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# “GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD” – CLERGY’S LIVED RELIGION IN PRETORIA CENTRAL AREAS<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to reflect on how clergy, working in Pretoria central areas, live out (the external dimension) and experience (the internal dimension) their faith in their everyday life. Thirteen clergy were briefly interviewed on an individual basis and then asked to keep a diary for two months. Four of the interviewed clergy completed the diary project. Based on the interviews and the diaries, the main themes that could be identified in relation to faith in their everyday lives, are responding to the challenges associated with urban ministry, including poverty and trauma, and dealing with the sometimes overwhelming experience of stress that the demands of this ministry can create. Distancing from the different aspects of their tasks, attending to personal needs, and focusing on individual experiences of faith are the main identified strategies the participants employ in dealing with the daily pressures they are exposed to.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: “*DE DOMINEE GAAT VOORBIJ?*”

The role of the clergy<sup>2</sup> has changed dramatically over time, suggesting also changes in expectations as to what exactly the responsibilities of clergy ought

- 1 The research for this paper, presented at a special project seminar on the UNISA campus on 12 November 2010 as part of the UNISA Bright Site community involvement project, is also part of an National Research Foundation (NRF)-funded project called “Resilience and the family”, hosted at the Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg.
- 2 For the sake of simplicity we use the word clergy throughout this article, by which we refer to pastors, priests and ministers of religion.

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to be (see for example Furniss 1994:1f). Heitink (2001), for instance, explores such changes of expectations over time by focusing on different time periods from the sixteenth century onwards, as it mainly relates to the Netherlands in the reformed tradition. He argues that developments in how the role of clergy is understood (“predikantschap”) are closely related to developments within the church which, in turn, are influenced by developments in society (Heitink 2001:15). According to Heitink, the sixth identified period in his analysis, from the 1960s onwards, was heavily influenced by secularisation in the Netherlands, and as a result clergy came under pressure on how to play a meaningful role in society. The question is even posed whether “*de dominee gaat voorbij*”?

In the South African context, secularisation, though an ever-present factor (cf. Dreyer & Pieterse 2010:#798), is not among the main challenges faced by the clergy. Rather than what may be termed a socio-cultural impulse towards a-religiosity, as one of the ways in which secularisation may be understood<sup>3</sup> within the European context in which Heitink (amongst others) writes, here, the litany of pressing socio-economic problems brings different pressures to bare on those serving in church ministry. These problems are well known, and are usually listed as “an inventory of the evils on the continent: HIV/AIDS and other health problems, poverty, war and violence and crime...” (Lombaard 2006:151; cf. De Beer & De Beer 2002:256). Both because of the self-evident magnitude of these problems, and because of the values inherent to most religious traditions towards alleviating such suffering, the external care practices of religion (part of “externalised spirituality”, usually referred to in Spirituality literature as “the lived experience of the faith” – cf. e.g. Kourie 2009:162) tend to take precedence on this continent over the philosophical problems inherent to the phenomenon of faith<sup>4</sup>. If anything, the closest local

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- 3 Apart from the importance of geographical and historical context, the so-called secularisation of societies (often linked with Western societies, although Western Europe may be more accurate, and therefore locality can account for the different experiences relating to secularisation) is complex in itself: “However, the more recent neo-secularization paradigm recognizes that the broad equation of modernity with religious decline is not valid ... and instead emphasizes the reshaping and relativization of religion as a result of the rise of individual religious autonomy and collective religious pluralism ... Within this new paradigm, secularization can usefully be understood as a theory of religious *change* occurring across different social levels: cultural, organizational and individual” (Miner, Sterland & Dowson 2009: 464-465). Furthermore, even urban western European cities are diverse with immigrants of various localities openly practising Christian, Muslim and other religions (Vroom 2008: 564-566).
  - 4 This statement is not meant to trivialise such questions; they are indeed serious, and are given serious treatment on the international arena by figures such as Hick (e.g. 1995) and locally by Gericke (e.g. 2007:152-167). Our observation here is

parallel to the European socio-cultural impulses towards secularisation would be socio-cultural impulses towards what are variously known as the Africanisation, contextualisation or inculturation (cf. e.g. Peters 2007:56-74, Jackson 2002:11-29, Lombard 1999:353-368). These phenomena that are of importance to urban ministry, characteristic on the international arena of inner cities in for instance the USA (Russell 1992:191-193), are paralleled by similar conditions in South Africa (cf. De Beer 1998).

The role of clergy within such environments can be investigated and analysed on the level of community or society. However, the expectations related to the role of clergy are not only of a broad, general nature, but also relate to a parish/congregation or individual persons coming in contact with clergy – thus, on the interpersonal level. What may be called the “pastor project” has evolved into engagement with manifold challenges that are linked to the locality and the time period. Far from secularisation questioning the role of the clergy, in such contexts, the needs in poor communities demand attention from religious sources, in fact overwhelming the resources available to clergy.

With these variable expectations of clergy as background, the present research project focuses on how clergy serving in ministries in the Pretoria central areas<sup>5</sup> both *live out their faith and experience, personally, their faith*. The visible deeds of faith and the more hidden aspects of personal faith experience are here placed under the spotlight. The focus of this research project is thus not directly on the expectations of the community with whom the clergy who form our group of research participants engage with, but on how the clergy, on their part, perceive their engagements with and the expectations from the communities they serve. A strong emphasis on the expectations the clergy have of themselves is naturally also implied within such a more subjective approach. In order to gain access to such issues, in-depth information about the research participants is needed, to generate insight and understanding of these faith issues on the part of us as the researchers, and therefore an appropriate method was required. The method of diary keeping, within a broadly qualitative approach, was decided upon.

This methodology will now be discussed in greater detail.

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however that this is not the dominant stream within either popular religious or academic theological discourse.

5 The term Pretoria central areas refers to the inner-city of Pretoria as well as adjacent suburbs such as Sunnyside and Arcadia. Such a broad term was required since the boundaries between the different areas of Pretoria are not rigid, because some people live, work and worship in different areas of the city.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The University of South Africa (UNISA) launched the Bright Site Project with the aim of being more involved in the immediate community surrounding the main campus of the university, namely the Pretoria central areas. This project was initially driven by the department of Social Work at UNISA, but other departments were invited to contribute to this initiative, and both the department of Sociology and the discipline of Christian Spirituality responded to this invitation by conducting this study, amongst others.

The involvement of churches in the Pretoria central areas came to the fore through various other, related projects, which had indicated that clergy in the area are indeed responding to the demands of urban ministry (see details below). In fact, at the head of various projects within the Pretoria central areas are often members of the clergy, who – like anybody else in such positions – work under tremendous pressure. The various demands placed on them seem, from the outside, to be overpowering. In order to gain more detailed insight into the way churches, but specifically the clergy, respond to the communities they serve, we decided to embark on a qualitative project amongst ministers, pastors and priests in the Pretoria central areas, namely by focusing on lived religion (cf. Dreyer 2010).

Since a close-up picture of the clergy's experiences was sought, one of the most intimate of research methods available to social researchers was employed, namely diary research. Although diary research has long been employed in certain places, especially in Poland (Konecki, Kacperczyk & Marciniak 2005), it is not a common social-scientific research method in most parts of the world, which is also indicated by the paucity of academic publications on this research method (Alaszewski 2006:vi-vii). As historiographical sources in the study of Spirituality, diaries have proven useful (cf. e.g. De Villiers 2010); usually, however, without much methodological reflection. Certain details should therefore be given here in order to explain our way of working:

We approached a number of clergy in the Pretoria central areas, first by telephonic means, to make an appointment, and then by meeting them personally, and then invited them to participate in this research project by keeping a diary for two months in which they reflected on the following two questions:

- *How do you give expression to your faith?* (= giving expression to one's faith); and
- *What role does religion play in your life?* (= personal experience of faith).

The type of diary we requested is described by Alaszewski (2006:19) as a memoir, in the sense that the participants are approached as people who

experience significant events in relation to the research topic. The participant's role in these events is of importance, and it is described in the diary in a narrative form. The information is thus presented through the eyes of the participant.

These diaries then serve for the purposes of the present research project as case studies, which were analysed in accordance with qualitative research principles that seek to establish meaning through "thick" in-depth descriptions. In analysing these diaries, a thematic approach was followed, where key themes from the diaries are identified, categorised and verified (Neuman 2003:441-445). These categories are not decided upon by the researchers, at the outset, but are gleaned from the diaries themselves. The research participants thus, in this sense, set the agenda themselves, based on both their experiences and their reflections on these experiences. Rather than the researchers setting the agenda in any other way than indicating only broadly our research interests (namely the two questions stated above), this approach makes for a more valid way for the researchers to come to an understanding of the life world and experiences of the research participants.

We made use of purposive sampling in order to reach a wide variety of clergy (Neuman 2003:213-214); unfortunately certain churches could not be reached because they apparently had no administrative support (their telephones were never answered) or, in one case, the administrative support acted as gatekeepers, preventing us from having direct contact with the clergy members. In the latter case vague messages and only promises of appointments were received.

A total of 13 members of the clergy were willing to meet us, in order for us to explain the purpose and method of our research project. One potential participant was contacted telephonically and via e-mail, because he had recently moved away from the area. The remaining 12 people we met in person at their choice of venue (church offices were the most common, but other venues such as coffee shops and homes were also used). All the pastors were friendly, accommodating and interested in our research, but only four eventually embarked on and completed the diary project (despite additional promises of diaries by other potential participants). Time constraint was the most common reason given for not being able to partake in the research project, but not having the ability to write well was also cited as a stumbling block. Apart from the fact that keeping a diary is time consuming (despite our assurances that diary entries do not necessarily have to be made all that regularly), it is also an extremely personal exercise, revealing much that almost always remains hidden from public view, which may have contributed to the relatively low response rate. Nevertheless, and precisely because of the intimate nature of the information obtained by such means, unusual insights

are gained from this method that could not easily have been obtained via other research methods.

In order to protect the identities of the research participants, they were in our writing about them given pseudonyms. Furthermore, we also extracted the direct quotes that are employed in this article and sent them to the research participants concerned, to have them assure themselves that they are willing for such material to be placed in the public domain. One of our research participants has been keeping a daily diary for many years, and this participant simply made photocopies for us of the periods that we requested. Not unexpectedly, this diary is richer than the others, because there is a more natural reflection on various personal aspects, whereas the other diaries turned out to be more focused on church related matters. In light of the personal nature of that particular diary, various themes from it are not explored below, even though they are fascinating and insightful, because the identity of the participant could be divulged unintentionally. All diaries were carefully stored so that only the researchers have access to them and they will be destroyed after the publication of this article further to ensure the protection of the identity of the research participants.

As researchers, we regard the initial conversations with the 13 pastors as part of the data gathered for this project: already, useful observations could be made from these interviews. Therefore some reflections from our research notes on this stage of the research process are included here, to give a wider, fuller picture of the clergy working in the Pretoria central areas.

### 3. THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

An overall impression of the 13 clergy approached was that they are extremely busy people who had to arrange their time carefully in order to fulfil all their roles and meet all the expectations of other people. The parishes/congregations they served varied from large, highly organised churches, with a number of clergy members along with administrative staff to support them, to smaller, more informal churches where the clergy take care of the administrative tasks themselves. The 13 clergymen and -women differed in age and seniority in the church, ranging from one who had just recently started a career in the church to one who is close to retirement. Two people were operating at a managerial level, which implied large administrative workloads and organisational commitments towards staff matters. Five of the 13 approached potential participants did not have fulltime appointments, and had to combine their work in the church with other fulltime or part time careers. Of the 13 approached clergy, five were foreigners, with two of these hailing from other African countries and three from other continents. As may be expected, the

overwhelming number of clergy approached were men (two of the 13 were women); 10 of the approached clergy were white and three were black.

In almost all the initial conversations we had with the original 13 ministers/pastors/priests, links with countries outside South Africa were highlighted by them. The fact that many of the clergy are foreigners themselves already point to the importance of linkages with other countries (for perspectives on in some ways relevant experiences in Johannesburg, see Nzayabino 2010:#290). The cosmopolitan character of the central Pretoria areas certainly contributes to the prominence of links with foreign countries, the diversity amongst clergy reflecting in some way also the populations they serve (cf. Eriksson 2007:6). Furthermore, the importance of language in such multifaceted contexts should not be underestimated: apart from the churches that operate exclusively in a language other than one of the 11 official languages of South Africa, many of the bigger churches have separate services in languages such as Portuguese, French and Mandarin.

Interestingly, clergy from large churches seemed eager to share statistical information about their parish / congregation. In two cases we were provided with this type of information even though we did not ask for it. Although the statistical information offered does not fit our research interest directly, the fact that it was offered remains of interest – apart from the fact that this type of information is more readily associated with research, it also appears that a certain comfort is derived by clergy in large congregations from the number of churchgoers who attend services regularly.

The actual sample of the four participants who eventually presented us with their diaries, consisted of four men. Two of them were foreigners who had come to South Africa as adults. One young participant was a pastor dedicated to youth ministry in his church; one had a large number of elderly church members in the congregation; two had large numbers of foreigners in their respective congregations. One of the latter is known widely to respond to the plight of refugees. Although all of the research participants “specialised” their services in a certain way, it is noteworthy that all of them welcomed any member of the community in their church and, as will become clear in the analysis below, all of them responded in some way to the poor and needy who seem to flock to churches in the Pretoria central areas.

#### 4. THE CONTEXT: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

The Pretoria central areas have undergone dramatic changes over the past two decades, and a number of the research participants, especially those who have been working in the area for a long time, commented extensively on the

changes in the area. Pretoria has been the administrative capital of South Africa since the country became a republic in 1961, and with the government that came into power in 1994, this city changed from one with predominantly white Afrikaans speaking residents to a city with a thoroughly heterogeneous population of residents, comprising different races, languages, nationalities and cultural groups. Moreover, the influx of immigrants from across the borders of South Africa is clearly noticeable, with them moving into the central city areas. These migrants include refugees, students and other temporary or permanent residents from various African countries. The apartment blocks that characterise the central areas have become multicultural and multiracial, with as a corollary an exodus of large numbers of white residents, within just a few years. In one of the Pretoria central city areas, namely Sunnyside, the breakdown according to racial categories in 2001 was 59.8 per cent black, 3.4 per cent coloured, 2.2 per cent Indian and 34.4 per cent white. Furthermore, 44 per cent of the residents indicated in the 2001 Census that they had no income (although 22 per cent of the residents were under the age of 19 and could therefore be expected to be dependents) and a further 14 per cent stated an income of under R1 600. The overwhelming majority of residents, namely 80.7 per cent, indicated that they belonged to a Christian faith (StatsSA 2001, figures based on authors' own calculations from raw data; cf. also De Beer & De Beer 2002:254-256). Apart from the fact that these figures are dated (the results of the 2011 census are still awaited), they only give some indications of the daily living conditions, since many people entering the central city areas work there but do not live there, and certain people entering the areas are mobile (e.g. beggars and street vendors), moving regularly (even daily) from place to place in search of resources to sustain them.

#### 4.1 Socio-economic realities

With this context as background, it is thus not surprising that a first dominant theme found in the diaries of the research participants is a description of the socio-economic circumstances of not only church members, but also of people living in the vicinity of the church and of people who come into contact with the participants in their work in the close proximity of the church. In many cases the participant is approached as "a pastor" or "person from the church" that can possibly help needy people. The following quote from one of the diaries illustrates this well<sup>6</sup>:

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6 Note that the wording from the diaries quoted below is to a great extent left unedited. The language issues some of the research participants deal with at times show up clearly. One of the diaries was submitted in Afrikaans, and the translation into English here tries to offer English equivalents to Afrikaans idiomatic expressions.

It happens increasingly that a stranger, without a home, approaches me after a morning service and indicates that he/she would like to speak to me in my capacity as a pastor. Usually the account is as follows: I lost everything/everything is stolen, also my ID and all other documents. I don't have a place to live, I don't have food. Can pastor please help me? (Conrad).

Apart from such advances by the poor, clergy in these areas also witness other traumatic experiences:

People drink until they get drunk. This leads them to drive roughly which result to accidents. People are either killed or hospitalized, cars are damaged, there is violence at home and at the end, it is divorce or separation. How can a drunken person become responsible in life? We have witnessed several homes broken; we have read a lot about the havoc of broken homes. Children are abandoned; they eventually result<sup>7</sup> to living on the streets and in the end become abusive themselves (Theo).

I am now in my 34<sup>th</sup> year in the ministry here. I witnessed how the ministry gradually transformed from a "comfortable", "automatic", "normal" practice in the seventies and eighties to an almost focused trauma ministry (Conrad).

One of the homeless guys that were beaten and mugged still has fresh scars in his face! He is one of many homeless guys I met that were beaten and mugged, for what? Clothes? Is it worth it? My heart cries for justice (Jacques).

Even a "quick stop" at a shop can be a reminder of the needs of others:

I was on my way home from a church meeting ... I stop at a garage in Sunnyside to buy some cool drink ... As I walk into the "quick shop" a homeless black man, dressed in old dirty clothes asks me for money ... I ask the guys behind the counter in the "quick shop" if this guy outside will take a bread or does he just want money? They say he will take the bread. So I get him a brown bread. They think I am a good person ... [and] that God will reward me ... I say to them that ... I am not doing it for a reward. I ask them what they believe in and it turns out they are Muslims. I want to share the gospel with them and ask them a couple of questions but I could only get a few questions in before it gets too busy in the shop. I tell them that I will chat to them again ... I go outside and meet the man ... start sharing the gospel with him; he needs the gospel more than the bread. He needs Jesus Christ the bread of life so that he will never hunger again. At the end I give him the bread and tell

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7 Editorial note: "result" should probably be read as "resort".

him to come to our church sometime then we can help him with clothes ... As I am about to leave another petrol attendant comes and asks me where he can get a good bible translation. I happened to have one in the car and showed it to him. I invited him to come and visit our church sometime and encouraged him to continue living out his faith. Then I left to get home to my family ... what an eventful night at the "quick shop" (Jacques).

Clergy are thus confronted with the physical needs and trauma of people on a regular basis. All the churches are involved in helping to alleviate pressing basic needs of people in some way, such as providing weekly food parcels to certain families or extending an invitation to the tea / coffee drinking after a church service on Sunday to homeless people who approach them (although this was initially met with resistance from certain members of the particular congregation). One research participant jokingly recounted how people are referring to the fact that the institution of "temple prostitutes" is being reinstated, since women who are believed to be prostitutes use the church stairs as a place to sleep during the night. In trying to address these basic needs, it is clear from the diaries that certain churches are developing organised approaches to the plight of the needy:

Nowadays we are geared for this type of situation [hungry person asking for help from the church] and normally we can offer a food parcel to relieve the worst hunger. We have, in collaboration with Organisation Z, a number of projects that focus specifically on the poverty problem in the inner city (Conrad).

Our policy is to never give money unless at least two of the leaders have decided on it ... But we tried to help where we can. Now we want to start a new system where we take a photo of the guys just to keep track of them and to keep record of how we are helping them. Yesterday I helped two guys with clothes (Jacques).

In describing the different approaches by churches to respond to the physical needs of people, Franklin (2002:xii) argues that there are at least five zones of urban ministry: The first of these is the "ministry of charity and mercy", which responds to the immediate physical needs of people – for example providing the poor with food parcels, as was seen above. The second zone is the "ministry of nurture", which also aims to help people, but then by them becoming self-reliant, for example by finding employment. The latter type of ministry is believed to involve more time and resources than the former, and at least one of our research participants is involved in this type of ministry on a fulltime basis. The third zone is called the "ministry of human service delivery", which requires an institutional commitment to people on matters such as job training. The "ministry of justice" is the fourth sector, and focuses

on the requirements of the “least advantaged members of society”, which comes into existence because of a void left by more powerful agents of power such as government (so, e.g. Magezi 2008:273-274 appeals to the church to increase its role in poor South African communities, which requires this level of involvement). The last sector is the “ministry of comprehensive community transformation”, where churches are leading the way towards a “good community” and a “good city”. These latter sectors resonate with the term “public theology” (cf. e.g. Peters 2007:142-154; van Aarde 2008:1213-1234) that is commonly used to denote that clergy cannot only respond to the needs of those in their congregations, but that a more active approach should be taken by churches and church leaders for the betterment of communities and larger society (see e.g. Bedford-Strohm 2010:#784; De Beer & De Beer 2002:265-267).

## 4.2 Formalising outreach

Clearly not all churches will be able to operate on all these levels of urban ministry, but more sophisticated approaches to the needs of the poor are desired and attained by many churches. Links with other organisations, church structures, wealthier congregations and persons are mentioned in certain diaries, which testifies to a high level of care that takes place in a planned, coordinated manner.

One of the results of such planning and coordination is time spent in meetings, which is not always experienced as a burden, but can also be positive, as observed in the diaries:

We had a good meeting. We planned for the way forward. How our Church can grow and how we can reach other parts of Pretoria (Jacques).

A couple of meetings with some hope for the future – a bit of a plan ... A good solid day meeting with Q, all the staff individually ... A good week with a lot of admin done (Samuel).

As implied by the above quotes, apart from coordination with external structures, internal coordination is also important, and that involves other church members in order to avoid becoming a “predikantskerk” (in the language of Heitink 2001). For example, responding to the immediate needs of people is not regarded as the sole responsibility of clergy by any of the research participants, and one participant specifically mentioned how disappointed he was when he was called to help a man when, in his opinion, that particular church member could have responded to the needs of the man himself:

I remember once, a long time ago, how upset I was when a deacon called me after church and ask that I please come and speak to a homeless man at the gate. As can be expected, he wanted food and shelter. I was upset, firstly because the deacon that brought this to my attention was the leader of the deacons, and secondly, because I realised that I failed to prepare the congregation to act as the body of Christ in servicing others. We cannot, especially not in the inner-city, be a pastor's church. If the leader of the deacons could not understand this, how will the rest of the congregation understand it? (Conrad).

Our bible study went out to share the gospel and to hand out gospel tracts. They are students and I could almost see the shock on their faces when I said: 'Okay guys, tonight we are going out on the streets to share the gospel.' But it was a blessed time! (Jacques).

Attending to the needs of the people is thus not restricted to physical needs, and certain participants at times even questioned the fact that they have to respond to such needs which they saw as not necessarily the focus of the church (note here the tone of professional frustration):

Saw a man at the gate today from Burundi. He came asking for help. He is in desperate need of money and food. I ask him why he decided to come to the Church? I mean if you want your car fixed you go to a car repair shop, if you want a phone you go to a cell shop. Why did he come to Church? What do you do at Church? Isn't it the place where believers meet to worship, to be edified and to be equipped for evangelism? So how can we help him? He says he loves God, and he is desperate! My concern is that if he loves God, why hasn't he gotten involved with a Church in Johannesburg where he stays and studies? (Jacques).

The research participants are thus confronted with various challenges where material and spiritual needs are brought to them with the expectation that they will fulfil such needs. Furniss (1994:4) observed that "feminists and ethnic minorities [in the context of the USA] ... demand that pastoral care grapple with social justice issues." On an organisational level, it is clear that a lot of planning and managing of initiatives to address the needs of those they regard as their responsibility is taking place. In these initiatives the participants are working towards practical solutions, but, as will be seen in the section immediately following, in the long run the strain of responding to these demands could have a negative effect on their personal wellbeing.

## 5. STRESS AND RESILIENCE

The church as an organisation can be described as "greedy" in the sense that it can place ever-increasing demands on individuals, to the point that

finding a balance between responding to the needs of others and also to those of close family members and the self becomes a constant struggle (cf. Putter & Lotter 2010:101-122). Urban ministry, and living in areas where various needs are clearly visible, contribute to the strain under which clergy work. Such situational aspects have been identified as contributing factors to burnout amongst the clergy (cf. Arumugam 2003:12-28), of which heavy workloads and time pressures are the most common, but the importance of personal factors and the complex interplay between personal and situational factors are evidently the causes of such burnout (Miner, Sterland & Dowson 2009:464; Cooke 2008:25-26; Beebe 2007:258; Grosch & Olsen 2000:620). Grosch & Olsen (2000) found that disillusionment and even withdrawal can be the end result if the demands of church work are always placed ahead of personal desires.

## 5.1 Experiencing stressful realities

In the case of the research participants, responding to the overwhelming needs of people may indeed create weariness and disillusionment in the long run, as may be observed from our diaries (note here first the weariness, then the disillusionment):

Yesterday it seemed like all the homeless and hungry ran to the church again ... I cannot count on my one finger how many clothes we have given to guys from the street. Today I heard from this guy that the clothes get given to the Nigerian drug dealers for drugs! Hey they probably have a clothing factory by now! And a drug factory and a cell phone factory, business is booming! Anyway, he also tells me that often the drug addicts get free 'rocks' (a type of drug) from the drug dealers but it is not really free. You see they have to then work for that dealer for the day and bring money in. How sick is that, slavery hasn't been abolished! Men so easily become slaves of drugs...because we are slaves of sin. And to think that at times I even desire the drugs of my past? Can a slave long to be enslaved again? (Jacques)

In my worse moments I feel I have been given too poisoned a chalice in this job and I am clearing up others' mess – some of whom are around and don't want to take responsibility for it. Where is God in this? (Samuel).

In a report on risk and resilience in urban ministry in five cities in the USA, it was found that finding time for rest and relaxation, and the feeling of powerlessness to improve the situation for people in the community were two of the five most frequently cited stress factors amongst clergy. The remaining three factors were frustration with media portrayals of urban life, violence,

and subtle racist attitudes (Eriksson 2007). In the USA study, respondents were reacting to survey questions, but in this diary-facilitated research project, unsolicited inner feelings were shared, and the first two factors named above were repeatedly found in the diaries. Such experiences, and the constant needs of people, can even instil a desire to create distance between the self and the demands of the urban environment:

Life in Sunnyside is not a good one for anyone with kids or for someone who is a Christian, and not even for a pastor. One must have the vision to leave the place (Theo).

## 5.2 Dealing with stressful realities

Williams (2009), in reflecting on the demands of urban ministry, comments that clergy often have the luxury to decide whether they want to make their home within the community they serve or not, since they often have the means to live in a more upmarket environment. The author advocates a position where clergy immerse themselves in the city, so that the “us and them” changes to a “we”. One of the participants in our research project, who had started the diarising activities but did not contribute enough entries to form a full part of the analysis, also supports such a view, and indeed a certain amount of critique towards clergy who do not live in the community was verbalised. Although such ideals of immersion seem thus to be strongly encouraged, a certain amount of distance may yet be found amongst certain of the participants and the people they serve. Geographical differences can be clearly seen, but time allocation is another way to create distance. For example, one of the participants, one who did not contribute a diary, does not have any contact with anybody related to the church or church matters for one day of each week. He jokingly says that this is what keeps him sane. Such strategies of distancing, which serves to provide restful areas or periods for clergy, are particularly found amongst older clergy.

Grosch & Olsen (2000) argue that the interplay between the demands of “church work” and certain personalities with specific family backgrounds create a fruitful environment for counteracting burnout. Pro-active steps in preventing burnout are explained as follows:

Most clergy have heard the standard advice – take time off, build a balanced life, get regular exercise, develop friendships, etc. – to prevent burnout. Denominational gatherings are full of such well-meaning but unhelpful workshops. Yet, despite knowing this, most busy clergy cannot take the advice that they freely give to others. The standard advice about preventing burnout generally leaves people feeling guilty.

The advice to build a balanced life is one more thing they do not have time for (Grosch & Olsen 2000:620).

Writing as both a participant and an observer, Van den Berg (2004:188) confirms the validity of the above in the South African context too, by stating that clergy feel even more pressured if well meaning advice on time management and such aspects fail because of the complexity of clergy's work-life-situation. Coate (1989:10-12) shows how clergy are often approached by congregation members with "urgent" issues at all times of day and night, even on their "day off" which heightens feelings of stress. Those clergy members who are able to differentiate at a high level between the self and their role as pastor (keeping in mind that, of course, nobody can completely differentiate between the two, just as nobody can identify entirely with another person) are least likely to develop the symptoms of burnout (Beebe 2007:271). In Samuel's diary there is an example of struggling with precisely this process of differentiation:

Still feeling not quite on top of things health wise. Kind of reclaiming my own person at weekends a bit – sense that I am often playing a role during the week but need to recover some sense of fun [illegible]. The role is the person in control with the answers. Need more fun recreation in my life (Samuel).

In the diaries, glimpses of the clashing of personal and family needs and the demands of the work were also detectable:

Today very tired for some reason. Weight or amount of work weighing heavily on me – bad spirit making me think I am not up to the task? Feel something paralysing and blocking ... Tonight even doubting love of God – definitely bad spirit. Pray for grace to resist bad spirit and discernment to identify, heal and move past this block (Samuel).

I pray that my heart will be right. It is just so difficult to make a call. I have a family to support, I have other believing brothers and sisters in the Church who are battling financially...do we give to the guy from the street that we don't know at all? Anyway...just some things I am battling with (Jacques).

In trying to address the challenges in their lives the participants use more than one strategy, of which the first is obvious – trying to create quiet time away from the needs of others in order to attain some balance in their lives. The second strategy relates to experiences of faith. The participants express a close relationship with God, which for them translates into a sense of security for themselves:

Quiet day at home. Sense of God with us – Emmanuel even in His most meaningless moments – such as death and all other absurdity. Feel drained by the week but fundamentally at peace ... Feeling the need to be gentle on myself look after myself more, especially in downtime (Samuel).

This sense of religious security that is experienced (even though it is questioned at times) by the clergy themselves, and which they want to share with others, is often what keeps them going regardless of obstacles. Responding to the spiritual needs of those that come across their path is regarded as the major focus of their ministry. In this regard the Bible is often quoted and referred to in their diaries as a source of wisdom and hope and prayer, a source of finding strength for themselves and for the people in their congregation:

It is the time of reflection on the suffering of Christ. Why does the church still have to suffer if Christ had already suffered? And why must Job-figures still denounce the day of their birth on rubbish dumps? Victory has after all been achieved and the festivities may begin. But Paul takes part in the celebration in chains. What does celebration have to do with chains? That is what the people in the congregation are asking. Sunnyside wants to know how to keep afloat until the end from one burdensome struggle to the next.

I will, by referring to Ephesians 6 try to convey it to the congregation as follows: ... (Conrad).

I feel like David, my sin is ever before me Psalm 51. As believers we fight and battle sin and I can't wait till one day when my battle with sin will be over. Now I will battle on! I will fight the good fight of faith! To be honest, and God knows how often I long for the things in my past life ... but I have to remind myself not to live according to the lust of the flesh. Those are the things that Christ has saved me from. He saved me from being a slave of sin to become a slave of righteousness! It is only Christ that can once and for all satisfy! Satan always tempts us with temporal 'pleasures' that cannot satisfy! I am preparing for bible study on Romans 4 and my desire is to be a man of faith like Abraham and Noah (Jacques).

I pray to trust God more deeply and fully (Samuel).

A close experienced relationship with God thus urges the participants to provide answers through sermons, on an interpersonal and intrapersonal level, and on a continual basis. These answers are not necessarily easy to come by, or straightforward, but it inspires the clergy to act out their faith constantly, despite their own feelings of anger, disillusionment and moments

of doubt. The following quotation illustrates such an expression of faith by an older research participant:

As a young theological student I often wondered how a pastor is able to have a sermon every week. I am now close to retirement and I can truthfully say the following:

God has provided. Before I can even begin to wonder about the following gathering where the Word has to be served, the thoughts have already presented themselves chronologically! I am at times dumbfounded over the words and the timing thereof. I am not trying to imply that they are 'good' sermons – but every time I come to the realisation that the specific words are *valid* for that moment.

I believe that God's words are alive and powerful. I believe that words (also general words of human beings that are used by Christians) bring salvation.

I believe that God through Christ and his Spirit speaks through the stammering and often hesitant and struggling carriers of the words who dare to say 'thus spoke the Lord' (Conrad).

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the above that both dimensions of the research participants' spirituality – the external and the internal; the doing and the experiencing – were prominent enough that they could write in substantive terms about their lives of faith. The honesty and at times poignancy of the diary entries, the fact that the diaries included positive and negative dimensions to both the external and the internal, along with the descriptions varying between the factually descriptive and the emotionally revealing, have given us insight into the life worlds of clergy members in the central Pretoria areas.

The life world of a member of the clergy in this area namely now includes to a great extent dealing with destitute people, not as an occasional occurrence or for a few brief moments at a traffic intersection, which South Africans have to deal with commonly, but as part of a professional, daily activity. The experiences vary, namely from the realisation that a very basic yet important task is fulfilled for people who probably have no other resource to rely on, to the frustrations experienced that this task is never ending and, at times, that it may well be abused by criminal networks. In such times, parallel to what has been found elsewhere, it is not only the broader role of the clergy that is put to question, but more strongly personal, what exactly it means to be in ministry (Peterson, referred to in Cooke 2008:28; De Beer & De Beer 2002:256). The

eventualities described above have for the research participants religious significance (cf. De Beer 1998), since dealing with the impoverished is part of the vocation to which clergy often feel themselves called; pulling in another direction, though, is the drudgery of performing such tasks, along with administrative and at times managerial duties, and the demands made on the emotional and time resources of the clergymen concerned.

That so much human tragedy has to be dealt with, takes its toll. Even though theological education / ministerial formation training programmes often include a focus on such matters (cf. e.g. Nel 2009:#130), the reality can be so overwhelming that it impinges on the wellbeing of the clergy, to the point that what they do flies in the face of their very own best advice, as we have seen above. The distancing in emotional, temporal and physical terms that result from this, though found in some ways in many professions, gains a different hue in these particular circumstances. Given that the human difficulties that cause this psychological dynamic of distancing do not cease to exist during such exercises in extraction, of which the clergy are of course fully aware, and given the intensely personal appeal of the sense of call that lead people to a life of service within such a church ministry, we should not be surprised that unresolved tensions are experienced by clergy in such situations (cf. Dreyer 2004:1245-1266). Something of this can be seen in the indications above on the competing demands – all valid – made on the research participants by their work alleviating the suffering of strangers, by close family members, and by own needs and desires. The latter includes dealing with own “demons” or temptations, either because of past, pre-ministry, life experiences, or because of a sense of loss of possibilities precisely because of the choice to follow this calling.

That intense job satisfaction can be found despite at times trying circumstances, is clear too. It is touching to read how sense is made of the world the clergy have to deal with daily; also, to notice how initially unforeseen adaptations have had to be made over the years, as the demands of the context shaped the nature of the ministry, and how a research participant makes peace with this, even finds joy in this.

To earn one's daily bread by, in a sense, being a provider of, or at least a conduit for, the daily bread of others, is namely no simple matter. On the one hand, it can be unfulfilling for highly qualified individuals constantly to perform intellectually and spiritually unchallenging tasks, given that they quite naturally reflect deeply on their circumstances, their own being and work, and – in line with the nature of their profession – the theological dimensions involved with such matters. Along with this go the emotional and existential pressures of dealing daily with suffering and trauma to which there seems to be no end. On the other hand, the ideals of a simple life, and the idealisms of helping where help is most needed and bringing with it also spiritual upliftment,

which are inherent to the religious identity of these clergy members, add dimensions to the work they are engaged with which neither counteract nor balance the aforementioned difficulties, but which add different dimensions. To the multiplicity of such life experiences, we should not be blinded by prejudices on the clergy, on socio-cultural impulses such as secularisation or contextualisation (cf. e.g. du Toit 2006:1251-1268; Dreyer & Pieterse 2010:#798), or on inner-city life.

As outsiders (cf. Rabe 2003:149-161) for the researchers to give a full sketch of the variety and complexity of these experiences of the research participants and of others in similar vocations, is of course not possible. Both the abundance of inner-city religious life (cf. Smit & Rugunanan 2010) and the restricted nature of our enquiry limit the table that we can set here, academically. Moreover, the fact that only four people submitted full diaries to this project is a serious limitation. Sandelowski (1995), in reflecting on the sample size of qualitative research methods, advises that saturation should guide the number of cases investigated. Although certain issues repeated in the four diaries (which would indicate saturation), diaries from more diverse quarters may have brought additional themes to the fore. However, the trail of crumbs we were able to follow by means of the diary method offered us enough insight to be able to present something of the value of clergy members' lived religion in Pretoria's central areas.

Three recommendations spring from these conclusions:

- That, to as great an extent as possible, the clergy involved in ministry in the Pretoria central areas not be burdened with additional duties, or that any further meetings such as feedback sessions or support programmes be arranged for them. Their time allocation is already strongly committed, and to add to their burdens would not serve them well in their daily work. Training for such ministries as this may well be expanded upon during the initial period of theological education (cf. e.g. Putter & Lotter 2010:101-122), prior to entering pastoral work, but once active within their profession, the demands are such that normal work experience would be a better suited learning school than other forms of additional training.
- To facilitate their continued work, low-impact but practically useful strategies of support which make no demands on the ministers'/pastors'/priests' time, but which support them in what they are already doing, be implemented. A possible example would be a simple bi-annual leaflet posted to them, containing the up-to-date contact details of all other, related services (such as crisis counselling services, help centres for immigrants and refugees, and the like) for easy reference when needed.

- That some form of public acknowledgement of and appreciation for the work of these members of the clergy and their colleagues be expressed. This we propose by publication of this research material, through three fora:
  - \* by means of the seminar of interested parties at which this research was presented;
  - \* by publication of this research in an academic journal (with possible re-publication later of the same material in a book that collects studies from the two projects of which the present research forms a part);
  - \* by sending such publication/s to the research participants, in order for them to gain broader perspectives on their work, by which hopefully they may as individuals gain some sense of how their experiences fit into the broader patterns of similar experiences, and the regard in which they are held for undertaking these valuable services.

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