and receiving (ibid., 62). According to Nagy & Krasner (1973:53), there is an intergenerational ledger of debits and credits by which every human being receives from the previous generation, and thus has the obligation to give back to those and also give to the next generation. Every person has the right to give and to receive. This (giving and receiving) is also true about sin. You are born into a family of origin with their unique context of the good and bad amongst them; you are influenced by this family context and pass it on to the next generation. In this way, you can inherit sin and continue to give an inheritance of this sinful behaviour to the next generation.

These intergenerational relationships are also affected by a person’s horizontal relationships, “in the triadic aspect of intergenerational family life each person is confronted with, and forced to think about, the ethical side of life” (ibid., 78). Thinking ethically helps me to focus on the appeals that others can make to me with an awareness of what I have also received from others (ibid.).

3.3 Grounds for church discipline

3.3.1 Private and public sins

It is worth noting that not all sins lead to official disciplinary action by the relevant church meeting. Although all sins are disgraceful in the eyes of the Lord, normally only those sins that lead to formal, actions against it are considered to be warranted punishable sins. In line with Calvin, churches of the Reformed tradition have always distinguished between private sins (*peccata private*) and public sins (*peccata publica*) (Plomp, 1969:89).

Private sins are those sins that are not known to many people, and it offends less people than public sins. The acceptable way for believers to deal with it is in accordance with the guidelines of Matthew 18, i.e., the sinner is addressed in private. If such a member has remorse after the exhortations in private, it is not necessary to report his/her sin to the official church meeting (Sadler, 1979:55).

Public sins refer to those sins that are generally known in the congregation. These sins are committed publicly, offending the whole congregation. These sins that are eligible for the application of church discipline, should further be public and annoying (see Heyns’ description below about an annoying sin). In this regard, Plomp asks: “*Is een enkele persoon beledigd,*

gekwetst, of de hele gemeente?” Such sins bring shame to the entire congregation and are regarded as warranted punishable sins (Plomp, 1969:91). W. Heyns describes an ‘annoying sin’ as follows: “a sin that threatens to seduce others to sin that can endanger their spiritual welfare and results in them becoming worse than they were previously” (Sadler, 1979:62). Heyns also describes an annoying sin as, “a public sin that constitutes an offense, that is, a sin by which occasion is given for blaspheming the name of Christ and defaming the holiness of the Church, and which threatens to be a stumbling block or others, tempting them to do the same or worse, and thus causing them to stumble and fall” (ibid.).

In this regard, Emmanuel Levinas states that an individual has a responsibility for the wellbeing of others, “This responsibility consists in the first place of taking care not to violate or destroy (kill) the other in his otherness, which is to say not to reduce the other to his countenance, but instead to recognize, respect and do justice to him in his otherness” (Burggraeve, 1999:32). To conclude, for the church to enforce formal discipline on her members, their sins must be public and annoying, offending the entire congregation and bringing dishonour to God’s holy Name.

3.3.2 The Power of the Keys

According to Calvin, church discipline depends largely on the power of the keys and on spiritual jurisdiction. For him, discipline in the family and society is necessary for orderly living; thus, it is even more essential in the church, which ought to be the best-ordered institution (Calvin, Institutes, 2002:750).

The church received the *right* as well as the *duty* from the Lord to bind and to loosen here on earth, i.e., the right and duty to judge what is ethical, what is acceptable and not acceptable amongst Christians. If a situation is allowed in which anyone can do as he/she pleases and where ecclesial discipline is abandoned, such a situation steers toward the total devastation of the church (ibid., 751).

The power of the keys refers to the two biblical passages of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. The power that Jesus first delegated to Simon Peter in Matthew 16 and then to all the disciples in Matthew 18, is a spiritual power which *pertains to the kingdom of heaven*, that is, to the church (Matthew Henry, Complete Bible Commentary, 1709, in biblestudytools.com/library).

According to Henry, this *power* of the keys gives the disciples the authority in such a designated place, i.e., the church, by delivering to them the keys of the place. They received the power to *bind and loosen*, and as far as they enforce it justly, Christ will approve their acts.

Henry further elaborates on *the keys of the kingdom of heaven* and mentions the following:

(1) The key of *doctrine*, called the key of *knowledge* – the disciples then and the ministers of the Word today, must explain to the world the will of God, both as to truth and duty. At that time, it referred to prohibiting and permitting, i.e., if a minister of the Word ‘taught or declared a thing to be unlawful, it was to *bind*; and to proclaim it as lawful was to *loosen*. Thus, an ordinary power is conveyed to all ministers, to preach the Gospel as appointed officers; to tell people, in God's name, and according to the Scriptures, what is good, and what the Lord requires of them: and they who declare the whole counsel of God, use these keys well (Acts 20:27). Even if those who received these keys of proclaiming the Word executed their duty but some members of the body of Christ still get lost, they are in the words of Paul, not guilty of the blood of these people (Acts 20:26).

(2) When ministers proclaim the good news of pardon and peace to the penitent, wrath and the curse to the impenitent, in Christ's name, they are in fact binding and loosening.

(3) The key of *discipline* – the right estimate of sinful members’ characters and actions. It is not *legislative power* that is hereby conferred, but *judicial*; the judge does not make the law but only declares what is law, and upon an impartial inquiry into the merits of the cause, gives sentence accordingly. Such is *the power of the keys*, wherever it is lodged, with reference to church membership and the privileges thereof. The minister of the Word or even the church council is not tasked with making new laws as such, but only with applying the Word of God truthfully to determine whether His holy name was dishonoured by people’s sinful acts. Ministers of the Word have the power to restore and to take in again, upon their repentance, such as had been thrown out; to loosen those whom they had bound; declaring to them that, if their repentance is sincere, the promise of pardon belongs to them (Henry, 1709).

3.3.3 Goal of church discipline

In his Institutes of the Christian Religion (IV, 12.5), John Calvin indicates the following three aims that the church must have in the practice of church discipline:

“The first is that God may not be insulted by the name of Christians being given to those who lead shameful and flagitious lives, as if His holy church were a combination of the wicked and abandoned.” The sacred name of Christ should be protected and those that bring disgrace to His name should be expelled from the church. Together with this honour to His name, the sacrament of the Holy Communion should also be guarded against ‘unworthy use’.

Calvin’s second aim of discipline is that the good may not, as usually happens, be corrupted by constant communication with the wicked. Thus, on Paul’s recommendation, the church should be protected against the bad influence of a persevering sinner to not be corrupted as a whole; from such a sinner the other members should stay away (1 Cor. 5: 6, 11).

Thirdly, the sinner may be ashamed and begin to repent of his/her turpitude, and thus church discipline does not intend to cast the sinner away, but it is an effort to encourage him/her to turn around from his/her wicked ways and become a disciple of Jesus.

The Church Order and Stipulations of URCSA identify the same aims of church discipline and admonitions as Calvin does (VGKSA, 2018:103). The ultimate goal of church discipline is clearly the health of the congregation as a whole, inclusive of the recovery and the re-incorporation of the fallen member in the household of God. As was mentioned earlier regarding Nagy’s approach of involving the co-suffered family members, the congregation should also take collective responsibility for the disciplinary process amongst others by supporting the congregant and not judging him/her. In this way, an effort is made for the restoration of the whole body of Christ. *A lack that needs to be addressed in the Church Order is that reconciliation with the church and neighbour should include a direct and personal reconciliation with God as well, and that it should as such be formulated into the Church Order.*

3.3.4 The Spiritual Character of Church Discipline

Ever since the Church Order of Dordt from 1619, all the reformed churches associated with this historical Church Order (including URCSA) agree, that church discipline has a spiritual character (Strauss, 2017:377). The spiritual character of church discipline is essential for it to reach its goal since the goal of church discipline is also spiritual in character. It is of vital importance for those who are involved in the process of church discipline to be conscious of its spiritual character because this will help them to encounter one another with the right attitude in the sense that it entails a spiritual goal, i.e., honouring God and not just completing a process of the church.

Nevertheless, what do we understand under the spiritual character of church discipline? According to Nauta (1971:358), it means that church discipline is practised based on God's Word alone. Those that are enforcing discipline should focus on using the Word in such a way that it speaks to the conscience of the disciplined in such a way that so that he/she is convinced of his/her wrongdoing, will break free from his/her sinful lifestyle, and transform. It further means that the enforcers of church discipline must refrain from enforcing it from a political and worldly perspective; it should express a spiritual character.

3.3.5 Relevant words in the Old and New Testaments relating to church discipline

In an article about the relevance of the church discipline, van Graan & van der Merwe mention that certain elements of the discipline are observable (Kleynhans 1988: 139). The most important one was the *cherem* (ban). God instituted it as a punishment against the heathen tribes and against those members of the people of God who were guilty of gross trespasses (ref. Ex. 22:18; Lev 20:27; Num. 35:16; Deut. 18:10) (Kleynhans 1988: 139-40). During and after the Babylonian Exile, the practice of discipline was shifted to the synagogue. Three aspects were important: 1) *Nidui* – a lighter punishment; 2) *Schamatta* – a heavier punishment and 3) *Cherem* – ban (Kleynhans 1988: 140).

Words used for discipline in the Old Testament include *r s y (jsr)* – to chastise, correct or punish; *r s W m (moesar)* – chastisement, discipline, and instruction (Buttrick, et al 1962: 846); other words are *t x k w T (tikagat)*, *h x k w T (tikeigah)*, *x k y (jakag)* en *j b v (seibet)*. These words mostly referred to discipline in the family, e.g., a father who corrects or instructs his son to do the right thing (van Graan & van der Merwe). This way of discipline in and by the family needs to be acknowledged in a society where the expectation is that external institutions e.g., the church or school, are primarily responsible for discipline instead of the family. The words mostly used in the New Testament in respect of discipline are the following:

- *paideuw (paideuo)* – discipline
- *paideia (paideia)* – to educate, learn, discipline.

Rather than chastisement, these words focus more on the child's home education as well as a man's training to fill his place in the cultural community (van Graan & van der Merwe • STJ 2016, Vol 2, No 1, 491–511).

3.4 God disciplines His people

3.4.1 Calvin's theology is all about God and His people.

The purpose of human life is to know God (Philippians 3: 8 & 10), and this knowledge is about honouring God in the way He deserves it. The right way to honour Him is to trust Him wholeheartedly, to commit oneself in obedience to His will, to call upon Him in one's distress, to seek one's redemption and all good things by Him and to acknowledge Him with heart and soul as the only resource of all good (Dankbaar, 1982: 177).

One can know God through nature in which the glory of God shines as well as in the lives of human beings where God shows his provision. Unfortunately, humanity has corrupted this knowledge through sin and as such, this knowledge is inadequate for knowing God. Thus, the only trustworthy witness given by God to humankind for knowing Him as well as they know themselves is the Holy Scripture. In the first place, the Bible teaches people who God really is; secondly, people see themselves as sinners; and lastly, they learn how to honour Him properly by being obedient to Him throughout their lives (Dankbaar, 1982: 179). Jansen (1913:1) also mentions that the principles of church discipline are revealed in Scripture, and it is important to base church discipline on it because Scripture is the main source of truth for the Lord's church. The mistake made by the church is to discipline its members by first looking at their transgressions. The researcher's view is that it can make a big difference when the church *starts with who and how God really is* in relation to humanity both collectively and individually. Because church discipline wants to protect or uphold the honour of God, He and his interest should be placed right at the centre of our discipline in the church. Based on this, the congregant should be led to honest self-examination, in other words, that he/she deals with question 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism and its answer, which reads as follow:

Question. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort? Answer. Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

In response to these core aforementioned questions in the reformed doctrine it is necessary to mention both Calvin and Luther's view that man is justified by faith alone (*sola fide*). Man cannot be justified by good works since all of humanity are sinners. Thomas R. Schreiner (Credo Magazine, March 2018) rightly states that "faith is the instrument or vessel that joins us to Christ, and ultimately believers are justified by Christ as the crucified and risen one."

Although believers believe the gospel and should exercise their faith in daily living, this faith is however does not originate by man, but it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Calvin argues that God called the church our mother who educates and cares for us spiritually. He underwrites the view of St. Cyprian that “there is no salvation outside the church” (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*) (Wikipedia). God entrusted the treasure of preaching the gospel via ministers and pastors to support us in our weaknesses and help us to live righteous lives.

Calvin distinguished between the visible and invisible church. These two are however one church. The visible church, though imperfect, may never deduce from her imperfection that she would allow everything. On the contrary, thinking about the invisible church, the visible church must remember how it should be in this world, i.e., “one community, one organic body who has Christ as its Head and of which all members with Him and amongst each other are all bonded in brotherly love” (Dankbaar, 1982: 194).

For Calvin, the criterium for a true church on earth does not lie in the excellence of its members, but whether she (the church) faithfully keeps those whom God entrusted to her by proclaiming the Word purely and correctly administering the sacraments. From this, the obligation to uphold discipline in the church arises. By no means was it the intention of Calvin to establish a perfect church, but he wanted to secure the best possibility for upholding God’s honour. Even in *excommunicating* a member, it was done in the belief that he/she is not lost forever, but it was a *last attempt* to bring such a member to repentance; it also served as a warning against seduction and apostasy for others. Calvin did not promote church discipline as a third characteristic of the true church because he did not want to create the false impression that humans created the church by their own measures. He was however convinced that without church discipline, the purity of the church cannot be preserved (ibid., 195).

3.4.2 God disciplines Israel as a collective: references to some Old Testament texts

All discipline of God’s people is based on the so-called *mother promise* in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Jansen, 1913:2). The context of this promise (it is actually the first prophecy in the Bible) is that it comes immediately after Adam and Eve fell into sin. Calling them to account for their disobedience, God however did not abandon them, but offered them grace. He promised them salvation in the person of Jesus.

Referring to Genesis 3:15, Jansen's view is that the root idea of discipline is about 'drifting apart', meaning that separation came between Eve and Satan and between her seed and Satan's seed (ibid.). Discipline in the Old Testament necessitates that enmity and separation come between the kingdom of darkness and that of light. This enmity is twofold: on the one hand, it is the banishment of Satan and its seed, and on the other hand, it is about the protection of Eve and her seed. It entails the so-called mother promise. This promise is evident in God's further dealings with His people. He separates the wicked and the pious as He did with Cain and Abel; Abel was accepted through grace and Cain was rejected.

God also used discipline to sanctify His children internally. Although they were graciously accepted by God, Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24) and had to live in a sinful world while trying to refrain from sin (ibid, 3).

We see the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the following incidents, which reinforce the abovementioned mother promise:

- (i) As promised by God in Genesis 3:15, the people are separated as a result of their actions that are in contrast with the good that God wants for His people. Noticeable is that He normally disciplines them in a group context or as a community.
- (ii) In the time of Noah, the people did not listen to God's warnings and persevered in sin. Once more God separated the wicked from the faithful. The same water of the flood that killed the wicked was the source of life for Noah and his family (Gen. 6).
- (iii) In the time of Moses, discipline was practised in a more fixed form. The Hebrew term mentioned earlier, *cherem*, translated as "ban" meaning "to cut-off", became familiar for disciplinary actions (Ex. 22:20). During the journey through the desert Israel showed that they could not uphold the discipline and keep sin out of their midst, e.g., the story of the golden calf that was worshipped by the whole nation under the guidance of Aaron (Ex. 32). God sent a plague amongst them to call them to responsibility and repentance.
- (iv) When the Israelites continuously murmured and revolted against God via Moses in the desert, God disciplined them by letting a whole generation die in the desert and decided that they should not enter into the Promised Land. (Num. 14).

- (v) The Babylonian exile – God used Babylon as His agent of judgement against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him (Ezek. 39:21-24). At the heart of this exile, God’s purpose was to teach them obedience towards Him alone.
- (vi) The Day of Atonement – the instructions for this holy day are recorded in Leviticus 16. Once a year the high priest must bring a sacrifice on his and the people’s behalf, asking for forgiveness of their sins and reconciling them with God again.
- (vii) Furthermore, God sent His prophets with the message of a Messiah that would come to redeem His people from their sins. The Old Testament ends in Malachi with the promise of a day of reckoning for the people’s sins. In Malachi 4:5-6, God promises that He will send Elijah to reconcile the ties among family members.

From these text references, it seems that Israel’s sins were always directed towards God, dishonouring His sacred name. In this regard, Calvin’s first aim of church discipline, i.e., *protecting the honour of God*, makes absolute sense. Furthermore, the texts indicate that the people sinned as a collective and as such, the second aim of discipline, *protecting the congregation from being corrupted by the sinful influence of some members*, is applicable here. Despite God’s firm and decisive actions against the sins of His people, His final goal remains throughout that they repent and reconcile with Him. This leads us to the third aim of discipline: God’s *loyalty* towards his people is evident in the abovementioned biblical texts. Israel was not just another nation amongst others, but they were the Covenant people of God. This fact makes their disloyalty towards God so tragic, but the good news here is that God constantly kept his side of the covenant. The term *Chesed* is used in Hebrew for loyalty. It refers to “the specific nature of the irrevocable connectedness between parents and children as an existential ethical phenomenon” (Meulink-Korf & Van Rhijn, 2016:160).

Loyalty can be defined as an attitude of fairness; it includes reliability, engagement in relationships, giving and receiving, solidarity, and reciprocity. The first formulation in *Invisible Loyalties* (1973) impressed the idea of indebtedness.

When applying loyalty to church discipline, it is important to remember that as a congregation, we are the family of God. The church or congregation came into existence through the work of God Himself, who gathered His church through his Word and Spirit. It was not our doing, and although you voluntarily decide to join a certain denomination or congregation, you cannot actually choose who your spiritual family members should be – they

either are already there or will join later. Our interconnectedness as a spiritual family requires loyalty of us. It means that we have the obligation of reciprocal giving to our fellow believers as we have received from others in the past.

3.5 Church Discipline in the New Testament

While the Old Testament ends with the announcement of punishment for the evil people and redemption for the believers, the New Testament begins with the announcement of the birth of the promised Messiah and Redeemer (Matt. 1). God continues to be present amongst his people (Immanuel) by sending Jesus as Redeemer to the earth. Moreover, when Jesus started acting in public, He called upon the people to repent¹ from their sins. He furthermore forgave people their sins and restored their relationships with God.

3.5.1 Jesus as the final intervention from God to redeem us

While humanity has been struggling with their sinfulness since the beginning of time, God in His great wisdom sent His only begotten Son to the world to redeem people from their sins. The entire New Testament is a confirmation of this fact. The history of Salvation, with the death and resurrection of Jesus as the highlight, clearly expresses that Jesus came not to judge the world, but to save it and give new life and healing to his people. This mission of Jesus confirms the message of the Hebrew author in Hebrews 1 that He came as the final revelation of God to redeem God's creation and make the devil powerless (Heb. 1:3, 2:14-18).

3.5.2 Some references concerning the discipline of God's people in the New Testament:

- (i) Church discipline in the New Testament begins with Jesus entrusting Peter and the Apostles with the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Here, three biblical references in which Jesus directly speaks about the power of the keys are applicable, i.e., Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 as well as John 20:23. In the two texts of Matthew, the power of the keys is given to Peter and the Apostles, respectively, and in John 20:23 it is given to the church. It provides these bearers of the keys of the kingdom of heaven with the authority to mediate the forgiveness of people's sins, on the basis that they adhere to the Word/ordinance of God. On the other hand, they had the mediating authority to withhold forgiveness from those who persevere in sin. However, this authority rested on the fact that Jesus is ultimately the one who is the entrance to heaven (Jansen, 1913:28, 31).

- (ii) Since discipline is viewed as imperative for the well-being of the congregation, it becomes a mutual responsibility of the church/congregation to address the sin that exists amongst them. For the well-being of the congregation, the church must punish wrongdoing (2 Cor. 2:6; 10:6), excommunicate in the case of persistent sin (1 Cor 5:2, 10-13) and reinstate the repentant (2 Cor 2:7-8).

3.5.3 The Lord's Prayer as a guide to deal with our trespasses

It is notable to see how Jesus' mission as Redeemer is included when He teaches his disciples how to pray (Matt. 6:9-13). In this regard, the fifth, sixth, and seventh petitions are very meaningful in terms of dealing with our sins. Extracted from his *Small Catechism* (1986), Martin Luther makes the following comments about this prayer:

The Fifth Petition

'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. Therefore, we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us. Receiving and granting forgiveness should be our response towards sin and in this way, we can restore relations with God and our neighbour.

The Sixth Petition

'And lead us not into temptation'.

God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although these things attack us, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory. See 1 Cor. 10:12-13 above.

The Seventh Petition

'But deliver us from evil'

We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven. This

petition acknowledges the reality of evil amongst us, but it also expresses the belief that Our Father can free us from it.

This all-inclusive, general prayer, *The Lord's Prayer*, offers good direction to those believers who have a serious desire to be disciplined by God and have a sincere longing to come into the right relationship with Him and their neighbour. One should pray it intentionally based on the Great Commandment, i.e., to love God and equally your neighbour as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). These petitions appeal to God for justice for both ourselves as well as our neighbour, i.e., forgive *us*, lead *us* not, deliver *us*, while we ask that God helps us that *we* forgive *those*. Forgiveness for that matter is always a relational concept, i.e., the one who asks for forgiveness and the other one who grants forgiveness.

3.5.4 Forgiveness and exoneration

Church discipline as a pastoral care intervention in response to sin inevitably brings the church to deal with forgiveness and the quest for restoration for both victim and perpetrator. It is therefore important to look at how URCSA understands the biblical imperative of forgiveness. Furthermore, it would be helpful for this study to be mindful of how contributors to DIPP view the concept of forgiveness, which in turn can contribute to a new approach for church discipline in URCSA. Thus, forgiveness and exoneration will be briefly discussed here, as it will be highlighted in more detail in chapter 4.

Forgiveness: The confession of sin and the granting of forgiveness are biblical teachings, which are accepted in the tradition of URCSA. Congregants understand *The Lord's Prayer* as a definite instruction from the Lord to forgive their trespassers (Matt. 6:12). They also hold dear the 'acquittal' in the liturgy after the confession of sins as a collective during a worship service (generally taken from 1 John 1:8-9). There is no objection to the whole concept of forgiveness amongst God's people. In fact, believers normally have the objection that others, whom they feel are obliged to ask for their forgiveness and confess to them, do not do it promptly. From this attitude by believers, one can possibly understand Nagy's caution when it comes to the concept of forgiveness, because even though Buber states that all are guilty, some forget this fact and persistently seek to find the guilt in others.

The Bible is full of evidence that God forgives us and expects us to do the same to others. According to Hebrews 8:12, when God forgives us, He will not think about our sins anymore.

Exoneration

Nagy refrained from using the term “forgiveness”. For him, forgiveness puts the power into the hands of the forgiver who can exploit the process of forgiveness, keeping the perpetrator in debt, and enhancing the guilt of the latter. Nagy & Krasner state: “The act of forgiving usually retains the assumption of guilt and extends the forgiver’s generosity to the person who has injured her or him. Offering forgiveness, a person now refrains from holding the culprit accountable and from demanding punishment” (1986:416). Nagy preferred to use the term “exoneration”. By this concept, he foresees the possibility of the burden of guilt being lifted on merit, which includes accountability and retribution. In family relationships, it is indeed of great value, because by lifting the burden of culpability, the intergenerational relationship can be restored, and the guilty person gets the chance to transform and start afresh.

In the parable in Luke 15 about the man who had two sons, the father’s response is an example of exoneration. The father not only forgave the youngest son – he did not even get the chance to explain and ask for forgiveness - but he (father) lifted the load of his guilt immediately without any conditions whatsoever.

Apart from Nagy’s caution in terms of utilizing forgiveness, Terry Hargrave (1994) considers exoneration as the *first step* in a more complete process of forgiveness. According to him, the two steps of exoneration, i.e., insight and understanding, are completed through the two steps of forgiveness, i.e., opportunities for giving and overt acts of forgiveness.

3.5.5 Paul’s view on discipline

According to Ridderbos (1973: 522-530), the Apostle Paul dealt with the concept of church discipline from the starting point of God who is not a God of disorder, but of peace. This God expects his church to function in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor. 14: 33, 40). For him, discipline and order in the congregation go hand in hand, and at the basis of it is the edifying of the church. The congregation also needs to be aware of their own identity as the holy nation of God and the body of Christ and should therefore function in an orderly manner.

Paul not only advises the congregation about issues which they can consider, but also prescribes commands to them about what they should do and how they should act (1 Thess.

4:2; 1 Tim.1:8). One can also say that he gave them regulations and, in a more pastoral sense, admonitions about their behaviour in the household of God (1 Cor.7:17; Titus 1:5-9).

Apart from the admonitions, Paul also instructs the congregation to act with church ordinance or church law against those who refuse to be led or who have strayed so grossly that they can no longer be regarded as part of the congregation (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul introduces what was later called “excommunication”. The congregation should retreat from those who persevere in sin. In texts like 2 Thessalonians 3:14 & 15, the abscission is temporary, and the strayed member can be welcomed again in the congregation after continuous exhortation and repentance.

In other instances, as in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul reproached the congregation for allowing a severe case of a member who sinned so grossly that they should have already removed him from the congregation and delivered him to Satan. This is no doubt a case of permanent abscission from the church. The abscission from the congregation has a dual purpose: (1) to cleanse the congregation from those who by their living desecrate it and (2) to give room for the sinner to repent.

Paul also addresses the issue of authority to discipline in the congregation. He emphasizes that the responsibility is primarily that of the congregation itself (1 Cor. 5). He does not place the responsibility in the hands of those granted with spiritual gifts or certain office bearers in the congregation. However, the congregation needs to subdue itself to the authority and the order in her midst. God gave the charismata as gifts to the congregation for their edification and they (the congregation) must subject themselves to these God-given gifts. Thus, the congregation is both subject as well as object when it comes to the authority to discipline (Ridderbos, 1973: 522-530).

In contrast with what was mentioned earlier – that Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians initially for not disciplining the member amongst them who committed incest – it seems that the church has gone too far in the punishment of an individual (2 Cor. 2:6). Paul's counsel to them is threefold. First, the punishment by the majority is sufficient (v. 6). The mention of the man's sorrow (v. 7) shows that the punishment had its intended effect; he has repented of his action. Secondly, the Corinthians are instructed to forgive and comfort the man rather than continue the discipline (v. 7). Instead of *aphiemi*, the customary word in the Gospels for forgiveness,

Paul uses *charizomai*, which means to "give freely" and so to forgive based on one's gracious attitude toward a person (Louw and Nida, 1989:40). It is likely that the man is becoming discouraged by the church's continuance of the discipline. What is needed at this point is for the Corinthians to stop the punishment and to "encourage".

The third and last piece of advice Paul gives the church is to reaffirm their love for the man (v. 8). The Greek word *kyrosai* (to reaffirm) means, "to confirm" or "ratify." They are to confirm their love for the man thereby showing that Christian discipline is always intended to be remedial, never merely punitive.

These verses point to two dangers in taking discipline too far. First, there is a danger for the individual. What starts out as godly sorrow can unwittingly lead to a consuming guilt or to an over preoccupation with one's sin (v. 7). The Corinthians are to forgive and encourage the man so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. The picture is of a drowning person who is in danger of being swallowed up by his grief, as by a rushing river or flood of water. Discipline that goes beyond the stage of "godly sorrow" becomes strictly punitive and non-redemptive (7:10).

Secondly, there is also a danger for the congregation. The Corinthians are to forgive the man so that Satan might not exploit them (v. 11). The word *pleonekteo/pleonektethomen* means, "to take advantage" of someone with the intent to cheat or exploit them. Over-discipline can provide Satan with just the right foothold into the life of a congregation that he covets. For we are not, Paul continues, unaware of his schemes (v. 11). The Greek translation literally means, "we are not unmindful of his mind," which in the case of Satan is a scheming, plotting mind. What kind of plotting is in view? It is possible that Paul is thinking of how Satan can take advantage of the disciplinary process to alienate a person from the church or even from Christianity. The presence of the plural, "that we might not be outwitted," suggests, however, that the congregation is in mind. Paul could well be thinking of how Satan can take advantage of an unforgiving, overly legalistic attitude to sow division and dissension in the church. Mention of the majority suggests that a difference of opinion existed within the Corinthian congregation that Satan could easily exploit. This is probably why in Paul says verse 10, "if you forgive anyone, I also forgive . . . for your sake" (2 Cor. 2:10; Harris, 1976:330).

3.6 What does this story of God's disciplinary dealings with his people teach the congregation?

The Bible is not a textbook in which you find a list of what to do and what not to do. It is however, the essential source of reference that teaches us about who and how God is. He is the divine parent that always seeks the good for his children. It is therefore imperative to understand that He also does this by disciplining his children.

1. On this side of the final judgement, every act of divine discipline is intended to reform and renew God's people. Throughout God's long and winding history with his often-wayward people, He has at times enforced discipline in an effort to remove their tendency to sin. Each time the goal was repentance and spiritual renovation. Similarly, when the congregation excludes someone from church membership, she is not pronouncing their final fate, but warning them of what it could be. To exclude someone from membership is not to pronounce their final condemnation but to seek ways to avert it. When the church excludes someone, she must continue to work, pray, and hope for his/her repentance, renewal, and restoration.
2. God "disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). God's discipline is good for members of the church; it aims at a good far greater than what they often settle for. They constantly needed to be reminded that hard providences do not mean God has a hard heart. If God uses hard measures, they should look to their hardened hearts as the targets and not accuse God (Ezek. 36:26).

3.7 Does the Bible prescribe a specific process for church discipline?

Different church traditions conduct the discipline of their members in different ways. It is in fact a good question to ask whether all churches practise church discipline at all. All churches have the same Bible with the abovementioned references to discipline, but they must admit that they interpret it in their own way and doctrinal traditions. The following is not intended to be the common approach amongst churches for practicing discipline, but it would be rewarding to take a closer look at the following two passages of Scripture, namely Matthew 18:15-20 and Hebrews 12:4-13.

3.7.1 Matthew 18:15-20

Reproving another who sins

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Revised Standard Version)

Context of Matthew 18:15-20

It is important to note that Matthew places Jesus’ words about church discipline between two very familiar stories: the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the unforgiving servant. The question that arises is: Why did Matthew arrange the narrative in this way? Here Jesus moves from telling the parable of the lost sheep to discussing church discipline followed by Peter’s question in verse 21 about the limits of forgiveness. The first parable ends on a high note with the sheep being recovered and the shepherd rejoicing. Jesus concludes: “So it is not the will of My Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (v. 14). Thus, Jesus denotes that one should pursue finding the lost with everything available. The second parable of the unforgiving servant ends with a stern warning against unforgiveness (v. 35). Meysenburg (2014) answers these questions about the context as follows:

“Church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17) must be *motivated by loving pursuit* (Matthew 18:10-14) and *marked by repeated forgiveness* (Matthew 18:21-35).”

Some churches have failed to understand the true purpose of church discipline. It is not meant to be a straightforward rule for expelling sinful members; rather, it is a process of increasing severity with a view to recovery. John MacArthur notes:

“The goal of church discipline is not to throw people out, embarrass them, be self-righteous, play God, or exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose of church discipline is to bring people back into a pure relationship with God and with others in the assembly” (MacArthur, 2008:267).

Churches have policies to help guide them along, but we are not slaves to them. That was the Pharisees' problem in Matthew 23. While adhering to the minutiae of their rules, they woefully neglected the weightier matters in dealing with people: showing justice, mercy, and faithfulness (v. 23).

Steps in the disciplinary process

Often seen as "*the church discipline passage*," Matthew 18 outlines a procedure for the restoration of a sinning brother or sister. Here the context of the passage helps us understand more than the *process* of engaging in church discipline; rather we see the *heart* behind it all.

Mutetei, refer to this procedure as different steps in the disciplinary process. He denotes four basic steps, which include private reproof, private conversation with witnesses, public announcement, and public exclusion (Mutetei, 1999:111).

Step 1: Have a private conversation.

It all begins with a private confrontation (Matt. 18:15). The offended and the offender meet alone. The offended believer goes and reproves the offender privately. Christ's purpose in giving this procedure is that sin be removed quickly and quietly. Rather than fostering gossip and division, Jesus commands his people to speak privately first, "just between the two of [them]." This conversation is not about complaining about the other, but always about finding a solution for the issue, about dealing with the sin promptly before it later leads to indifference and bitterness.

This step can accomplish certain things:

Firstly, the people who can do something about this sin are brought together.

Secondly, it brings the issue into clear focus. The offender might be quite unaware of his/her sin if he/she is not confronted with it, or he/she may feel that he/she had adequate provocation to do what he/she did.

Thirdly, it provides a clear means of ending the problem created by sin. The truth is that the offended is in the best position to do something about the sin because unlike the offender, he/she is not faced with the spiritual and emotional battle of admitting his/her fault. Moreover, if the offender is a proud person, there may be a resultant unwillingness to admit

that he/she is wrong. Again, the offender may fear the response his/her confession may bring and thus be reluctant to meet with the offended party.

The offended party does not have most of these emotional roadblocks. He/she only has to guard his/her heart from hardness toward his/her brother and to open his/her heart in neighbourly love to such a degree that he/she is willing to risk reproving his/her brother or sister. Any discussion of sin must be *with* the offender, not behind his or her back.

The Greek word for reprove used in Matthew 18 is *elegcho*, which means, "to bring to light, expose, convict, or convince someone of something." In Matthew's context, the word "reprove" simply means to show someone his/her fault. This means that the most biblical and loving thing one can do for a sinning brother/sister is to reprove, demonstrating to him/her the fault with the truth and the solution for the sinful conduct.

In his sermon entitled *Reproof, a Christian Duty*, Charles Finney remarked, "If you see your neighbour sin, and you pass by and neglect to reprove him, it is just as cruel as if you should see his house on fire and pass by and not warn him of it" (Laney, 1986: 358).

Such a statement points to the significance of the ministry of reproofing one to the other in love. Pointing out someone's fault is risky for there is no way of knowing how he/she will respond. However, if done gently and graciously, the offender may be more inclined to recognize the error than become stubborn and bitter. This is what might be called the loving, caring confrontation between the believers.

The last clause of Matthew 18:15 reveals the potential positive results of this first step. The offender might listen, meaning that he/she might see his/her sin and repent. If this happens, then we have gained our brother or sister; the will of God is done, and so we will rejoice together with the restored brother or sister.

However, what happens if that initial confrontation is rejected? What does it look like once we get beyond that informal step?

Step 2: Take one or two others along (Matt. 18:16).

The next step widens the circle of involvement, while not yet involving the church as a whole. Jesus instructs the members to take one or two others along to confront the one caught in sin. Jesus drew on the Old Testament requirement that a person may not be convicted of a

crime based on a single witness (Num. 35:30). At least two witnesses were required to ensure that the testimony was truthful and unprejudiced. Numbers 35:30 states: "Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness." From this, it is apparent that the witnesses in the Old Testament were supposed to have witnessed the event in order to testify about it. In contrast, Matthew 18:16 does not seem to indicate that to be the purpose of the one or two witnesses accompanying the offended person. Alfred Plummer writes:

Yet these are not witnesses of the original wrongdoing but of the wronged person's attempts at reconciliation and the response, which the wrongdoer makes to them. They will be to certify that the one has honestly tried to bring the other to a better mind, and that the other has or has not yielded to his/her efforts.

These men are to be witnesses, not judges. Christ seems to be anticipating the need for confirming testimony if this matter is not settled and must go before the entire church. The word of mouth in this case is used metaphorically for testimony. The testimony of these witnesses will confirm every fact that the offended party brings to the attention of the church. Their testimony helps give the church adequate information on which to stand united and demand the offender's repentance (Plummer, 1909: 253).

The additional witnesses, therefore, serve a threefold purpose. First, they bring additional moral pressure to bear on the offender so that he/she may be encouraged to repent. Second, they bear witness of the offender's response to the reproof so that, if necessary, they can testify before the church. They can also hear the evidence and determine whether or not an offense has really been committed in the first place.

While the witnesses may serve to bring new objectivity to the situation, it appears that their primary purpose is to strengthen the reproof and thus lead the offender to repentance. Surely, bringing a matter of sin to a brother's attention in the presence of witnesses may sound like a threatening or intimidating situation, yet the purpose is not to threaten or intimidate the sinner into repentance; it is to help the offender realize the seriousness of the situation.

In responding to the research problem in this study, the researcher's humble submission is that not much has been done in URCSA to utilize this step of private reproof and conversation

in the presence of witnesses in the disciplinary process. Reasons for this are unknown. Does the church not jump to the prescribed formal discipline too quickly before applying the exhortations as described in this text?

Step 3: The Public announcement - tell it to the Church

Matthew 18:17: "And if he refuses to listen to them (witnesses), tell it to the church." It should be noted that up to this point in the process, the disciplinary procedure should have taken place *in private*. However, an unresponsive saint now requires strong public action. The congregation is the final court of appeal in such disciplinary matters. Interestingly, the Lord Himself advised that Christians should take their disputes to the church and not to the secular courts. This process differs from the time of the Reformation where the secular court also dealt with the disciplinary matters of the church. The church is gifted by God with men/women with much wisdom, and He expects them to settle their disputes among themselves. Therefore, the Lord said to take the disputes to the church.

Here, the leadership has the responsibility to consider the nature of the charges. However, it seems that Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:4 gives the responsibility to discipline to all the committed members of that specific local church/congregation. In our modern-day practice, the leadership of the congregation normally administers this step on behalf of the congregation. In this way, the so-called 'formal church discipline' takes place. Some questions that can be asked here are as follow:

Is the sin concrete and serious enough to warrant taking the next steps of church discipline? Are there extenuating circumstances that the member might not know? Are there other members who might better speak to the one caught in sin? How do we care for those who have been wronged? The leaders of the church will need to think over these and other important questions, and prayerfully shepherd those involved in the following step/s. The local church however remains the final authority in disciplinary matters.

Step 4: The public exclusion or excommunication

Jesus presented the final step in the discipline of an unremorseful sinner. He said, "if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matt. 18:17b). When the church leaders and congregation have made every effort to bring the

sinner to repentance without results, they must then disassociate the offender from the church fellowship. He/she must be removed from membership.

Synodical Stipulations 108 and 112 of URCSA that entail the procedures about the 'expiring of membership' and the 'cutting off of confessing members' are applicable in this regard. Even though Christ was the friend of tax gatherers and sinners, He still recognised them as sinners. Christ looked at them as classes of people who were morally defiled.

It is suggested here that the offender may first need repentance towards God for salvation before he/she can establish a proper relationship with the church. Perhaps this person never had any personal relationship with Christ, which is the basis for relationships in the church. This person is possibly still a Gentile, which is why his/her heart is hardened. Gentiles and tax-gatherers would, for the most part, be outside of God's salvation. To treat an offender as a non-believer suggests that the latter may be his/her spiritual state. Consequently, by his conduct, he/she has excluded him-/herself from the church and is no longer to be considered a part of the local assembly.

Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians exhorts them to excommunicate certain disorderly brethren. "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:14).

Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that even this last step of excommunication is done with the hope that the unrepentant sinner will still come to his/her senses and return just as the youngest son in Luke 15 and be reunited with his/her spiritual family.

Step 5. Public restoration when there is genuine repentance

Although this part is not specifically included in Matthew 18:15-20, the possibility that the excommunicated member can repent always exists; an appropriate action of the church/congregation should then be in place to welcome him/her back. This repentance involves godly sorrow over his/her sin (2 Cor. 7:8-10) and restitution where appropriate (Philemon 18-19). A person's deeds should reflect repentance (Acts 26:20; Cole 2017).

3.7.2 Hebrews 12:4-13

Discipline in God's family is portrayed in the model of a Father's love in Hebrews 12:4-13.

This part of the chapter will give a brief overview of this pericope to support the command or duty for discipline amongst God's children. By doing this, the researcher intends to give a guideline for the fact that discipline is indeed an action that takes place in the familial relations of God's household.

Love and discipline are vitally connected to one another and cannot be separated. The author of Hebrews points out that God's disciplinary action is executed within the bond of a family relationship and if you are not disciplined by the Father, then you are regarded as an illegitimate child. The discipline by earthly fathers is used here as analogy to God as our Father who disciplines his children. The purpose of church discipline is not to execute judgement on those who have fallen, but to awaken people to their sin and encourage them to return to their formally healthy spiritual condition (Price, 2019).

The researcher will henceforth predominantly refer to John Calvin's insights in the overview of this portion of Scripture (*Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 44: Hebrews*, translated by John King, [1847-50], at sacred-texts.com). It is important to refer to his contribution since he is the champion of the reformed faith on which URCSA is based; to a certain extent he 'revived' the practice of church discipline at a time when it was neglected by the church. As a result, his insights about this text with the intention of applying it to church discipline would be advantageous for this study. Chapter 12 begins with an encouragement to the Hebrews whose literal temptation was the danger of apostasy. This was due to their persecution because of their faith as well as the fact that they grew weary while waiting for the Parousia.

The author reminds the readers that they are contending - actually making war - against sin because sin always dwells within them. The persecutions that people endure in their struggle against sin are useful to them because they are remedies to destroy sin. In this way, God keeps them under the yoke of his discipline and sometimes punishes his children's sins, that they may be more cautious in future.

The author reminds the addressees that they have not yet resisted the assault of sin unto blood, which in this case is apostasy. As such, there is no acceptable reason for them to ask for a discharge from the Lord because they must remember what the Lord Himself had to endure for their sins. Faintness or despondency in mind would inevitably be accompanied by weariness. Faith or strength of mind is necessary to prevent fatigue or weariness while engaged in contests and great trials.

They are interrogated about whether they have forgotten about the Scriptures' teachings concerning discipline, because now in their affliction was not the time to forget. The Hebrew writer refers to the instruction of Solomon in Proverbs 3:11-12, which includes two parts; the first is that we are not to reject the Lord's correction; and secondly, the reason for this correction is because the Lord loves those whom He chastises.

Despite the severity of God's judgements, He has no hidden intention but to demonstrate His paternal love for His children. Reminding believers that the judgement begins at God's house (1 Pet. 4:17), He shows them that, as His children, they are the 'objects of his peculiar care'. Everyone realizing this must understand they are chastised because they are loved by God. For when the faithful see that God interposes in their punishment, they perceive a sure pledge of his love, for unless He loved them, He would not be solicitous about their salvation. Hence, God is offered as a Father to all who endure correction. One learns that God's corrections are then only paternal when one obediently submits to Him.

Believers must allow God as their Father to discipline them. Just as it is common practice for fathers to discipline their children, so it is unthinkable that God, who is the wisest father, would neglect this essential remedy for them. Calvin states: "If anyone raises an objection and says that corrections of this kind cease among men as soon as children arrive at manhood: to this I answer, that as long as we live, we are with regard to God no more than children and that this is the reason why the rod should ever be applied to our backs. Hence, the Apostle justly infers that all who seek exemption from the cross do as it were withdraw themselves from the number of his children" (*Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. 44: Hebrews*, translated by John King, [1847-50], at sacred-texts.com). The writer refers to the time when children who were born out of wedlock were seen as illegitimate children and could therefore not have the rights of children born in wedlock.

Calvin compares the earthly fathers and God as spiritual Father by mentioning the following :

- (i) considering the reverence to their biological fathers to whose discipline people submit, they are even more obligated to honour God who is their spiritual Father;
- (ii) the discipline, which earthly fathers use is only useful for the present life, but God's discipline prepares them for eternal life;
- and (iii) while earthly fathers discipline their children as it seems good to them, God disciplines his children in the best manner, and with perfect wisdom, to continue forever in a way that leads to people's eternal destiny.

Believers may experience God's reproofs in the way children feel when disciplined while they cannot - at their age - judge how useful it may be to them in the long run. Therefore, unless they focus on the outcome of God's chastisements, they will not be able to value the wonderful outcome, i.e., the peaceable fruit of righteousness – the fear of the Lord and a godly and holy life.

The author admonishes at the end that the Hebrews have their hands hanging down and their knees feeble because they do not know what real consolation there is in adversity, and this makes them slow to do their duty. However, now that the author showed them how useful the discipline of the cross is to them, this doctrine ought to put new vigour in all of them to follow the call of God. The literal rendering of verse 12 is, "Therefore, the enfeebled (or relaxed) hands and the paralysed knees restore, i.e., to their former vigour, so that you may contend with your enemies and your trials and run your race." The idea of repairing or restoring or reinvigorating comes to the fore in this passage.

In conclusion, believers are encouraged to guide their steps according to God's will, so that neither fear nor the allurements of the world, nor any other things, may draw them away from it. They are warned to stay the straightway and not halt on their path, because they can go astray and become totally alienated from God. If they stay on the right path, the promise is that they can be healed.

3.8 John Calvin's zeal for upholding church discipline

3.8.1 Protecting the sacredness of the Holy Communion.

John Calvin's point of reference in respect of church discipline was his insistence for order in the church. He connects the regular celebration and attendance of the sacrament of the Holy Communion to this orderliness. For him, church discipline and even excommunication is essential so that those who do not submit to God's Word can improve, and in so doing, the church will function properly (Dankbaar, 1982: 47).

Calvin prohibits the use of the sacrament of the Holy Communion by those whose way of living desecrate the sacrament. He does it based on Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29: ²⁷ "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord." ²⁸ Examine yourselves, and

only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.” (RSV)

In this regard, he recommends that the oversight of the people be done in order to exhort them and lead them to remorse, or if not, to exclude them from the sacrament and even the Christian fellowship if necessary. However, all of this was aimed at the correction of those involved (Dankbaar, 1982: 48). The protection of the sacredness of the Holy Communion was a key principle for Calvin to apply in church discipline.

3.8.2 Civil and church discipline

In Calvin’s time, church and state did not function strictly separate from each other, as is the case today. Therefore, the discipline of church members was intertwined with those in society. It was about not only the order in the church but also the orderly living in society.

Members of the church were disciplined by both the church and civil court for their trespasses. Common social challenges like drunkenness and immorality, especially prostitution, was included in the discipline.

In order to address the vast occurrence of drunkenness in society, the hotels were all closed down and replaced with five abbeys where visitors could be controlled to adhere to certain practical disciplines, e.g., washing, praying, and reading the Bible. This effort only lasted for a month because it did not consider the attitude of hotel visitors who were not there to be edified (ibid., 95).

Harsh penalties were applied to trespassers of the law. Shady or suspicious houses were closed down and prostitutes were banned from the city of Geneva. One prostitute woman who continued operating was even drowned in the Rhine River. Various rules about the protection of the marriage as institution were enforced in society, including rules about adultery and prohibitions to certain marriages. Exhortation, flagellation, corporal punishment, and even the death penalty was used to discipline (ibid., 96)

No exclusions were made with the discipline of citizens, irrespective of social standing or class. One example was when a factory owner and council member, Pierre Ameaux, had to confess his guilt in public before his judges. That brought Calvin and his city council in conflict with those that were opposed to their harsh disciplinary measures. One other, Jacques Gruet, who suggested that the French king should stop Calvin’s rule, was beheaded and this controversial

sentence was fully justified by Calvin as it was later discovered that Gruet made some very vile and despicable remarks about Jesus, Mary, the prophets, disciples, and church in one of his earlier manuscripts (ibid., 98). Despite the cruelty of such measures, Calvin should be credited for the principle that no one is above civil as well as church law and biblical principles. Thus, every member in church and society is entitled to be treated equally and fairly when it comes to the exercising of discipline. God is in fact not partial to anyone when He disciplines: “³⁴Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation, the one who fears him and does what is right.’” (Acts 10:34-35, NIV). This biblical principle emphasized by Calvin needs to be upheld by the church so that everyone is treated fairly and just and in doing so, upholds the honour of our righteous God.

3.8.3 ‘Pharisaic’ disciplinary measures?

Concerning the religious life of the Genevan citizens, bizarre disciplinary measures were applied, some of which are even laughable in our modern era. Parents were not allowed to give certain names to their children if the minister did not agree with it. People laughing in church while the sermon was underway, neglect of the attendance of church services, swearing, and many small trespasses were all punished accordingly.

By these strange and strict disciplinary measures, Calvin and his associates tried to make Geneva a holy city where the honour of God would be upheld. He carried the heavy burden for taking responsibility to see to it that the societal and religious life in this city was in line with the requirements of God’s justice and majesty (Dankbaar, 1982: 99).

Despite the fact that one would not necessarily agree with the measures of Calvin in respect of discipline in church and society, one cannot but acknowledge the reformer’s sincere striving, intention, and passion to guard against the evils in society and church that dishonour the holy Name of the Lord.

However, the critique of his measures and approach is that it resembles the legalism of the Pharisees and Scribes in biblical times. Something about pastoral compassion is missing in these strict measures and punishment. One cannot really experience the difference between the laws and acts of the government of the day and those of the church of the day. While Calvin’s view is that church discipline has a spiritual character, this view is not reconcilable with the harsh disciplinary measures, which he approved of.

Although Calvin was relentless in his application of disciplinary measures, we must remember that his harsh actions were not stricter than the acceptable punishment of that time. Geneva used the “*Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*”, the penal code of Karel V, which was in force for the entire German empire (ibid., 100).

Despite efforts by historians to minimize Calvin’s contribution to these inhumane sentences by the Genevan council, the fact remains that he approved of and even encouraged it. To discipline trespassers with violent penalties such as the burning of suspected witches and the vicious execution of others was quite acceptable for Calvin. There were, however, instances where he pleaded that those convicted of the death penalty and poison-mongers should not suffer for long. It seems that he was of the opinion that, in line with the Old Testament laws, sorcerers should be removed from the earth (ibid., 102). His religious obsession would lead to a distorted view of the Christian religion of love to one of a wrathful God and it would lead to all sorts of cruelty.

A lesson that the church ought to learn from this is to be cautious about how she practises church discipline in order not to proclaim by it a God that is just ‘out there to get you’; instead, because of His love for sinners, He would rather discipline His children fairly. Synodical Stipulation 86.1 states that with the practising of church discipline, the overseers must refrain from the attitude of civil administration of justice and worldly exercise of power. (URCSA, 2018: 103).

If we want to judge Calvin’s harsh disciplinary measures, we should do so in terms of the history of his time. Although Calvin was undoubtedly serious in his efforts to uphold the Lord’s honour with his reformation efforts, the question needs to be asked whether he did not perhaps mistakenly accept that God’s honour is the same as his own ‘task’ and insight. In light thereof, it is fair to ask whether his way of practising discipline was in fact the most effective one (Dankbaar, 1982:100).

Despite the harshness with which he and his companions practised discipline, Calvin must be credited for making Geneva a spiritual and moral centre of global historical significance from where the reformation led to the purification of many countries.

3.9 Church discipline and morality

Church discipline intends to address this sinful behaviour amongst God's people, i.e., it wants to correct the sinful behaviour. Sin does not take place in a vacuum, but always in a relationship, whether it is between God and the sinner or between the sinner and his neighbour. These sinful actions happen in the church or social society, both of which functioning on certain values and morals. The researcher, therefore, deems it necessary to look at how morality was seen and functioned amongst the people of God.

Morality in Israel was defined in terms of a living ethos. It is connected to Israel's history, which included the whole matter of land (Dijkman, 1984:11). It is the way of living of a nomadic group of herdsmen who lived in tents and moved from one residential place to another. It includes their wandering in the desert and the occupation of the promised land of Canaan. In this life of wandering, they understood that God was living amongst them since He moved with them in the pillars of cloud and fire as well in the tabernacle. For them, ethics meant an all-inclusive social and national institution. It was an institution of people and families that formed a living, residential, and working community, i.e., one nation with its own fatherland and place of residence (Dijkman, 1984:12).

It is understandable that the form in which we know church discipline and how we understand it today is not the same as the way it functioned in the Old Testament. The background of this is the way the community and church were structured (Van Graan & Van der Merwe, 2016:493). God gave them the Ten Commandments as the norm by which they need to live as His people. These commandments are expressions of the relationship between (i) God and His people and (ii) God's people amongst each other. At the core of it lies the love for God and the love for the neighbour.

Levinas' Ethics of Goodness

Emmanuel Levinas' views concerning humane living are relevant in this instance about morality. For him, a "human being" is still an incomplete creature and the term is a descriptive word describing a being that belongs to a specific species in the universe. It is however also a prescriptive word because "human" has the connotation of "humane" behaviour. As such, it is an appeal to one's own humanity; a descriptive word that prescribes how one should respond to another – "the meaning of the other sets in myself going a movement of respect

and closeness” (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:93). Thus, one becomes ‘fully’ human when one opens oneself in compassion and solidarity towards the other in his otherness.

According to Levinas, human existence is about “a being for the Other.” Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn state that “ethical” refers to the fact that a person is a subject who has a relationship with another from the start. To be a subject means that you came into existence as a subject to be ‘subjected to a burden or task’ as if from the start man was given a burden that he did not choose but for which he is responsible (ibid., 94).

A human being is mandated with this burden for the other person even before he/she becomes conscious of him/herself. He/she is responsible for someone else’s life simply by being human in relation to another human being. The burden to which I am subjected comes from the other or the eternal Other. (ibid.). My responsibility towards the other person precedes my own personal freedom. It is not a responsibility for oneself, but a responsibility to and for the other. It’s not a choice, but an existential givenness (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:180).

Levinas finds ‘concrete evidence’ for this *other centeredness* in Ezekiel 3:20,

“When a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.”

This quote articulates that responsibility is shaped by a code of conduct that makes one accountable for the other. Responsibility implies accountability, thus, the introduction of the notions of righteousness and justice.

As a structural model of the humane aspect of human beings, Levinas pointed out that Man is a being that is opened ‘from the outside’, or perhaps ‘left open’ to see who regards him. This is a description of compassion and solidarity with the other: *Misericordia*, the literal Latin meaning which implies that someone else’s misery is irrevocably my concern. Thus, when it comes to church discipline, those responsible for the practising thereof will do good by approaching the fallen brother/sister with a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the latter.

3.10 How did John Calvin understand pastoral care?

3.10.1 Hearing the voice of the true Shepherd

Referring to the office of pastor, Calvin used the parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10 as basis. The church is referred to as a sheepfold in which God assembles his people, and compares himself to the door, since he is the only entranceway into the church.

The office of pastor entails governance in which the shepherd's duty is the following: (i) leading the flock in the right direction, (ii) defending the flock from the wolves and false shepherds, and (iii) nourishing the flock.

Christ as the Good Shepherd makes His voice heard so that human beings are led, protected, and fed by the One to whom they already belong. This refers to 'wholeness', which is the aim of pastoral care. We grow healthily when more and more we hear the voice of Him to whom we already belong, trust in, and obey. We engage in pastoral care when we enable a context in which humans can hear and trust Christ's voice and not their own voices or the voices of others who want to say the first or last word to or about them.

The *Church* is the context in which the true Shepherd's voice is heard above all other voices, and *salvation* is growth in the life together of those who are freed for service by hearing that singular voice above all others. Remembering that at the basis of the original sin, Adam and Eve listened to Satan and to each other. It is critically important for the church and its members to discern between the different voices and opinions and hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.

The approach of the DIPP is that every human being is born into a family as a son or daughter of them. You are existentially part of a network of relations that you can deny but cannot undo. You belong to this family of origin and there is a certain loyalty amongst these family members that extends even beyond different generations. The context of an individual refers to the ethical relations of these family members and as such, it correlates with Calvin's view of the church, which is the context in which Christ's voice is heard. In fact, the church refers to the relationships or fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ.

According to Calvin, the wholeness, which results from pastoral care and the growth in the assurance of our salvation, is the aim of pastoral care. Pastoral care reinforces people in that already established, ultimately irreversible identity by continually calling them to repentance,

assuring them of pardon, and thereby empowering them to walk in newness of life by focusing on the truth of the freely given promises of Christ.

The saving knowledge of God entails a corrected self-knowledge. It involves a daily shift away from complacent ignorance about the extent of one's sinful condition and sins. However, it also involves a daily shift away from becoming fixated on the conviction of one's sin and speculation about whether or not one is forgiven. That shift away is a shift to the good news, which displaces the bad news. This positive shift is the healthy, whole, healed knowledge – of self as freed for the new life together in Christ and therefore from the bondage of sin and death and the devil.

Calvin's view about the aim of pastoral care corresponds wonderfully with the whole ministry of church discipline; the latter intends to deal decisively with people's sin and guilt and to help them to hear the voice of their Shepherd, which will ensure forgiveness of sin and a new life in Christ. Thus, for Calvin, church discipline was a means of doing pastoral care.

As in the *Institutes* 3.19, Calvin's treatment of Christian freedom has somewhat evident, pastoral significance on this point. One of the benefits of pastoral care is that people grow in the realization that their righteousness is completely freely given, and they do not live under the servile fear of doing works to earn acceptance or to avoid alternative dire consequences. Another benefit is that people grow by distinguishing between the few things, which are essential and the vast number of things, which are matters of indifference. Moreover, a third benefit of pastoral care, which continually frees the conscience by the assurance of pardon is that people are enabled to grow in the practice of the law.

A further word about the third use of the law in relation to Calvin's theology of pastoral care is necessary if we are not to miss one of the strongest and most relevant parts of his insight. Christian freedom in all its parts is indeed a summary of the wholeness, which is the aim of pastoral care. Nevertheless, it is more: Christian freedom is also the way humans who were chosen to be pastors do their work. That is really the issue of the third use of the law: not only that individuals are freed by grace to better obey the Decalogue, but also that the wholeness in which forgiven sinners are freed to grow in is social in both its nurturing context and the extent of its transforming range. Hence, social reform is not an addition to pastoral care but integral to it. It is part of the governance for wholeness, which is the pastor's office (Willis, 1992).

Meeting with a congregant/s in a church disciplinary session is a precious pastoral encounter, providing the space for the pastoral care that Calvin mentioned above. Martin Buber's contribution about human life confirms what was said to date and is important for the understanding of pastoral care. According to him, the reality of a real human is in all dimensions and from the outset a relational reality. Simply stated, from the beginning of a human being's existence, he/she is born into a relationship. The relationship is inseparable from the individual self. "A real relationship is not about fusion, but about an encounter" in which both persons remain themselves as individuals (Meulink-Korf (2007). According to Buber, humans share the *life of dialogue* as the 'primary human reality'. To view the individual outside of this reality is like trying to draw a map of the world with only the north and south poles as references (Friedman, 2002:10). What is essential is not what goes on within the minds of the partners in a relationship, but what happens *between* them.

Buber introduced the expression "healing through meeting" (*Heilung aus der Begegnung*). One should enter into such a meeting with an open mind without any prejudice or pre-occupancy about the other person, and both parties "may be surprised by the other." With this kind of attitude, healing can result from such a meeting. (Meulink-Korf, 2007).

The crucial elements for healing to take place in such a pastoral meeting are not the skills of the pastoral caregiver, but rather the engagement between the pastoral caregiver and the client and between the client and other people.

Friedman's interpretation of Buber's healing through meeting is that the basic element of healing is not a matter of some repair work; rather it is about *restoring* the atrophied personal centre which can only be realized by healing through meeting. This approach of going into an encounter without any prejudice is essential for the healing of the fallen brothers and sisters at the disciplinary meeting.

3.10.2 What does Calvin's theology of pastoral care imply for pastoral care today?

It recalls us to the fact that pastoral care is primarily a matter of life together in the body of Christ, over which and through which Christ Himself is the active agent by his Word and Spirit. What goes on in the dynamics of pastoral care is ultimately Christ at work through those chosen, equipped, and used as His subordinate, vicarious agents. Pastoral care is exercised by communicating – through preaching, sacraments, and discipline – the voice of the one pastor, which a person has himself or herself heard and so can re-announce.

Pastoral care is a contextual discipline of co-membership in the body of Christ. The pastor and the persons being cared for engage in *a reciprocal ministry* enabled by the way the Gospel's demands and assurances are heard and lived in successive contexts. This contextualization is really a matter of the fidelity of Christ's promises. Christ, the one pastor, accommodates Himself so that it remains His voice that is heard, trusted, and obeyed. This is another way of saying that the Word and the Spirit are never separated. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel takes root in people's lives with healing particularity, becomes vital for them with person-by-person and season-by-season and institution-by-institution specificity.

The actions of pastoral care through the ordinary means of grace – preaching, sacraments, and prayer – are not to be divorced from other ways the pastor responds to and communicates the Gospel, including social reform and church administration. Pastoral care as governance by the Word through guidance, protection, and nourishment cannot be separated from the commonwealth for which the pastor also has a responsibility as part of his or her exercising of Christian freedom. The wholeness that comes about through pastoral care (i.e., Christ's care through those whom he chooses and equips) includes people's social, economic, political, medical, and aesthetic well-being, etc. The wholeness of the people of God entails all the areas of life covered by the Decalogue.

It means that the called and equipped vicarious pastors are those whose Christian life includes the right use of the goods of this world and deployment of resources according to the imagery of the body, whose various parts are mutually helpful to the health of the whole. The distinctive feature of pastoral care is focused on *the wholeness* that comes about through the *forgiveness of sins* and how that fundamental reorientation affects every area of life. Pastoral care explicitly has to do with sharing in Christ's death and resurrection so that we may walk in newness of life. There is timing and variety to pastoral care as there is to every skilled caring; but eventually, sooner or later, the participants get around to the freely offered new being which is co-membership in the body of Christ (Willis, 1992).

3.11 Conclusion

The Word of God is the unfailing guide to edify people to grow in faith, have obedience to God, and move into the image of Him who created humanity in his own image. As children of the first Adam, humans are born with the tendency to sin, but God expects them to obey the second Adam, Jesus, who by His blood on the cross redeems them from the eternal

consequences of their sins. People can do this by not only knowing His eternal instructions in His Word, but also allowing the Holy Spirit to exhort and discipline them every time they hear the Word of the Lord and give heed to it.

It is indeed meaningful to notice that the aims of church discipline, which Calvin originally promoted, are still applicable for the church today, and this is the case because it is biblically based motivations. In fact, God's purpose for creating humans in His image and likeness remains, and thus humanity lives to protect the honour of God's holy name, guards the congregation against sin, and aims to encourage the fallen co-member to transformation.

The church will be true to its faith and the aims of church discipline if it is serious about upholding the spiritual character of church discipline. It is essential to refrain from applying discipline against the background of political and corporate motivations and instead apply 'Word-based discipline'.

In agreement with Calvin, church discipline is a pastoral intervention, and thus lends itself to an excellent opportunity for the church to facilitate a counselling process towards healing for both the congregant and the congregation. It is also an opportunity for education, as some of the words describing discipline suggest. The intervention should be utilized to instruct members in the Word of God and the longings and dreams of God for his people. In this regard, it remains relevant that the fallen members need to be reminded of the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer two (2), i.e., how to live and die comforted.

Today, where moral decay is at its worst, congregations need to be reminded of the seriousness of sin, especially the fact that it is about 'drifting away' from God. You do not stay true to your original creation purpose if sin comes between you and God, and it is indeed not just a matter between you and the church. It is therefore imperative today that the church reflects deeply about Osmer's four tasks concerning sin and morality in all its forms. It is in fact a charge against the church that the political government is doing more than the church via its Moral Regeneration Movement, in fighting the moral decay in South Africa. Churches should join hands with these initiatives in communities and work for the common good.

As pointed out above, God normally disciplined His people in a group context or as a community. The principles of *Ubuntu* can thus be applicable in the discipline of church

members. It remains the responsibility of the congregation to reprimand and exhort its members to adhere to God's will for their lives.

This chapter clearly established that there are indeed some important common principles between the Biblical guidelines and those of DIPP concerning pastoral care. It provides a clear theological framework for an approach that can improve the functioning and exercising of church discipline in URCSA. Therefore, in the chapters to follow, this study will further explore ways to integrate the biblical guidelines and the relevant concepts of DIPP into a practical approach for church discipline. The relevancy of the Confession of Belhar in respect of church discipline and DIPP will also be dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: The Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP)

4.1 Introduction

With this chapter, the researcher intends to introduce the theory of the Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP), which is predominantly based on the *Contextual Therapy* of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy. The motivation for this is to explore an alternative approach to the current practice of church discipline in URCSA. As previously mentioned in this study, the researcher's conviction is that church discipline should not be part of the structured, transactional, systemic processes of the congregation as is currently the case; it must rather form part of the discipline of pastoral care and counselling. In this important interaction, we are not dealing with members who have trespassed the laws of the country; but instead, we are meeting with wounded people who are struggling with all sorts of guilt feelings, regrets, and even remorse. They need guidance from the church and not a 'sentence' or conviction. Therefore, this research explores the field of the contextual therapy in a broader sense and the DIPP approach more specifically in order to use its principles for the realisation of the abovementioned goal. This theoretical framework is of great importance, as the next chapter will draw from these concepts to formulate a possible response to answering the research question and objectives and introduce a new approach for the practice of church discipline in URCSA.

In this chapter, the researcher will do a literature review of available sources in the field of contextual therapy and DIPP. This chapter is a further elaboration on the third task of Osmer's framework for practical theology, i.e., the normative task. The question to be answered here is, "What ought to be going on with regards to the practice of church discipline?"

The different concepts of DIPP – relevant to church discipline - as expressed by some proponents will be discussed in this chapter. The Confession of Belhar is one of the pillars of the confessional basis of URCSA. Its three articles show some parallelism with the concepts of DIPP which strengthen the researcher's conviction that DIPP can enrich the functioning of church discipline in URCSA. The relevance of the Confession for church discipline will therefore be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter will draw a correlation between the articles of the Confession of Belhar and some of the core concepts of DIPP to show the appropriateness of both in the church disciplinary process in URCSA.

The following concepts of DIPP are important for the enrichment of church discipline and will subsequently be discussed:

The interconnectedness of humans, the relational reality of them and their intergenerational existence are relevant because church discipline is the collective responsibility of the congregation as family of God. Loyalty is at the core of human relations and impacts the behaviour or actions of an individual. Thus, the entire concepts regarding loyalties will be discussed as these play a role in the bad or positive decisions of humans. Every person is born into an existing family and society and as such owe his/her existence to others. Interrelational living makes people indebted to each other, therefore this chapter will discuss what Nagy and Krasner refer to as (i) an “invisible” ledger of merit and indebtedness amongst family members and (ii) giving and receiving as responses to the aforementioned indebtedness. The legacies in families can be motivational in people’s choices either to continue with negative actions or taking decisive steps to stop it. The same applies to the revolving slate that is sometimes present in the trespasses of people in the disciplinary process.

Justice is a core concept in the DIPP and therefore it is necessary to discuss some phenomena of it such as parentification - as an unfair mode of giving - as well as deparentification. Constructive and destructive entitlement present in a person needs to be considered when encountering him/her. Taking responsibility and being accountable for the other is expressive of interrelational living. In order to reach the goals of church discipline, Buber’s views on guilt, guilt feelings, and existential guilt can be helpful. Forgiveness and exoneration as responses to guilt are crucial in the restoration process of a trespasser. In order to address all the above mentioned in the disciplinary process, real dialogue between subjects is indispensable. The chapter will be concluded with the theme of renewed hope as the ultimate outcome of pastoral caregiving and how hope is functioning in DIPP.

4.2 The relevance of the Articles of the Confession of Belhar to church discipline and its parallelism to DIPP.

The question the researcher wants to address here is whether there is any correlation between the content of the Confession of Belhar and DIPP, and how both potentially relate to the discipline of the church. The three core articles of the Confession of Belhar are important for the continued instruction of members of URCSA since it forms part of the confessional basis of this church. In light of the fact that church discipline has the education

of the believer in mind, the instruction in the Confession is indeed applicable to church discipline. It is even more appropriate to include the Confession when DIPP is utilized as a framework for practising church discipline because one finds the principles of visible unity amongst God's family, reconciliation, and relational justice in DIPP.

Article 1

"We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family." (Confession of Belhar, 1986)

In this article, we as a church confess that the church is the one body of Christ, gathered by God through his Word and Spirit from the entire human family. The individual Christian/member belongs to this unity of the body of Christ. The article embodies the concept of pastoral care, which, according to Calvin, means living together as God's family (Willis, 1992). An interconnectedness amongst human beings as one of the principles of DIPP is indeed evident in this article. The church is reminded to ensue unity as well as to make this gift of unity that already exists, visible as an expression of our interconnected living.

In the spirit of intergenerational living, all believers are recipients of the grace and provision of God, our one Father that makes all indebted to Him. Receiving in this unity puts the obligation upon all to serve others with their common and individual gifts. The giving of yourselves for the sake of your fellow human beings will strengthen the unity of the church, i.e., the entire family of God. Concretely, the unity of God's people is manifested "in that we love one another; that we experience, practise and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another" (Confession of Belhar, Article 1:1986).

The article explicitly states that as an expression of our unity we should "admonish and comfort one another", and this relates to the fact that church discipline is a joint ministry from the congregation as such (1 Cor. 5:2). The article about unity correlates with the concept of mutual responsibility in DIPP. Members of the church should live in communion with one another because they are indeed their brothers' keepers. This is possible by living in unity with one another in the church.

Article 2

“We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22) (ibid.); that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world” (Eph. 4:17–6:23, Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1–4:6).

The English word ‘reconciliation’ comes from the Latin word *reconciliäre*, which literally translates as “to make good again” or “to repair”. The essence of this word is to go to the ‘radix’, i.e., the root of that which caused division and to get rid of it. In this regard, it is also important in DIPP to address the ‘contributing factors’ that led to broken relationships in the family structure. This article expresses the truth that the church has an important duty toward the healing of people, society and the world. The new life is a result of the fact that God reconciled people to Himself and to others (Ephesians 2), and this makes us co-responsible for addressing the divisions and irreconcilability in the church and the world.

When a believer sins, a break in his/her relationship with God and his/her neighbour takes place. Isaiah confirms this by stating: *“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear”* (Is. 59:1-2 NIV). Hence, this relationship between the sinner and God is ruined, and where it has consequences for him/her and his/her neighbour, that relationship is also damaged. The church discipline should fulfil this intercessory role in the reconciliation process. This must add to the healing of the sinner and the restoration of his relationship with God.

Article 3

“We believe that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged; that God calls the church to follow Him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; ...that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down

like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream; that the church belonging to God, should stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged" (ibid.).

The concept of justice is a core element in DIPP. It is in fact the key factor, i.e., to look for justice for every member in the relational reality, whether alive, deceased, yet to be born, or absent. The biblical command to do justice is inevitably clear in the whole of Scripture. This article in the Confession of Belhar is therefore an echo of the aforementioned two resources. When caring for the disciplined member, it should thus also be about seeking justice for him/her, other parties that suffered because of his/her sin, and about justice for the Lord's holy Name, which was brought to shame, and justice for the church who as a spiritual family also got hurt. Thus, the meeting/encounter with the disciplined member should be sensitive for this essential claim. Noteworthy is also the fact that the Confession states that God makes Himself known as the One who takes sides for the most vulnerable in cases of injustice and enmity, i.e., "the destitute, poor and the wronged". This action of God correlates with Nagy's choice for the most vulnerable side/justice for the most vulnerable. Furthermore, this article states that God is a God that gives to the vulnerable what is needed. He "brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry". Thus, He is a God that gives in a fair way to those for whom He takes responsibility.

The truths of the Confession of Belhar should be incorporated into the practice of church discipline as a pastoral care intervention. The congregant stays interconnected with the congregation despite having fallen into sin, and the congregation should as such take care of her 'family member'. Thus, even with this act of discipline, which must be an act of love, the visible unity of the church is demonstrated and should intentionally be ensued. By doing this, a congregation shows that it is indeed the one body of Christ that does not abandon its fallen members but takes care of them. The imperative of reconciliation is essential in the pastoral care of the disciplined member. Reconciliation between God and the congregant as well as amongst the latter and the congregation and other neighbours should take place as the logical result of Christ's reconciliation work on the cross. In line with the reference of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 that the congregation was entrusted with "the ministry of reconciliation", it is evident that the congregation is instrumental in the reconciliation process between the congregant and all the other parties affected by his/her trespasses. Those responsible for enforcing church discipline must also view the fallen member as somebody that is eligible for

the special attention of God because due to his/her sin, he/she is also vulnerable like the so-called lost son (Luke 15:11-32). He/she is entitled to receive justice. He/she should still be treated as a son/daughter of the household of God with fairness and dignity, in the attitude Jesus demonstrated in Zacchaeus' house, "Today salvation has come to this house *because this man, too, is a son of Abraham*. For The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:9-10). The researcher is convinced that there is indeed a correlation between the Confession of Belhar and DIPP and that the content of both should be utilized in church discipline within URCSA.

4.3 Being human is about interconnected living

Since the beginning of human existence, people were created in community or relation with other human beings (ref. Ch. 3, section 2). As John Donne indicated:

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." (John Donne, 1624, Meditation XVII). Thus, all people are connected in a human order, i.e., they live out their humanity in community.

Referring to the biblical account of the creation in Genesis 2, Howe (1995:37) is of the opinion that 'Adam' refers to the whole of humanity that was created in the image of God. He states that relationships constitute human nature, meaning that to be human is to be with other humans. Even the command of man's dominion over creation is a shared dominion amongst humankind. This shared duty is carried out by humankind "by means of a partnership entailing a commitment to mutual respect, fairness and cooperation" (ibid., 38). Sharing something, one does so in relation to someone else. Hence, to exist means to be in a relationship.

Martin Buber described human life by way of a principle consisting of two basic movements: (i) 'the primal setting at a distance' and (ii) 'entering into relation'. His view is that humans can only enter into a relationship with other human beings that have been set at a distance from them, and thus are independent of them (Friedman, Religion Online: *Buber Between Man and Man*, op. cit., 'What Is Man?', p. 120 f.). According to Buber, human life finds its meaning in relationships. Ultimately, all our relationships bring us into relationship with God,

who is the *Eternal Thou*. Human existence is defined by the way in which people engage in dialogue with each other, the surrounding world, and God (Buber, 2000).

In his classical philosophical work, *Ich und Du* ("I and Thou"), Buber denotes two basic modes of human existence, i.e., "I-Thou" (*Ich-Du*) and "I-It" (*Ich-Es*). The word pair "I-Thou" describes the world of relations. This is the "I" that does not objectify any "It", but rather acknowledges a living relationship. It refers to the relation of one subject to another. In the "I-Thou" relationship, two people meet each other, but not with preconceived ideas of one another; there is a unity of being and they acknowledge each other as whole persons. With an "I-Thou" relationship, you *participate* in the dynamic living process of an "other" being. In this regard, van Doorn states that the "I-Thou" relation is an action that is happening in the present reality of here and now, "surrounded by the silence of being" (van Doorn, 2020:41). Therefore, Buber's basic argument with his "I and Thou" is that human existence is fundamentally interpersonal.

Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy also emphasized the perspective of interconnectedness among people in his contextual therapy. His main thesis is the conceptualization of intergenerational connectedness, in which every person is a contributing subject, with indebtedness and merits linked both to the past and the future generations. A dialogue with significant others, with persons to whom we are not emotionally strongly attached, but also primarily *existentially connected*, is considered as the main resource for restoring hurt human justice and eventually for constructive entitlement. This reward can be seen in the freedom for the individual to go beyond the family into a greater society in which the person can contribute to what Nagy calls (along with Buber) "the justice of the human order". According to Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn "the justice of the human order" refers to "the search for what is just, as an important human motivation, [that] should not be given up" (2016:49).

According to Gathogo, (2013:276), African hospitality is based on the view that "no one is an island on himself or herself; rather, each and every one is part of the whole community". This sense of community in African culture is expressed by the view of "I am because we are", or "I am related, therefore, I am" (*cognatus ergo sum*). A very important expression used in the African context for human existence is the word *Ubuntu*. It is a word for humanness and encompasses all that makes one human. *Ubuntu* includes all the qualities and traits, which comprise making a person fully human and includes the willingness and ability to respond

positively to the Creator (Baartman, 1980:77). *Ubuntu* is a unifying vision or worldview enshrined in the Zulu maxim, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means, “a person is a person through other persons” (ibid.,2013:285). Thus, the above-mentioned scholars confirm the view that human living is interrelational (and in fact interdependent) living.

4.4 The four dimensions of relational reality

Nagy and Krasner distinguish four dimensions in the description of relational reality. By this, they offer a practical frame of reference through which one can have a more comprehensive understanding of someone’s intergenerational, relational reality. With these dimensions, or lenses as van Doorn calls it, the pastoral caregiver gets an initial view of how a person is interconnected as well as who the important others are in his/her context (van Doorn, 2020:88). These dimensions are connected; however, it is not possible to equate a component of one with a component of another, because they refer to different realities. Yet, each dimension has implications for other dimensions: for example, the loss of a parent is an event that elicits a process of mourning for each family member in the psychological dimension, with a restructuring of the family system in the both the interactional and ethical dimensions. It gives rise to a new balance of giving and receiving, resulting from the loss of opportunity to give to the deceased parent. Furthermore, each dimension is the appropriate place for specific therapeutic interventions. For instance, transference and countertransference emerges in the psychological dimension, while the transactional dimension forms the context for systemic interventions and changes in family rules and patterns. The ethical dimension is unique to the DIPP approach. Relational reality is not conceptualized from the vantage point of one person only, but rather as a multi-personal field characterized by multiple perspectives and multiple ethical claims and obligations.

4.4.1 Dimension 1: Facts

This dimension entails that the pastoral caregiver gathers information relating to important facts in the life cycle or history of a person. It includes factors such as genetic input, physical health, basic historical facts, or events in a person’s life cycle. Facts can be unavoidable (inescapable facts) or avoidable (facts created by human choices), but all facts have consequences in the ethical dimension. Facts do not necessarily determine a person’s fate in life, because a person can respond positively to his/her factual circumstances, live with

contentment, and evolve as a trustworthy person. Another person can however have all the positive facts in his/her life and respond with destructive entitlement.

It is indeed important for pastoral caregivers to be aware of the facts surrounding a person, because it will help them to avoid the temptation of prejudice toward the client/congregant, and taking these facts into consideration will lead to an increased quality of caregiving. According to van Doorn, it is unethical to ignore the facts because it robs the other of his/her dignity and unique subjectivity. She states that ignoring the facts surrounding an individual, “detaches human beings from being interconnected with history and their unique family legacy” (2020:90).

4.4.2 Dimension 2: Individual psychology

The focus of therapy should be to look at what these aforementioned factors have done to the ‘inner world’ of the client. Without insight into his/her psychological make-up, one cannot support a client to effectively cope with his/her personal challenges. In view of Anna Freud’s view of transference and counter-transference, suggesting that a client’s childhood circumstances and fantasies should be considered, Nagy reckons that the pastoral caregiver should consider the loyalties of the client. With his approach of multi-directed partiality, Nagy tried to provide protection against possible harmful effects of transference and counter-transference between client and therapist as well as between the client and his/her existing relationships with others.

4.4.3 Dimension 3: Systems of transactional or interactional patterns

This is the field of patterns of observable behaviour and communication between people. This dimension provides the pastoral caregiver with information regarding the structuring and functioning of a group of people that has something in common, e.g., families, colleagues. Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn’s view is that such groups are more than the total of their individual psychological realities (2016:11). Here the pastoral caregiver can observe the dynamics of how people in these relations interact with and influence each other, in line with the rules of the group. According to van Doorn (2020:92), transactional systems help one to understand mutual communication and the structuring of ethics within mutual interactions. She further adds that this dimension of transactional analysis helps to illuminate the depth of human interaction within all three dimensions. It helps to identify dysfunctional forms of reciprocity in families and other organic systems, in other words, how responsibility is functioning or

neglected and how power struggles function in family systems. Thus, with this awareness of interactional patterns, the pastoral caregiver can understand the client's actions and beliefs more holistically which would hopefully lead to better caregiving.

4.4.4 Dimension 4: Relational ethics

The fourth dimension is concerned with specific motivations and “is a specific contribution of Nagy and his associates to therapeutic discipline” (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:13). The question here is, ‘what fundamentally motivates a person?’ A person can act contrary to what is expected from him/her. Nagy talks about relational ethics, referring to “a form of intrinsic justice, which is ultimately determined by a dynamic balance of giving and receiving in existentially important relationships” (Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn, 2016:13). The mere reality of a person's existence is owed to others, i.e., mother and father, who gave life to him/her, and from there, all his/her actions are motivated by a constant flow of giving and receiving to and from others. This dimension is seen as Nagy's unique and largest contribution to therapy and consequently human well-being, i.e., “his emphasis on the link between ethics and relational networking” (van Doorn, 2020:93).

Paul Heyndrickx (2018) agrees that the dimension of relational ethics is what makes contextual therapy different from other therapeutic paradigms. This dimension is fundamental to the other three dimensions. In the words of van Doorn, “This dimension reveals the fact that human behaviour and mutual interaction are shaped by an ethical dynamic” (van Doorn, 2020:93). According to Heyndrickx, Nagy viewed relational ethics as that what is helpful in therapy. Relational ethics occurs between people. Working on justice and fairness in relationships helps people to deal with pain and become themselves again (Paul Heyndrickx, 2018).

4.5 Intergenerational existence as human beings

The DIPP approach is oriented toward discovery and acknowledging family resources and strengths. It is about intergenerational living. The term ‘context’ was chosen by Nagy to indicate the dynamic interaction of a person within his or her significant relationships, thus, the relational reality of a person. Each person is born into a complex and unique network of relationships that constitutes a matrix of motivations, rights, and options. Nagy and Krasner define it as follows: “Context is the fabric of trust and interdependence established by people giving and receiving” (Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn, 2016:50).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, a human being is born into an existing world that was there long before he/she came into existence. However, the story of the world is about not only individuals forming part of the human society, but also us coming into existence in different generations. According to Nagy (ibid., 77), it is important to consider at least three generations in order to understand a person or a group of people within their context. An individual human being is connected among different generations (for details on this interconnectedness, see Chapter 3, section 1.7).

People are intergenerationally connected within their vertical relationships, inclusive of ‘the still-to-be-born generation’ as well as the deceased and absent. Horizontally, they are generationally connected with both the vertical dimension as well as within ‘immediate established relationships’, i.e., partners, friends, siblings, colleagues, etc. (van Doorn, 2020:86).

The influence of past generations continues within the present context and extends into future generations. Within intergenerational pastoral care, the caregiver takes cognizance of this interconnectedness of parents–children–grandchildren, but also of grandparents–parents–children. Every human being is either a grandchild, child, parent, or grandparent, and has to deal with those that come after him/her (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:78). From an ethical consideration, this intergenerational pastoral process helps you to focus on the appeals that others can make on you and being aware of what you also received from others (ibid).

The biblical understanding of a human being is that he/she is born into a specific family. God gives children to parents, starting from the conception in the mother’s womb (Psalm 139). Cain was born as a ‘man-child’ to Eve. Looking at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, the writer indicates how sons/children were conceived by/for parents. Thus, children are given in a certain line of different generations (genealogical line). Each one of us is born as either a son or daughter into a family of origin. Hence, even before birth, one is a relational being and continues to live in these relationships by ‘giving and receiving’.

4.6 Loyalty as a key expression of relational ethics

Nagy used the term ‘loyalty’ to concretely express what relational ethics entails. The Hebrew word *chesed* is used to denote ‘loyalty’. For Nagy, loyalty is neither a feeling of loyalty or

disloyalty towards another, nor a rule of the family system, but it is a core component of relational ethics. In terms of DIPP, loyalty entails the responsibility or obligation of one family member to take care of another family member due to indebtedness for previous caregiving in the family system (van Doorn, 2020:103). It is about ethical living in one's relationships with others; you do good to others as others have been good to you in the past.

Nagy distinguishes between *horizontal* and *vertical* loyalty. *Horizontal loyalty* refers to one's relationships with friends, partners, and colleagues. *Vertical loyalty* is intergenerational and existential; it refers to the familial connectedness. The latter relationship is not by choice, because you do not choose your parents or your child nor your siblings (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:16). Every human being has come into existence through his/her parents, and for the parents, their children are born of them. These two facts underlie vertical loyalty. The child who receives his/her existence, care, skills, and knowledge from his/her parents as well as from previous generations is bound to his/her family by an indestructible tie of indebtedness, even in the event of death, abandonment, separation, or estrangement. In this sense, parents and family regard, their child's loyalty more highly than anything else they have a right to expect from him/her.

From his/her birth, the child is not passive but gives to his/her parents; the child's presence gives the parents the possibility of self-validation through caring and accepting their parental responsibilities. This possibility of giving to his/ her parents is very useful for the child in preparation for receiving. This builds a spiral of mutual self-validation. Vertical loyalty is *irrevocable* in nature, and one cannot delete it, while with *horizontal* relationships, friendships can be broken and spouses get divorced. Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn (2019:85) describe this familial interconnectedness as a bond so strong that it even transcends enmity, hatred, and parental detachments; it is about a desire for intimacy in this secure fold of the family.

Loyalty is *triadic* in nature, meaning that there is always an invisible third person to consider when making choices about your relationships. It is also a *conflicting* matter because there is always a preferring one, a preferred one, and one who is not preferred. Thus, loyalty conflict is present in all steps of life, and it is often a factor of maturation. For Nagy, vertical loyalty is a fact of life which can be denied if a child grows older, but it cannot be undone. However, it is sometimes unavoidable that this vertical loyalty will clash with other important horizontal

loyalties (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:19). For example, each member of a new couple can be caught in a loyalty conflict between his/her spouse and their family of origin.

It is necessary to distinguish between *conflict of loyalties* and *split loyalty*. In split loyalty, it is not possible for a child to be loyal to one parent without feeling disloyal towards the other. Split loyalty occurs when a child is forced to choose one parent's love at the cost of seemingly betraying the other parent. In this situation, the child is deprived of the acknowledgment of that parent and of his or her right to give to him or her. It is therefore not possible to give and not possible to receive. The trust is broken. The backlash is severe: for example, the suicide of teenagers is often the result of split loyalty.

When a direct expression of loyalty is not possible, *invisible loyalty* becomes a destructive form of the attempt to remain loyal in one's familial connections. It is a behaviour of disloyalty to one person, which in turn is an expression of loyalty to a third party. In the case of invisible loyalty, the loyalty towards your parent or sibling, for example, is not absent but rather just hidden, and it can suddenly become visible when your family member is being disrespected in his/her absence. In such instances, one would feel obliged to defend him/her. Another common example is where an adult has been cut off from his/her parents, but at the same time behaves destructively towards his/her spouse and children. Invisible loyalties can involve both giving and receiving, and rejunctive attitudes can stop this destructive configuration (Le Goff, 2001).

Applying loyalty to church discipline, one must consider what has been mentioned in Chapter 3, i.e., the congregation is the family of God. As loyalty entails indebtedness or the obligation to care, we can look at how Paul speaks to the Romans about the indebtedness amongst believers:

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8, NIV). Paul admonishes the congregation not to owe anything to anyone. He refers to our obligation as Christians to love others. It is important to note that love always implies a relationship, and when referring to divine love, it is always about giving unconditionally. The presence of loyalty is visible here. He is suggesting that loving others is a debt we will never pay off. We will never be done with loyalty to one another. Therefore, church discipline needs to be practised in love (Stipulation 86.1, URCSA, 2018:103). We are indebted to the disciplined congregant to give to him/her our loving care

inclusive of our time, our resources, our prayers, etc. because “it is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*” (Acts 20:35). Thus, through the practice of church discipline, the congregation has the opportunity to express their loyalty to their fellow believer by giving and receiving that which he/she needs.

The congregant should be probed about where his/her loyalties lie (to whom) and who was loyal to him/her in the past. The pastoral caregiver/committee needs to be aware of the congregant’s loyalty conflicts, if any, and try to establish a real dialogue of trust in which he/she can deal with the reality of conflicting loyalties. The pastoral caregiver/committee should be very mindful and seize the opportunity to guide the congregant, as this can be a huge obstacle in moving forward, becoming whole again, and being healed.

4.7 Ledger of merit and indebtedness

As pointed out in the description of loyalty, family members have an obligation to care for one another due to care received in the past. Nagy used the term ‘ledger’ to refer to a calculation of the balance between the accumulating merits and indebtedness of the two sides of any relationship. Van Doorn chooses to refer to ledgers because one is always in relation with more than one person. Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn agree that you are connected to more than one person in a family. The ledgers function as a kind of systemic, familial memory regarding give-and-take in all distinct relationships (van Doorn, 2020:430). For Nagy, the amount of entitlement or indebtedness owed by each party at any given time depends on the fairness of give-and-take that exists between them (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:417). Both Nagy & Krasner on the one side and Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn on the other side, agree that the terms of give-and-take or fairness in the relationship depend on whether the relationship is symmetric or asymmetric. Symmetry and asymmetry pertain to the basic configuration of each partner’s basic needs and entitlements within the relationship. In a symmetrical relationship, one peer owes the other approximately the same due consideration. In an asymmetrical relationship, the child is an unmatched partner who cannot be expected to repay the parent in equal terms. Balancing fairness between parent and child requires equitable but not equal reciprocity (ibid.).

4.8 ‘Giving and Receiving’ as response to indebtedness

In general, any outstanding account needs to be settled. In relationships, an account of indebtedness also accumulates due to caregiving of each other. Regular giving and receiving

takes place between subjects in any relationship. It involves a dialectical movement in which the balance between people is fair, and thus everyone gives to the other according to his/her ability and capacity. Van Doorn states, "The contextual dialogical approach to pastoral care is unthinkable without this balance of giving and receiving" (2020:130). Accordingly, it does not mean that the needle is in the middle, because the balance is always in motion. This is because people and their situations differ. As a result, they cannot always give to the other in the same measure that they received.

Van Doorn warns against the danger of manipulation and abuse in cases where giving is demanded from a selfish attitude and the other party is being objectified (ibid., 129). In such instances, fair giving and consequently justice, comes under great pressure. In this regard, the question arises about what fair giving is, or as van Doorn asks: "What is meant by an appropriate mode of giving?" (ibid., 136). According to her, there is no objective measure for determining this. One should rather look at what is good for both the giver and receiver. For Nagy, the giving of a person is fair and just when the balance remains somewhat constant over a long period of time (ibid.).

Fairness in giving is indeed essential in the familial system. According to Nagy, "every child has a right to give and to be seen and recognised" (ibid., 131). It is unthinkable that a child will not give, because from conception, the unborn baby starts giving, and curious toddlers normally want to do good to others. In fact, Nagy and Krasner state that children have become the most reliable resources available to reinforce family stability (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:356).

Giving between parents and children will never be equal because of their asymmetrical relation. For van Doorn, there will always be an indebtedness present that is not refundable (van Doorn, 2020:131). Adult children should give to their ageing parents in a fair way for their caregiving, but that giving should always be voluntary, otherwise, if giving takes place under pressure, it can lead to destructive entitlement. Whether giving is acknowledged or not, it eventually leads to either constructive or destructive entitlement for the giver. This will be discussed in more detail in 4.12 below.

4.9 Legacy

Generally, your legacy refers to the mark that you leave on society, including what you have accomplished. It also has to do with your inheritance, in other words, what you *give* to others,

your family, friends, workers, etc. In contextual therapy and DIPP, however, legacy is a term related to loyalty and entitlement. According to Nagy, legacy refers to not only a generation's inheritance, but also the obligation to discern which elements of that inheritance is important to pass on to the next generation that will benefit them as well as life in human society. In this regard Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn (2016:24) states the following about legacy, "The experiences and traditions of each generation contribute to this learning process, so that there may be a future worth inheriting". By referring to the survival of man, Nagy sees legacy as a positive, enabling input in the chain of the survival of the species. For him, legacy is not about repeating the errors of past generations out of loyalty. Rather, legacy is an obligation to help free posterity from crippling habits, traditions, and delegations of previous generations (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:418).

It is a particular relief for posterity when they differ from the previous generations concerning cultural and religious traditions. In this regard Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes, "Everybody is struggling with the meaning of life and concerns about the world we leave behind. We must not only talk about our passions but also about wisdom out of different traditions as they are handed over in love and respect from *generation to generation*" (van Doorn, 2020:232). According to van Doorn, positive legacies strengthen and connect loyalty between different generations and form part of the future narrative of family traditions. A legacy is a mandate for a person to pass on what he/she has received to posterity, but with the added obligation of how to do that. One must remember that via this mandate, one partakes in the future of the present, and especially the next generations. Not everything in the legacies of previous and present generations of families are exemplary, hence the necessity (as mentioned earlier) for people to assess what they've received in their family tradition, and then deliberately and freely choose what to pass on to posterity.

4.10 Parentification and deparentification

The concepts of contextual therapy and DIPP discussed up to this point in the study echo one thing – the principle of mutuality by *taking care* of others in your relational reality. 'Parentification' refers to the process by which one member of the family, often a child, comes to act as an overly responsible caretaker for another family member, a parent, several others, or the family as a whole. The child is forced to take on more than age-appropriate responsibilities for a relationship. It is not necessarily a negative or destructive act because

sometimes a family crisis requires a child to take responsibility for the wellbeing of a parent/sibling or the family at an early stage (Meulink-Korf & Van Rhijn, 2019:431). Parentification becomes harmful and destructive when it involves prolonged and unilateral use of a child, and when the adults fail to acknowledge the child's giving to them and ignore the child's needs and rights. When parents abuse the dedication and commitments of their children and do not acknowledging the latter's contributions, parentification becomes destructive.

In cases where the parents are too generous and permissive towards the child, that can also be seen as parentification (ibid.). In such instances, the parentified child is kept hostage and cannot freely engage in genuine dialogue in such a relationship. At worst, parentification deprives the child from his/her right to be a child and results in destructive entitlement.

Only time will tell, but it is an open question whether 'parentification' will increase worldwide after the devastation of Covid-19. Considering that many households were left parentless because of the mortality rate of the pandemic, there will probably be more child-headed households, as is the case with the impact of HIV & AIDS on families. Even in cases where one parent is suddenly taken away, the child will probably help to support the parent that was left behind, especially in cases where the latter cannot handle the changed situation.

Le Goff (2001:151) used the term 'deparentification' to describe a positive response to parentification. For him, the process of deparentification is a major aim in the initial phase of therapy and includes the following:

- acknowledging the child for her/his helpful contributions to the family;
- acknowledging the parentification the parents experienced in their families of origin and the burdens they carried;
- connecting the acknowledgement of the child's parentification and the experience of parents' parentification, which is important to reduce the parents' guilt in order for them to recommit to loyalties without polarising the generations;
- emphasising the importance of the child's ability to continue to give, to establish self-delineation and self-validation. Therapy must assist the child to find a new position in the family without having to disqualify his/her existing position (Le Goff, 2001:151).

The practice of church discipline can be improved drastically through pastoral care which probes into the depth of possible parentification of the congregant in his/her family of origin. In the researcher's ministerial experience, the phenomenon of parentification is quite extensive in the living experiences of congregants, and this insight will definitely grant the pastoral caregiver a deeper understanding into the choices of these congregants.

4.11 Responsibility and accountability – coherent concepts of DIPP?

4.11.1 Nagy & Krasner

The theory of DIPP raises the awareness that the concepts of responsibility and accountability run like a golden thread through it. In other words, to live interrelated, be fair in your giving, or be confronted with your legacy, etc. requires that people take responsibility and be accountable for their actions/inactions and particularly for those in their relationships.

Nagy and Krasner are of the opinion that responsibility for consequences as a relational reality is indeed not a popular notion today. People try to live with the unrealistic and unethical view that they do not need to be involved with others. Consequently, they have “the false hope that they can live their lives free of the need to be responsible for the consequences of relating” (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:11). The unfortunate reality is that when adults refuse to take responsibility in/and for relations, children need to pay this costly price (ibid.). One of the guiding principles of the DIPP is to help adults prioritize by incorporating responsibility for the consequences of posterity. In the words of Nagy and Krasner, “Nonetheless, contextual priorities are inseparable from responsibility for prospective consequences, especially for posterity” (ibid., 12).

Concerning the core of the DIPP, where all relationships' balances are in motion, accountability for the future is the inescapable anchor point of this relational core. Contextual therapists always explore the possibility of the adult taking responsibility and offering care to his/her child, despite the latter's behaviour (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:263). Accountability refers to (i) the fact that a person must bear liability for the consequences of his/her action or inaction, and (ii) a person's willingness or ability to accept responsibility for dialogue in both its self-delineating and self-validating phases (ibid., 413).

4.11.2 Levinas' call to responsibility

A key concept for Levinas is his call to responsibility for the other or An-Other. According to Levinas, human existence is about "a being for the o/Other." Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn state that "ethical" refers to the fact that a person is a subject who has a relationship with an o/Other from the start. Being a subject means that man comes into existence to be 'subjected to a burden or task,' as if man was given a burden that he did not choose, but for which he is responsible (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:94). Levinas links his idea of the infinite to responsibility. In a very poignant sense, the idea of the infinite implies "the infinite of responsibility"; it is a responsibility for subjectivity as structured by and embedded in the being for the other. To defend subjectivity is to stand up for the quality of a person being human; one defends human dignity and the person of the other. Subjectivity in this sense means that "humane humanity" implies more than the thinking of the human mind, and thus, becomes founded on the idea of "infinity" (Meulink-Korf, 2019:180). A human being is mandated with this burden for the other person even before he/she becomes conscious of him/herself (before my ego starts functioning). He/she is given the responsibility for someone else's life simply by being human in relation to another human being. This burden to which a person is subjected comes from the other or the eternal Other (Meulink-Korf, 2016: 94).

As a structural model of the humane aspect of human beings, Levinas pointed out that Man is a being that is opened 'from the outside', or perhaps 'left open' to see who regards him. This is a description of compassion and solidarity with the other: the meaning of the Latin word *miser cordia* implies that someone else's misery is irrevocably your concern. Forsaking this compassion and solidarity towards the other makes one guilty (ibid, 99). There is extra value of the other with respect to the one, added value that the other has for you 'as other'. The other has importance and the implication is that 'you' are never even, but always a debtor. As Levinas talks about the face of the other, Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn states, that "from (the face of) the other there is a commandment without power, but with infinite authority. The text of this command is at the same time supplication: 'make it possible for me to live' (ibid). Thus, when it comes to the appeal of the other on you, as a human being you find yourself in "the wondrous situation that the one (you) can become a harbour for the other who does not have a place to go." Thus, as Levinas understands subjectivity within the

dynamics of relationships and ethics, you as fellow human being are always in a position to be 'able' to 'respond' to the other in his/her vulnerability (*respond-ability*).

Your responsibility towards the other person precedes your personal freedom. It is not a responsibility for yourself, but a responsibility to and for the other. It is not a choice, but an existential givenness (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:180).

In an interview with Richard Cohen (first published in 2006), Levinas states that if you are exposed to the vulnerability of the face of the other, ethics requires that the other's right to exist has primacy over your own. It entails that you subordinate your existence to the other's. Levinas quotes a Jewish proverb, which states, "the other's material needs are my spiritual needs;" he then elaborates further on it: "it is this disproportion, or asymmetry, that characterizes the ethical refusal of the first truth of ontology – the struggle to be (*conatus essendi*). Ethics is, therefore, against nature because it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first." (Cohen, 2019).

This focus of Levinas about this 'other centeredness' reminds one of what is stated in Ezekiel 3:20: "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (NIV, 1985). This text articulates responsibility shaped by a code of conduct that makes one accountable for the other. Responsibility implies accountability, thus, the introduction of the notions of righteousness and justice. It is about a just claim for care that the appeal of the other has on the one who has been called upon.

4.12 Constructive and destructive entitlement

4.12.1 Constructive Entitlement

When Nagy introduced the term 'entitlement' to psychotherapeutic terminology, he referred to both a 'justified claim' and the merit that a person acquires by taking care of others. However, not all entitlement is earned, for instance, a child is born with a justified right to receive from and give to his/her parents, e.g., from the very first smile a baby gives to his/her parents, he/she starts earning the right to receive (entitlement) (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016:20). At the early stage where a child gives to a parent in his/her innocence, he/she earns 'constructive entitlement'. Such giving of a child should be acknowledged, otherwise a

‘destructive entitlement’ could result from this ignorance. When the giving of a person is acknowledged, it is an indication of his/her loyalty, and this recognition is a response of ‘giving’. The acknowledger invests in the ‘self-esteem and future self-confidence’ of the giver. This is an example of what Nagy calls “a constructively entitled claim that grants inner freedom and security” (van Doorn, 2020:133). When you give to another, your entitlement increases and so does the debt of the other. Yet, the accumulation of debt is not a negative factor, it is the new source for the giving and earning of entitlement.

Giving has many implications in life; it can be seen as a *right*: the right to give. Equity or fairness pertains to the symmetrical or asymmetrical aspect of relationships. All relations are asymmetrical, but it predominates between parent and child. Parents cannot receive as much as they give. It is through caring for the child and offering trust and reliability that they earn self-validation, independent of the child’s actions. Hence, constructive or earned entitlement means a certain ability or responsible freedom to enjoy life and engage with others, without being captured by guilt about unpaid indebtedness (Meulink-Korf & Noorlander, 2012).

4.12.2 Destructive entitlement

When a child is denied this basic entitlement to receive or give de facto, when there is no or insufficient caring, when the impact of the world is unjust towards the child, then his/her entitlement grows but develops into ‘overentitlement’, i.e., a destructive character (ibid). The child’s right to have reliable and trustful relations is injured; subsequently, the child has a right to reparation that is not acknowledged, and this entails being the victim to claim reparation and equity in another context that is not connected to the original deficit.

Some people have accrued so much ‘destructive entitlement’ that they become blind to the impact of their actions on others. Overentitled children or adults can act as victimisers of new injustices. Their own pain makes them unable to see the pain of the other, even the pain and injustice that they themselves inflict on others. Their own experiences of injustice and injury make them almost unable to feel the primary calling into responsibility and to recognize the admittance to their own possible resources. An individual may feel no guilt or remorse, yet still act unjustly. However, earning this destructive entitlement does not inevitably involve destructive patterns and the previous experience of trust and fairness can diminish the impact of destructive entitlement.

4.13 A revolving slate

In this phenomenon, victims are unjustifiably blamed for problems in society or in relationships for which they are not accountable. It involves a process of displacement of aggression once termed ‘a revolving slate’ (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973:65-67). With this term, Nagy articulates a process in which a person unjustly lays blame on another in order to protect his parents and tends to be immune to feelings of guilt towards the innocent victim of these dynamics. This revolving slate only tends to stop (temporarily) with the most vulnerable persons, often the youngsters. After all, their capacity for actively taking it out on others, or taking revenge, is very limited. This limitation is only temporary because the transmission of unfairness can continue later. In many ways, victims become victimisers (Meulink-Korf & Noorlander, 2012). A revolving slate is the result of the fact that a person with an unpaid debt transfers his/her guilt and hurt to another relation, and in doing so, creates a new victim. It entails a transmission of injustice (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:432).

Van Doorn asks the following questions when describing the revolving slate:

“What is going to happen when legacies cannot be purified or restored, when deficit, damage, and guilt cannot be rectified or stopped and become unintentionally being transferred from one generation to another?” (van Doorn, 2020:251). Without thinking long and hard about such questions, one would impulsively answer that we are doomed to a cul-de-sac if that happens. Alternatively, one would quickly respond in a pietistic way ‘that God knows of better and we trust Him to work things out for the better.’

We can however acknowledge what Nagy calls a revolving slate. With this concept, Nagy refers to the fact that a new victim is established because a person with an unpaid debt transfers the guilt and hurt to another relation, other than the one where the debt has been caused. Thus, the children, as innocent third parties, inherit an account of something that was unsettled between the parents and their ancestors (ibid). If the child or other family member decides to own this credit account in order to settle it, a destructive entitlement can follow in which the ‘innocent third party’ feels entitled to claim the deficit from another innocent third party. This constitutes a revolving slate.

4.14 Guilt and guilt feelings

Buber's essay *Guilt and guilt feelings* (1957), describes three categories of guilt that manifest in the universe of human relations, namely guilt, guilt feelings, and existential guilt. *Guilt*, a phenomenon engendered in the structure of a given society, is defined as a state of painful awareness, on the part of such a society, of the wrong deeds' men do to one another within its confines. '*Guilt feelings*' are defined as the state of anguish and anxiety issued from the awareness of the conflict within us, between the right that we know and the wrong that we do to one another, coupled with a fear of the moral and other consequences accruing from it. '*Existential guilt*' occurs when an individual undermines the order of the world of which he/she is part, and upon which the well-being and security of the whole of society depend. Such an individual, faced with the irreversibility of time and the fact that he cannot undo what he has done, becomes aware of that inescapable other self that stands over him, i.e., time. He only has his lifetime in which to correct the wrong he has done to the human order of things. *Existential Guilt* from one person to another damages the confidence of the victimised other person as well as the trustworthiness of the world they have in common. The person doing the damage is also the one who should repair the damage done to human society. It requires actual guilt awareness confronting the deceiver, and where possible and acceptable, a contribution to the damaged person in both tangible and intangible ways. It also requires an active commitment to society by repairing the human order. A person can be guilty and know it; that is part of being human. The counsellor/therapist should not reduce this to guilt images or guilt feelings. Guilt is not a feeling in someone, but 'a reality in which the guilty person stands'. Something needs to be done because guilt means being in debt. Thus, guilt always refers to the 'past that is unchangeable', but more so, to the future that lends itself to opportunities for repairing the damage. This does not necessarily imply a personal common future between the guilty person and the victim (Meulink-Korf, 2007:11).

Buber denotes a 'resolution' to deal with guilt, which involves three essential movements of the mind: (i) confession of sin, (ii) repentance, and (iii) penance. The one without the other cannot be fully valid or meaningful, yet the presence of all three may not suffice to do atonement, if one or the other, and especially atonement, comes too late (S.A. Medical Journal, 1972:1491).

After the Second World War, Buber was confronted with the question of guilt since he was saved because he fled before *Kristallnacht*⁷, but his family and friends died in the war. Although loyal to his Jewish people, he had to deal with survival guilt. Guilt was only seen in terms of psychology and according to Freud, it meant the trespassing of society's rules without taking any relations into consideration.

It is possible to feel guilty even though you are not the perpetrator. This is often the case with victims and sexually abused persons who feel they are guilty or that it is their fault because either the perpetrator told them so or they unfairly took the responsibility of the 'despicable' deed for themselves. On the other hand, you can really be guilty (existential guilt), but you do not feel guilty, because you do not take responsibility for your actions (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2016: 100). Real guilt is existential and hurts another, i.e., it is not just about the trespassing of society's rules, but there are consequences of your actions which involve hurting other humans and even society as a whole, like Adam's sin did.

We live *coram Deo*, and the result thereof is that he/she who perpetrates also becomes guilty before God. The concepts of guilt, guilt feelings, and existential guilt are important phenomena that are addressed in contextual therapy. It is indeed relevant to deal with it in the discipline of the church. It is a reality in humanity that we are all sinners as Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV). A member who falls into sin remains part of the congregation and his/her fall affects the congregation as such. Such a person is also guilty before God who has been dishonoured by the sin. Certainly, this reality needs to be addressed through the proper practice of church discipline.

In the process of practising discipline, the pastoral caregiver or disciplinary committee must not ignore or minimize the existential guilt that is present. The sinner must be guided to deal

⁷ Kristallnacht, (German: "Crystal Night"), also called "Night of Broken Glass" or "November Pogroms", was the night of November 9–10, 1938, when German Nazis attacked Jewish persons and property. The name Kristallnacht ironically refers to the litter of broken glass left in the streets after these pogroms. The violence continued during the day of November 10, and in some places, acts of violence continued for several more days. A Pogroms refers to a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national minority

with his/her guilt. The sinner needs to acknowledge his/her sin and the consequential hurt that was done to the other person/s, congregation, and God.

He/she should acknowledge this guilt and take responsibility for his/her trespasses. The sinner/trespasser can only come to true remorse about the pain caused by his/her behaviour if the three 'steps' proposed by Buber is implemented, i.e., confession, repentance, and penance. Furthermore, guilt is construed by Buber as the outcome of remorse for a painful awareness of a lost and irrecoverable opportunity for establishing right human relations, and of the irreversibility of time. The truth of the following quote would be timely in such an instance:

"I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again" (Attributed to Stephen Grellet, an American Quaker of French birth, 1773 - 1851). If this opportunity for a real meeting is missed, as Buber said, it is possible that the person can subsequently live with real, unattended feelings of guilt.

4.15 Forgiveness and exoneration as responses to guilt

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Nagy refrained from using the term 'forgiveness' and instead preferred the term 'exoneration'. For Nagy and Krasner, 'exoneration' is a major moment in therapy and is "a process of lifting the load of culpability off the shoulders of a given person whom heretofore we may have blamed". Exoneration differs from forgiveness in that "it replaces a framework of blame with mature appreciation of a given person's (or situation's) past options, efforts and limits" (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:416). Exoneration is a judicial term and with it, Nagy deliberately made a choice for a judicial hermeneutic. In this regard, it entails the notions of reasonableness and fairness, and although it points in the direction of exemption, it is not limitless (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:297).

When shame, blame, ambivalence, rage, grief, and guilt are intense within the family context, the process takes a long time, but the possibility of receiving through giving is a source for exoneration. Multi-directed partiality is very useful in supporting this process. According to Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn (ibid), exoneration can indeed be connected to healing and human well-being. According to van Doorn (2020:287), Nagy opts for exoneration because he was concerned that forgiveness could easily be misunderstood as a kind of cheap generosity.

Exoneration, however, is a judicial term that is linked to the ledger of merit and indebtedness. With exoneration, fairness and loyalty are important in order for a total transformation of the violated relationship. However, exoneration gives an indication that forgiveness and dealing with guilt have no instant, general, and obvious answers because injustices affect each person differently (ibid.). Nevertheless, exoneration points to the fact that although forgiveness is a process, it is possible that the perpetrator and the victim do not need to carry the burden of guilt eternally and into future generations. Exoneration offers a clear indication that a new beginning and healing in the disturbed intersubjective relationship is possible. A new guilt-free relationship can begin between perpetrator and victim where both can be underway in a mutual search for justice. The words of the apostle John are applicable in this regard concerning exoneration, especially for church discipline: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV, 1985). Here, the text refers to the fact that God will respond, true to his nature and in accordance with his gracious commitment to his people, to the sins of those who confess truthfully. The promise is that God will provide the forgiveness that will restore the communion with Him that was interrupted by sin, which his people requested in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:12 (ibid.).

4.16 Justice

Contextual theory assumes that people not only need each other but also have an innate tendency to care for each other (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner, 1986: 78). In contextual theory, it is about reciprocal care and responsibility in a concrete, practical way. The intention with reciprocity is to pay or give back in equal value to the other who extends care to you. This is however not always possible in relationships because relationships differ, e.g., the child cannot give back to the parent in the same measure as he/she receives. Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn refer to this as “reciprocity based on inequality” (2016:70). Partners in a symmetrical relationship can offer care for each other in fairly equal terms.

Though equal reciprocity is not always possible, for Nagy, relational ethics entail justice in relationships (van Doorn, 2020:121). In contextual therapy, it is about fairness in relationships; a balance of fair giving and receiving (of care) should be promoted. One can also refer to it as relational justice. “Contextual therapy regards justice as an ongoing challenge to existing balances of fairness” (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:417). Referring to justice,

Nagy means that righteousness is at stake. Justice is always rooted in trust and connected with truth (van Doorn, (2020:315).

4.16.1 Distributive justice

Nagy and Krasner distinguish between 'distributive' and 'retributive' justice (ibid., 1986:417). They state that retributive justice concerns related persons. Distributive justice has to do with the happenstances of life, e.g., a sickness that befalls you for which you did not ask. Van Doorn confirms Nagy & Krasner's view about distributive justice, i.e., the kind of justice that is needed in situations where another person did not directly cause the damage and consequently the injustice (ibid,2020:315). Examples of these are natural disasters, pandemics, sickness, and war. Moreover, distributive justice is concerned with the way power is executed and who is responsible for the distribution thereof. In this case, when unfairly distributed, it is sometimes difficult to discern precisely who is responsible for this 'distributive injustice'.

4.16.2 Retributive justice

For van Doorn (ibid., 317), retributive justice relates to the actions or injustice of a person/s considered to be the culprit. In such cases, it holds the notion of a just claim for fair compensation for the victim of such injustice. The legal processes of society would normally be utilized as there is evidence of guilt and a guilty party, hence a fair punishment and sentence can be given. Distributive injustice takes place in cases where too much is expected from a child in caring for the parents, and the latter cannot guarantee fair compensation or provide for the child due to illness or other circumstances. If this is not properly acknowledged and addressed, it can lead to a revolving slate in the form of retributive justice for the next generations.

Contextual pastoral therapy views life as living together with others *coram Deo*, and the truth of this is expressed by the biblical insistence on just relationships with your neighbour. From the beginning of humanity, it was expected from God's people to live in trustworthy, just relationships with other humans (Mic. 6:8). The detailed description of 'how' God's people must live with others here on earth (e.g., care for widows and orphans, prescriptions for the jubilee), reminds us of this. When it concerns the congregant in the disciplinary process of the church, the church as visible representative of that which God stands for, must do everything

in its power to guarantee fairness and justice to the disciplined congregant. The impact of this experience of justice on his/her walk with God should not be underestimated.

4.17 Dialogue - a means to achieve justice in the human order of being

4.17.1 Martin Buber's view on dialogue

For Buber, the relational reality of a human being is about encounters. People in their uniqueness meet each other; Buber calls this the life of dialogue. For Buber, it involves a movement or the action where a person turns towards the other in his/her particularity, not necessarily in a physical sense, but more in a spiritual one. Dialogue is normally seen as a conversation where two people talk to each other with words. Here, it is understood that whether spoken or silent, each participant has the other/s in mind in their present and particular being, and they turn towards each other with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between them. In this regard, Meulink-Korf (2007) states that “a real relationship is not about fusion, but about an encounter” in which both persons remain themselves as individuals.

Friedman agrees with Meulink-Korf's view that according to Buber, as humans we share the life of dialogue as the 'primary human reality'. Thus, to be a human being means to be in dialogue. To view the individual outside of this reality is like trying to draw a map of the world with only the North and South poles as references (Friedman, 2002:10). When entering into an encounter with the other with the hope that something meaningful should happen, both persons are called upon to be so open-minded in order to respond to this unique and defining moment and circumstance in which they find themselves.

The account of human creation indicates the notion of 'meeting'. After God brought the entire animal kingdom to meet Adam, He saw that no real dialogue took place in the sense that Man could not find a fellow being amongst them with whom he could be in relation. Hence, God brought the first two human beings together to meet each other in their uniqueness as male and female, as person to person with the whole of their being. Adam declared that Eve shall be called 'woman' because she was made out of 'man' (Gen. 2:23). She was a human being like him, and he could enter into a relationship with her. As a result, a real 'human encounter' occurred, or put differently, the narrative of humanity started with a meeting between two humans.

What is essential in a relationship where people meet each other is what happens *between* them. When entering into an encounter with the other, you are required to go into such a dialogue with the whole of your being – physically and psychically, in other words, *wholeheartedly*. Real dialogue is only realized when whole human beings meet in their individual uniqueness directly. “I meet you from my ground and you meet me from yours, and our lives interpenetrate as person meeting person in the life of dialogue. Our very sense of ourselves comes only in our meeting with others as they confirm us in the life of dialogue” (ibid, 2002: 11).

Van Doorn states that Buber regards meeting as real living because a new time for significant living is created through the meeting (van Doorn, 2020:43). In the meeting or encounter, one eventually finds much more than just two individuals, but in fact, the reality of the immanency of God is here (ibid). Furthermore, dialogue is about ‘confirmation’ as explained by Buber (Friedman, 2002:4). This refers to the fact that (i) every person has the wish to be confirmed for who he/she is by the other and (ii) the other has the capacity in him/her to confirm his/her fellow human in this way.

Therefore, mutual confirmation of men is most fully realized in what Buber calls ‘making present,’ referring to when and wherever persons come together. Making the other present means to ‘imagine’ the real, to imagine quite concretely what another person is wishing, feeling, perceiving, and thinking. This mutual confirmation is best illustrated by speech. Genuine conversation, like every genuine fulfilment of relation between men, means acceptance of otherness. This means that although one may even have the ‘good desire’ to influence the other for the ‘better’ and lead him/her to share in one’s relation to truth, one accepts and confirms that he/she is this particular man made in this particular way. One wishes him/her to have a different relation to one’s own truth in accordance with his/her individuality, and thus stays true to him/herself (ibid).

4.17.2 Dialogical view of Nagy & Krasner

The dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber played a fundamental role in Boszormenyi-Nagy’s relational model for contextual therapy. According to Meulink-Korf and van Rhijn, Buber’s paradigm of thinking about the dynamics of the dialogical, human encounter serves as a theoretical framework for Nagy’s theory formation regarding the relational dynamics of contextuality (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:145). In his contextual therapy, Nagy regards

intergenerational relationships as dialogic in nature. According to Nagy and Krasner (1986:73), there are three aspects of genuine dialogue that can assist the pastoral caregiver in therapeutic interventions between family members or in relationships of people: (i) polarisation between selves, (ii) symmetry versus asymmetry, and (iii) inclusive multilaterality. ‘Trustworthiness’ is the foundation of a genuine dialogue which Nagy regards as the glue of viable relationships (ibid.,75).

Firstly, polarisation as an aspect of dialogue entails two major options for genuine dialogue: ‘self-delineation’ and ‘self-validation’. Success in therapy ultimately depends on evoking a genuine dialogue between a person and those who are in close relationships with him/her. The first option is self-delineation: ‘the self uses other relationships to define itself’. The formation of boundaries between the self and others is an aspect of this. The second option is self-validation: ‘the validation of the self through entitlement earned by offering due care to others’. When a person offers care to another person, he or she earns liberty, security, and merit in the relationship, whatever the response of the other may be. Self-validation is a reciprocal process that can be depicted as a ‘spiral of merits’. Each partner can earn self-validation. Another formulation of this dialogical outcome is constructive entitlement.

In contextual therapy, individuation is a dialectic, relational process. In other words, the self evolves through relations with others who are also developing and evolving. It is about two subjects (selves) promoting each other without neglecting their own unique individuation. For Nagy, the emphasis is on “familial reciprocity between subject-selves, balanced by justice and fairness” (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:146).

The second aspect of dialogue entails symmetrical and asymmetrical liabilities in relationships (Nagy & Krasner, 1986:81). Respecting symmetry and asymmetry is indeed an important resource to dialogue. The question here has to do with the justifiability of what people owe each other. It addresses the issue of one person’s inherent limits in accepting liability for another person’s justifiable expectations (ibid.) In symmetrical relationships, i.e., between equal partners such as spouses, the relations are intrinsically reciprocal. Here, partners of equal strength who give of themselves are entitled to a return of approximately equal measure. Intergenerational relations on the other hand, are fundamentally asymmetrical. In asymmetrical relationships, the giving and receiving cannot be of equal measure between parents and children, for example (ibid., 82).

The third aspect of dialogue between generations of people is inclusive fair multilaterality (ibid., 88). This aspect indicates the degree of trustworthiness in the relationship by showing the extent of actualized, responsibly caring reciprocity. By using the term ‘inclusive’, the authors emphasize the importance of considering the justifications and liabilities of all the parties involved in an ongoing process within the familial relationships.

With the inclusion of all family members, even those who are absent, have passed on, or who are seemingly irrelevant, the pastoral caregiver creates the dialogical space for people to benefit from facing their responsibilities. Multi-directed partiality as the main methodological principle of DIPP is built on the mutual healing power of responsibility in which every member’s balance, fairness, and give-and-take needs to be considered. Based on the view that genuine dialogue is an ongoing process of give-and-take between parties, it is an important means to reach equality and justice in family and other relationships.

For van Doorn, dialogue is a unique event between human beings in which something new happens. As indicated above, it is based on mutual trust. Van Doorn states that this “trust comes into being when people are willing to take responsibility for one another and to be available for the well-being of the other” (2020:20). Genuine dialogue happens when you allow the encounter to take you ‘underway’ and open yourself up for the surprise and unpredictability of the encounter. The outcome of a dialogue ‘is never the same as the starting point’. In fact, your perceptions and images of the other person/s change during and after an authentic dialogue, and it affects one’s self-image and self-understanding. The specific relationship should eventually become stronger after such dialogue.

4.18 Multi-directed partiality – a strategy for authentic dialogue

As previously, mentioned, multi-directed partiality is the major methodological attitude of contextual therapists, aimed at evoking a dialogue of mutual position taken among family members. It consists of a sequential, empathic turning towards member after member (including absent members), in which both acknowledgement and expectation are directed at them. The attitude of multi-directed partiality (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1966) is essential to working for justice in families and systems. Two main aspects of this approach are ‘empathy’ and ‘acknowledgement’. It is an alternative to ‘neutrality’ or unilateral partiality. Multi-directed partiality requires of the pastoral caregiver to appreciate the ledger from each person’s point of view, even that of the current victimiser. Although the pastoral caregiver

cannot credit the perpetrator for his current actions of wrongdoing, acknowledgment can be given to the guilty party for “his/her suffering from hurt or forms of being victimised during his/her youth” (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019: 431). The assumption is that the therapist is personally responsible and accountable for the impact of therapeutic interventions and implications for every person involved, even the ‘invisible other’ not directly involved.

The application of multi-directed partiality cannot be reduced to specific techniques. For each pastoral caregiver, this application is influenced by gender, age, experience, family of origin, etc. In this framework, it is possible to develop imagination and creativity and, as Buber says, the gift of ‘imagining the real’. From the start of therapy, the pastoral caregiver leads the dialogue in order to provide the family members with opportunities of earning constructive entitlement. As soon as a family member requires the pastoral caregiver’s acknowledgement, he/she can engage in the realm of care and self-validation.

Within a pastoral care intervention in church discipline, multi-directed partiality can be utilized with great benefits for both congregant and congregation. Church councils, disciplinary committees, or pastors should involve the ‘invisible other’ in the dialogue between them and the disciplined congregant. In the case of extra-marital pregnancy, where only one of the parents is present, a voice needs to be given to the absent parent, the unborn child, and even the parents of the unmarried congregant in the pastoral encounter. In this way, justice can be done for all parties involved.

4.19 Renewed hope as the ultimate outcome of pastoral caregiving

4.19.1 Hope in DIPP

In the researcher’s view, pastoral care should eventually guide the person in need to receive the gift of hope or renewed hope to continue living as a responsible human being in his/her important relationships. Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn (2019:272) refer to motivational layers of hope in which they quote Nagy by saying the following:

“Nagy wrote... ‘that it is more important to explore the motivational layer in which hope resides for repairing the human hurt justice’” (Nagy & Spark, 1973:53). The following is at stake in Nagy’s approach: He specifically works with the perspective of motivational layers, which is a focal point in order to be engaged in repairing. Probing into the realm of motivational layers is essentially about instilling hope. Hope is focused on the healing

(reparation) of the disturbed 'human justice' (Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn, 2019:272). Thus, according to the aforementioned authors, many motivational layers influence human behaviour. Hope is continuously operating amidst these. Hope has a unique quality, and unlike Buber's view in *Hope for this Hour*, it does not stem from needs. Meulink-Korf & van Rhijn define hope as follows, "*It is about an inspiration that renews the zest for life; it bypasses resignation and rancorous behaviour*" (i.e., bitterness) (ibid.).

Nagy does not refer to the category of hope in his conceptual framework and clinical guidelines. Unlike the hope in Christianity, it operates on a different level in therapy. In therapy, it entails a hope that supports the courage of taking risk in which success is not guaranteed. For Nagy, hope is anchored in the presence of the frail other and the caregiver attends to the complaints about the injustices done to him/her. Hope is then that he/she hopes for recovery from the injustice done to him/her (ibid.).

Martin Buber's *Hope for this Hour* concludes, not with a hopeful note, but with a challenge. Citizens need to push back against the forces of polarisation. The flames of resentment and mistrust are fanned by politicians and journalists who stand to gain from a divided society, but these tactics only work as long as ordinary people allow them to. As Buber states, "The hope for this hour depends upon the hoppers themselves, upon ourselves", those who amidst the immediate crisis can say: 'I will live' (Buber, 1952:228). Buber's argument is that when we ask about hope amidst the most difficult situation/context we find ourselves in, we actually have that vision for a better hour and as such, existential hope. When we find the common source of our suffering, only then can we receive the "true hope of healing" (ibid., 220). Genuine, direct, frank dialogue between men of different kinds and convictions has become increasingly difficult since World War 1. The abyss between people threatens to become unbridgeable. However, it was Buber's conviction that the future of mankind "depends upon a rebirth of dialogue" (ibid., 222). The problem underlying the lack of communication is the 'universal mistrust' between people globally. It has in fact become existential according to Buber. He believes that despite this 'progressive decline' in dialogue and the 'growth of universal mistrust', mankind still has the need to be confirmed by others (ibid, 225). For Buber, the hope relies on 'the renewal of dialogical immediacy between men'. Nevertheless, the immediate crisis associated with the greater picture of humanity's way must be seen. As such, one needs to see how man also mistrusted the source of his existence, i.e., the eternal

‘Thou’. Therefore, if man can reconcile with man, it should be the logical consequence that reconciliation between man and his Maker can realise. And one can place one’s hope in that possibility.

4.19.2 Hope in the Christian tradition

The researcher deems it essential to refer to other views concerning hope as an important gift in the daily reality of human relational living. Pastoral care and counselling aim to assist by guiding people in their time of crises, and in doing so, help them to imagine a new reality of health and wholeness. Simply stated, hope has the element of ‘looking into the future with a positive attitude’ amidst the depressing realities of life. Without a vision of a future that will be better than the present experiences, a person will not be transformed into a whole being again. The poet of Proverbs rightly states in Chapter 29:18a, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (KJV). Thus, by allowing the gift of hope to be a guiding principle for the pastoral encounter as well as including it in the therapeutical intervention should indeed make a difference in the well-being of the disciplined congregant.

For van Rhijn & Meulink-Korf, hope is not an illusionary concept, but it entails a concrete view of a positive reality. It “is not a dream or an abstraction that creates false expectations” (van Doorn, 2020:319). This hope is about a renewal of lived time in the present realities of life, and it is an anticipation of the future outstanding time that the balance of giving and receiving can realize. Only through real dialogue between different parties in the family and other relations, this concrete hope can be realized.

4.19.2.1 Jurgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope*

For Jurgen Moltmann, hope is concerned with Christians’ actions amidst the real challenges of the moment, e.g., endangered life, the threatened earth, and the lack of justice and righteousness. Amidst these threats, Christians have the opportunity to focus on what has to be done today and tomorrow with the courage of hope (Appiah-Kubi & Karikari, 2020:167).

In response to the question of Immanuel Kant, “What can I hope for?” Moltmann answers in his *Ethics of Hope*, that the hope for the future without hope in God’s future and the ethical responsiveness to God’s expectation of the future has no foundational basis. In other words, God through Christ establishes the human consciousness of eschatological life realism. The real experience is that the suffering and death of Christ represent the current suffering and pains of humanity, and the resurrection is a pointer to a life that has hope for moving forward.

For Moltmann, in reflecting on the experience of the risen Christ in the transformed life of the people, Christian ethics of hope is called to life and therefore expects the dawn of the new world of God in the passing of the old world. Moltmann grounds his social ethics on the Christian hope which, according to him, is founded on Christ's resurrection and opens up a life in the light of God's new world. Christian ethics anticipate the universal coming of God in the potentialities of history.

In the Ghanaian context, the future is in 'the hands' of God. A popular saying in this context is the following: "if you cultivate your farm and God does not look into it, there will be no meaningful results or harvests". The belief that God lets rainfall on one's farm for it to be fruitful is imbedded in the ethical consciousness towards God and one's desire for the future (Appiah-Kubi & Karikari, 2020:167).

Christian hope has its roots in the God of Israel, as we find it in the Old Testament. The God of the people of Israel revealed himself to them in the form of promises. God made promises to Abraham and his descendants, journeyed with them, and fulfilled it in the fullness of time He determined. Turning to the New Testament, we find that the core of both Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* and Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus provides a universal message of hope that extends beyond the chosen people to all humankind. With the resurrection, the promises of the God of Israel are not simply fulfilled; they are reborn and offered anew to all. For Moltmann then, the resurrection of Christ *is* the essence of hope. The resurrection of Jesus is a promise about the new order of the kingdom of God, which has been fulfilled, but its completion is still in the future. Moltmann states, "In the gospel the Old Testament history of promise finds more than a fulfilment which does away with it; it finds its future." For Moltmann, eschatology is also about future but, more importantly, it is about the present as well. Christ's death and resurrection did more than just introduce a new future: it introduced *a new present* (Moltmann, 1967:147).

The key to the universal message of hope is the common bond forged between Jesus and all humanity – the bond of suffering. Jesus has identified himself with all humanity through his suffering and, since this is the same Jesus who was resurrected, this means that the hope associated with the resurrection applies to all humanity. Just as Christ's suffering is universal, Christ's hope is universal. God's promise of hope for the chosen people has been extended to

the horizons of all humanity through the suffering and death of His son, Jesus Christ. God's hope is now universal.

In his 1984 encyclical on suffering, *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope John Paul II states that the Bible is a "great book about suffering." According to the Bible, suffering has been part of human life since the earliest days, since the fall of Adam and Eve. Because of their disobedience, God declared that Adam and Eve would suffer physically: women would experience "pain" in childbirth and men would have to "toil" and "sweat" for food (Gen 3:16-18). God also expelled them from the Garden of Eden, causing them to suffer mentally and spiritually because of the separation from their homeland and from God.

However, Jesus' suffering also has meaning in that it teaches us about suffering. It teaches us that suffering is part of being human and that all humans suffer, even the just. Suffering is not punishment. Jesus' suffering and death also removes the barrier that has existed between humanity and God since the Fall. This paves the way for complete reunion with God in His kingdom. And on that future, we can hope (McIntyre, 2010:26).

4.20 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher introduced DIPP as a possible approach for the enrichment of the practice of church discipline in URCSA. It was established that the approach is indeed appropriate for a pastoral care and counselling intervention in general, but particularly for church discipline as well. The DIPP approach confirms the biblical understanding of a human being as a relational being in its view that human life is about interrelated living. The four dimensions of a person's relational reality is an acknowledgement of the fact that those congregants reporting for church discipline, are real humans with a history of facticity, psychological emotions, they form part of the society of daily interactions, and they are essentially ethical beings connected to families of origin. These families of origin are also confirmed in that they consist of different generations, and the congregant lives within these relationships as children, grandchildren, mothers, fathers, grandparents. The DIPP approach confirmed how these different generations affects each other's lives, hence the need to consider what is right and wrong for the sake of posterity or the esteem of previous generations. Your legacy in terms of DIPP confirms anew that you are not alone in this world and cannot do what pleases you. It calls on you to discern what is good to pass on to the

current and next generations, and in doing so, you have an impact on the future of your family, even if you have already passed on.

Where the church is aware that loyalty to a person's family of origin plays a role in the lives of congregants in the congregation, and the fact that these loyalties sometimes make real transformation difficult, it should however be a helpful insight to caregivers to reckon with these loyalties and adapt caregiving accordingly. In fact, the church should embrace the loyalty of persons to their family of origin as a basis for establishing loyalty towards the kingdom of God.

It was confirmed in this chapter that human life is about taking responsibility for your fellow human beings. People are accountable for the well-being of others. As the Bible indicates that people are indebted to each other with regards to love and care for their neighbour, so DIPP confirms that people are indebted to each other for being cared for. Nevertheless, they are also entitled to be cared for due to caring for others. Depending on whether people's giving or care are being acknowledged, the result can either be constructive or destructive entitlement.

Human living is not perfect; sometimes people will hurt each other. They can treat each other unjustly, trespass against each other unconsciously, or even deliberately disturb life in society. It is often part of a revolving slate that takes the form of attitudes and behaviour, which were passed on from one generation to another. In other instances, it is simply due to evil amongst people. Consequently, people become guilty and ultimately stuck with unfounded guilt feelings.

The need is thus for people to deal with their guilt and be transformed. Therefore, people need to forgive one another by dealing with the truth and see to it that justice be done. This however requires more than just forgiving; people must eventually come to a point of exonerating family members or perpetrators, in other words, the willingness to lift the load of culpability from the perpetrator.

Buber denotes that real living is about meeting. Additionally, it is confirmed by DIPP that to be a human being is to be in dialogue with others. It is important to be sensitive to encountering others, that you wholeheartedly put yourself in such a dialogue/meeting so that something worthwhile can come from it. Pastoral caregivers should always use the strategy

of multi-directed partiality for justice to be done to every significant partner in a relationship. Despite the most challenging situations in a relationship and life in general, pastoral caregivers must remember that there are always motivational layers of hope present in people. Therefore, they should keep this in mind and inspire their congregants anew with a vision that life can be better than the current situation.

In the following chapter, the fourth task of Osmer, i.e., the pragmati task, will be addressed. The question that needs to be answered is, *how may we respond to the specific challenge of our 'outdated system' of church discipline?*

CHAPTER 5: A Pastoral care approach for church discipline based on DIPP

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis is to propose an improved approach to the practice of church discipline in URCSA. The origin, purpose, and current state of church discipline were explored, and it was confirmed in Chapter 2 that it remains essential in our day and age. Relevant biblical texts and their applicability concerning the admonishes and discipline of God's people were reflected in Chapter 3. In addition to this, connections were drawn with some concepts of DIPP where applicable. The concepts of DIPP and along with it, the core articles of the Confession of Belhar were outlined and reflected upon in Chapter 4. It was established that both sources could indeed enrich the functioning of church discipline in URCSA.

This chapter aims to present the researcher's conviction that (i) church discipline belongs to the field of pastoral care and counselling; (ii) by aligning some of the core concepts of DIPP with the vision and mission of a specific ministry in URCSA, church discipline can become more effective and functional; (iii) a new approach to the practice of church discipline is needed. The concepts of DIPP (inclusive of Contextual Therapy) will be utilized to compile a pastoral care intervention for church discipline in URCSA. This will be done by integrating the concepts of DIPP and the articles of the Confession of Belhar into the current framework of the church disciplinary process of URCSA. In addition, pastoral care centred on ecclesial discipline will also be addressed.

The practical theological framework of Osmer, specifically his fourth task, the pragmatic task, will be attended to. The question – *"How may we respond?"* – will be addressed in an attempt to enrich the functioning of church discipline. After this, attention will be given to the appropriate field of the congregation's ministry from where church discipline needs to function. Thereafter, this chapter will propose a pastoral care approach to enrich the existing church disciplinary process. Finally, this chapter will propose a possible way of introducing the pastoral care approach to church discipline in URCSA.

The researcher will utilize the evaluation research method (see chapter 1, subsection 1.5) in this chapter to address the aforementioned aims.

5.2 Should church discipline be functioning under the jurisdiction of another ministry?

The researcher believes that church discipline for ‘ordinary’ congregational members currently functions from a misplaced field of the ministry of the local congregation. The Support Ministry for Oversight is currently responsible for practising church discipline. It operates as an official juridical function of the church where members are cross-examined by church council members and a suitable ‘period’ of church discipline is administered to them which they experience as a sentence.

The fact that church discipline functions as a support ministry as if it is a ‘supplementary activity’ leads to a good question to ponder about: *“Does this skewed view contribute to congregants’ perception that church discipline is just a ‘side’ activity of the church and not as important as the ‘core’ ministries?”* In many instances, congregants do not regard discipline as a core function of the congregational life, because the church is for them about evangelism, liturgy, diaconate, and finance.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the words used in the New Testament in respect of discipline all have a reference to educate and instruct, e.g., *paideuw (paideuo)* “discipline”; *paideia (paideia)* “to educate, to learn, discipline”. It refers to the child’s home education. It is clear from the aforementioned that church discipline includes the notion of education or instruction in the household of God. Considering the aims of the ecclesial discipline (Chapter 1, subsection 3), it would be more appropriate to place the discipline of congregants under the jurisdiction of the Core Ministry for Congregational Ministries (abbreviated CM).

5.2.1 What does this Core Ministry for Congregational Ministries (CM) entails?

Definition and vision of the core ministry for congregational ministries.

In Regulation 9, the church order describes the different ministries under the Integrated Ministries Model (hereafter referred to as IM) (URCSA, 2018:170). The congregation lives as the family of God, as *koinonia*, bound to one another, mutually sharing joy and sorrow, each considering the other higher than him- or herself, accepting responsibility for one another’s spiritual and physical needs in mutual care for one another, in mutual sharing of one another’s burdens. The instruction for baptised members and confessing members will be conducted

from the Word of God and the teaching (doctrine) of the church, in addition to the instruction through the Word of God in the worship service.

The Congregational Ministries' (hereafter referred to as CM) target groups are all those organisations and activities in the church that are connected to the family as such, i.e., the ministries of children and youth, men and women. The focus in IM is that CM must "equip the saints for their work of ministry" as Paul states in Ephesians 4:12.

Ephesians 4:11-13:

"¹¹And He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (21st Century King James Version)

The tasks of the ministry specifically involve developing policies and guidelines for living in the household of God, promoting a healthy family life, moral and physical instruction, education (catechism), training and skills development. It is important to keep these tasks in mind for the sake of the researcher's argument that church discipline as an educational intervention should be functioning from CM (URCSA, 2018:171).

5.2.2 Motivation for proposing this move to CM

Considering the approach of DIPP regarding intergenerational living, it makes sense to conduct church discipline as a specialised ministry under the scope of the ministry that deals with all 'family ministries' in the congregation, i.e., CM. Church discipline as an edifying and correcting procedure thus belongs to the activities relating to the education and guidance of believers at the hand of Scripture. As Psalm, 32:8 states,

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you." (NIV)

Here David receives this assurance of God's intention to educate him after he sinned, confessed, and received forgiveness. The 'process' of church discipline does not stop at the receipt of forgiveness; education for the way forward (to live a transformed life) is also essential. This aspect – education – should be an indispensable part of the disciplinary process

in the church; without the teaching of the will of God and an understanding of it, the people of God will be destroyed as Hosea 4:6 points out.

5.3 Integrating concepts of DIPP through other programmes under CM

In the experience of the researcher in URCSA, the IM does not really function to its full capacity as an integration of the different ministries. Service organisations and former commissions still function on their own; it is basically only by way of a joint meeting or report that it becomes evident that they are under one umbrella ministry. The time has come to integrate the functioning of these different sub-ministries in concrete ways to fulfil the tasks of the core ministries.

This study wants to show that church discipline under the scope of CM should function complementary to the rest of the activities of CM as well as the entire ministerial work of the congregation. In this way, the negative stigma of church discipline as a judicial act of punishment (see proposal beneath) can be broken and it can contribute to the aspect of the instruction of and pastoral caregiving to congregants.

Mindful of the aforementioned as well as the perspective that the congregation is the family or household of God (Chapter 3, subsection 7.2), the approach of DIPP can be utilized in the programmes of CM. The content of the activities of the service organisations, i.e., the Men's, Women's and Youth Ministries, the Christian Youth Brigade and the Catechism, can be aligned with concepts of DIPP (some are already aligned with DIPP). The following should be noted:

- (a) The current curriculum for grades 7 and 8 of the junior catechism includes themes about creation and humanity, caring, relationships with others and nature, morality, norms, values, truth, justice, reconciliation, commitment, biblical role models and their legacies, trust, and loyalty. The curriculum of the senior catechism includes themes about moral issues, church discipline, substance dependency, violence, discrimination, poverty, nature conservation and decision-making.
- (b) The Christian Women's Ministry (CWM) is founded upon *values* such as humbleness in serving God and one another; love, goodness, and care towards others; truthfulness; trustworthiness towards one another; respect for oneself and one another.

Their *vision* entails being a Christian Women's Ministry that strives to be dynamic in unity, reconciliation, justice, and obedience. Part of their *mission* is to work in partnership with other ministries and the church in its ecumenical relations in building a community of believers where the walls of gender, race, language, and culture are demolished, and equality acknowledged. Some of their *objectives* are to pray together and for one another as women and families; encourage and empower women to care for the needy; encourage women to raise their children within the Christian faith, respect their parents and elders and desire a Christian marriage; assist the church in caring for creation.

- (c) The values, vision, mission and some objectives of the Christian Men's Ministry (CMM) are basically the same as those of the CWM. Added objectives for them include promoting harmonious holy living between men and their families, addressing the unique problems/challenges, needs and aspirations of the church community.
- (d) The Christian Youth Movement (CYM) meets regularly for religious, cultural, and recreational purposes. Activities include Bible studies, debates, activities relating to public testimony, providing healthy recreation, and assisting the cultural development of members.
- (e) The Christian Youth Brigade's aim is the spiritual, moral, physical, and cultural education and development of the youth. Activities include Bible studies, talks about purity, practising good habits, gymnastics and drill exercises, emergency care and the practice of discipline.

With reference to the focuses of the aforementioned organisations, the approach of DIPP can be integrated into its activities. To qualify this assumption the following should be noted: the perspective of interconnectedness and intergenerational living is in line with the different organisations' activities where they interact and transact (Nagy's third dimension) with each other. The Christian Youth Brigade is composed of different generations that are allowed as members since there is no age restriction. Ethical living amongst fellow human beings is evident from the goals of these sub-ministries or organisations. Responsibility and accountability are embedded in the ministerial work of these entities. From personal experience with these sub-ministries, the researcher is aware of how some of the common problems in their activities arise from destructive entitlement amongst members. Injustices occur all the time since the organisations are composed of fallible people. Where challenges

arise, it is essential that the strategy of multi-directed partiality be utilized in order to be fair and to serve the common good of all members. Most of the ministerial work of the organisations and catechism entail meeting together. Therefore, these meetings can be planned with the aim of experiencing real transformative encounters for the attendees.

What is the idea behind this suggestion for integration?

Considering (i) URCSA's principle in Synodical Stipulation 68.2.2 that all instruction in the church is based on the Bible as the primary source (URCSA, 2018:92) and (ii) the perspective that church discipline is "Word-based discipline" (Calvin, Ch. 2, p. 10; Nauta, Ch. 3, p.11, 1971:358), the researcher is of the opinion that instruction based on such an integrated approach can serve as preventative pastoral care for congregants.

As previously mentioned, the tasks of the core ministry include the promotion of 'a healthy family life and family focus'. By utilizing, some of the concepts of DIPP can potentially assist the ministry to develop guidelines and programmes to address the real causes which are responsible for disruptions in interpersonal relationships.

Church discipline ultimately aims to educate and prevent congregants and their posterity from repeatedly reporting for church discipline. Thus, in the idiom of Nagy (1986:418), one must try to leave a legacy for future generations by not repeating the errors of past generations out of loyalty, because (as indicated in Chapter 4) "not everything in the legacies of previous and present generations of families are exemplary". The pastoral sessions for church discipline can assist congregants in discerning what to pass on from their family inheritance to their posterity. In this way, CM can design and introduce joint programmes aiming to prevent repetitive negative behaviour, address the root causes of behavioural problems, and contribute to the healing of our *wounded* generation as Richard Rohr (Rohr, 2003) understands sin to be the "fall from innocence". 'Innocent' from the Latin root means "not wounded". Real transformation means leaving your innocence and returning to it.

The concepts of the DIPP have been discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and will not be repeated here. Those concepts that might be useful for integration into a new approach to church discipline will be highlighted under the proposal below.

5.4 Proposal for a pastoral care approach that can enrich the functioning of church discipline in URCSA congregations

5.4.1 Motivation for proposal

(i) Complying with the guidelines in the Church Order

The researcher proposes that DIPP be utilized in URCSA for the practice of church discipline of congregants by the church council as stipulated in Synodical Stipulations 108 to 114 (URCSA, 2018:110-114). This proposal excludes the church discipline of office bearers in Synodical Stipulations 115 to 134 (ibid.,114-127) as that should be performed by the Presbytery and Synod. The motivation for this is that the guidance of congregants with regards to sin, guilt, forgiveness, and repentance lends itself more to a pastoral care intervention than a judicial process to punish the congregant. The discipline of office bearers entails more elements of a judicial process like complaints, appeals, and disputes. The multiple church meetings – responsible for these processes on a broader church level – also need to strictly adhere to technical procedures of the Church Order, before even attending to more pastoral guidance for the object of discipline, i.e., the office bearer.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the ecclesial admonitions and discipline must be carried out in a spiritual way (Synodical Stipulation 86.1) in accordance with their spiritual character. Thus, DIPP as a method for pastoral care is appropriate to reach this spiritual goal for the congregant and the congregation. In accordance with the aforementioned stipulation, church discipline as pastoral care for the congregant is then practised by the church council/disciplinary committee from the perspective of God as the loving Father who disciplines His disobedient children (Heb. 12:4-13).

(ii) Church discipline has an important place in all the special, public occasions of URCSA

The doctrine of church discipline is accentuated at basically every ‘special occasion’ in the life of the URCSA congregations as well as at the presbyterial and synodical levels. At the public confession of faith, the confirmation of elders and deacons, ministers of the Word as well as at the legitimization of theological candidates, a solemn promise is requested that the confirmand will *subject* him/her to the *discipline and admonitions* of the church. It is part of an oath that accompanies that specific vocation. Being such an important teaching in URCSA, church members should be taught that they join the church voluntarily, and simultaneously

accept the obligations together with the privileges of the church. In doing so, they commit to subject themselves to the discipline and oversight of the church as well. This discipline is purely spiritual in its character and censure is applied to the offender by admonishing him/her, suspending certain privileges, and finally cutting him/her off from the church in the case of unrepentance (Hall, 1904).

As it is with any ordinary household, family members are part of it with all the obligations and ethical requirements in these familial relations. As a family member in the household of God, a congregant is interconnected with the rest of the 'family', being indebted to give and receive in this relation. Thus, the obligation to submit oneself to the discipline of the church, but also to take responsibility for the church family's spiritual well-being, is the oath that one took when joining the church. The whole practice of church discipline should thus be understood against this background of church membership.

5.4.2 Name of the new ministry for a pastoral care approach to church discipline

The researcher strongly recommends that church discipline be renamed in light of the negative stigma and associated trauma that the current name holds, especially in the Afrikaans language, i.e., "TUG". In view of the DIPP approach and the focus on the healing of both congregant and congregation, the following name can be considered for discipline, "*Pastoral Instruction and Care*". (For the purpose of this thesis the proposed name will sometimes be *italicize* in order to highlight it). Local congregations can however decide on the most suitable name for their context, but it is strongly advised that an alternative name should be implemented in light of the abovementioned reasons. The purpose of renaming this ministry is also to guide the facilitators of the disciplinary process to be mindful that they are not busy with the punishment or sentencing of members, but with pastoral care and instruction; hence, aiming for the transformation or healing of the congregant to a reconciled state of being with God and the neighbour. For the purpose of this study, the name "*Pastoral Instruction and Care*" will be used.

5.4.3 Specific space in which *pastoral instruction and care* should function in the congregation

In order to enrich the functioning of *pastoral instruction and care* for more efficiency, it is essential to critically assess whether the current space of a formal meeting of the church council or disciplinary committee is indeed the most suitable physical and spiritual space in

which to administer it. From his experience in the congregational ministry in this regard, the researcher is convinced that this is not the case. Therefore, another space needs to be utilized for a more efficient, life-transforming intervention towards healing.

Referring to Buber's view that the life of dialogue is our primary human reality, *pastoral instruction and care* take place as an encounter between the church and the congregant. Important is what happens between these parties when encountering each other. In order for real dialogue to take place in such an encounter, the participants should enter this space openminded and with the whole of their being. Van Doorn (2020:20) states that dialogue is a unique event between human beings in which something *new* happens. It is based on mutual trust. This "trust comes into being when people are willing to *take responsibility for one another* and to be available for the well-being of the other".

The suitable space in which *pastoral instruction and care* take place should display the following:

- The pastoral instruction and care should not be an administrative communique but a real encounter.
- The church should no longer think in terms of a 'formal church council or disciplinary committee meeting'; it is about a pastoral care encounter as mentioned earlier.
- The pastoral caregivers, i.e., the pastor or committee responsible for the pastoral care at congregational level, should be open-minded when entering into a genuine dialogue with the congregant, and they should allow the encounter to take them "under way" to the surprise and unpredictability of the encounter/dialogue (van Doorn, 2020:25). They should allow the encounter to influence them for the better so that restoration and healing can happen for both congregant and congregation/caregivers.
- For an encounter with the congregant that has a transformative outcome, the pastoral caregivers should pay special attention to the 'meeting space'. Here, the researcher refers to the therapeutical relationship between the congregant and pastoral caregiver/s. In this regard, the person/s of the pastoral caregiver/s play a decisive role in how the congregant experiences the encounter itself.

- The caregiver/s should enter into such a dialogue with empathy, fairness, non-judgementalism, open-mindedness, being fully present and with the hope that all the participants will leave as changed people of God.
- Even if the encounter does not have the desired outcome that one hoped for, the caregivers should still appreciate the fact that genuine dialogue took place, and they need to trust that something good can still result in future from this dialogue.

For this to happen - creating such compassionate meeting space - it is of great importance that these proposed pastoral caregivers be thoroughly trained in the basic principles and practices of pastoral care and counselling as well as a simple training in DIPP. This can be done via workshops/training sessions done by professionals in this field.

5.4.4 Who should be responsible for the practising of pastoral instruction and care?

The premise is that *pastoral instruction and care* is a pastoral care intervention, hence pastoral care and counselling would in all probability be needed. It is therefore necessary to rethink the way the specific committee for pastoral instruction and care is compiled because provisions should be made for the necessary pastoral care and counselling skills.

- Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that in light of this intervention being about pastoral guidance, the professional office bearer in the congregation, i.e., the pastor, together with recruits from the other behavioural sciences in the congregation, forms part of the facilitators of this dialogue towards transformation (i.e., they function as the pastoral caregivers for pastoral instruction and care). Apart from these professionals, ordinary congregants who have the necessary wisdom, spiritual maturity and passion for the vulnerable can be included in this ministry group.

As mentioned above, pastoral care and counselling are the appropriate fields from where *pastoral instruction and care* should be practised. In light of the newly proposed pastoral care approach, it is not necessary for the committee to only consist of church council members because it is no longer a 'management' function of the congregation.

A possible hindrance to such a compilation: The challenge would be at far-off, rural vacant congregations where 'skilled' human resources are sometimes not readily available.

- Recommendation 2:

In such instances, it is recommended that a facilitating committee be compiled from members of the church council and congregation who really have a compassionate heart for the fallen members and who are willing to be trained as facilitators. They also need to be objective and let go of any prejudices against the ‘familiar members’ whose ‘histories’ they are aware of.

The implication of such a compilation is that it is imperative for such committee members to be trained, as mentioned in sub-section 5.4.3, in this new pastoral care approach for *pastoral instruction and care* as well as in the basics of DIPP. This can be done locally in person or online. As it is a new and different paradigm, it is essential that such committees be trained and upskilled annually. They should meet once a quarter to share experiences with the aim of improving the practice of pastoral care to fallen members. For training purposes, the church council and ministers of the Word can also make use of specialists of DIPP, e.g., skilled persons from presbyterial or synodical level, or any person that studied in the field of DIPP. Currently, the capacity of ministers is limited and those in active ministry are so overburdened due to a vast number of vacancies in congregations where they need to act as relieving ministers; hence, they do not necessarily have the time for extra training.

5.4.4.1 Criteria for committee members

In pastoral care, the church is dealing with intense confidential matters of congregants. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the most suitable, trustworthy persons be assigned for such encounters (the committee of pastoral caregivers). A new orientation about such a committee is necessary in the church in which the following should be considered:

- (i) The committee members are representatives of God, to whom the church belongs, and they are here on behalf of the congregation who wants to address the sin that has been committed amongst them.
- (ii) They should stand as mediators between the strayed sheep and the Shepherd, and they should function in the gap to support the sheep to find his/her way back to the fold of the Shepherd and the rest of the herd.

Having said this, the committee should preferably meet the following requirements:

- In the language of DIPP, the member as a subject should meet the fallen co-believer equally as a subject. It means they do not approach the other as an object in the sense

that he/she is somebody or something that they can use as a means to an end, or towards whom they act with prejudice (Buber, Chapter 4).

- Since the core of the ethical relationships in DIPP is about justice, they should be righteous people with a deep sense for ensuring that the other person is treated fairly and with justice. They should also see to it that justice to the kingdom of God, as it finds expression in the local church, is served and God be honoured by that.
- With reference to the previous point about justice as the 'core focus' of ethical relationships, multi-directed partiality should be part of their focus in caring for the trespassers. Every trespasser needs to be treated fairly and justly. Notwithstanding the fact that a congregant has trespassed, he/she is precious in God's sight and remains an object of the grace of God. In cases where there are more than one party involved, e.g., with a pregnancy out of wedlock, both parties are entitled to a fair chance to give account of 'his/her side of the story'.
- They should commit themselves to a code of confidentiality. At all times, they must regard all information from the therapeutical relation as strictly confidential (as is the case with therapist–client confidentiality). This is particularly important in light of the new POPI legislation (see footnote ¹).

5.4.4.2 Aspects that should be included in the training of the pastoral caregivers responsible for pastoral instruction and care

- The congregant entering pastoral encounter is first and foremost a confessing member of the church. He/she is also like any other human being, a sinner before God. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, entering the pastoral instruction and care encounter does not change his/her status as a member of the congregation and his/her being of *imago Deo*. Thus, in dealing with him/her, the pastoral caregivers must be mindful of the golden rule as a guide: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sum up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).
- The member entering the pastoral encounter does so not as an isolated individual, but as a human being existentially connected to a family of origin. He/she is intergenerationally connected within his/her vertical relationships (i.e., grandparents, parents, children), inclusive of the 'still-to-be-born' generation as well as the deceased

and absent. Horizontally, he/she is connected with partners, friends, siblings, colleagues, etc. (van Doorn, 2020:86). The church must be sensitive to the fact that the influences of these relationships play a role in the congregant's interactions.

- With reference to the four dimensions of the relational reality of an individual (as described in Chapter 4), this congregant comes as an individual relational being with his/her own factual historical background; his/her personal psychological world; his/her own transactional patterns and systems with the influence of family or other systems on his/her behaviour; and lastly, his/her relational ethics. These dimensions are simultaneously present in the congregant because he/she is present in the meeting as a whole person with everything that 'constitutes' him/her as a human being. We need to consider all dimensions and treat him/her as a whole person, not just as a sinner.
- He/she is a person with his/her own loyalty towards significant others like family members and friends. Thus, he/she enters the therapeutical relationship as a person with responsibilities or obligations to take care of another family member/s due to the indebtedness for being taken care of previously in the family system (van Doorn, 2020:103).
- The congregant comes to the pastoral encounter as part of a generation between other generations. He/she shares a common history and future with other family members across different generations and that certainly has an influence on his/her frame of reference.
- The congregant is an object of God's discipline and His grace. He/she is an individual believer, guilty before God due to his/her sin. He/she can be someone with unfounded guilt feelings with reference to certain events/aspects. However, he/she is also within reach of God's grace and forgiveness and ultimately exoneration, and this pastoral encounter can be an instrument for achieving this.

5.4.5 Process, frequency, and content of encounters

5.4.5.1 Reporting for church discipline

- Congregants who are eligible for church discipline should report for the process of pastoral instruction and care. This is necessary for administrative purposes.

- The congregant reports to the local minister and if he/she is absent, then to the committee of pastoral caregivers. A purposeful registration form for the proposed pastoral sessions should be completed.
- The congregant should also be informed about the details of the pastoral process, including the obligation that he/she must attend all four sessions, and his/her family should, if possible, attend the last two sessions with him/her. It should also be conveyed that the purpose of these sessions is to guide the congregant towards healing for both him/her and their families as well as for the congregation.
- In congregations where this reporting is not viable, the registration together with an accompanying information letter can be made available to the congregant via the scribe of the congregation.
- Reporting for the pastoral instruction and care process is voluntarily and can either be the result of the congregant's own awareness, encouragement from his/her family or the ward church council member, or in response to an invitation from the pastor.

5.4.5.2 Frequency and attendees of encounters

- The pastoral instruction and care will take place in the form of joint sessions for groups of the congregation. Where needed, provisions should be made for individual sessions.
- Depending on the size of the congregation and the availability of volunteers, it should take place at least once a quarter, but once a month is recommended in the light thereof that it is now about pastoral care for both individual congregant and congregation.
- The pastoral care sessions should be clearly recorded on the yearly calendar of the congregation as official congregational activities. Further announcements via social media or the bulletin of the congregation can be made. Four sessions divided into two parts can be considered:

Session 1

Attendees: Considering that the previously known 'church discipline' now entails an educational, pastoral function, the first two sessions which may be conducted in a group or individual setting, should be open to anyone in the congregation who is interested or has a need for pastoral a care intervention. It will also help to remove the stigma with regards to

church discipline as it is not only the censured members who are attending, but it serves as group pastoral care sessions like any other 'open' gathering of the congregation. The researcher's motivation for these 'open sessions' is twofold: (i) to highlight the biblical understanding that 'church discipline' is a collective responsibility of the entire congregation, and (ii) to create a space or opportunity for preventative pastoral care in respect of possible trespassing by congregants.

Before referring to certain themes to be recommended, the committee of pastoral caregivers and church council should take note of the following viewpoint of the researcher:

Pastoral instruction and care should not start with the trespasses of the congregants and their accompanying guilt as a point of reference. Though the reality of their sin is an undeniable present reality, which must be addressed, starting with *who* and *how God* really is in relation to humanity, both collectively and individually, can make a big difference with regard to the congregant's experience. As mentioned in Chapter 3, church discipline wants to uphold the honour of God, therefore He and His interests should be placed right at the centre of this pastoral process in the church.

What would be appropriate themes for placing God at the centre of the meeting with the sinner and other congregants from the start?

The following themes can be explained and discussed in the first two open sessions. These concepts will set the basis for the rest of the sessions and are a starting point for building relations.

(i) The God of Love

The basic biblical message is summarized in the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:34-40 – loving God with all your heart, soul and mind and loving your neighbour in the same manner as you love yourself. The commandments immediately position the individual hearer of it interconnectedly with God and fellow human beings. Here we find different relationships in which this love must come to expression, i.e., a love relationship with God and a love relationship with your neighbour. However, the latter (relation with neighbour) is not possible if you do not have a love relationship with *yourself*. Thus, the second commandment of the great commandment assumes a love for yourself and rightly so, because you are *imago Dei*!

As a human being, you are created in the image of God and you should love this image of God in yourself.

The 10 commandments were given to Moses on two clay tablets, which were divided into a dual set of commandments. The first four commandments on the one tablet refer to the love relationship with God, which you as His image need to adhere too. The following six commandments on the second tablet give instructions as to what your love relationship needs to be towards your fellow human being. These commandments entail relational ethics. It guides a person as to what is the right way of living towards God and your neighbour. It is notable that the 10 Commandments express the right ethical behaviour in terms of ‘everyday living’ in society. It is about concrete daily life as a relational being in society.

(ii) Justice as the core of ethical living

As mentioned in Chapter 4, according to the Bible as well as the Confession of Belhar, God is a God who demands justice from His people. It is also a core theme in DIPP. This theme of justice has been thoroughly dealt with in Chapter 4 and it needs to be addressed in the proposed open session in detail.

Session 2

The following theme will be explained and discussed:

(i) Intergenerational living

The concepts of the interconnectedness of human beings and intergenerational living was discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4. These themes as well as the interconnected living in the household of God, i.e., the congregation, should be dealt with in this session. This can contribute to what Calvin states that pastoral care is about ‘life together in the body of Christ’ and co-membership in the congregation.

(ii) Legacy

In a family’s legacy, one will find narratives of both positive and negative experiences. From these, the current generation needs to choose what to pass on for the common good of humanity. Thus, the congregant under church discipline needs to look at his/her personal family legacy and extract those contributions that will benefit him/her and his/her relations

with his/her significant others. For this open session, the attendees can be encouraged to take a contemplative look at their legacy and draw meaningful conclusions from it for a more wholesome life going forward. What can the congregant take from the family legacy that will help him/her in his/her current context? Added to that, it will be good if they are also reminded of their spiritual legacy as the co-heirs of Jesus Christ, hence they should be challenged with the choice of whether they will turn around and live in a new transformed relation with Christ and others or continue to live with some old destructive habits.

Here is another wonderful opportunity for compassionate pastoral care to the congregant. Encourage the congregant to talk about his/her family legacy and determine which incidents/narratives in it had an influence on his/her ethical choices and relationships. This will in all probability create the therapeutical space for further encounters towards healing.

Sessions 3 and 4

The last two sessions will be compulsory for the congregants who are eligible for pastoral instruction and care due to their trespasses. Here individual sessions with them and their families will be conducted. The aim is to intensify pastoral counselling in respect of their personal state. As mentioned earlier, they are obligated to attend all four sessions.

The following concepts could be explained and discussed:

(i) Dealing with the guilt feelings, guilt, and existential guilt of the trespasser

The concepts of guilt and guilt feelings are important issues in DIPP that are described in more detail in Chapter 4. It is important to discuss this content in the pastoral session. In addition to this, it is important to explain that,

- (i) *being human, they are all sinners like Paul says: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV), and*
- (ii) *due to this disobedience, they are all guilty before God.*

It is thus essential that their existential guilt needs to be addressed through pastoral instruction and care sessions. In the process of dealing with the sin of congregants, the pastoral caregiver or facilitators must take the following into consideration:

(a) Do not ignore or minimise the existential guilt that is there. It is not just a feeling of guilt, but it is a real situation of guilt in which the perpetrator stands.

(b) Remember that through the actions of the guilty person others were hurt, i.e., there are victims from his/her trespasses.

(c) Distinguish whether you are dealing with unfounded feelings of guilt or existential guilt by the congregant.

(d) Remember that the aim of this pastoral care intervention is to assist the congregant to deal with his/her guilt decisively (once and for all) so that genuine repentance and transformation can follow. Support the congregant as far as possible not to repeat the same sin.

Therefore, the encounter (dialogue) should focus on guiding the guilty member to:

- a) acknowledge his/her sin;
- b) acknowledge the hurt that he/she caused to others as well as to him/herself;
- c) acknowledge his/her existential guilt before man and God;
- d) come to true remorse and confess his/her sin;
- e) take responsibility for his/her sin and guilt and do restitution to the victim/s (without forcing him/her, but whenever he/she is ready).

The story of David's sin and remorse in Psalm 51 can be used as an example. He is an excellent example of a sinner who acknowledges his guilt before God. He reiterates his guilt no less than four times. He does not only confess his guilt and express his remorse, but he also sought retribution by marrying Bathsheba and taking care of her.

(ii) Forgiveness and Exoneration

These two concepts in DIPP were discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The content should be understood by the facilitators and applied in the dialogue with the congregants. However, the difference between forgiveness and exoneration should be highlighted and here an important question that needs to be answered is, *"What is the church's ultimate aim in exercising what was previously called 'church discipline'?"* The latter or pastoral instruction and care, should lead to remorse, repentance, forgiveness, and eventually a transformed life for the disciplined member. This transformed life is possible for the sinner if the load of his/her culpability has been lifted, thus *exoneration* needs to take place. The pastoral instruction and care process can make exoneration possible for the sinner by creating a safe space for dialogue between

him/her and his/her victim/s (those affected by the wrongdoing). This act of exoneration is indeed biblical according to what the researcher understands about exoneration at the hand of texts like Isaiah 1:18:

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

The pastoral instruction and care of the church must help the sinner to get to the point where God says to him/her, “I also don’t judge you, go home and sin no more.” He/she should go home knowing that the load has been taken off his/her shoulders. The relationship between the sinner and God as well as fellow human beings is damaged when a person sins. The pastoral encounter should fulfil this intercessory role in the reconciliation process between these different parties. This must add to the healing of the sinner and the restoration of his/her relationship with God and his/her fellow human being.

A last word of caution, pastoral caregivers should guard against ‘forcing’ members to reconcile when they are not ready to do so. Normally, this kind of ‘forgiveness’ does not last long before the blame starts. Rather just, enable the safe space for exoneration to happen spontaneously at the appointed time.

5.4.6 Lifting of the formal discipline and “after-care” for attendees

For the current dispensation where the Church Order requires a formal process of discipline in response to sin, an outcome must be reached where the trespassing congregant is officially relieved from any disciplinary action instituted against him/her. The congregant would normally also desire to be restored in the privileges from which he/she had been excluded while under discipline. Therefore, the researcher recommends that a comprehensive report about the holistic well-being of the congregant be compiled by the committee of the pastoral caregivers with clear recommendations for the lifting or continuation of church discipline (currently it is done but only by means of a ‘check-list’ mostly about attendance of church activities, so it will not be something unfamiliar). Further research and exploration are necessary for how to deal with this formal part of the process in future.

Congregants who undergo the pastoral care process can be encouraged by the pastoral caregivers to engage with a mentor for further pastoral assistance, and hopefully this practice of mentoring can spill over to the entire ministry of the congregation. The motivation behind

this is to take collective responsibility for one another as ‘keepers’ of their brothers and sisters (Gen. 4:9). The local pastor, church council, and pastoral caregivers however, remain ultimately responsible for pastoral support.

5.4.7 Broadening the opportunity for healing encounters

- (i) The other sins as listed in the Church Order about the scope of ‘church discipline’ (see Chapter 1) should be addressed in the pastoral instruction and care process. All these sins are concerned with a human being’s relationships with fellow humans and God, and as mentioned earlier, it causes damage/hurt to others. Currently, these trespasses are not dealt with properly because the extra-marital pregnancy cases are mistakenly ‘over-emphasized’. It is the hopeful expectation that people in need of intervention for these sins will use the opportunity of the open-connect sessions to seek assistance towards restoration. The pastoral caregivers should also connect with other ministries in the congregation, for example, Christian Dependency Ministry (CDM), to address these aforementioned trespasses.
- (ii) The phenomenon of extra-marital pregnancies should be dealt with separately, still under the Core Ministry for Congregational Ministries, but possibly as “Responsible Parenting Sessions” as it is indicated as one of the tasks of the core ministry.

5.4.8 How can the pastoral care approach to ‘church discipline’ or pastoral instruction and care, be introduced to URCSA?

To implement a new approach for church discipline, especially in respect of a century-old system in the church, was and never will be an easy task and not without resistance. Well aware of this, the researcher intends to start with a process of consultations at different levels of the church affiliation. Initially the researcher intends to engage with the Synodical Ministries for Congregational Ministries as well Judicial Affairs to do a submission in respect of the pastoral care approach towards church discipline. The aim here is to get their approval to do a pilot project in URCSA within the regional synod of the Cape. If this permission can be granted by these ministries, a next round will entail consulting via workshops and conferences with the different presbyteries to get their willingness (buy in) to participate in this project. If a presbytery agrees to it, training should be done with them on presbyterial level with the purpose to assist in promoting this approach in congregations. Following this step different congregations can be selected in consultation with the presbytery where workshops can be undertaken to introduce the new *pastoral instruction and care* to the local congregation.

The next phase would be for the researcher to do a thorough evaluation of the entire process by using the method of evaluation research. Following this, an extensive report with clear recommendations for the implementation of the new approach, should then be submitted to the previously mentioned ministries of synod for approval and submission to synod.

5.4.9 POPI Act

The implication of the POPI Act ⁸of 2013 should also be included in a new model or practice of church discipline in congregations. The necessity for this is because there are still congregations that disclose the personal information of disciplined members in public. This includes the public announcement at worship services of the names, surnames, ward number and sin for which the congregants were disciplined. Apart from the hurt and shame that it causes for the congregants, it is also against the civil law of our country.

5.4.10 Conclusion

The researcher is well aware that certain processes in the church, such as the way church discipline has been practised through the decades, have become the 'gospel truth' for those members that are part of the church tradition. Certain rituals have been performed in a certain way for decades without being critically evaluated over time. Although processes like the current disciplinary system have been outdated and become ineffective, church meetings refuse to change it. From the way the church practises 'church discipline', it is clear that it has stagnated in the past and is indeed in great need of a fresh approach. Since the researcher entered the ministry 33 years ago, URCSA has not done a thorough study of the relevance and theology of our disciplinary system. The researcher has no intention whatsoever to doubt the necessity and the biblical guidelines for admonishing and disciplining the fallen members of the church. Church discipline is indispensable for the well-being of the church and its

⁸ **Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013.** The Act applies to any person or organisation who keeps any type of records relating to the personal information of anyone, unless those records are subject to other legislation which protects such information more stringently. It therefore sets the minimum standards for the protection of personal information. The POPI Act sets out the minimum standards regarding accessing and 'processing' of any personal information belonging to another. The Act defines 'processing' as collecting, receiving, recording, organizing, retrieving, or the use, distribution or sharing of any such information.

members. However, the researcher is convinced that the church is currently losing out on divine opportunities for directional ministry which will increase the impact of the kingdom of God in our world today.

Having said that, the researcher still has the conviction that by starting a process of enrichment of the church discipline on local congregational level, an entirely new fresh expression of ministry can be set alight.

The DIPP approach provides such a divine opportunity to take pastoral care in a fresh way to those in the congregation that live with their hurt, guilt, and shame and who are in desperate need of a healing experience from the Lord. The researcher hopes that this introductory effort to enrich the pastoral care process in respect of 'church discipline' will also create the opportunity for the church to take note of this wonderful therapeutical approach and, first and foremost, help change congregants' perspectives when dealing with their fellow believers. May these possible changed perspectives lead to a renewed interconnectedness and loyalty amongst the people in God's household.

The following chapter will be the concluding chapter of the entire thesis. In this chapter the researcher will evaluate whether the research question and objectives have been answered and further research possibilities will be proposed.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This is the concluding chapter of the entire research study. The research question and supplementary secondary questions in Chapter 1, section 4, will be revisited and the researcher will evaluate whether and how these have been answered. Furthermore, it will determine to what extent the intended objectives were met. Subsequently, some recommendations forth flowing from the research will be tabled for consideration by the different affiliations of URCSA. The researcher will then propose further research possibilities concerning the research topic. The chapter will then highlight what limitations were experienced by the researcher in this research study. Thereafter the chapter and thesis will be concluded with some final remarks by the researcher.

6.2 Overview and reflection on the research question

The primary question that this research study tried to answer was, “How can the approach of DIPP, with its focus on intergenerational existence, enrich the practice of church discipline in the local congregation to experience a more compassionate pastoral care intervention?”

The struggle underlying this particular question was the realization of the researcher that this essential ministry, which is even regarded as one of the characteristics of the true church (Belgic Confession, Article 29), runs the risk of becoming irrelevant if the current practice of church discipline continues indefinitely in an uncritical, random way.

In answering the research question the researcher used as the main research methodology a qualitative study inclusive of some of its various methods e.g., literature review, historical research, evaluation research, etc. Sources in the fields of Practical, Systematic, New and Old Testament theologies, as well as Ecclesiology, were used in order to answer the research question. Subsequently to this, the extensive ministry experience as pastor loci in dealing with the church discipline part of the research topic played a valuable role to deal with the research question. The utilization of Osmer’s practical theological framework helped the researcher to keep track of the research question and objectives.

The research question was thoroughly investigated and it is the humble submission of the researcher that it was properly answered for an initial investigation. Having said that, there is definitely room to explore this problem further.

Mindful of the fact that Osmer's 4 tasks were used to answer the research question, these tasks were addressed in Chapters 2 to 5.

In Chapter 2 the descriptive empirical task, as well as the interpretive task, were jointly answered. Concerning the descriptive empirical task, the question *"What is the status quo with regards to church discipline in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)?"* was answered. The interpretive task was answered by investigating the question, *"How did the practice of URCSA's church discipline develop into the current practices?"* These questions were answered by: (i) giving a description of church discipline; (ii) giving a historical overview of the development of church discipline since the Old and New Testaments, through the early church and Roman Catholic Church. The developments during the Reformation of the 16th century, and the views of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands from which URCSA originates (via the Dutch Reformed Church in S.A., abbreviated DRCSA), were highlighted. Finally, the current practice of church discipline in URCSA was discussed.

The 3rd task of Osmer, prophetic discernment, was answered in Chapters 3 and 4. The question that was addressed here was, *"What ought to be going on concerning the practice of church discipline?"*

In Chapter 3 this question was answered by attending to the theological interpretation of ecclesial discipline as a response to sin. References to relevant biblical texts concerning discipline were made as well as homiletical interpretations from two texts, i.e., Matthew 18:15–20 and Hebrews 12:4–13.

In Chapter 4 DIPP was introduced and discussed as part of the 'human shaping' of the understanding of God's Word and human reality. Concepts of DIPP and contributions of its proponents were applied to church discipline and practical guidelines for the enrichment of church discipline were derived from it.

The 4th task of Osmer, the pragmatic task, was addressed in Chapter 5. The question of *"How may we respond?"* to enrich the functioning of church discipline, was answered here. A correlation between the articles of the Confession of Belhar and some concepts of DIPP was drawn and the appropriateness of both for an improved exercising of church discipline in URCSA was established. By applying, the approach of DIPP to church discipline the researcher

introduced a new pastoral care approach for the functioning of church discipline in URCSA congregations.

6.3 Overview and reflection on the aim and research objectives

The researcher listed 5 objectives in Chapter 1 in order to answer the primary research question.

Objective I

Give a description of relevant concepts of the DIPP approach.

The focus here was to describe some of the concepts of DIPP relevant to the research study. This objective was reached since the researcher gave detailed descriptions of these concepts in Chapters 3 and 4. The following concepts appropriate to the exercising of church discipline were described and applied to church discipline:

The interconnectedness of human beings and intergenerational existence, the four dimensions of relational reality, loyalty, a ledger of merit and indebtedness, fair giving and receiving, legacy, parentification and deparentification, responsibility and accountability, constructive and destructive entitlement, a revolving slate, guilt, guilt feelings and existential guilt, forgiveness and exoneration, relational justice, dialogue, multi-directed partiality, hope as motivation for human behaviour.

Objective II

Describe intergenerational existence.

The intention here was to give a description of what intergenerational existence involves. The researcher realized this objective in Chapter 4, section 4. The view of Nagy that a human being is born into an existing world and that he/she also comes into existence in different generations was highlighted. It was explained how people are intergenerationally connected within their vertical relationships and that intergenerational living involves at least three generations. The relevance of intergenerational living was shown by indicating that the influence of past generations continues within the present context and extends into future generations.

Objective III

Explain what the practice of church discipline entails.

With objective 3 the researcher intends to explain what the practice of church discipline entails. This objective was reached since a detailed description of what church discipline entails was given in Chapter 2 and reference was made in Chapter 1, indicating that church discipline involves the guiding of censured congregants through a process of correction and the combatting of sin. Its connection with education or instruction of people was established and the Calvinistic view that it is a Word-based discipline was confirmed.

Objective IV

Draw conclusions that are common/evident from the researcher's experience in congregational ministry.

The aim here was that the researcher draws conclusions about church discipline that are common/evident from his experience in congregational ministry. Throughout the entire study, the researcher made applications of phenomena in respect of church discipline that is commonly present in congregations. This is in particular shown in Chapter 2 when the status quo in URCSA was described. Thus, this objective was definitely met.

Objective V

Explain why it is necessary to 'experience' more compassionate pastoral care and what the latter entails.

Through this objective, the researcher had to explain why it is necessary that censured congregants need to experience more compassionate pastoral care and what this care entails. The researcher pointed out in Chapter one how church discipline became a stick to hit the fallen congregant with rather than a shepherd's crook to draw him/her nearer to the congregation and ultimately to God. It was pointed out how church discipline was exercised in a destructive way that led to indifference toward the church. It was mentioned how John Calvin regarded church discipline as a way to do pastoral care and his conviction that pastoral care involves living together as fellow believers in the sheepfold of the Lord. In the researcher's view, this objective was indeed reached in this research study.

6.4 General recommendations for the future

Throughout the research study and in particular in Chapter 5, some recommendations were already made as to a more suitable approach with regards to the research topic.

In addition to those recommendations, considering the current state of affairs in respect of congregational ministry and life, the following can be considered by synod, presbyteries and congregations:

- The researcher became deeply aware of how DIPP with its focus on interrelational and intergenerational living can assist a family ministry in the current challenging times. In the long-run the approach of DIPP – inclusive of its principles and concepts – can be introduced as a pastoral care and counselling approach in congregational life. For the short to medium term, it is recommended that the new proposed approach to church discipline (*pastoral instruction and care*) be integrated into the life of the congregation as a valuable pastoral care instrument. Thus, taking into account the proposed path for implementing a new approach in URCSA, equipping church leaders and congregants for this new approach should be undertaken.
- For the aforementioned to happen, opportunities to make the congregation familiar with the approach should be created. The challenge in this regard is that there are currently - to the best of the researcher's knowledge - only a limited number of trained people in DIPP available to facilitate consultations regarding new pastoral approaches based on DIPP.
- It is therefore recommended that 'basic' training in this new pastoral care approach to church discipline be undertaken at presbyterial level if it is not currently possible at a congregational level. This should be done on a regular basis, e.g., at least annually, and it should be for congregational leaders, i.e., church council members, ministers, and leaders of service organizations. Equipping these stakeholders can contribute to it that they lead with a different, more positive mindset as people with a vocation.
- The researcher is deeply under the impression of the superficiality that is so often characteristic of the ministry of the church today in general when it comes to pastoral care. It is not as Buber sees it that "real living is meeting". Furthermore, egoism, powerplay and misuse of power, are blocking the ministry to play a transformative role in people's lives. Thus, the church never comes to the stage where the real issues of people's lives are properly addressed. The researcher would therefore recommend that the synod makes continuous ministry training compulsory for ministers of the Word. It should also be implemented in the church that more opportunities be created

for the equipment of lay persons (the office of the believer) to function as pastoral caregivers in the congregations.

- More efforts should be put in to help congregations to make a paradigm shift, from a church that is functioning more from legalism to one that is functioning from interconnectedness as the body of Christ. In this manner the ministry can be more about mutual care and accountability for one another. The principles embedded in DIPP can be valuable in this regard.
- Regular application of relevant concepts of DIPP in worship services and discussions about it at e.g., prayer meetings, can be of great value that the congregation starts thinking and functioning as human beings in existential relations with one another. The visible unity of the church can be strengthened by this.
- Furthermore, it is recommended that ministers and church councils put in more effort to instruct the basic teachings of our Calvinistic heritage in light of the confusion, false teachings, and shallowness that reigns today in our society and sadly influence our congregants. The motivation for this is that through this research study the researcher has discovered by renewal how profound and timeless these (reformed/Calvinistic) teachings are. It has indeed stood the test of time and is thus worthwhile to train congregants for responsible living in this world. It is however important that the necessary creative, out-of-the-box thinking be used to present these profound truths in 'congregant-friendly' methods for our post-modern members.
- With reference to chapter 5, sub-section 5.4.8 about implementing the new pastoral care approach to church discipline in URCSA, the researcher would like to emphasize that it could be beneficial to undertake a pilot study to implement this new approach in the church. A possible way to do this is getting the necessary permission by the different church meetings and ministries of the church for the undertaking of an empirical process by selecting certain presbyteries and congregations to facilitate and monitor the implementation.
- In view that the researcher does not claim that this thesis is the final word about the research theme, as well as the fact that the study utilized the DIPP approach for pastoral care, it is therefore recommended that a comparative research study be undertaken about the functioning of church discipline in other churches and religious

traditions. Possibilities are the Anglican, Pentecostalist, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Congregational and Jewish traditions. The church of origin for URCSA, i.e., the current Protestant Church in the Netherlands as well as other reformed churches abroad, should also be included in such a study. As far as the researcher knows, the historically called 'Mother Church' of URCSA, the DRCSA, is in terms of the theology of ecclesial discipline basically of the same view as URCSA. Comparing the theological interpretation, methods, etc. of these traditions with those of URCSA, could broaden the perspective of the latter in its efforts to further enrich ecclesial discipline.

6.5 Limitations and challenges of this study

- i. Excluding empirical research in this study, contributed to the fact that the data being dealt with, were primarily from the perspective of the pastor and professional academics. Thus, the experiences and perspectives of congregants were not thoroughly investigated and it could in all probability lead to a different outcome. While the researcher initially intended to do an empirical study, certain dynamics in the congregation made it undesirable to continue with that.
- ii. Access to the history of the functioning of church discipline in the former Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, i.e., the ethnic black section of URCSA, was very limited and consequently the data dealt with in this study was mostly from the context of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church, i.e., the ethnic-coloured section of URCSA. Consequently, a possible void could exist for the acceptance of a new approach to ecclesial discipline in the Xhosa-speaking section of URCSA.

6.6 Conclusion

The researcher experienced the research study as a very enriching personal experience with regards to his theological knowledge, his personal growth in his faith life and his vocation as a pastor and minister of the Word. He regrets the fact that he undertook this study only near the end of his term in office because the knowledge gained could be utilized with great effect as a congregational pastor. However, the opportunity is still there to apply the results of this study in the church by way of equipping leaders and others with this refreshed understanding of church discipline and DIPP.

As some colleagues and ordinary congregants of URCSA and the DRCSA became aware of the research topic, their spontaneous response was that "such a study is so necessary and long

overdue in the church.” It is therefore the sincere hope of the researcher that this research study can make a contribution towards a broader understanding of the ministry of church discipline, and that the church develops a renewed appreciation for this ministry as a pastoral care intervention that wants to draw people nearer, contribute to their restoration and healing and not punish or exclude them from the kingdom of God. The researcher himself is convinced that the practicing of church discipline as a pastoral care intervention based on DIPP can be a crucial instrument in the transformation of lives and the unity of the body of Christ if the congregants take responsibility and are accountable for their fellow believers in the household of God.

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