Fostering a praxis of spatial justice in suburban churches: An emancipatory approach

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

Signature: Date: 31 May 2021

ABSTRACT

Almost three decades after the end of apartheid in South Africa, Cape Town remains a racially, economically and spatially divided city. This study focuses on the praxis of suburban churches and is located within a wider national conversation about land reform, the crisis of ongoing urban land (in)justice and the position of church-owned land and property in this discourse. It takes an emancipatory research approach towards fostering a praxis of spatial justice in churches located in the former Whites-only Southern Suburbs of the City of Cape Town. The framework of the praxis cycle guides the literature and the voices of ministers in suburban Cape Town into three moments: immersion and social analysis, theological reflection and action towards spatial justice. Lenses are then proposed with which it is possible to approach an ongoing emancipatory approach to suburban churches, and churches in general, in the quest for more just and inclusive cities.

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Undertaking a project of this nature, as a South African who directly benefitted economically and spatially from the atrocities of apartheid is not a journey I embarked on lightly. Through the years leading up to and during this study, I have been carried and generously encouraged by many who still wait to see land and spatial justice realised in their own stories. Without their questions, challenges, assurance and support I would not have been able to bring this contribution. They number too many to mention by name but I want to specifically honour the communities of The Warehouse Trust, Reclaim the City, Tshwane Leadership Foundation, Word on the Street, Leadership in Urban Transformation cohorts and the St Johns Leadership Academy.

My thanks go to each of the ministers that attended the focus groups or were interviewed and who reflected openly and honestly. I learnt so much about what it means to be called as a minister in the church, to trust God with the calling and to carry a congregation and the neighborhood in one's heart.

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I have shed many tears as I listened to stories of the crushing losses suffered at the hands of colonial and apartheid spatial planning, the silence or complicity of churches in these injustices, the ongoing violence of the State and the City against landless and homeless people. I have also had my heart filled with hope. Churches are full of creative, courageous people laboring for liberation and justice. Our cities are full of even more! I believe the Holy Spirit is moving between us all and that we are seeing the groundswell our fore-runners prayed and longed for.

But as it always goes in life, it is the love of friends that most causes our hearts to fill with hope and break with tears. I dedicate this study to …

Faustino, Ntombi, Prof, Richard,Tata Tshawe and Clint

… you brought the most wonderful hope during your lifetimes and you caused our hearts to break by leaving us too soon. You, like the people of Isaiah 58 let your righteousness shine like the noon day sun. I know you see us. And we still see your light. With God’s help, we will keep laboring in this light until it is our time to rest.

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1.1 Urban theologies and spatial justice

> That our geographies and histories are socially produced and not simply given to us by god or nature leads to an awareness that the geographies in which we live can have both positive and negative effects. They can provide advantage and opportunity, stimulate, emancipate, entertain, enchant, enable. They can also constrain opportunity, oppress, imprison, subjugate, disempower, close off possibilities. In our terms, geographies or spatialities can be just as well as unjust, and they are produced through processes that are simultaneously social and spatial, subjective and objective, concretely real and creatively imagined (Soja 2010:104).

Theological reflection centring on issues specific to urban life and struggle and the challenges of a rapidly urbanising world has grown with the growth of cities in the past few decades (Venter 2006:201). De Beer (2016:13), a leader in the academic discourse on and praxis of urban theology in the South African context speaks of 1) 'engaging the spirit of the city' that happens at a theoretical level and 2) 'outwitting, unmasking and dismantling the spirit of the city' that happens at a practical level. He states that this may require 'innovative, critical and prophetic spatial embodiments, irruptions against the dominant narrative, boldly demonstrating – with where we locate our bodies – the possibility of an alternative imagination'. These theological ideas, in conversation with global thought-leaders in city-making and spatial justice, seek to put the growing discipline of urban theology and the theology of spatial justice firmly on the agenda of churches, theological institutions and faith-based social activists to make what de Beer & Swart (2014:11) describe as an 'authentic, theological contribution towards meeting the challenges of the urban in South Africa'.

Soja (2009:2) defines spatial justice in the broadest sense as 'an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice' and asserts: 'As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them'. This study brings churches, the city, space, justice and theology into a dynamic conversation with one another.

1.2 Locating myself as the researcher

I, the researcher, approach this project fortified and informed by the collective pursuit of this growing urban theological agenda. I am also shaped by my attempts with others to engage, dismantle, reimagine and reconstruct the spirit of the divided city of Cape Town. I am a third-generation South African of British descent who grew up in a former Whites-only suburb of Cape Town during apartheid, turning eighteen only a few months before our first democratic elections in 1994. I have worked with a wide variety of churches in Cape Town over the past 15 years[1], with a focus on developing church-based responses to inequality and injustice. Through my involvement in the suburban church that I attend, and with urban land rights movements in Cape Town, my desire to understand more about suburban churches and their relationship with spatial (in)justice has grown. As part of my growing consciousness, I have become increasingly aware of what I perceive as a disconnect between the realm of urban, especially spatial, theologies of liberation and justice, and the lived realities of churches in the suburban belt of the city.

In 2017, I conducted a study in Practical Theology[2] that asked preliminary questions to this study. In that research, I focused on the journey of a suburban church, of which I am a member, towards a praxis of spatial justice. That initial research launched me into becoming more intimately involved in the spatial transformation of my church. This

[1] I work with The Warehouse Trust, an organisation that exists to walk with churches as they seek the peace and justice in their contexts (cf. Warehouse, n.d.)

[2] Powell, C., 2017, *Fostering a consciousness for spatial justice in a suburban church: a practical theology challenge.* Unpublished PGD mini-dissertation, University of Pretoria

experience made me want to better understand the lived experience of suburban churches more widely in order to contribute to the body of academic work in this arena and to inform the work of those of us in the faith-based movement in South Africa who are seeking to journey with churches in this way.

Located in the emerging field of an ‘emancipatory approach’ to research (Swartz and Nyamnjoh, 2018:4) which is detailed in Chapter Two, this project invited churches onto a bridge that is being built between the spatial injustices of our South African urban context and the activists and academics who are calling for urgent attention to this issue. I believe that this approach can contribute to the work of fostering the growth of a movement in suburban, and other, churches towards a just relationship to and use of space in our context and beyond.

I consider my history, social location, vocation and faith to be an integral part of the research process, seeing myself and those with whom I share a similar history as simultaneously part of the crisis and the possible solution. Therefore, the churches included in this study are located in the former Whites-only Southern suburbs of the city of Cape Town.

Reflecting the call from local spatial justice activists for ‘affordable housing in well-located parts of the city’ (Reclaim the City n.d.), the churches in this study are well-located close to the economically active main road, train lines, business hubs and commercial districts, places of recreation and in economically exclusive residential neighbourhoods. De Beer (2016:8) reflects theologically (and ecclesially) on this reality:

> The way in which a city is socially or spatially constructed tells a story of the city’s spirituality. A greedy, profit-driven city will place much emphasis on monumental developments that often exclude the poor but testify to a certain kind of political and economic power. The gods of the market and capital have the upper hand and the church too often bows to the same gods. Can Christian theology, as part of a spatial justice agenda, discern where and how the Creator Spirit is hovering in resistance of death-dealing forces,

> seeking to liberate, redeem and transform in radically contrasting ways to what we have normalised as a society today?

Over the past six years, my own praxis has come into closer proximity with these tensions held in the heart of Cape Town's spirituality - in churches, theology classes, not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) and social movements. In my previous, exploratory research, I reflected on not just the exclusive and insular nature of suburban churches, but also the potential and hope held within them:

> Churches of the suburbs own large pieces of prime land in well-located parts of the city. They are full to the brim with highly skilled people living with the longing that their lives would count for something in this world. They are closer in proximity to the poor than the suburban Christian might suspect: their immediate neighbours increasingly include people living homeless on their streets, the women working in prostitution on the nearest main road, and the commuter learners from the townships travelling to and from the school on the corner that suburban children no longer attend. These factors mean that the suburban church has the potential to ask searching questions about its place in history and its role in the future of city-making. This means that in the arena of urban theology and a theology of spatial justice, the suburban church could yet rise and take a significant place as a role-player in a passionate drama of co-constructing a different city, liberating itself from the narrowness of suburban life and embracing the stranger, who may well be the one who brings redemption (Powell:2017:14).

This research project has been sustained by this hope for suburban churches and by the concern that without a purposeful intervention to nurture a praxis of spatial justice they might continue to live with, or even perpetuate, the spatial injustices that de Beer (2016:8) reminds us 'we have normalised as a society'.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to foster a praxis of spatial justice in suburban churches in Cape Town through undertaking participatory action research with an emancipatory

approach with ministers who elected to be part of the study. The research set out to explore the interrelated dynamics of reflection and action in suburban churches as they relate to the concept of spatial justice:

- Reflection: the theories, thoughts and influences, specifically theologies, that the churches engage with that shape the spatial consciousness of their corporate lives

- Action: the spatial decision-making, practices and activities as lived faith of the churches

- The dynamic interplay between action and reflection in which reflection determines action and action influences reflection

The praxis of spatial justice I am interested in is about liberation and transformation, in the way Freire (2003:123) speaks about it: 'Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.'

1.4 Research Title and Question

Fostering a spatial justice praxis in suburban churches: An emancipatory approach.

Central question:

What does a spatial justice praxis look like in churches located in former Whites-only suburbs of Cape Town?

Sub-questions:

- Are the churches aware of issues of spatial injustice in their historical and current context?
- Do churches in the sample group have a developing consciousness and theology of spatial justice?
- What theological reflections and practices are present in the churches that either foster or hinder spatial justice?

- Is there a role for research with an emancipatory approach in fostering a praxis of spatial justice?

1.5 Research associates

I conducted this research towards the completion of a Masters degree in Practical Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria. I am a research associate with the Centre for Faith and Community (CFC n.d.) at the same faculty, in a team considering issues of social justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid spaces, and my focus in that group is on spatial justice and churches. I work as a member of the church mobilisation team at The Warehouse Trust (The Warehouse n.d.), an NPO based in Cape Town that accompanies churches on their journeys of internal transformation towards addressing transformation in the world around them, with a specific focus on social justice. This research project was informed by my work within this organisation. The findings of this research will inform our ongoing work with churches.

1.6 Literature overview

The full study of consulted literature is found across Chapters Three, Four and Five as each chapter puts the literature and the voices from the churches into conversation with one another. This overview thus provides a reference to the literary sources that frame the whole study.

1.6.1 A historical overview leading to this study

The political approach to land reform and how this relates to theological discourse and church praxis in South Africa is powerfully explored by Mofokeng (1997:53) who says:

> A brutal dispossession of African land has been legitimized and legalized in the Codesa agreement. This means that a white theology that attributes the criminal dispossession to God viz. that God gave them land, has been given State sanction. In this regard instead of calling that violent dispossession a sin, it has been turned into God's blessing. This further means that our dispossession has been turned into God's act of punishment which Africans

> have to painfully accept….[W]e also have to conclude that socially speaking, a Black Theology of land that is developed upon the basis of the fundamental illegitimacy and sinfulness of dispossession, has to oppose the political compromise that provided the basis for legalization of the sin of land dispossession. That compromise is a sin because it legalized a sinful act of land dispossession. It is also a sin because it legalized the creation of a perpetual state of poverty and loss of culture and identity of the African people. It laid the political basis for the development of a heretical theology of land.

There is much still to be done to bring South African churches into reflection on this 'heretical theology of land' and churches
complicity in land injustice and to bring us into meaningful conversation with, and praxis alongside, land justice movements in our country where people cry 'Land for people, not for profit!' (Reclaim the City n.d) and 'Umhlaba - Izindlue - neSithunzi (Land - Housing - Dignity)' (Abahlali baseMjondolo n.d.).

Ecumenical and denominational church expressions have had this question on their agenda for many years. The Rustenberg Declaration that emerged from a gathering of delegates from 85 South African churches in 1990 stated: 'For many years, greed has led to the taking of land from the poor and weak. But church and state must address the issue of restoring land to dispossessed people' (Tsele and Butler 1998:42). The consultation on the effective use of Church Land in 1997, convened by the South African Council of Churches, Surplus People's Project, and National Land Commission, resulted in an extensive policy framework. This included theological reflection and practical outlines for the way forward to be adopted by churches, as well as a call for and commitment to a nationwide audit of church-owned land (Gillan 1998). The Church Land Programme (CLP) released a series of articles in the *Bulletin for Contextual theology: The Land Issue,* (CLP n.d.) that includes a report of a preliminary church land audit. Ntsebeza (2005) wrote on church land in *Land Tenure Reform in South Africa: A Focus on the Moravian Church Land in the Western Cape*, which includes a summary of the response and follow up to the previous

commitments, declarations and policy frameworks, as well as an in-depth case study of the Moravian Church and its relationship to the land it owns. While possibly lacking consistency, collective action and unity, and widespread support from across the board over the past three decades, these conferences, declarations and statements should be heeded and built upon to foster a praxis of land and spatial justice in South African churches.

But what does this mean for churches in urban and specifically suburban contexts? Are the questions and agendas of land justice weighted heavily towards the rural context? If so, has this affected how churches in cities relate to these questions and agendas? In their report of a preliminary church land audit conducted with nine mainline church denominations in 1997, Philpott and Zondi (1999:20) state:

> The type of land owned by the church ranges from small urban plots for a local church building to large rural farms for both residential and agricultural purposes. For the purposes of land reform, it is presumed that it is the rural land-holdings of the churches which are of interest, and this study attempts to highlight these and will focus on the possibilities regarding the larger rural land-holdings. However, information is provided on local church plots to provide the context of church land in general.

The following table summarises findings from their church land audit, adapted with amendments – highlights my own addition.

Denomination	Number of Properties	As % of Total	Area of Properties (Ha)	As % of Total
ELCSA (Lutheran)	122	6%	57 146	31%
Moravian	10	1%	55 103	30%
Roman Catholic	315	15%	40 738	22%
NGK (Dutch Reformed)	600	30%	14298	8%
CPSA (Anglican)	379	18%	7131	4%
Methodist	450	22%	2027	1%
Presbyterian	79	4%	2579	1%
United Congregational	29	1%	2031	1%
Salvation Army	61	3%	1898	1%
Other	8		2	
Total Amount	**2053**	**100%**	**182 953**	**100%**

Figure 1: Church-owned land in South Africa Philpott and Zondi (1999:23)

There is a marked difference between church denominations that own the most hectares of land (*i.e.* mostly rural), and those that own the most properties (*i.e.* small urban plots). The top three landowners all have fewer properties, in some cases considerably less, than the top three property owners.

1.6.2 Locating church land justice in the cities and suburbs of South Africa

I affirm Philpott and Zondi's assertions that for effective land reform and redistribution to happen at the hand of the church in South Africa, the larger rural and peri-urban land-holdings are critical spaces of engagement. However, I believe that in the two decades that have passed since this initial audit, there has not been enough research focus on the many relatively small pieces of church-owned land in the inner cities and suburban areas of our country. This is especially important in light of the rapid urbanisation of our country and continent, and the shifting demographics of church attendance and property use. In the literature on church-owned land in South Africa, I have not found further data on church-owned urban and suburban plots in South Africa and have found very few documented case studies that significantly bring this decades-old discussion into conversation with emerging theologies and case studies of spatial justice.

Bowers-Du Toit and Nkomo (2014) conducted research with suburban churches in Cape Town regarding their perceptions of poverty, injustice and inequality; Eliastem (2016) reflects candidly as a former pastor of a suburban church in Cape Town on the fears and prejudices that he perceives to have held the congregation back from truly liberative praxis and ecclesiology and puts the concepts of Ubuntu and Spatial Justice into conversation with one another; and Swanepoel (2016) speaks equally openly and somewhat more positively on the process the church he leads in a Johannesburg suburb went through to repurpose the use of their under-utilised property that reflects a movement towards hospitality that seeks justice and challenges the status quo of the suburb within which it is located.

These and other studies point towards research and documented praxis that already exists in my area of interest, and also provide crucial insights for other churches seeking to foster a praxis of spatial justice in their contexts.

1.6.3 Theoretical frameworks used in the study

The theories and theologies that undergird my praxis as a researcher will be referenced throughout the rest of the paper, as the literature study is woven through the findings. They include:

- Practical Theology with an emphasis on the framework of the praxis cycle as described by Holland and Henriot (1983) and Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991).
- Interdisciplinary theories of spatial justice drawing on the work of Edward Soja (2013), David Harvey (1973) and Henri Lefebvre (1974).
- Theologies of spatial justice pioneered in the work of de Beer (2016).
- A black theology of liberation and land justice from the South African context as shaped by Vuyani Vellem (2016).

1.6.4 Introducing the Praxis cycle

The term ‘praxis cycle’ can be used interchangeably with Holland and Henriots ‘pastoral circle’ or ‘circle of praxis’ to describe the theological method as an ongoing spiral of action and reflection (Headley 2018:3). Holland and Henriot (1983:8-9) define the four moments of the cycle as *immersion* (where and with whom are we located?); *social analysis* (examining causes, probing consequences); *theological reflection* (understanding the first two moments in light of lived faith, scripture, church and tradition); and *pastoral planning for action* (what response, in individuals and communities, is provoked by the first three moments?).

De Gruchy (2015:127), locating his work in social theology, promotes the use of the praxis cycle - ‘a framework for engaging the world and religion in a rationally defensible way’ - for use in academic research and thesis-writing. He supports this by describing the praxis cycle as a ‘consensus outcome’ of the methods of the first generation of Latin American Liberation Theologians including Gutiérrez, Bonino, Boff, and Segundo, who collectively ‘paid a great deal of attention to the question of methodology and the dialogue between theology and the social sciences’ (De Gruchy 2015:127).

In the following chapter, I describe how the praxis cycle shaped the analysis of the empirical data that I collected. As a method born out of a commitment to praxis, it provided the ideal framework for the body of this study. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, each moment will be described in more detail, and specifically with the lens of spatial justice. Banawiratma (2005:73) reflects that the praxis cycle 'has been helping Christian communities to live contextually for the past twenty-five years' and affirms that 'it continues to help activists and theologians serve their communities'. It has been my experience, both leading up to and during this study, that this method truly does invite participants ever more deeply into their contexts while imparting theological and practical tools with which to navigate and serve these contexts.

1.7 Research contribution

Despite numerous calls for this to take place, there is no evidence of a coordinated and comprehensive full church land and property audit in South Africa to date. Notwithstanding, the Methodist, Roman Catholic and Moravian churches have all identified land and property for restitution purposes (cf. SACBC 2012, Bolnick and van Rensburg 2005, Ntsebeza 2005). However, there is little publically available qualitative or quantitative data regarding how effectively church-owned land is currently used for redemptive purposes or how much has been used for restitutive purposes. As a result, there is no evidence of a comprehensive national understanding of how much urban and suburban land is currently owned and occupied by churches, or how it is used.

In December 2017, the then newly appointed president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, announced that the ruling party had 'resolved that the expropriation of land without compensation should be among the mechanisms available to the government to give effect to land reform and redistribution' (Merton, 2017). This announcement sent South African society into what felt like an unprecedented season of civil-political engagement on this issue. The renewed interest in land justice from some churches and denominations informed the preliminary literature study of this research to include the history of church-owned land in South Africa.

It has been fascinating to uncover the deep theological and contextual questions that have been grappled with and the many attempts at launching a more public and corporate process of land restitution by the churches of South Africa over the past three decades. Seldom though, did I find the discourse about land justice and the role of the church merging or synergizing with theories of spatial justice. Furthermore, while theological and church institutions leant into the urgency of the land debate after December 2017, few have sustained conversations that are leading to action, and even fewer relate the vast question of land justice in post-1994 South Africa to urban areas or urban plots owned and occupied by churches. I found even less significant reflection, research or helpful synergy being pursued with or about churches in the suburban areas of the nation.

This study aims to contribute to building the academic discourse towards fostering a praxis of spatial justice in suburban churches, as well as to identify significant areas for further research in this regard.

1.8 Definition of terms used in the study

Church

In this study, the word church refers to a local congregation in a specific location usually (and always in the case of this study) allied to a wider denomination or body.

Minister

The term minister as used in this study refers to the religious leader of a local church congregation.

Racial classifications

The apartheid racial classifications of people: African/Black; Coloured; White; Indian are used in this study. These are contested terms and there is important literature that must be engaged around the classification of people in post-apartheid South Africa that is beyond the scope of this study. They are, however, the terms used most frequently in the literature describing the genesis of the apartheid city. Several ministers used the

term People of Colour as a term that includes, in South Africa, Black, Coloured and Indian persons.

Praxis

The term praxis is not only used in this study as related to the framework of the praxis cycle but also to describe the human activity of action and reflection as defined by educational theorist and activist Paulo Freire (2003:123). Integral to this study is the idea that reflection fuels action and action provokes reflection.

Spatial justice/injustice

The term *spatial injustice* is used when referring to the *presence of spatial injustice* in a context, and the term *spatial justice* when referring to the *pursuit of spatial justice* in a context. The term spatial (in)justice is used when the meaning will be amplified by acknowledging that it could be both the presence of spatial injustice or justice.

1.9 Conclusion

The interviews and focus groups for this study had just been completed when the disaster of the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded across our country in 2020. As civil society, including churches, responded to immediate needs, especially food insecurity, the spatial fractures in our cities became harder to ignore. Questions of homelessness, evictions, and land to live on returned to public discourse and are increasingly being framed as crucial issues of spatial (in)justice in a world affected by the pandemic (cf Kihato and Landau 2020).

In my capacity at my own church, as a consultant with churches across the city, a researcher and as a friend and supporter of local urban land and spatial justice lobby groups, I hope to play a part in fostering a movement of church-led spatial justice in Cape Town for many years to come. I am careful not to base my praxis within this movement on pure assumptions about particularly the churches in my city, particularly in suburban areas. By doing this focused study, I have gained deeper insights into the lived reality of these churches.

I am affirmed in my quest to better understand the experience of churches by the words of Haight and Nieman (2012:30) who describe the critical contribution of congregational studies and research in ecclesiology. They call for ‘theology that stands in service to the church’, asserting that it is essential that such research ‘engage accurately and amply with the local realities, sorrow, and hopes of actual assemblies of the faithful’ and continue with a warning:

> Without this check, theological study can risk becoming insulated from the world in which it tries to speak, and thus its gifts of wisdom and reflection become muted or subverted. Not only is the field of theology hurt by this, but congregations also desperately need the connections, perspectives and mediation theology can bring (Haight and Nieman 2009:30).

This research project is committed to bringing robust theological research and reflection to churches while simultaneously bringing the lived realities of the churches to ongoing theological discourse - all towards the greater purpose of seeking a praxis of spatial justice in the cities of South Africa.

CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGIES OF AN EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH APPROACH

This chapter describes the overall empirical research design and methodology used in this study. It explains the rationale behind the selection of the sample group, the research interventions and activities conducted with this group to gather data, and the methods used to analyse the data.

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks for this Research

2.1.1 Qualitative research

The research was executed as a qualitative study. I applied Creswell's eight key aspects of qualitative research (Creswell 2014:185-186):

i) Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting rather than a created one:

The research setting was churches in suburbs of interest to the research topic.

ii) The researcher as the key instrument of research:

I used my role at the NPO where I work to invite churches into the research process. By this, they knew that not only was their involvement to collect data but that it is part of the wider, ongoing, work of fostering a praxis of spatial justice through churches. I personally contacted, met with, interviewed, and hosted participatory focus groups with the ministers who took part in the study.

iii) Multiple sources of data:

I used interviews, participatory focus groups, ethnographic observation and autoethnographic reflection to collect data.

iv) Abductive approach to data analysis:

I worked through the data (written notes, recordings, transcriptions of recording, written feedback of participants) to build patterns, categorisations, and themes from the bottom up by organising the data into themes, using an inductive approach. I also approached the data collection method and data analysis with a theoretical framework (the praxis cycle) in mind, following a deductive approach.

v) Participants meanings:

While my interest in the subject and desire to see churches grow in this arena is clear, in my research findings and reflections I focus on the meaning the participants described in response to the questions, whether I agree with it or not.

vi) Emergent design:

As the research progressed, the design of the method needed to be adjusted slightly due to emerging needs and availability of participants without compromising the primary aims of the research question. I started by inviting 29 churches from the sample area via email and followed up the contacts with telephone calls to answer questions for clarity if needed. Seven ministers responded to the initial email invitation to engage in a participatory focus group, which I ran with them. I also used that opportunity to pilot and then refine the questions for the study.

Others who responded positively but could not attend the focus group were invited to a one-on-one semi-structured interview. One minister who heads up a monthly arch-deaconry gathering of all the ministers in his denomination (8 in total) who were part of the sample area, invited me to attend one of their gatherings where I was able to meet other ministers who expressed interest in being interviewed.

Finally, one minister from a denomination contacted me to suggest that I run a focus group with the ministers from her denomination that mostly fell into my sample area. I conducted a condensed version of the research interview and focus group with this group of 6 ministers. The two focus groups differed in structure and time from each other and were several months apart but had the same core questions and reflections.

vii) Reflexivity:

In my previous study, I stated:

> I have reflected throughout on how my role in the study, my background, culture and experience as a member of the church and being demographically similar to many of the participants of the study could shape the outcomes or interpretations (such as themes identified, including the meaning I ascribe to the data). In particular, I have had to be careful of imposing my own passionate views of what a church that owns and under-utilises a lot of prime real estate in a well-located part of the city could or should be doing to use their properties in restitutive and imaginative ways (Powell 2017:17-18)

While this has remained a reality and caution, as a researcher my involvement in the complexity of the church that I attend and its tentative steps towards a praxis of spatial justice since I last reflected academically on it, has made me all the more aware of what I do not know about the lived realities of individual congregations. This encouraged me remain reflexive and aware of the effect of my presence throughout this research process and to integrate an autoethnographic element to the study. The wider diversity of participants in this study heightened my awareness of my listening posture and responses as the research design emerged. The ongoing journey of emerging spatial justice praxis with my own church is reflected on in Chapter Five.

viii) Holistic account:

The research seeks to gain nuanced and multi-layered responses by applying a variety of research techniques. Holistic data and reflection can be elicited by giving participants a chance to respond in several ways. The emergent design of listening to one ecumenical group, two groups that were denomination-specific, and six individuals speaking in-depth about their church context was able to give perspective to the subject from several different angles and ultimately provided rich, holistic data to analyse.

As the research process unfolded, I was able to self-critique and hone my interview skills. The questioning and discussion style evolved, not just to build trust for deeper data, but also to investigate whether phrasing a question or response to an answer in a certain way might bring about a potential new way of thinking about the idea. At times this occurred in both the participants and myself, within the course of the interview. This approach speaks to a commitment to emancipatory approaches in research. The human and dynamic nature of the interviews struck me as I listened to the recordings of the focus groups and interviews, sometimes finding myself being emotionally moved by conversations that were at times tender, often inspiring, sometimes difficult, and other times frustrating as ministers shared accounts of the injustice, whether perceived or not, of space and the church in the story of this city.

2.1.2 An emancipatory approach to research

This qualitative research is located in the field of emancipatory research. This concept was initially developed to mitigate the consumer nature of research that is especially problematic when extracting data from a vulnerable population while leaving it unchanged or assisted in the very area that is being researched (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon & Walsh, 2004:169). Baker *et al* (2004:169) state that 'the questions that are chosen for research and the ways that research is conducted and used can have significant effects on inequality'.

Bringing this concept into conversation with contemporary practical theology, Reader (2008:12) asserts that the discipline is characterised by being 'emancipatory or transformative' and 'one that advances the freedoms associated with the kingdom of God'. Reader (2008:12) proposes three questions in relation to this: 'What exactly is entailed by such a freedom? What is one trying to gain freedom from? In what ways are people now trapped or constrained by life as they experience it?'. These echo the questions for the neighbourhoods, people, and communities in this study. Reader (2008:12) provides the practical theologian with concepts that help describe the conditions that hold people captive or 'offer the hope of pathways to other possibilities'. This style of research complements the journey of churches in the sample group on

pathways to other possibilities of ecclesial expression and presence in the neighbourhood.

The choice to have research be an intervention rather than just an inspection of the life and attitudes of churches in this sample group opens up the possibility for this to be an emancipatory process, at least for the participants, but potentially to contribute to the liberation of the congregants of the churches as well. The interviews and focus groups in this project were influenced by the methodology of emancipatory social theory that requires: ‘an empirical stance which is open-ended, dialogically reciprocal, grounded in respect for human capacity, and yet profoundly sceptical of appearances and “common sense”’ and that is ‘rooted in a commitment to the long-term, broad-based ideological struggle to transform structural inequalities’ (Baker et al 2005:179 citing Lather 1986:269).

Swartz and Nyamnjoh (2018:3) highlight that a realistic approach to research as freedom has by its nature an ‘intentional continuum of research methods’, acknowledging the congruence between emancipatory, participatory, and interactive research.

A key factor of emancipatory research is the idea that research participants identify the subject of the research (Swartz and Nyamnjoh 2018:4). This was not in this research design as it was rather my personal, ministry and academic pathways that led to this research topic. However, these pathways have over the years pointed me to a strong conviction that suburban churches are seeking ways of contributing to a just city. I have been asked about land and spatial justice by many suburban ministers and church-goers and have held discussion forums in this regard. Through my role at the faith-based NPO where I work, I have identified that the subject of land justice was very much in the consciousness of churches in South Africa during the 2017-2019 period. Furthermore, it became clear while doing the empirical research that the majority of ministers who opted to take part in the study, did so because they were interested in the subject and wanted to reflect more deeply on it.

During my own experience with the church that I attend, I observed that my sustained involvement in that church was able to contribute to their journey towards a more spatially just use of their property, which I reflect on in Chapter Five. That church is also represented in one of the voices of ministers in this study and in their case, a very direct ask for research and accompaniment to continue in this regard was forthcoming. In addition to these background influences, the questions and exercises of the focus groups and interviews were designed with the emancipatory research approach in mind.

As part of the broader emancipatory approach there is also a strong element of autoethnography as I, the researcher, reflect on my own history, locatedness, and journey with churches.

These factors, whilst not indicating a direct ask from the churches who were involved, contribute significantly to this research having an emancipatory effect on the participants, myself, and the organisation I work with.

2.2 Research procedures

2.2.1 Research Sample Group

This area of interest in research comes from the life-long relationship that I have with what it means to be a white, affluent, church-going suburban South African. I have grappled with the pains of the often homogenous insularity of suburban church-going. These include the fears and defensiveness sometimes associated with calls to a more liberated future and the ways church decisions are made about the space and place they occupy in the divided city of Cape Town. There is an equally interesting and encouraging move by an increasing number of churches in these areas who have been asking about the role that they could play with the space they occupy in the city and with the resources they have. Creative case studies that point to more just and inclusive use of space can be found in churches across the city and country and some of these are to be found in the otherwise quite exclusive suburban areas of cities and towns. I have been at suburban church-led forums where land justice and theologies of land are being discussed and I hear more and more people raising the question of church-owned land and property.

The sample group includes:

Churches in the Southern suburbs: The Southern suburbs are located along the length of the Cape Peninsula, close to transport arteries, residential affluence, and areas of dense commercial and economic activity. This is where I live, where the church I attend is located, and where I have a particular interest in the effects of the Group Areas Act on church-going and property acquisition.

Subset: Churches were chosen from the suburbs of this greater area that are still majority-white residential demographic (South African Census, 2011): Pinelands, Rondebosch, Claremont, Kenilworth, Wynberg, Plumstead, Bergvliet, Meadowridge

Figure 2: Area from which the sample group was taken in the context of greater Cape Town

Denominations: Churches in each suburb were selected from denominations that ranked as the highest three property owners in South Africa in a church land audit in 1999 (Philpott and Zondi 1999:23), which included Dutch Reformed, Anglican and Methodist. In addition, several Baptist churches in the sample area were known to me and were included to increase the sample size.

I refer to the data collected from this sample group as *Voices from the churches*. The following table presents a summary of the contribution of different voices.

Data collection method	**Voice(s) recorded**	**Denomination**
Focus Group Discussion - Group I	Ministers 1 - 6 Lay Leader 1	5 Anglican 1 Baptist 1 Methodist
Interview	Minister 7	Methodist
Interview	Minister 8	Anglican
Interview	Minister 9	Anglican
Interview	Minister 10	Baptist
Interview	Minister 11	Baptist
Interview	Minister 12	Methodist
Focus Group Discussion - Group 2	Ministers 13 - 18	Dutch Reformed

TOTAL	19	Anglican (7), Baptist (3), Methodist (3) Dutch Reformed (6)

Figure 3: Data collection technique used in this study with ministers, showing different denominations

While all churches in the study are located in suburbs that were declared “Whites only” during the Group Areas Act, the ministers represented three race classifications. However, 2/3 of the ministers in the study were White. Where ministers explicitly refer to their own and/or other peoples’ race classification as part of their narrative, I only included if I felt it aided analysis of the data. I therefore do not explicitly make reference to the race of a minister when quoting them or when reflecting on themes identified across the dataset.

2.2.2 Data collection

Focus group 1 was conducted at the start of the study with 7 ministers as a pilot and helped inform the framework for further research questions (Appendix 1).

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with 6 ministers using the same participatory research questions that were used in with Focus group 1 (Appendix 1).

Focus group 2 was held with a group of 6 ministers following a presentation of my research aims at a regular meeting of the Dutch Reformed Ministers. These ministers were from congregations from across the geographical sample area. I adapted the first focus group session to include anonymous responses to questions and exercises and invited reflections and discussions in a less structured way.

I collected my reflections from one local church where I am immersed.

2.2.3 Data collection exercises and questions

With Focus group 1, the participants were led through a set of four exercises, and invited to reflect quietly on questions posed and to write down reflections before sharing with the group in a facilitated conversation. These questions led to such rich reflections that I decided to use the same four exercises and questions in the framework for the

semi-structured interviews. The motivation for framing these exercises with these questions is detailed below.

Exercise 1:

Describe a moment in your church history when you most saw the physical space of your church (buildings and grounds) come alive in relationship to the immediate neighbourhood around you.

This exercise intentionally uses an appreciative inquiry method, described by de Gruchy (2015:85) as an approach that engages a 'creative use of memory and visioning around four stages', namely: discovering (explores and appreciates what has been good in the past), dreaming (what might be if the good could be expanded into the future), dialogue (amongst participants to co-construct a vision of what could be achieved) and delivery (of the vision through action). Starting the interaction with this appreciative exercise was chosen to connect the ministers with what has been good with their church in the past concerning its spatial realities, and to invite them into approaching the subject with imagination, openness and a sense of possibility.

Exercise 2:

Here are several scenarios describing different church points of contact with the subject of this research, either listed on board (focus group discussion) or listed on paper (interviews).

- read them through and pick one that you would like to answer, one that feels closest to home

- think about the response that you, with your church leadership, might give to the questions provoked by the scenarios

- if there is nothing in these scenarios that feels familiar enough to reflect on then reflect on something similar that does, and describe it

- if there is a real case study that any of these scenarios remind you of (past or present) that you would be happy to describe, you may do that instead

The rationale for this exercise was two-fold: 1) to introduce ministers to issues of spatial (in)justice that were relevant for their context and would thus bring the topic from theory into their lived reality and 2) to discover whether these scenarios would surface the ministers' knowledge, attitudes and experiences of spatial justice.

This exercise was also designed to provoke thinking outside of just their own opinion or reflection and to surface thoughts about congregational involvement, church leadership, and decision-making related to the topic.

Exercise 3:

Here is a short survey about the community, location, physical space and usage of your church.

As you look at the survey, please share some responses you may fill in for your church.

Please also comment on what you think is missing or problematic in the survey.

I expected that some of the ministers' reflections on the survey questions would provide valuable insights into church space and usage and contribute to the spatial picture being built of suburban churches concerning the divisions in our city. But just as important in this exercise was getting their feedback on how such a tool might be shaped and used by churches to promote a heightened awareness of their spaces. This was connected to the emancipatory approach of the project – that participants would shape my ongoing praxis, and especially how I walk alongside churches, beyond the scope of this study.

Exercise 4:

Thinking about our discussions to this point:

(a) what theological ideas came to mind while you were reflecting?

(b) what theological ideas and resources do you think inform your responses?

This question was deliberately chosen as the final exercise. I was interested to get a robust discussion going on the subject, provoked by the first three questions, drawing primarily from their lived experiences in the world. There was a free flow to the conversation, with movement between past and present, and concepts and stories throughout. Drawing on the richness of the conversation generated above, I invited theological reflection, holding to the idea of praxis.

As part of the emancipatory approach to the research, the focus group environment was set up to include a gallery with resources related to the topic of the research, including books, articles, maps, pictures and printed quotations from literature on church, land and spatial justice. When participants arrived, I orientated them to the content and during the refreshment break and at the end of the group discussions they spent time engaging with the content, asking further questions and requesting copies of some information, which I supplied.

Figure 4: The displays at the venue of the focus groups introducing participants to resources on church, land and spatial justice.

For ministers who did not attend the focus groups, I included some relevant resources in my email correspondence with them. Once we had conducted the interview, I forwarded further resources of interest that came up in our discussions.

2.2.4 Data analysis

The Praxis Cycle (cf. Holland and Henriot,1983) was the overarching framework providing a deductive lens to the data analysis process. This framework informed the high-level themes, as chapter headings for this research project, as a praxis-based framework and lens through which all the data was approached and analysed.

I was also committed to hearing with fresh ears any new ideas, concepts and expressed experiences from interviewees. This was achieved by applying a thematic analysis (cf. (Braun and Clarke, 2012) to each subsection of the data, ensuring an inductive approach.

Using this thematic analysis approach, data analysis included: 1) immersion in the data; 2) generation of initial codes of meaning; 3) searching for themes across the codes; 4) reviewing potential themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) writing up the research report (Braun and Clarke 2012: 60-69).

To ensure immersion in the data, all of the interviews and focus groups were conducted personally, recording any non-verbal information, listening to the recordings of interviews and the focus group discussion several times, and transcribing these myself. Steps 2 through to 6 of the thematic analysis approach are detailed in the following chapters.

This combined approach was effective in bringing the data analysis together - the praxis cycle remaining a useful framework for the meta ideas; thematic analysis allowing new ideas to be found, analysed and reflected upon.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

This research project, while held within the Practical Theology department of the University of Pretoria, was also understood by the participants as being done under the banner of The Warehouse Trust, the faith-based NPO that I work with. Many of the churches in the study were aware of the work of the organisation and wanted to know and understand how the results would be shared and used towards fostering an ongoing movement of church-based spatial justice praxis through our work. Swartz (2016:265) describes the process of ‘interviewing intimates’ and highlights the possibility

of being able to glean richer data due to the trust factor that may be present between people who know one another.

While interviewing the ministers, I became increasingly aware of the sensitivity of some of the stories they were telling, especially when reflecting on the painful effects of apartheid forced removals on the lives of their congregants. Moreover, it was often the case that the stories they were telling were not directly their own, but of their congregants. Where I have chosen to reflect these stories to illustrate a theme, I sent the section to the minister to ensure that they are satisfied with how it has been written and asked if they would be open to sharing it with the congregant they were speaking about.

Additionally, it was possible that some participants could be more guarded if they knew of the affiliation with my organisation and our commitment to social justice, on which we speak and write publically. Since the spirit behind the research is for the increased ecclesial wellbeing and liberation of all participant churches, these ethical considerations are crucial. During the research process, I was happy to hear that ministers reflected positively on the role that our organisation, and others like it, play with churches in the city, often citing it as a reason for their willingness to participate in the study. Several indicated that they were keen to connect with us more, especially around the topic of this research study, which we have done.

Where ministers described their neighbourhoods or people by name, the names were replaced with descriptions in brackets when quoted directly in this paper *e.g.* Instead of the direct quote saying "*The church is located in the area between Scott Road and Main Road and the whole neighbourhood previously known as Scottsville"* ... I have written: "*The church is located in the area* (describes neighbourhood a few blocks from the church where wide-scale forced removals were conducted)". This will also be more descriptive and helpful for readers who do not know the geography of Cape Town and the suburbs in the study, making these research findings more accessible to a wider audience.

Swartz (2016:265) also highlights the value of undergoing member checking, a ‘voluntary process by which the data and the way it has been represented is experienced by those who participated in the study’, especially for those who feel that they may be identifiable, to be undertaken before it enters the public realm. This process was undertaken using this full research report.

2.4 Conclusion

In striving to stay true to an emancipatory and praxis-based research framework I found the four moments of the Praxis Cycle were never far from my mind while immersing myself in and analysing the data, as referenced above (section 2.2.4). While listening to and reflecting upon the voices of the ministers who took part in the study and then articulating clear cross-cutting themes across the dataset, these themes came into dynamic conversation with the literature. The framework of the praxis cycle aided the description of this conversation as faithfully as possible. The following three chapters present the literature and empirical research results together, following Holland and Henriot (1983:8) in the four moments of the cycle: immersion and social analysis (Chapter Three), theological reflection (Chapter Four), and pastoral planning for action (Chapter Five).

Chapter Three, *Between a spatial Immersion and Analysis in the Suburbs*, follows the history of land and spatial injustice in Cape Town with a special focus on suburban studies, suburban churches and an introduction to theories and theologies of spatial justice. It puts this literature into conversation with the ministers in the study who describe and analyse the spaces their churches are immersed in, from both a historical and present-day lens.

Chapter Four, *Theologies towards Spatial Justice,* revisits the church and spatial justice conversation with a focus on the related theological discourse in the global and South African context. It then describes how the ministers in the study understand the topic of this research from a theological perspective.

Chapter Five, *An emergence of spatial justice in churches,* outlines a few local and global models of faith-based initiatives that address spatial injustice alongside stories

from the ministers in the study that describe steps that their churches are taking in this regard, while also exploring the factors described by the ministers that hinder creative and collaborative action by churches towards a praxis of spatial justice.

Chapter Six, *Future(s) for the church on the corner*, presents a discussion of the findings between the literature and voices of the ministers, critically appraises the emancipatory aims of this study, and highlights further research that the study has surfaced.

CHAPTER 3
BETWEEN A SPATIAL IMMERSION AND ANALYSIS IN THE SUBURBS

This chapter:

- Introduces immersion *in* and analysis *of* suburban Cape Town
- Describes the spatial history of Cape Town, brought to life through narratives of how ministers describe their suburban contexts
- Provides an overview of concepts of spatial (in)justice and narratives of how church ministers analyse their churches and spatial locations and
- Shows how analysis of the suburbs is informed through spatial immersion

3.1 The praxis cycle: between Immersion and Analysis

The first two moments of the praxis cycle, Immersion and Social Analysis, are described independently from each other (Holland and Henriot 1983:8). However, there was a tendency in the ministers to combine the description of their contexts (reflected under Immersion) with attempts to analyse the reasons for why things are the way they are (reflected under Social Analysis). Therefore, I hold these two in a dynamic movement with each other during this chapter naming it “between immersion and analysis”. Though the four moments of the praxis cycle build upon one another and are ordered in a logical sequence, in reality, they are not lived out linearly (cf Holland and Henriot 1983) which is evident in the dynamic interplay between these first two moments.

Describing practical theology as the ‘hermeneutics of lived religion’, Eliastem (2016:2) notes that in this discipline we are ‘concerned with the social construction of meaning and the processes of interpretation by which people make sense of life in general, but particularly life concerning the sacred’. Cochrane *et al* (1991:18), in asserting the

centrality of *context* to all theological endeavours, specifically highlight the presence of suffering caused by injustice and inequality. They describe this as ‘moments in which the pastor or Christian’ are ‘inserted into (directly confronted with)’ the realities of such suffering, and these moments as ‘the basic point of departure for a holistic practical theology which refuses to reduce its concerns to the atomized individual or family’ (Cochrane *et al* 1991:18). The praxis cycle thus starts with an understanding of where the faith community is inserted in the world and then moves to this interpretive task of naming life in relation to the sacred and the church in relation to its suffering context.

Referring to it as ‘immersion’, Holland and Henriot (1983:8) describe this first moment that ‘locates the geography of our pastoral responses to the lived experience of individuals and communities’. Osmer’s four questions in practical theology enquiry (Osmer 2008:4) – ‘What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?’ – start with a question of immersion: ‘What is going on?’ To add a specifically socio-spatial lens to this, I ask ‘What is going on *in this space*?’ thus evoking the sense of space and place related to the geographical areas where churches are located.

The second moment of the praxis cycle, social analysis, according to Holland and Henriot (1983:8) ‘examines causes, probes consequences, delineates linkages’. Here we ask the deeper questions along with the second question of practical theology asked by Osmer (2008:4): ‘Why is this going on?’ In their work *Word and Deed,* Cochrane *et al* (1991) applied the central questions of practical theology, as well as the commitments of the praxis cycle, to the crisis of their time: the brutality of systemic racism at the height of the apartheid regime. They reflect on the crucial prophetic witness of the confessing church in the 1980s that culminated in the Belhar Confession and the Kairos Document, naming any theology or church practice that supported apartheid as heretical and they assert that the praxis cycle of Holland and Henriot is ‘one in which pastoral praxis, hermeneutics and theological reflection are integrated into an ongoing process in the life of the church’ (Cochrane *et al* 1991:13).

De Gruchy (2015:129) refers to Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:1-3 when looking at social analysis in the praxis cycle when he states that ‘Theology has always been done in

relationship to the “signs of times”, and a crucial task of a theologian is to “interpret the signs of the times” as Jesus put it.’ Kritzinger and Saayman (2011:5) name this moment ‘contextual understanding’, asking how the agents or community of mission understand the social, political, economic and cultural factors of their context and also refer to the concept of ‘signs of the times’, deepening its description to include ‘discerning the negative and positive powers at work in their society’.

The concept of ‘ecclesial analysis’ (Cochrane *et al* 1991:17) is of particular importance to this study as at the heart of the research is the concern of the local church in the neighbourhood where it is located. In my conversations with ministers, I endeavored to understand how they see themselves in relation to their neighbourhoods concerning their current-day context, and to the history of their church in the neighbourhood and city, and the relationship between the past and the present. Cochrane *et al* (1991:17) name the church as an integral part of socio-political life which demands that any social analysis includes the societal role of the church:

> …an analysis of the structures and dynamics which shape and determine the life and witness of the church. The need for such ecclesial analysis is particularly relevant in South Africa because of the dominant yet ambiguous socio-political role which the church in its various forms fulfils.

3.2 Immersed in the suburbs

3.2.1 A spatial history of suburban Cape Town in the context of South Africa

Geographic locations cannot be understood outside the history of how they came to be. Every patch of ground carries intersecting histories, both known and unknown to those who inhabit or pass through that space. A church that exists on a piece of land is not an island. That church and all its related grounds and buildings are located on land with history. For the churches in this study, located in suburban Cape Town, many histories come to bear on their contemporary existence and the people that are drawn to their sanctuary. And so to understand Cape Town, a city frequently named as having the

highest rates of inequality in the world[3], her suburbs and the churches in them, we must understand the city in relationship to the rest of the country and our history.

Delport and Lephakga (2016:2) deal theologically with how land dispossession created what they call ‘spaces of alienation’ in South Africa. I agree with their opening premise that ‘the history of conquest and alienation in South Africa … must be understood together with a history of world formation and division through the era of colonial conquest’. They describe the way Europe was established as the centre of global political power and that by declaring the rest of the globe non-European, their political powers were able to dispossess the indigenous peoples of those lands to create European colonies, concluding that:

> It is for this reason that one cannot engage the question of space in settler colonies without considering it within the bigger movement of conquest, colonisation and the universalisation of Europe. Space, specifically in the form of land, was the central point of contention between conquerors and the conquered (Delport and Lephakga 2016:3).

When trying to understand spatial injustice in contemporary Cape Town, one can make the mistake of forgetting this and telling the story as if it started in the mid 20th century with the rule of apartheid. South African histories sometimes erroneously position pre-apartheid Cape Town under British colonial rule as having ‘liberalizing tendencies’ (Maylam 1995:28) when in fact segregation in Cape Town, as in the rest of South Africa, was a centuries-old project starting with the first colonial settlers, becoming more and more entrenched with each ruling colonial power.

Terblanche (1991:312) explains that the political system of apartheid was defined and named during the election campaign of the Nationalist Party (led by White Afrikaaner politicians) in 1948 to distinguish their policies from the already segregationist policies of the United Party (led by White British politicians). He asserts that ‘apartheid was not as

[3] According to the Gini Coefficient, a calculator of inequality in societies, South Africa, and especially Cap Town ranks as one of the places with the highest rates of inequality in the world (cf. Milancovic, B., 2011)

new or as different from segregation as is often alleged. It built scrupulously on the foundation led by the English establishment's segregationist regimes of the previous 50 years' (Terblanche1991:312).

Centuries of colonial spatial planning culminated in influx control, including the 'notorious pass laws' which operated as a 'tight network of laws to keep Africans out of urban areas' (Platsky and Walker 1985:32). The successive declarations and implementation of the Native Land act of 1913, the Urban Areas Act of 1922, and the Group Areas Act of 1950, which spanned both British and Afrikaaner rule, worked together to complete the establishment of the apartheid city (Delport and Lephakga 2016:4).

Maylam (1995:28-30) systematically addresses the development of racialised urban segregation in South African cities:

> The growing historiography of urban segregation clearly shows that a variety of imperatives and mechanisms were at work to bring about racial zoning in towns and cities throughout the first half of the twentieth century and before … The idea that the National Party came to power and reversed the liberalising tendencies of the former United Party government's urban policy is part of liberal mythology. It has already been shown that urban segregationism was gaining momentum through the first half of the twentieth century...

The systematic legalisation of racist policies through colonialism and apartheid touched every sphere of human life and infringed upon every possible human right including education, marriage and intimate relationships, economic activity, and religious freedoms. However, it is those that restricted South Africans' rights regarding where they could live, purchase property/land and freely move that had explicitly spatial consequences for the country and therefore bear specific importance to this study. In particular, the Group Areas Act and the subsequent era of forced removals need to be understood as the backdrop to the suburbs and churches in this study.

Platzky and Walker (1985:9) report that through research conducted by the Surplus People Project they were able to estimate that up to 3.5 million people were forcibly removed from their homes and land by the apartheid government across South Africa between 1960 and 1983. They also estimated that these forced removals were, up to the time of their publication, 'the single largest category of relocation within urban areas' stating that 860 400 people, mostly Coloured and Indian, were forcibly removed under the Group Areas Act that zoned geographical areas according to homogenous racial classifications, in cities and towns (Platzky and Walker 1985:35). In Cape Town, they estimated that approximately 11 500 families were removed from the city and its suburbs to 'distant townships of the Cape flats'. The Western Cape was distinct from the other provinces as it did not neighbour a Bantustan which meant that segregation in the city was highly effective due to the dual effect of Influx Control that kept Black people from coming in and the Groups Areas Act that forced Coloured and Indian people out (Platzky and Walker 1985:57). The publication *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town* (Fields 2001) provides oral histories and detailed descriptions of how forced removals were executed across Cape Town. A map of Cape Town (represented in Figure 5), described below, shows the government's strategy:

> The white areas cover the most valuable property of the inner city and the mountain slopes of the Peninsula. There is usually a barrier between coloured and white areas. Often the barrier is an industrial area - like the massive area of Epping Industria between Bonteheuwel and Pinelands. Sometimes the barrier is a road or railway, or a green belt. By 1979 the only undecided area was a small part of Woodstock. About 150 000 people had been forcibly removed, the vast majority of them coloured (Bickford-Smith 2001:24).

Some suburbs like Harfield Village, Mowbray and Protea Village near Kirstenbsoch were upgraded by developers for Whites, whilst places like District Six and Tramway Road were demolished entirely (Bickford-Smith 2001:24). While this map does not name every suburb in the sample group of this study, it does show the full area of the

study, following the train line and parallel main road, though not featured on this map, that runs north to south just after Mowbray and ending just before Heathfield. The account by Bickford-Smith (2001:24) that accompanies the map, mentions several of the suburbs covered in this study.

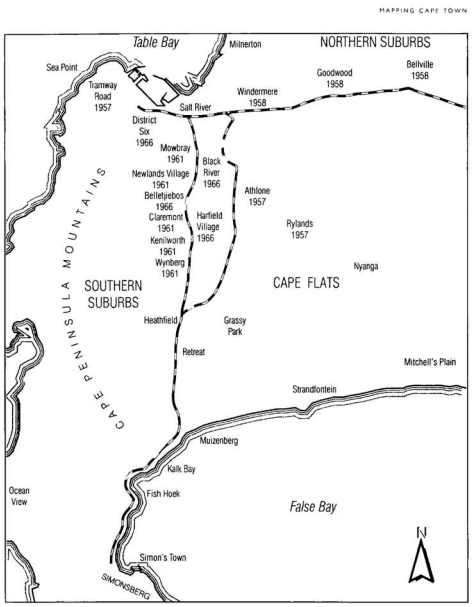

Figure 5: Map depicting areas of forced removals across the Southern suburbs of Cape Town (Bickford-Smith 2001:25)

Almost three decades into post-apartheid South Africa, we seek to understand what the establishment of the apartheid city succeeded in achieving, not only in its own time, but into contemporary urban life, specifically looking at Cape Town. Just short of a decade after the birth of our democracy, Sandercock (2003:119-122) described Cape Town as a city that still lived with a collective, and neo-liberally driven, fear of losing control, despite the prevalence of integration as a city design concept, including policy-driven spatial frameworks. She highlights this as a fear of the loss of control: of order, of descending into urban decay, of its European appeal (seen in its fear of becoming an

African city) and of rampant crime. Sandercock (2003:12) describes the state of Cape Town in 2003 through these lenses:

> These fears are an expression of white Cape Town's ambivalence towards changes in society since the African National Congress came to power in 1994. Their response is to try manage the fear by marginalizing and defining as a threat certain social groups. Such as the informal traders, the parking attendants, the illegal immigrants, and the homeless, by controlling them, reducing their numbers, introducing codes of conduct relating to their economic activities. The desire is to create a clean and safe city, with the shopping mall as one model, and New York's Business Improvement Districts (BID's) as another.

Eighteen years after Sandercock's observations, as a resident of Cape Town, I see how the trajectory of centuries of colonialism, decades of apartheid and the neo-liberal approach described by Sandercock[4] has entrenched racialised spatial division as the status quo of the city. Pieterse (2018:15) calls it a 'public secret' that Cape Town as a collective has 'no practical idea how to undo and remake the legacy of the spatial inequality apartheid has bequeathed us'. He attributes the stubborn entrenchment of Cape Town's spatial division to 'private property, existing real estate market dynamics, and public policies that seem to exacerbate the problem' (Pieterse 2018:15).

The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) (2013:3) is a policy formulated to address this 'stubborn entrenchment … and provide for the inclusive, developmental, equitable and efficient spatial planning at the different spheres of government; … and to address past spatial and regulatory imbalances'. In the preamble to SPLUMA, the South African government names both past and current cause and effect forces of spatial injustice and details a framework to be implemented by local governments across the nation. In the 2017 *Report of the High Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation and the Acceleration of Fundamental Change* (HLP), it

[4] The City of Cape Town has employed a scheme for local areas modelled on the BID's of New York, called City Improvement Districts (CID's)

was found that SPLUMA and other policies such as the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) are to date failing to break the damaging patterns of apartheid and colonialism. Therefore, a call has been made for a special transdisciplinary focus on spatial inequity with ‘an integrated solution that goes beyond the mandate of any one government department, or specific level of government’ (HLP 2017:443).

Bickford (2017:8) asserts that the urban land question is central to cities, that it has not received enough attention, and describes the consequences of that:

> The exclusionary nature of urban land markets plays out in the form of poor settlements located on cheaper peripheral land; the homelessness of people working informally in urban centres who are unable to appropriate shelter; strains on infrastructure and management capacity, as densities exceed their design capacity; and increased vulnerabilities, when people are unable to gain secure tenure. These are not technical outcomes but rather lived realities.

This overview of land and spatial injustice in South Africa and Cape Town paints the backdrop upon which the rest of this study must be understood. This will be built on when revisiting the intersection between urban land and theories of spatial justice later in this chapter, through the voices of the ministers, and in Chapter Five when describing the praxis of various contemporary movements for urban land and spatial justice in the city.

3.2.2 Suburban studies

To bring focus to this study from the very wide lens that included the global forces of historical colonialism enacted upon land and the current day forces of neo-liberalism enacted upon urban spaces, I turn to a brief look at the phenomenon of suburbs within the urban ecosystem. Academic literature on suburbs or suburbanisms is vast and crosses many disciplines. However, there is common agreement that no consensus exists on one definition of suburbs, suburbia or suburbanism (cf Forsyth 2012:270; Vaughan, Griffiths, Haklay and Jones 2009:476; Walks 2013:1471).

Vaughan, Griffiths, Haklay and Jones (2009:476) cite Hinchcliffe: ‘The literature on suburbs is extensive, yet the subject always seems elusive. For some the suburb is a geographical space; for others, a cultural form; while for others still, it is a state of mind. (2005, 899)’. These three ways of approaching suburbs are relevant to this study within a South African context.

Forsyth (2012:14) cites Healy (1994, xiii) ‘the terms “suburb” and “suburbia” have functioned as imagined spaces on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings have been projected and displaced.’ While some theorists describe the concept of suburbia as an imagined space, others such as Vaughan *et al* (2009:485) call for a focusing of suburban studies away from a tacit conception of suburban space as ‘formless, timeless and “other”’, which they claim leaves the notion of the suburb ‘too epistemologically fragile to carry the burden of representation that it currently bears’. They further assert that research into the nature of the suburban is vulnerable to widely held assumptions around what they call the ‘essential’ nature of the suburb and call for a move away from one-dimensional approaches towards a more complex focus on the built environment (and therefore suburbia) across space and time.

What then of suburbs in the African context? Mabin (2013:155) asks whether the terms suburbs and suburbanisms can be applied to the African context, or whether they are mostly applicable to the northern/western world, and offers some simplified parameters to the question of defining the suburban in Africa:

> The indirect answer is that anywhere cities are growing quickly most of their inhabitants, and indeed passersby, will be in places that are new relative to original sizes and centres. The term “suburban” applies minimally both to many recent areas of expansion and to many older areas simply conceptualized as “between old centres and new peripheries”. Both exist, of course, in every African city. So minimally again, African cities have “suburbs” and “suburbanisms” associated with them. Some of them may even look like or feel like suburbs on other continents…

In my experience, the term suburb in Cape Town has become a catch-all colloquialism for the domain of the middle to upper class, and still encompasses the racialised legacy of apartheid meaning largely, but not exclusively, the domain of the minority wealthy, white population[5]. The majority of people in Cape Town live, as Mabin (2013:155) describes, either in 'new peripheries' or 'recent areas of expansion', but not all of these would be named suburbs according to this colloquial definition, or display suburban qualities. In Cape Town, suburban areas 'may even look or feel like suburbs on other continents' (Mabin 2013:155). The suburbs featured in the empirical research of this study fit into this description and are complex and very real actors in the urban ecosystem of wider Cape Town. They too, have the emotional contours described by Healy both projected onto and held within them.

3.2.3 Suburban churches

In the introduction, I looked at an overview of the discourse surrounding church-owned land, especially as it relates to land justice and land reform in South Africa. Church history studies go into depth about the links between the colonial projects, the missionary endeavours in this part of the world and the land contestations tied up in that relationship, as does the work of the Church Land Programme (cf Mlambo 2020, Philpott and Zondi 1999, Ngoetjana and Denis 2016). Whilst a deeper look into these histories is beyond the scope of this study, it is essential to note that matters relating to church-owned land (and therefore churches and their relationship with urban land and spatial injustice in cities) cannot be seen separately from colonial dispossession of indigenous people's land since the 1652 start of the European colonial settlement in the Cape and the associated missionary accompaniment to this dispossession (Ntsebeza 2005:56). If we contextualise this sentiment for the urban land question, we need to turn our attention toward urban churches. This study focuses specifically on how this plays out in suburban areas. A few theologians have paved the way for this.

Leong (2017:90) reflects theologically on urban geographies in *Race and Place* from the North American context and calls us to be 'honest about the very particular history of

[5] This observation is based on Cape Town and not other cities in South Africa

suburbia and the disturbing ways that suburbs created possibilities for many while explicitly excluding many others'. Following on from this thought, Leong (2017:90) states: 'Images and echoes of that exclusion are still prominent today for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. The burbs (sic) are not inherently evil, but the story of how they came to be is hardly an innocent tale'. He speaks of 'cultural and economic walls created by suburban growth and development' that perpetuate damaging barriers in racially divided cities and warns us of 'the fallacy that we are passive consumers of place, living above or apart from the land' (Leong 2017:90). With echoes similar to the apartheid city he describes the active exclusion created by suburbs:

> Contrary to the notion that place is neutral and we all simply choose the kinds of places where we want to live, the development of suburbia is a clear example of how patterns of exclusion can create structural division. Geography has a long memory, and none of us got to where we are by random chance alone. As we look closer at the story of highways, housing, and the walls created along the way, it will provide a clearer picture of the true cost of the suburban American dream and the challenges of Christian discipleship in the face of a racial faith.

Suburban congregational studies and insights from a Northern/Western context abound in literature, especially in Practical Theology, but few reflect with the same commitments to space and justice as Leong. Morrissey (2004:95-114) comes close in her exploration of the suburban church concerning (in)justice and urban mission in the United Kingdom. She describes 'the suburban challenge' of the church and theology as one that must overcome pretence, surface vulnerability and recognise and embrace suffering (or at least overcome the avoidance of the 'raw and abrasive' aspects of life) and states:

> Here is the rub. The Church, like every other agency, finds it hard to challenge the dishonesty and denial that affect suburban and affluent living … So far the Church has found it is more acceptable to speak up on behalf of the poor than to confront the mainstream culture which forms us so excessively (Morrissey 2004:96).

Similarly, research into the role that South Africa suburban churches play in systems of injustice and inequality is underrepresented in academia, but increasingly growing. It seems like the practical theology question of ‘Why are things the way they are?’ becomes ever more pertinent to our context of inequality. Bowers Du Toit and Nkomo (2014:1) researched churches in the southern suburbs of Cape Town (some of the same areas as focused on in this study) asking ‘majority white wealthy suburban congregations questions around reconciliation, reparations, and restitution. They found that churches that reach out with what they term ‘sacrificial and practical involvement with the poor’ beyond the borders of their suburban context become the most racially diverse creating, at least on a Sunday morning, communal spaces that differ from the majority-white suburbs in which they are located (Bowers Du Toit and Nkomo (2014:7-8).

Eliastem (2016:7), having been a minister in the same geographical area as this study, names his experience an ‘unholy contradiction’ where ‘Instead of exercising agency towards justice, religion in general (and Christianity in particular) may be complicit in perpetuating injustice, both at a structural and local level.’ He notes of his church’s journey:

> A pastoral emphasis on Biblical imperatives to pursue reconciliation and justice led in tentative attempts to reach out to less advantaged people in the communities around us. However, the presence of homeless people and refugees in Sunday services disrupted suburban religious comfort. There were complaints from some members about the odour of unwashed bodies, about ‘disruption’ in the children’s church from the presence of other cultures and about people begging after the Sunday morning service. It was enough to let ‘them’ into ‘our’ space. The demands for the reconfiguration of that space that their presence now demanded were too much to bear. (Eliastem 2016:7).

I value how Smith (2015:158) contributes to thoughts on churches in the divided context of Cape Town, highlighting that the socio-economic-spatial gaps in the city cannot only be seen by churches as ‘simply a product of history, an awkward reality we might seek

to ameliorate or simply live with, but an issue of fundamental theological concern' (Smith 2015:158). These themes will be discussed in the next chapter.

As with suburban studies, there can be no one definition or description of the suburban church or the experience of the suburban by South African churches. Nor does this study aim to offer such definitions. However, we gain more insight into the contemporary lived experiences of suburban ministers and their churches by turning to the voices of the ministers in this study.

3.2.4 Voices from suburban churches

Moving from an overview of the first two moments of the praxis cycle and a spatial history of Cape Town, I now ask these questions of ministers based in the heart of these spatial realities: How do they describe and analyse the realities of the suburbs in which they are immersed, concerning these histories? How does their lived ecclesiology in the neighbourhood affirm or deny notions of spatial (in)justice, whether they are aware of these concepts and refer to them directly, nominally or not at all? Do their stories bring the histories of colonial and apartheid city planning into reflections on their present existence?

3.2.4.1 A general description of space

General spatial descriptions

I start with the ministers' general spatial descriptions of the location of the churches and the church communities themselves.

Of the six ministers with whom I conducted interviews, four spent time describing the effect of apartheid spatial planning on the neighbourhood in which their church is located. Three of these narratives included sensitively held and heartfelt reflections on the effects of forced removals on the neighbourhood and church congregation. One minister unpacked in detail the evolution of the suburb that was created from the outset as 'Whites only' and the effect of that to this day.

In my introduction to the focus groups and interviews, I explained the concepts of spatial (in)justice in South African and so they had that as a framing concept in their minds as

interviews/focus groups proceeded. I did not use any terms relating to apartheid racial classification in any of the exercises or questions. However, several ministers spoke candidly of their racial classification and that of the people (congregants and neighbours) they were talking about. In some cases, socio-economic terms were used such as "*wealthy people*" and *"poor people*" or even spatial/economic descriptions such as "*people who can afford to live in the area*" and *"people who cannot afford to live in the area*", or social/historical terms such as "*people who live here now*" and "*people who lived here before forced removals*".

I was interested to hear one respondent use the description *"well-located*" in a comparison between two churches he had previously led. In the example he gave, "well-located" referred not to what perhaps an estate agent would describe as 'well-located' in the leafy suburbs, but rather because it was close to the main road, the train station, the homeless people living under the bridge and the hustle and bustle of semi-urban, village life affording many more opportunities for what he termed 'outreach and urban mission'. He appreciated that "*many people used our building*". The other was in his opinion "*tucked away*" in a leafy suburb, surrounded by big houses with high walls and not much connection with the neighbourhood.

Several ministers described the ability of the church to break down spatial and socio-economic barriers and directly related this to the physical location of the church. I noticed a distinction between the description of churches near the main road and ones that are "tucked away". Ministers close to the main road described their immersions as having access to the life of the city, the economic hub and the thoroughfare of commuters while those who were located in quieter suburban areas dealt more with Neighbourhood Watch WhatsApp groups, public nuisance complaints and what one minister described as "*the consumer nature of suburban Christians*". A minister whose church is located in such suburbs describes his congregation as "*chalk and cheese*" in comparison to a church (also interviewed in this study) located just 800m away on the main road.

Other church leaders simply described their surroundings in relation to urban/suburban definitions: "*It's kind of a commuter area and always has been. So if you were to look*

from like nine till five the population of the area triples and then drains again, and so in that sense, it's not really suburban, it's more semi-urban."

Some ministers describe the relationship of the church to the neighbourhood around them as quite detached:

> *In relation to people staying around, it's very minimal to be honest, what is happening between us and the people who are in the community because most of us stay all over the Cape flats and also beyond. So when it comes to festivals, you find that people are shocked to see that there is such a beautiful church and say 'but I've never been inside'.*

Congregational demographics

Ministers also described the racial demographics of the church congregation and how apartheid shaped this. I noted different types of congregational composition. In the next section, I delve into their analysis of how this came to pass so these are surface-level descriptions:

a) Churches that mostly reflect the current demographics of the suburbs in which they are located

As churches located in areas that remain economically and racially homogeneous (a hangover from being previously Whites-only suburbs) they either attract people predominantly from the immediate neighbourhood of the church ("*90% of this church is local but our immediate neighbourhood just knows there's a church here, I don't think there's much more than that")* or are a destination church that attracts people from elsewhere who are of the same racial demographic and/or economic status:

> *… historically the church has been pretty much a White church although we had a smattering of People of Colour. This church was constituted 50 years ago – it would have been right in the middle of forced removals. And historically it has been very wealthy and affluent and that brings the whole*

> *package deal with it … People of Colour, came here because they were invited to and they made a choice because they were asked to come here. But it wasn't a lot.*

In the case of one denomination, this was described as being further entrenched by only attracting people who are Afrikaans speaking and white. These churches do not reflect the predominantly English-speaking culture in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town. Ministers remarked that this dynamic came from providing a niche worshipping community for the minority White Afrikaans-speaking population in these suburbs. Remarks were also made about the dwindling numbers and that the average age of these congregations was ever-increasing, a dynamic reflected by several other ministers from different denominations.

b) Churches that reflect the demographics of people who were forcibly removed from the neighbourhood during apartheid

Two ministers in the study, from different denominations, a few blocks away from each other, described similar congregational dynamics. Located in an area that suffered forced removals of Coloured families in the 1960s, both churches are still attended and lay-led almost entirely by those who used to live in the area before being forced to move. Although located in a suburb that is slow to recover racial diversity and remains economically exclusive, these two churches are faithfully attended by people who travel far distances. While this dynamic was only described in two churches in *this* study, they tell a story echoed across dozens of churches located in the suburbs of Cape Town over multiple denominations.

One of the ministers describes this phenomenon with emotional insight:

> *People were evicted as a result of the Group Areas Act. But they still find the places they were baptised, the place they grew up, to be the places of hope and where they still come to every Sunday. And which also has the conflict of driving past the home that was once your home where you grew up, still in the same shape and form, but yet you cannot come inside. Sometimes I think it that may easily bring tears to your eyes, that this used to be the place*

where I was made and formed. And then the reality is that we still have that kind of anger where people ask 'who are you to say that you don't know us as if we are outsiders when in fact we are the people that know this community and are from here'.

The other minister also shares emotion as he describes what he knows of what happened:

I find it so very sad that that happened. It's not a District Six, but you get the feeling that it was a radically beautiful place, humanly speaking, with everybody living together … and people have wonderful memories of life…. Interestingly I did the funeral service of a lady who I visited with quite a number of times who was one of a very few White members of the church and she had lived (in the area) for like sixty years, more, and she had all the stories of the people and all the stories of how neighbours were moved out and then there are other who refused to leave. They just kept their feet, they refused to leave, the police came to the door and they said were not going anywhere.

c) Churches with a combination of people who currently live in the neighbourhood and those who were removed from the neighbourhood

Two ministers of local congregations and one leader of a group of six related churches from across the Southern suburbs spoke about being churches where this combination of congregants exists and how this shapes the life of the church and the relationships in the congregation or across closely related congregations.

One minster gave this history of his church:

It was in the mid-sixties when everyone was moved out. I think the church really was quite a hub for the community, people were just in and out and some of the older members here speak with a high level of respect for some of the ministers who were there at that time. I think it moved from being a Coloured workers' village with lots of vibrant village life. This whole area, (describes the roads and layout of the neighbourhood) This side … was one

> *of the bigger estates so this was largely a workers' village for the breweries, and people who were serving some of those bigger estates. In the mid 60s they were kicked out and the church was nearly sold off, there just wasn't a congregation. Some faithful members who would come past on the way to work at UCT would open the church for morning prayer, go to work, come back open for evening prayer, close up.*

He describes that for about 15 years the church was led by a minister from the large church on the main road nearby as the numbers declined, but then got a new minister as the area became populated again:

> *And then White folk moved in and it suddenly picked up again. We know about this because we've got a number of people who actually lived in the street who still come to church and participate in this community on a Sunday although they come from further afield … It's a handful who have stayed worshipping at the church and they would probably have been teenagers, seventeen, eighteen. They are where I get my stories from.*

The following minister describes how this dynamic has shaped her current congregation:

> *What we have here is a small group of your elderly White people. They are either getting old or frail … a few people left to be in retirement villages near their children, so that population is growing smaller and smaller. And then you have your Coloured people, seeing that we are talking about apartheid, they stayed in this area and because of forced removals they moved out of this area, but because of their family, their affiliations to the church they still come and worship here. They have been attending all these decades… But the sad part is their children, I don't think their children will follow with that. So there's a big question mark about the future of the church, the parish.*

d) Churches whose racial demographics are diversifying

Growth in racial diversity was highlighted in three churches. I identified two possible reasons for this:

- Church leaders have made an intentional commitment to address the segregated stories of the past (I reflect on these stories in Chapter Five)*:* I note that the two churches who describe this are from the same denomination and use much of the same language when speaking about diversifying efforts. In a third case, the minister tells the story of a predecessor who, during apartheid, made deliberate attempts to reach out to people who had been removed from the area and invite them to return to worship at the church.

- The suburb is becoming more diverse*:* The church where this was reflected most notably is located on the main road, close to public transport and a bustling economic hub and the university. It is a rapidly densifying area with increasing high-density rental accommodation, targeted at students: *"The uniqueness of* (this church) *now is the diversity … people from all over Africa, the students, and the Coloured communities and also the White communities and so that for me is the uniqueness and that for me is the aliveness."*

What was not described by any of the participants was churches that have remained demographically representative of the apartheid era Whites-only law while the suburb itself is starting to diversify. Anecdotal and field note evidence during my research and working experience with churches, especially in rapidly densifying areas close to the main road, highlight that this might be an area of interest for further research. This would also need to include an exploration of local market forces, planned gentrification, and thoughts about the trajectory of suburbs along the main road that are diversifying that may cause a pendulum swing back towards socio-economic exclusivity due to these forces.

3.2.4.2 An analytical description of church and space

Several minsters moved from describing their churches and spaces of immersion in the city to describing some of the societal dynamics at play. I call these more analytical

descriptions: White spaces, wealthy spaces, apartheid spaces and suburban spaces. Whilst there is overlap between these and the spatially nuanced reflection later in this chapter, I offer this analysis for initial consideration.

a) "White" spaces

While all the ministers in the study acknowledged the role that apartheid played in developing the demographic of the suburb in which their churches are located, two ministers used the term "White" in their description. For one it was a more superficial nod to the majority White demographic of the church and the neighbourhood around it, while the other gave an in-depth reflection on the evolution of the suburb itself, and showed an awareness of the spatial injustice of the location of his church:

> *(*This suburb*) was created from the outset as a White suburb. It was very intentional. It wasn't a forced removal area. This was built as a White space, primarily after the end of the second world war where soldiers were returning, so in the late 40's early 50's… a lot of young people moved into the area and grew up together … they came in as 20-year-old, 30 years old's and finished at 70, 80 years old, so you had an incredibly stable community but incredibly insular... As that group of people grew old together they chose, rather than open up their community, to densify their community but to do it with high-end retirement centres… in the '80s and '90s as the changes began to happen in our country. And forgive me, but this was driven overwhelmingly by the liberals of UCT who ran several of these things, who owned the properties and who turned it into a business model and a retirement centre that was overwhelmingly, exclusively white.*

The following ministers' reflection comparing racial integration in South African cities was the only one of its kind across the research project:

> *When you talk about spatial planning I think one of the problems here is that there isn't the sort of integration happening at the same level that I experienced it living in … Pretoria. So this is still largely a white community … wealthy, busy.*

b) "Wealthy" spaces

Four ministers spoke about the economic exclusivity of the neighbourhood around their church. A minister leading a church attended by people who were forced out of the neighbourhood, had this insight:

> *And some of the people actually want to come back but they can't … one congregant told me a story of her father who, before forced removals, had built a house in (the suburb where the church is located) but when he wanted to buy back in the area the compensation money he had been given was too small to be able to buy a house in the area …so those are the kinds of injustices.*

Similarly, another minister describes the lack of accessibility to affordable housing in the neighbourhood as directly impacting his church congregation:

> *Because we have lost quite a few of the cheaper rental blocks of flats in this area in the last eight years. There's been a lot of developments … at least ten blocks have gone up, but they've gone up at the expense of the more council rent-controlled blocks so we have very few of those left and we've lost members who were very faithful worshippers here whose block was sold to a developer and they couldn't afford the rent anymore and they had to move..*

And a minister whose church is within walking distance of the above two churches (but further up the mountain slopes in a very expensive neighbourhood), reflected: *"There's nothing in this area that doesn't sell for six million and then developers come in and knock it down and build other stuff on it… how do you get poorer people moving in when the cost of land is so high, and how do we as church respond?"*

It is not just land and housing that the ministers described as inaccessible, but also the schools, retail outlets, health facilities and most essential services in wealthy neighbourhoods that come with a high price tag.

c) Apartheid spaces

While it is obvious that “White spaces” and “wealthy spaces” are directly linked to the shadow that apartheid casts across all the suburbs in the sample group, a few ministers described the ongoing effects of racial segregation on their neighbourhood and church more directly. For example, the minister who spent the bulk of his career leading churches in a different South African city that was diversifying more rapidly, had this to say:

> *And so I moved out of what was becoming actually a very diverse community … and then coming here to a congregation that was 90% White … But there the change in the suburb was driving it and I think, for me here in Cape Town those changes just aren’t happening and the sad thing for me is that this land around us here, after forced removals it was bought up for nothing and apparently it’s now some of the most expensive per metre squared property in the country.*

The church (and its adjacent school) was originally in the heart of a working-class community and he remarks:

> *It used to be a school that served the poorer elements of the community, the point I often make is that we still serve the community, it’s the community that changed. It was a worker’s community and it's actually now a wealthy community and the school reflects the changes.*

Ministers in churches that are attended predominantly by White people, but also have members who were forced to move from the neighbourhood, reflected on the opportunities and challenges this poses. A minister who describes herself as the first woman and the first Person of Colour to lead the church since the 1960s, tells a story of a congregant being offended by the way another person in the church spoke to him. There was a minister during apartheid who referred to People of Colour in the church as *“You people*” and put red stripes on the pews to ensure White and Black or Coloured congregants did not sit together. The minister finished her story with: “*He said the way*

this person spoke to him made him feel like it was the time of when the lines were there, he doesn't feel like things have changed that much."

d) Suburban spaces

On the whole, the ministers did not reflect overtly on the nature of the suburban, or even middle-class life, patterns, mindsets or residents. This may have had to do with the fact that the whole study was framed with a suburban lens and therefore did not need to be overtly stated. One minister, however, described in more depth the nature of what he called "*the greatest challenge to the suburban church".* This is reflected in more detail in Chapter Five, under factors that influence a praxis of spatial justice. This is how he describes this phenomenon:

> *So my personal belief is that the greatest challenge to the suburban church in Cape Town is the consumer mentality. 'I come to church for me, so go away with your demands or your calling or your challenging us to get involved with all these other things.'*

With *Immersion* as a lens, I briefly reviewed the literature of the spatial history of Cape Town, suburban studies and a short review of some studies of churches in suburban contexts. I then turned to the voices of the ministers and how they describe their spaces, specifically in light of their suburban location in Cape Town. I now turn to social analysis.

3.3 Spatial (in)justice

There are many ways practical theologians and churches can approach social analysis, but in this study it will be with a lens explicitly informed by the theories of spatial (in)justice. I then return to the voices of the ministers with this lens and identify themes related to their spatially informed social analyses.

3.3.1 Foundational concepts: naming space, place, justice and injustice

Combining the terms spatial and justice opens up a range of new possibilities for social and political action, as well as for social theorization and empirical analysis, that would not be as clear if the two terms were not used together (Soja 2009:4).

In his work *Social Justice and the City,* Harvey (1973:97-118) lays the theoretical foundations for spatial justice. He starts by defining justice as ‘a principle (or set of principles) for resolving conflicting claims’ and builds towards a definition of social justice, namely: ‘a particular application of just principles to conflicts which arise out of the necessity for social cooperation in seeking individual advancement’ (Harvey 1973:97). With the departure points of division of labour, production and the distribution of the fruits of production, he asserts that ‘the principle of social justice, therefore, applies to the division of benefits and the allocation of burdens arising out of the process of undertaking joint labour’. He lands these notions of social justice as seeking ‘a specification of a just distribution justly arrived at.’ (1973:98). The idea of social justice as ‘just distribution justly arrived at’, when applied in space and place is ultimately defined by Harvey (1973:117) as ‘territorial distributive justice’ or ‘territorial social justice’. When applied to the urban, Harvey (1973:117) describes this as a ‘quest to maximize the spatial organization of the city towards justice’.

Harvey was speaking from a time of growing commitment to spatial thinking within many disciplines, such as geography, planning, architecture, urban studies and sociology, that came to be known as the ‘spatial turn’ (Warf and Arias 2010:1-2). Tracing its roots to the early 1960’s, Warf and Arias (2010:1-2) follow the spatial turn from the early works of Le Febre and Foucalt that named the link between capitalism and the functioning of space. This culminated in the specifically Marxist lens of Harvey in the 1970s that was responsible for bringing space and spatiality out of the realm of just geographical science into the realm of social studies.

Pirie (1983:471), theorising in the early 1980s from the spatially fraught South African context, made a case for developing a concept of spatial justice from Harvey’s ‘notions of social justice or territorial social justice’ and proposed that ‘the term “spatial justice” appear as shorthand for the phrase “social justice in space”’. The theorist Edward Soja who was ultimately responsible for providing the most comprehensive body of work on spatial justice for his time and place describes his and others’ work in spatiality as transdisciplinary, spanning the historical and social dimensions of human sciences to include the spatial (cf Soja, 1996).

Soja (1996:3) thus makes a case for a ‘three-sided sensibility of spatiality–historicality-sociality’ that is ‘not only bringing about a profound change in the ways we think about space,’ but also ‘beginning to lead to major revisions in how we study history and society’. He further notes that spatial thinking has contributed nuance to public thought in the post-modern era claiming that while much of postmodernism in the late 20th century became anti-modern, spatiality offers a lens that embraces the best of modern thinking with the critiques of post-modern thinking and offers what he calls a radical and critical postmodernism (Soja 1996:3-5).

Marcuse (2009:3) names two fundamental forms of spatial injustice – the confinement of people to limited space (for example, through the unfreedoms of segregation or ghettoisation) and the unequal allocation of resources over space. And Soja (2009:3) explains that while one might be able to see or name it when faced with manifestations of these forms of spatial injustice, it is more difficult to pinpoint the causes, which he calls ‘underlying processes that cause unjust geographies’. Soja (2009:3) thus proposes that ‘spatial (in)justice can be seen as both an outcome and a process’.

Closely allied to theories of spatial justice is Lefebvres concept of the ‘Right to the City’ (cf leFebvre,1996). Harvey (2003:939) describes it as such:

> The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire. We need to be sure we can live with our own creations (a problem for every planner, architect and utopian thinker). But the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights.

I conclude this overview by returning to the foundational contribution of Harvey (1973:118) who challenged the agendas of city-makers with questions of space and justice: ‘We cannot afford to ignore these questions, for to do so amounts to one of those strategic non-decisions, so prevalent in politics, by which we achieve a tacit endorsement of the status quo. Not to decide on these issues is to decide.’

3.3.2 Churches and spatial (in)justice

If this challenge from Harvey (1973:118) speaks into the political arena of his time, and echoes truth for this current political era, can the same exhortation be given to churches? How are the theories of spatial justice being engaged with at the level of church and congregation? Are churches making decisions or 'strategic non-decisions' that uphold the status quo? In the next chapter I delve more into theologies of spatial justice. In chapter five I explore faith-based actions towards spatial justice, so this first glance touches on those who have explored the theories of spatial justice with the 'ecclesial analysis' that was promoted at the start to this chapter.

Speaking about our lives as shaped by place, space and land, Leong (2017: 114) reminds a church audience that '… we never do so in an ethical or theological vacuum'. Eliastem (2016:7), approaching space from a religious departure point, states:

> Religion is always located. The sites, places and spaces within which lived religion occurs are produced by social processes and forces. Lived religion simultaneously shapes space and is shaped by the spatial configurations in which it exists. Space, in particular through its local manifestations, tells a story about religion within that space. Its topography mirrors the contours of religious belief and practice far more accurately than catechisms or statements of faith.

South African churches need to look no further than our capital city for depth of insight into the ecclesial implications of an agenda of spatial justice. A community of practitioners, churches, activists and theologians[6] have been leading the way in this arena for the past three decades. Here I highlight a few foundational concepts distilled from this community of praxis. De Beer (2016:3) argues that:

> A spatial consciousness (cf. Soja 2010:17–20) needs to be very intentionally fostered theologically and in local faith communities: for people to see,

[6] The Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF), Yeast City Housing (YCH), and Institute for Urban Ministry (IUM) – further reference will be made to their praxis throughout the study

> understand and interpret spatiality; to dissect the myth of spatial neutrality; to understand how spaces and places are constructed socially, economically and politically; to understand the spatiality of injustice and corresponding socio-economic exclusions; the way in which a certain understanding and working of capital ensure spatial inequalities; the relationships between land, space, place and housing or 'home'; the complicity of the church in co-constructing spatial injustice or the possibility of the church to mediate justice spatially; and developing critical spatial perspectives, theologically, about all of these categories.

Working this out in the same context with churches and communities that attempt to bridge socio-spatial divides, Ntakirutimana (2017:7) argues that the very people living in precarious conditions who need space to live in the city can journey with willing churches in concrete responses to spatial injustice, including housing advocacy and provision. He further focuses the onus on churches to be willing for such a journey and puts it as follows:

> An ecclesiological guiding principle flows from Jesus' requirement for the church to become a good shepherd (Jn 10:14) who (1) should know the sheep and (2) who should be prepared to lay life down for them. This call is intended to inspire the church's pastoral care plan to be broader to integrate housing for poor people.

This cannot happen, of course, without churches identifying their position in the stories of spatial injustice in their particular context, and where necessary as de Beer (2016:7) explains, 'acknowledging theological and ecclesial complicity in colonial constructs of power, capital and city-making.'

Returning to the specifically suburban church question, Eliastem (2016:7) reflects on the church that he led: 'Opening the doors of our congregational meeting place to the least advantaged in our community called for deeper, sacrificial withdrawal from our spatial position of privilege.' He notes that it is not easy for those in positions of such privilege

to make these sacrifices, but asserts the 'need for a transformation of religious practice that moves people towards a relational justice that is sacrificial and dynamic'.

Provocations such as these keep the church in conversation with the questions of spatial (in)justice and the invitation towards the spatial turn that others have made.

3.3.3 Voices from the churches

How then, did the ministers in this study move to describing their churches and neighbourhoods with a more socially and spatially informed analysis? The following themes register a move from merely *naming* towards trying to understand the causes of spatial injustice: why things are the way they are, how they came to be that way and what holds those dynamics in place? Alongside this, I note an ecclesial analysis of the presence, nature and purpose of "church" in both the neighbourhood and broader society.

3.3.3.1 Churches holding different living memories of the same area

Poignant reflections on the way history is remembered in churches came from one minister who is responsible for two very different congregations in the same suburb, separated by a bridge over a train line. Both churches are located in areas that were re-zoned "Whites only" during the Group Areas Act and both suffered forced removals and social upheaval throughout the period. Both sections of the suburb have been slow to desegregate, especially due to market forces that keep driving land and property prices up. However, in the one congregation there exists what I have termed a **"**spatial amnesia"[7], while the other church seems to have become what I call **"**church as a memorialised space".

a) The church with spatial amnesia:

The minister describes the church in which we met for the interview, as such:

[7] Bergmann (2008) speaks of a similar concept in urban studies, naming 'Environments of Urban Amnesia' as a theological concept

> *In this exact area, not the property where this church is … but a lot of the community in the surrounding area … people were forcibly removed, probably quite early on …but there are very few people, if any, who are currently members of this church who were forcibly removed from the area … and there's virtually no institutional memory of those events in this church.*

He described how he had not heard about the history of the area from his congregants, but rather from a man who visited and shared his story:

> *A chap came in … who had been removed, his parents ran a tailor shop. His parents resisted for as long as they could and then eventually they were removed and he's part of the land claim group that has been granted this adjacent bowling green. So it was a very interesting conversation because he was the first person that I'd met and spoken to that had experienced the removals himself from this area. It seems like the removal from this part of(of the suburb)were so effectively done that there's nobody in this church that has that history.*

b) The church as a memorialised space:

He describes the other church across the train bridge:

> *99% of the people who worship there don't live in the area because they were forcibly removed, but this was their resistance - that they kept coming back to church. So that has all kinds of dynamics for the health and the missional intent of the church … the church is drenched with that history.*

c) Churches bringing disparate memories together:

He further notes that both churches have written histories of their congregational life:

> *So it is of interest to me personally as from a historical point of view, and hearing the histories of the churches … it's so fascinating that when you read the history of this church … there's no mention of that, but when you read the history of the (other) church there's a lot of mention of it.*

Speaking of how the different leadership groups engage with their histories, he says:

> *Church leadership currently are not engaged at all with this shared history on this side of the bridge. On the other side of the bridge …the challenge is the exact opposite. Because there is zero engagement from the members of the church with the local community because of the history. So it's almost as if they are mirror images of one other.*

He concluded these thoughts with a reflection: *"So in a sense, the journey of the two churches is one of understanding each other's perspective I suppose*."

3.3.3.2 Churches uncovering unheard stories

It was remarkable to me that three ministers told stories of uncovering stories of forced removals that directly involved congregants who now live in the home of a fellow congregation member who was forcibly removed from that very home. In one scenario, a family of churches hosted an initiative called "Home is where the heart is" that gave space for congregation members from across the spectrum of Cape Town's divided racial and spatial history (and present) to tell their stories. The intent was that those who had been victims of the Group Areas Act could tell their story and that those who had been beneficiaries, directly or indirectly, would listen and learn.

> *There were two women in the group. One was… Coloured ..and the other … White. And what emerged was … that (the Coloured woman) was forcefully removed and the family (of the White woman) moved into her house. They were in the same group … (She) had never been back to (her road) since she'd been moved … She'd never been back.*

In a different church, a minister shared a story that he had only recently become aware of. Several congregants who had been forcibly removed from the area and who travel to the church in their old neighbourhood had recently discovered that a fellow congregant lives in the house they were removed from. Some felt uncomfortable to attend a post-church tea in her home and since the minister has become aware of this, he has been wondering what role he should play in the story. He reflected that while the congregants who were moved are aware of the full story and are pained by it, the person who currently lives in the house is not.

> Minister: "*I only discovered this about three weeks ago and so I'm just working on that."*
>
> Me: *"working on holding that knowledge in your heart?"*
>
> Minister: *"yes working on holding that knowledge in my heart because actually to introduce the two and just work through what that means, I think is quite important. So there's a whole lot of underlying stuff that's not spoken about."*

A church that focuses on uncovering the apartheid and spatial history of both their suburb and their congregants as part of a discipleship journey held a story-telling time. The minister tells the story of a congregant whose family, when facing forced removals from a coastal area, managed to find a home closer to the southern suburbs, which meant they lived on the edge of the Whites-only suburb in which the church is located, living what the minister describes as*: "A completely different life from (where they had grown up to where they were moved)."*

He attempted to describe his understanding of their story:

> *Part of their story was just describing the hardship of that move, that sense of loss, the sense of injustice, the sense of violation. Nevertheless, remaining strongly connected and invested and moving from a church there to a church in the area … and pressing on with that story and then living for decades just on the outside of the whiteness that is (our suburb).*

How many more people in churches across the southern suburbs hold stories that others have not heard and what is this doing to the communal nature of the church?

3.3.3.3 Exclusionary suburbs and the churches in them

The idea of spaces being exclusionary has already been touched on in the descriptions of churches as white, wealthy or apartheid spaces. Here I focus on how ministers named the ways their neighbourhoods and the churches in them act to exclude people

who do not fit a set of socio-economic and/or racial criteria, or as one minister quite candidly put it "*When the neighbours and congregants still have a colonial way of seeing things".*

One of the ministers in the study has been my friend for many years. I met him when he was a church-based community worker in one of Cape Town's largest townships, growing up and attending church there until he discerned a calling to the priesthood. Once he was ordained, he was placed in churches in the Southern suburbs. He describes the exclusionary nature of these suburbs and the churches in them in a story about wedding venues and the need for opening up church spaces:

> *They give you an invoice if you want to come and do a wedding or hire a hall or anything like that. A very fat invoice … you're paying for status, you're paying for the privilege of being in the area, you're paying for the views that you have from the venue and all those things. And so as a person who's always in contact with my people from the other side … the people come back to me and say, "Yoh, but the invoice was too fat"… How do we then accommodate? I had to sit down with my senior colleague and say, "How do you address these things?" Because clearly the invoice is not directed at those less fortunate and unable to afford…. And so we then needed to start to change our language around how we communicate about money and how ministry then reaches out to community in a way that still is affordable to those who are less fortunate, who want to be drawn into the space of the church in various ways. And obviously then the response to that … was interesting, because it's not the conversation that was there before, they needed to begin it. Not necessarily a comfortable one … we've got to be a church that's open in every respect.*

One minister focused on unwritten societal economic and racist practices that exclude. He reminded the focus group of a practice that many of us, but not all, were aware of where: "a Person of Colour tries to rent a place in the area and gets told the flat is taken, but when a White friend phones on their behalf they get offered the same flat". He also reflects that the members of his church, 99% of whom were previously removed

from the area, who want to return, cannot enter the buying market as properties do not come onto the open market, but get sold amongst networks of people who know each other. He asks:

> *How do we as the church challenge this status quo within communities? That says to people, remember those who were here, who **do** have money to come back, who want to come back and be part of the community, that you give them preference over others so that you address the land debate.*

It is interesting that the minister whose church is consciously working towards diversity and seeking to understand spatial and racial divides reflects that congregants from within the church community (and also voices from the outside) have raised the concern that while they might work towards diversity *in* the church, the suburb in which the church is located is too expensive. He describes the concern: "*It is a costly community to move into, and so many of the People of Colour who have started attending have started coming from the (*less costly suburbs, and some that were not previously Whites-only), *but can't move into the area."* This point provokes questions about churches seeking to diversify their congregations that do not diversify the neighbourhoods themselves.

3.3.3.4 Churches on either side of "the bridge"

As this was a study focusing on spatial (in)justice, the issue of socio-economic inequality occurred in almost every conversation. Every minister named this in some way as a stark reality in society and an important issue for the church, often at multiple points in the interview or focus group. Previous reflections have shown how some ministers more than others understand this with an explicitly spatial lens. But only one minister grappled with the crisis this poses to the churches of Cape Town. He spoke about being the minister of his church in a wealthy suburb while also serving pastorally at a church of the same denomination in a large township just over the mountain. He describes moving between a wealthy, White community and an informal settlement where the shack where they meet is regularly flooded, and how the tension of being part of two worlds affects him:

> *Sometimes I feel … overwhelmed, you know, by this gross inequality because I'm not sure what the solutions are. I'm not sure how we can address those kinds of issues. And we don't. I guess it's difficult to even challenge people on those issues. But members of our (suburban) congregation have holiday homes. And then you've got people living in the (informal settlement) that don't have a home at all. I think what are the biggest challenges facing the church? … the gross inequality. But I think, you know, we are not sure that we can even speak prophetically to the government when we haven't even gotten it right ourselves.*

I return to the story of the two churches led by the same minister on either side of a railway bridge who also explored the position of the suburban church in this disparity:

> *One of the things we try to do, it's really only at a leadership level, is help people to hear the stories of those who were removed, not just as ancient history that is totally irrelevant, but as something that still affects the way the local church sees the neighbourhood that they are in. And building a bridge between a church community and a local neighbourhood that are totally disconnected from each other is just as challenging as connecting a church community with the history of the area they are in when no one in our church now was living here at that time.*

3.3.3.5 Churches *as* the bridge?

As ministers spoke of disparity, inequality, socio-economic spatial and racial divides, it struck me that the presence of the church in the space and the minister in the church can (even if not intentionally) sometimes act as a bridge between disparities. Sometimes the minister and the church merely surface and hold stories, and in doing so enter into a naming and a form of social analysis. And so I reflect on churches "being the bridge" over which people could walk, as another layer of analysis. The heart and role of church ministers struck me in these reflections - those who feel called to shepherd and love every member of the church and neighbourhood without judgement, regardless of which side of the divides they fall.

One minister describes herself as "in the middle" in her diverse congregation.

> *There is still some hurt … but I work with both groups, it's a bit difficult sometimes I'm sort of in the middle. Sometimes my White congregation can be abrupt you know, the way they speak, and in the beginning, when I first came here I also felt offended. But I've learned this is their way of speaking, so how do I deal with this?*

She describes having the ear of all her congregants. She understands that to People of Colour this kind of abrupt manner triggers memories of being looked down on by White people and she hears things like, "*This is our church and they came and took our church*". During a recent church celebration, she asked people to share their memories of the church:

> *One person actually said to me, 'worshipping together White and Coloured together, and when we have a party the White people come to our house', that is their fondest memory. And the saddest memory is when that priest said 'You Coloureds, you sit that side'.*

These reflections led to a short conversation on the role that a minister can play in mediating racial tension and hurt:

> Minister: *A lot of those things can surface sometimes. Thinking back to the beginning of your own stor*y (we had spoken before the interview) *of white supremacy - maybe they don't realise it.*
>
> Me: *Is white supremacy maybe not reflected on*?
>
> Minister: *Yes, I'm still very much aware of that, and the old hurts …you think people have moved on, but if they didn't deal with it, it will surface.*
>
> Me*: Is the church a unique place for dealing with these kinds of hurts?*
>
> Minister: *Yes, I think so. In this year I have had several people reach out having experienced racial issues in other churches*. (One person) *keeps coming back. I said to him 'Come and experience and you decide'.*

The minister of a church I describe as a "memorialised space" holds the desire that his church will become a "*centre of hope and also a church that is connected to its local people",* even though the local neighbours are not connected currently in any way with the life of the church. He recalls when a family that was removed returned to live in the suburb and visited the church:

> *It's so exciting if somebody is coming back to the community and how then do we become a church that is connected to, that brings back, restores that which was lost? … But it becomes exciting when you have such kind of families that would like to see them coming back and using our church into a beginning of saying we are a community, not only for those who were evicted, but also of the community for those who are now staying here.*

Where ministers and churches hear otherwise silent stories of spatial injustice in wise ways, that in itself could extend an opportunity of analysis and naming. The family of churches that led the "Home is where the heart is" journey has already taken another step:

> *And at the end of this journey that they'd been on, the group could decide what they wanted to do. What they did was they hired a combi and they all got in the combi and they went to (her old home with her), first time she'd been back. And they walked down the road together … she had stories about the people who lived down the road, how they'd known each other and what had happened. And, and so it was a response of compassion and facing reality, what had happened and meeting each other."*

The minister telling this story did not expand on the hoped-for outcomes of this facilitated journey or indeed any further outcomes of this story since it had happened. To date, I am not aware of any attempts at restitution or reparation towards the person who had lost their home.

Returning to the church that has chosen to dig into these themes intentionally, I am struck by the minister naming "*a sense of powerlessness*" in the face of *"racial animosity*

and the narrative of race-based and identity-based political narrative in our country", as well as "*also feeling the weight of our own lack of transformation."*

These wrestles led to what he calls "*some really deliberate conversations about diversity, restitution and so on*" that culminated in hosting what he called "diversity conversations", which he describes as follows:

> *Ten or twelve people, and consciously bringing people from different backgrounds into the room and they would share meals over a couple of months and during that time every single person at the table would tell their story in-depth as it related to issues for example of land, of apartheid etc. We wanted to hear what your family back story was, as much as you were able to tell it and what the consequences had been and what it meant for you and what brought you to the table now. So during that time we had several families who … engaged with this in different ways and were able to process it. Some People of Colour have almost taken a view 'I have put that behind me or I simply couldn't walk with any degree of peace' and so they have made their peace by putting it behind them. Others needed the process to unpack it in order to start making peace - maybe not even with themselves, but with the people who were part of their dispossession and loss.*

3.3.3.6 Churches and their neighbours "under the bridge"

"Here's an interesting question: If our church burnt down tomorrow who would miss it, apart from the vagrants (sic) who sleep there at night" – Minister.

Fourteen ministers spoke with differing levels of insight and involvement about the relationship of their church with the homeless people living in the immediate neighbourhood. It seemed like a set of reflections specific to the lived experience of churches in suburban areas. It is for this reason that I include this particular focus as a part of the social analysis of suburban churches and have identified three ways suburban homelessness was named and analysed:

a) A problem

For some of the ministers, a reflection on homelessness came up in passing when describing the day-to-day life of the church - *"We are harassed for coffee, by tramps (sic) and security guards…",* but for others, the issue was discussed at length and with much angst. One story was told that visibly moved the minister who was telling it and caused a moment of quiet reflection during a focus group. A regular group of people made a nightly shelter in the grounds around his church. Being in an area with very high numbers of homeless people, the church had entered into a verbal agreement with the people regularly sleeping on the church grounds; they could stay if they limited the number of people living there, and packed and cleaned up every morning. One night a woman was violently attacked on the premises, which became a criminal case and resulted in the church no longer allowing the community to sleep there. The minister expressed the feeling that if they could not properly ensure the safety of everyone on the property, they could not offer a space. The feeling was that a church is a sacred and safe place where such things should not happen.

Another minister asks questions about safety with more of a focus on the wellbeing of the facilities: *"We have to have gates for the children's safety, but that doesn't stop them from jumping over the fence to get into the property at night."*

He talks about the people living and sleeping around the church:

> *We have to have security, but that doesn't stop them jumping the fence at night to sleep on the grounds. It's been an increasing thing over the past year or two … we are struggling… because with the whole drought we installed … water tanks and now there's water available so they will come and get into our water tanks and don't always switch them off so it wastes water - how do you regulate it, without being there all the time? I'm happy they have the water, but do we now give them a gate key so that they can go get the water, but then how do you control access when the kids are there?*

For the same minister, the mess, inconvenience and security pose a dilemma, both practical and theological:

> *We do have people who sleep on our porch every night and our members are fairly patient, but come Sunday morning and the entrance smells like urine, and it's a difficult thing … they say 'Let's call in the security people and chase them away every night and eventually they won't come back'. We try and talk nicely to them … And so we have a couple that stays there who do try and clean up quite nicely, but you never know who is jumping over your fence and stealing water…How do we manage this whole thing you know? Do we put a gate here to stop them sleeping there, but if we do that they're just going to go sleep over there … But the other theological thing is what are we doing about them, these are the least of the least and so how do we reach out to them? Which we do.*

b) An opportunity for outreach

While this is described much more in chapter five, I note here that several ministers spoke about homeless people, not only as a problem, but as an immediate reminder to love "*the least of these". They see this as* an opportunity for their congregants, who might otherwise have very little exposure to people living in extreme poverty, to engage in outreach and respond with mercy in their immediate context, thus fulfilling the calling on any member of the Christian faith.

c) Members of the community

Speaking about a workshop they held on biblical justice, one minister reflects:

> *A number of our participants were unhoused (local) residents, so people who were living rough in (the area) who also participated as part of the workshop as participants, which is another aspect of spatial justice/injustice.*

Two ministers reflected that when homeless persons are considered members of the church, ordinary church activities, such as holding the funeral of a homeless person, can be meaningful for the life of the church. I got the sense that just doing what the church does for everyone who is part of the sacred community, including the sacraments, becomes even more noteworthy when it for someone who otherwise is not seen by many as included in the life of the city.

I observed across the dataset that while reflections on homelessness were ample and able to be categorised as I have above, there were no reflections on issues of (in)justice, human rights abuse, or any forms of related advocacy. I reflect on this in more detail in chapters four and five, highlighting ways a few churches have made the connection, both theologically and practically, between homelessness and spatial (in)justice, and the praxis that is being born from this connection.

3.4 Further discussion of findings

The themes from across the dataset that were described in this chapter were identified directly from the words of the ministers. In a few places, I started to add my descriptors of their words, *e.g.* churches with spatial amnesia, or churches as memorialised spaces. In this final section, I discuss ideas that emerged as insights into the research questions while I was working with the themes.

Immersion, analysis and the foundations of spatial consciousness

As I named the ways ministers described and analysed their contexts, I noticed those who were spatially aware of both the historical and contemporary realities of their context and those who were less so. I could place the comments and overall contributions of the ministers on a continuum of spatial awareness or consciousness. This is predominantly based on responses from the six ministers who were interviewed individually, rather than those participating in focus group discussions. The latter may have limited input from some individuals in group discussions due to time constraints.

Two ministers went through the full interview without showing any interest or any natural inclination towards naming or describing the long history of spatial injustice in the area. The sense I got from them was that life in the present and hopes for the future were of central importance to the praxis of the church. Three ministers displayed a keen spatial awareness regarding historical and contemporary spatial injustices. And one minister gave a spatially rich description of the church, its history and its current setting in detail, but with a reticence to pass any judgement or explicitly name injustice.

It was interesting to interview two ministers from the same suburb. One tells a long story about the spatial history of the area, and the animated and distressed way he describes

what unfolded during apartheid led directly to him explaining what they have consequently done to address racial homogeneity in their church, and their attempted processes of reconciliation. The other minister, much newer to the area, was able to reflect more generally on “loving the neighbour”, but was not connected to the story of the space or place. This comparative reflection made me curious about what one would learn from a similar study focusing on just one suburb and all the churches in it.

In only one instance, described above as “churches holding different memories of the same area”, the minister spoke about the spatial awareness of his congregants across two separate churches in the same area, specifically related to the spatial histories of the neighbourhood.

My proposal that spatial awareness sits on a continuum is strongly influenced by the work of Soja (2010:18) who speaks extensively on the development of a spatial consciousness that strives to ‘rebalance the spatial, the social, and the historical dimensions of reality, making the three dynamically interactive and equivalent in inherent explanatory power.’ Soja (2010:19) also describes the movement from approaches to social science that are ‘space-blinkered’ towards those that activate a ‘strategically foregrounded spatial perspective’ and asserts that such a movement recognises that:

> The geographies in which we live can have both positive and negative effects on our lives. They are not just dead background or a neutral physical stage for the human drama but are filled with material and imagined forces that affect events and experiences, forces that can hurt us or help us in nearly everything we do, individually and collectively (Soja 2010:19).

Finally, I suggest that we layer onto this continuum the concepts of justice and injustice. A person may have a growing spatial consciousness starting with awareness, but an underdeveloped or even oppositional way of relating to notions of social (in)justice. Conversely, as in the case of several of the ministers in the study, one could have a growing sense of justice/injustice, but a fairly low spatial consciousness. These ideas

and the way they interact will be visited with different lenses in the next two chapters leading to integrated findings in the conclusion of the paper.

CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION TOWARDS SPATIAL JUSTICE

In this chapter I:

1) Introduce theological reflection, the third moment of the praxis cycle

2) Give an overview of existing theologies that engage land and spatial justice and propose further theological sources as building blocks for a theology of spatial justice

3) Share theological reflections from the ministers

4) Reflect theologically on these findings

4.1 The praxis cycle: theological reflection

The praxis cycle as a whole is a theological framework with a focus towards pastoral action and is theologically informed at every moment (Holland and Henriot 1983:8). The third moment of the praxis cycle, theological reflection, is where the realities of immersion and analysis are intentionally brought into conversation with overtly theological themes and sources, from biblical and other theological disciplines and authors. Holland and Henriot (1983:9) describe this moment as 'an effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analysed experience in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teaching, and the resources of tradition.'

Wijsen, Henriot and Meija (2005) revisit the method, application and influence of the praxis cycle after four decades of praxis in Christian communities. They offer four questions to accompany the four moments: Immersion: 'what is happening?'; Social analysis: 'why is it happening?'; Theological reflection: 'what does this mean to us as Christians?' and Response: 'what do we do?' (Wijsen *et al* 2005: 17-18). The simple question 'what does this mean to us as Christians, and churches?' provides the framework for this chapter.

To be more specific about the *this* of the question, I centre the focus of theological reflection on questions of justice and space, or as Cochrane *et al* (1991:68) write:

> the link between our theological ethical centre and concrete political praxis, the link between the Biblical text and social reality, and the link between prayer and praxis, worship and politics, service of God and political service, the kingdom of God and our historical engagement and struggle.

De Gruchy (2004) picks up the conversation for the post-apartheid church. He draws from traditions of prophetic theology, for example declarations and documents that came out of Rustenberg, the Kairos theologians and Belhar,during the church struggle against apartheid, and notes that 'this legacy of disciplined theological reflection, even while suffering and repression, must not be lost in the years that lie ahead' (de Gruchy 2004:259). He himself pursued such disciplined theological reflection, amplifying the struggles of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, land justice, service delivery and particularly the injustice of dehumanizing sanitation in poor communities in South Africa (cf de Gruchy 2005). I now turn to equally disciplined theological reflections that have the potential to be liberating and transformative for all that affects human life and flourishing: those that pave the way for a praxis of spatial justice.

4.2 Theologies toward spatial justice

The purpose of this section is to explore an overview of theological sources that have the potential to move those who engage with them towards a praxis of spatial justice. The first two sources (theologies of spatial justice and black liberation theologies of land and spatial justice) name place or land, space and justice as the departure points of their theological reflection. The second two sources (a prophetic imagination and a contextual readings of the bible) shape biblical hermeneutics that when applied to questions of space and justice could significantly contribute to a spatial turn in the praxis of individuals and churches.

4.2.1 Leading, developing, and emerging theologies of spatial justice

Theologians in South Africa have been tracking the spatial turn and highlighting its relevance for South African theology and churches for several decades (cf Venter 2006, de Beer 2008-2021, Prinsloo 2013, Ntakirutimana 2016-2017, Renkin 2016-2017, Eliastam 2016, Mlambo 2020). Through engaging the work of the social geographers and through direct engagement with the realities of spatial injustice in their contexts, these theologians have started to close the gap between theories of spatial justice and theology. In doing this, they have asked piercing questions of the contemporary South African church. Having already drawn on some of their work in the previous chapter when looking at churches, spatial justice, and the suburbs, I will now offer an overview of the journey towards a theology of spatial justice in our context and touch on a few of their primary theological ideas.

Venter (2006:201) described the concept of space as the 'Cinderella of theology' and sketched 'a rationale for asserting space as central to the theological agenda'. He did this by putting three 'turns' in academia into conversation with each other, namely: 'the spatial interest in critical human geography, the recovery of the importance of the Trinity, and the return of theological interest in the city' and asserted that 'by linking space both to God as triune and to the crisis facing contemporary cities, space is given a transcendent frame of reference and an existential social application.' (Venter 2006:201). He further proposes that by engaging radical notions of spatial justice, theology is confronted with several crucial factors to consider regarding its public role and task (Venter 2006:205), namely that:

- space is important to social organization;
- space is socially produced and produces social effects;
- the utopian ideals of spatial justice do not render theology intellectually irrelevant but rather increase its capacity to contribute towards social transformation;
- theology should heed the concern of socialist thinkers that centre the crisis of the 'dehumanising commodification of contemporary social life'

In 2008, the Theological Society of South Africa convened a conference calling for papers on the theme of *Grace, Race and Space: Towards a theology of place* and from this conference, a set of articles were published (Le Bruyns and Vosloo 2009:1-2) but these did not explicitly name theologies of spatial justice.

In the same year, de Beer published an article, writing from the community of the Tshwane Leadership Foundation (cf de Beer and de Beer 2002, 2018) drawing on their 'own analysis and engagement as an ecumenical inner-city community' (de Beer 2008:182). In this article, he offers 'some suggestions and some critical moments for a Christian spatial praxis that is rooted in an economics of community and a politics of justice' (de Beer 2008:182). This work brought urban thinking about contested spaces into conversation with praxis-based theological reflection. It explored an 'alternative Christian spatial praxis considering ways in which communities of faith can engage issues of inner-city space, land and housing to facilitate possible prophetic alternatives to the dominant trends' (de Beer 2008:181).

De Beer (2008:190 -191) suggests that the creation of an alternative Christian spatial praxis be facilitated by the following critical moments of deliberate Christian engagement with the city: 1) engagement that is politically and spatially informed and therefore does not maintain the status quo; 2) engagement with that which determines 'spatial dynamics and patterns' in the neighbourhood; 3) engagement that relates the lived faith of local communities to their current and historical experiences of spatial contestation and 4) engagement that is 'intentional about exploring alternatives to spatial, economic and other exclusions' (de Beer 2008:190-191).

These reflections and proposals were rooted in and born from urban life, struggle, embodied love and justice-seeking action in their context. And they heralded a new dawn of theological reflection in South Africa that foregrounded questions of space, justice and the city, that continues to shed its light across various fields of theology and beyond.

The last decade has seen this theological agenda engaged with many different theological lenses. These include:

- ‘Body theology’ that seeks to bring together striving for justice and the places where bodies endeavor to make meaning (Meiring 2016:7);
- The juxtaposition of spatial justice with the South African concept of ‘Ubuntu’, the interconnectedness of human life (Eliastam 2016:1);
- Social cohesion: with social justice, land justice and spatial justice as three critical elements that contribute to it (de Beer 2014:7-8);
- Racial justice and the questions of reconciliation and space (Leong 2018);
- Church history studies on land and space (Mlambo 2020);
- Biblical hermeneutics towards a theological-spatial justice agenda (Prinsloo 2013, Van Eck, Renkin, & Ntakirutimana 2016);
- Christology, from the perspective of the incarnation of Jesus as a ‘spatial strategy of transferring himself into the brokenness of our world’ (de Beer 2008:191);
- Christology– more specifically relating to the cross and resurrection – as the theme around which spatial justice can be framed (Ntakirutimana, 2017:6-9).

Mlambo (2020:9) interfaces an example of church land reform (in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Marianhill, KwaZulu Natal) with the concept of spatial justice and suggests that a theology of spatial justice will comprise of two anchors, very closely linked with a biblical treatment of land, namely:

- ‘Developing a spatial consciousness when looking at the Bible’ which she asserts must acknowledge and analyse ‘God’s commands and words on land … also on the relationship between people and with God’.
- ‘Looking at life-giving acts around land in the Bible’.

Several scholars offer a socio-spatial hermeneutic to biblical texts (explored in more detail in 4.2.4.) but I mention them here (cf Prinsloo 2013, Van Eck, Renkin, & Ntakirutimana 2016) as Mlambo's 'two anchors' (Mlambo 2020:9) must be informed by such scholarship and also with the theologies I suggest in the following sections, in order to make up the buildings blocks of a holistic theology of spatial justice.

4.2.2 A black liberation theology of land and spatial justice

This study is rooted in the theological discourse on land (in)justice, especially in South Africa. Theologies of land and land justice flow seamlessly from black theologies of liberation (Vellem 2015:1) and many of these from the South African context (cf Mofokeng 1992; Mosala 1989,1997; Vellem 2015, Lephakga 2013, Resane 2019). These lay a strong foundation for South African theologies of spatial justice therefore this section amplifies these influential voices.

While this study draws predominantly from South African scholarship on land justice, global theological reflection on the subject is vast. This recognizes the contribution of contextual theologies from international sites of land struggle across the globe, for example from Palestine (cf Raheb 2014); post-colonial African theologies (cf Oduyoye 1995, Mugambi 1996); global indigenous theologies that are inextricably linked with questions of land dispossession (cf Longchar 2002), and from the North American context, the roots of a black theology of liberation drawing on the themes of displacement, enslavement, dispossession, incarceration and how that now plays out in the story of land, space and the nation-state (cf Cone 1970; West 1982).

Before turning to look at specific theologies of land, I will briefly look at the foundation of Black theology and its direct partnership with Liberation theology. Cone, in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970:1) asserts the notion that all theology is liberation theology:

> Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, with is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into

> ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only *consistent with* the gospel but *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Vellem (2015:1-6) defines a black theology of liberation, in the context of empire, as a 'theology of life', drawing from the 1993 Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) statement with the title, *A Cry for Life: The Spirituality of the Third World*. Vellem amplifies these words from the EATWOT statement:

> The cry of the Third World is not a passive cry of resignation to the realities of death. It is a strident witness to the persistence of life. The cry for life is not a cry of despair, sorrow, hopelessness or grief. It is a cry that denies victory to torture, detainment, starvation and military might. It is a cry for bread, rice, water, land, housing, jobs health care.

In much of his work, Vellem relates this cry for life to the story of land dispossession in Africa, declaring 'Land is Life!' and links life, land and nurture drawing from Mofokengs' 1997 formative contribution to a theology of land: *Land is our mother: A Black Theology of Land* (Vellem 2016:1). He reminds his readers of the legacy of the host of consultations, academic works and publications on land, theology and the church in South Africa that have paved the way for an articulated theology of land from the South African context (Vellem 2016:1). Pointing to the work of William Saayman from the 1997 conference on Church, Land and Poverty hosted jointly by the South African Council of Churches and the National Land Committee, Vellem writes:

> Saayman explains that Christians in South Africa need to understand that land cannot be understood or perceived merely as a commodity. He further suggests that the problem of land requires an intercultural interpretation in the light of the brokenness of our history and concludes his argument by making missiological propositions for a "contextual theology of land" (Vellem 2016:4).

Vellem (2016:4) goes further to assert that a black theology of liberation 'has long ago proposed a theology of land'. Referencing the history of the Western Christian tradition

and its use of the Bible in the dispossession and oppression of Black Africans, Vellem (2016:8) highlights the reality that both the beneficiaries and victims of land dispossession are Christians ‘inspired by the same Bible’. He juxtaposes the views of the Western Christian Tradition against the view of the Black African that understands land as God-given, an intrinsic part of life, for life-giving activities and contends that this view renders its ‘commodification by the market a perpetual hoax’ (Vellem 2016:8). This view, Vellem asserts is at the heart of a theology of land (Vellem 2016:8).

In conclusion, I visit the application of a black liberation theology of land as applied to space and justice. Delport and Lephakga (2016:8) approach questions of a theological basis for reconciliation from a lens of spatial justice stating that in South Africa ‘justice must be spatial and any reconciliation must be based on a spatial redivision’. They critique post-1994 theological agendas of reconciliation that claim that liberation has already come to the oppressed, naming that such theologies foster praxis where the ‘injustices prevalent in society are to be alleviated with missionary-type activities in the form of NGOs and community outreach projects, all the while allowing an undisturbed continuation in the material order of things’ (Delport and Lephakga 2016:7). They maintain that this theological agenda has replaced ‘the ideas of liberation and justice with forgiveness and reconciliation’ and that a new theological agenda for spatial justice in South Africa should reverse this ‘to sufficiently address the lingering presence of structural sin in South Africa’ (Delport and Lephakga 2016:7).

I conclude with their words, which bring us full circle to the founding commitments of a black liberation theology:

> It is, however, our view that the questions raised by a spatial theology is best addressed through the work and mediations of liberation theology. The prioritising of the question of liberation and justice will inevitably lead to the prioritising of questions of space and land (Delport and Lephakga 2016:7).

4.2.3 A prophetic imagination for spatial justice

In theological readings on spatial justice and a black liberation theology of land and spatial justice, various references to the prophetic tradition in scripture are present. Across the wide scope of theological and biblical interpretation, the role of the prophets, the location and work of the prophetic tradition, and indeed the very term prophetic means vastly different things (Cochrane *et al* 1991:56). In this case, I refer to what Brueggemann (1978), Cochrane *et al* (1991:56), Katongole (2009:132-157) and Boesak (2017:194-226) describe in different ways as 'prophetic theology', or as Boesak (2017:226) so powerfully unpacks it: 'a theology on the edge of hopeful, real, durable anticipation: prepared for derision, persecution and suffering, for revilement and struggle, but unprepared, totally and resolutely, to accept the world as it is and things as they are.'

Boesak's 'world as it is' is described by Brueggemann (1978:11) as 'the dominant community'. He unpacks that this dominant community is fueled by a dominant consciousness, which is closely linked with what he calls the 'royal consciousness' that is prevalent throughout the rise and fall of empires (chronicled across the biblical narrative), and is in opposition to the purposes of the rule and reign of God's kingdom (Brueggemann 1978:11-43). This dominant, or royal consciousness must, according to Brueggemann (1978:80), be 'radically criticised and the dominant community must be finally dismantled'. He explains that an alternative (and prophetic) community, with an alternative (and prophetic) consciousness, must exist for the sake of that criticism and dismantling (Brueggemann 1978:80). He does not believe that prophetic theology just gives rise to criticism and dismantling, but also describes the work of 'prophetic ministry' that fosters a new perception of reality, what he calls 'the prophetic imagination', and paints a picture of the future in light of 'God's freedom and his will for justice' (Brueggemann 1978:109).

While Brueggemann speaks predominantly to a postmodern North American church audience, Katongole bridges from that context across the Atlantic to his home continent, speaking to a postcolonial African church and context. Katongole (2009:133) reflects on his encouragement to pastors and activists in Central and East Africa to lift their head

above the everyday work of their parishes and communities to foster such an alternative/prophetic consciousness by asking them to imagine ‘God’s greater plan to redeem the world’ and ‘God’s bigger vision for the church in (Africa)’. He roots this call in scripture, reminding the church that ‘the witness of the biblical story is that God’s people are always invited to say no to the idols of their age and rise up by the power of the Spirit as a holy interruption’ (Katongole 2009:133).

As prophetic theology does the work of helping the reader identify the ‘idols of their age’ both in the biblical text and in their context, the concept of the ‘kingdom of God’ is frequently foregrounded as a biblical concept that reaches across time, place and space. Dorr (1984:94-100) draws the lines of connection between the Old Testament prophetic tradition, most especially Jubilee motifs of land justice and freedom from enslavement, to Jesus’ teaching in the New Testament on the ‘Kingdom of God’ as the heralding in of ‘good news to the poor’. He asserts that the kingdom of God is the ‘reign of God in this world’ that establishes values that are ‘the very opposite of the dominant values in the personal, interpersonal, and the public aspects of life,’ and highlights that ‘to live by these “Kingdom values” is to be religiously, morally, and “politically” converted.’ (Dorr 1984:96). Pillay (2015:6) makes the following crucial connection between the kingdom of God and resisting the dominant culture:

> The Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus preaches is brought into conflict with the dominant culture and creates tension. Those whom society despises are pronounced ‘blessed’ (5:1- 12); the inclusiveness of the kingdom is made manifest when outsiders (the despised) such as lepers, Gentiles, ‘unclean’ women, and the demon possessed are pronounced ‘clean’ (Chaps 8-9). Jesus’ vision of the kingdom as symbolically presented in the parables, entails hearing, understanding and doing the word of the kingdom (13:23)

Gutierrez (1973:170), the founder of Liberation theology, applies this to the ‘kingdom of God’ sayings and stories of Jesus and specifically to the words in Luke 6:20: ‘blessed are you poor for yours is the Kingdom of God’. He warns that this is not an eschatological promise of access to heaven afterlife on this earth, but this implies ‘the re-establishment of justice in this world’, and that we must believe therefore that ‘Christ

says that the poor are blessed because the Kingdom of God has begun … in other words, the elimination of the exploitation and poverty that prevent the poor from being fully human, has begun' (Gutierrez 1973:170).

Venter (2006:220) draws together some of the above concepts in his exploration of a theology of spatial justice. He draws parallels between questions asked of Liberation theology: 'what is the relationship between liberation and the Kingdom of God?', and questions asked of urban theology: 'what is the relationship between renewed cities in history and God's final New Jerusalem?'. Venter (2006:220) proposes alternative spatial orderings in the urban and draws on Guiterrez's eschatological vision to do so:

> Gutierrez's answer (1999:34) to critics of Liberation Theology is applicable to Christian involvement in urban renewal: historical renewal is only an expression of the final eschatological city, not its advent. Construing alternative spatial orderings and by labouring for its construction is a deed of obedience to eschatological hope. Some sign, some form of approximation should be erected to reflect our ultimate hope. Materialisation of alternative spatial orderings is intrinsically redemptively informed. As such this becomes part of God's work. … What has recently come to be known as "urban mission", should be broadened to include this very task of re-envisioning urban spatial ordering as part of God's movement to invite his creation into communion with him.

Through the years of doing theological reflections in churches and Christian communities of practice in Cape Town, I have found that teaching based on these commitments of prophetic theology and concepts of the prophetic imagination has been instrumental in helping Christians move from analysis to hopeful action.

I have seen people able to shift in their relationship with the spaces they occupy as worshipping communities when asking questions provoked by such a prophetic, theologically-fuelled imagination. Biblical texts used by academics to explain the concepts of the kingdom of God and the prophetic imagination frequently have very concrete, even geographical, references to space and place. Through engaging these

texts alongside the actual geographical locations of life in the city, people can identify where the reality in front of them does not line up with a scriptural picture of human flourishing, especially in urban areas. Moreover, such texts do not leave a reader in the moment of analysis but point to a new reality with tangibly described characteristics[8].

4.2.4 Contextual readings of the Bible: a possible resource to facilitate a spatial turn in churches

I highlight one last contribution towards theologies that could foster a spatial turn: contextualized hermeneutics of biblical texts. Academics at the Ujamaa Centre for Contextual Bible Study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal developed the methodology of *Contextual Bible Study* (CBS) that they teach and practice with grassroots faith-based communities towards economic and social justice in society (cf West 1993, Nadar 2009). Nadar (2009:390-391) summarises CBS as follows: 'Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is an interactive study of particular texts in the bible, which brings the perspectives of both the context of the reader and the context of the bible into critical dialogue, to raise awareness and promote transformation.' She names five C's that underpin the methodology: 'interactive (Community), context of the reader (Context), context of the bible (Criticality), critical dialogue and raising awareness (Concientisation) and transformation (Change)' (Nadar 2009:390-391).

Prinsloo (2013:132-154) brings the work of Soja, Tuan and Lefebvre together with a spatially charged hernemuetic of the Hebrew Scriptures motivated by the spatial turn in other disciplines and foregrounding it for biblical studies:

> It is surprising (indeed disappointing) that developments in spatial thinking have not been adequately recognized or addressed in exegetical approaches to the Bible. Spatial concepts played an important role in the authors'/redactors' of the Hebrew Bible's conception of the self and the

[8] For example, Isaiah 62:21 describes a future world of justice where people will 'build houses and live in them', and 'plant vineyards and eat the fruit'.

> orientation of the self in his/her household/group/ community, country, and the world at large (Prinsloo 2013:133-134).

Van Eck, Renkin, and Ntakirutimana, (2016:1-7) explore 'The parable of the Feast' in the New Testament gospel of Luke (Lk 14:16b–23) with the aim of 'breaking down boundaries and discerning a theological–spatial justice agenda'. To do this they use 'a social-scientific' reading of the parables where the 'economic and social registers that are presupposed in the parable are taken seriously' (van Eck 2011:1). Van Eck *et al* (2016:7) describe the socio-spatial architecture of the pre-industrial city where:

> People were separated by walls; political and social elites were walled off, and gates controlled the interaction between the different social groups that inhabited the city. The socially ostracised were 'housed' outside the walls and were only allowed to enter during the day for very specific purposes such as working as day labourers'.

They assert that very little has changed in the post-apartheid city:

> Today the inner city no longer hosts all of the elite, as the elite have moved to the periphery of the city and created new walled off, privileged spaces. If you are not part of the elite, you may not freely enter the new walled-off places. Entry is limited to invitation and permission.' (Van Eck *et al* 2016:7).

They apply this observation theologically to the role of the church, and particularly in their context, to a wealthy, walled-off megachurch existing close to a dump site where people live causing them to ask questions of inclusion and exclusion provoked by the parable:

> In the church, Christ is the host who invites those on the other side of the wall, those whom society does not welcome. We as the church are challenged by this parable to critically ask the question: Who do we invite and allow to come to the table of Christ? Is there any person that we are excluding? Are we creating boundaries and privileged spaces on the basis of people's social–economic status? Or are we actively working against the

> injustice of boundaries? How do we justify spending millions on an exclusive worshipping space whilst there are people in walking distance who are living on a landfill site? (Van Eck *et al* 2016:7).

In my work, I have attempted to fuse the scholarly work of the social-scientific reading of such texts with the CBS methodology. I have had the opportunity to facilitate processes with churches regularly, and as part of the wider emancipatory project associated with this research, I was eager to apply the urban, spatial lens of Prinsloo, van Eck, Renkin, and Ntakirutimana to a CBS. While CBS's have been designed around the themes of land and economic justice available in the resources provided by the Ujamaa centre, I could not find one that explicitly does the work of 'developing a spatial consciousness when looking at the Bible' promoted by Mlambo (2020:9).

I thus developed a CBS focusing on the theme of spatial (in)justice in Cape Town and used it with a focus group in the post-graduate research that was a precursor to this project. The study makes use of biblical texts that put Jesus in conversation with or about the city of Jerusalem (namely Matthew 21: 1-17 and Luke 19: 28-46) and uses diagrammatic maps of the pre-industrial city (as described above), apartheid urban spatial design, and contemporary demographic maps of Cape Town.

The outcomes hoped for in the CBS, which I still regularly use in my praxis with churches, is for participants to move towards 1) recognizing the socio-spatial nature of the world of the text, 2) naming space, place, power, and (in)justice in the biblical narrative, 3) drawing lines of connection between the social-spatial injustice present in the text with the historical context of Cape Town and the injustices that prevail, 4) identifying possible theologically fueled actions towards spatial justice for their context, and 5) using this newly acquired lens beyond just this text to all of scripture (Powell 2017, West 1993:11-26).

I hypothesise that a meaningful spatial consciousness could be fostered in church communities that engage with contextual readings of the biblical text such as these, alongside, as in this study, theologies of land and spatial justice, black liberation

theology, and prophetic theology. And so I turn to the voices of the ministers to explore the theologies influencing their praxis in the suburbs.

4.3 Voices from the churches

The centrality of spatial justice to this study was explained in the introductory email sent to ministers, at the start of the interviews and group discussions, and through the various exercises and questions. Therefore, I was able to focus the final question specifically on asking the ministers to articulate theological ideas that either informed and/or were provoked by our discussions around spatial justice. The bulk of the theological reflections discussed here are from this final question but were also identified from across the dataset, as many reflected theologically throughout as they described and analysed. I identified seven themes that describe how the ministers reflected theologically. Behind all of these themes are the questions of space and justice. I conclude this section by naming the sources that ministers described as influencing their theological reflections.

4.3.1 The holistic gospel

Theologies that hold social justice as integral to the gospel were prevalent amongst this group of ministers. I would describe this as both a theologically informed social awareness and a belief that the concept of social justice is integral to scripture and lived faith.

When discussed, this theological concept pointed towards the equal treatment of preaching the word and living the word and to an understanding that salvation is multi-dimensional. This could be because the ministers who elected to take part in the study were interested in engaging with the concept of spatial (in)justice and may therefore all be ministers with a particular theological bent. Hence, I found that unlike those who assert that the salvation of souls is primary and all other concepts, including social justice, are secondary[9] the ministers in this study embraced a holistic view.

[9] In my work experience with churches, I note instances where ministers and churches understand the central message of Christianity to be about the salvation of souls for the afterlife and all other concepts in the bible as secondary to this.

It felt like one of the ministers was acknowledging this theological tension when he said: *“this being … a (*names denomination*) church, has a VERY high view of scripture … We hold to that but then avoid things that could potentially be perceived by others to belong in the … liberal realm of the church”.* He continued by describing how in his opinion both the fear of liberalism and the pendulum swing that he has observed towards a rejection of the bible by liberalism, can be so misguided. He felt that to have a high view of scripture is to have a high view of everything that scripture promotes, which includes social justice:

> *The thing we keep saying to people is that it is the bible itself that says “it is the spirit of the Lord will rest upon you for the work for justice”, so why would you want to dispense of scripture to argue with the church about justice when scripture cries louder than you ever could for a change of the social fabric. I mean so you’ve got to sometimes show people the blind spots that they have had. And once their hearts open, it is incredible.*

Referring to a book that shaped his theology over time, one minister spoke of a theological framework (Mana and Mercy, n.d.) that *“runs throughout the whole of scripture in terms of turning the upside down world, the right away up. And so a gospel about … breaking down the barriers that exist … and bringing about equality or equity for all people.”.* This minister and many others spoke about the concept of the gospel and linked it directly to the concept of “the holistic”.

A point was made against pursuing only one theological focus and praxis, what the minister called *“collapsing the whole thing into one issue”.* He described the tension as not wanting to collapse the whole of church into just one focus and said:

> *We want to be a rounded church. So every part of justice and care and compassion and pastoring and evangelism and all that, all hopefully gets honoured in a theology of the gifts where everyone does their bit and we honour all.*

Another minister was quite pragmatic and practical in his theological exploration of the concept of being a rounded church*:*

> *The moment a community starts existing for itself it's going to collapse. So community always needs to know that we exist for people outside of ourselves. Whatever those outsiders are, the vagrants (sic), (he mentions an economically struggling area close by), the world. That doesn't mean we're not important, we need to grow ourselves … but if we don't have an outward vision or an outward journey we just going to become fat unhealthy Christians…. you've got to do both because if you don't do the internal journey, … you're never going to care for your people and they're never going to feel sustained but if you don't do the outer journey then life becomes a little selfish and maybe a bit pointless.*

For most of the ministers, these concepts were directly linked to a tangible change in the world around us, summarised by these thoughts:

> *I think the gospel de facto brings about change. Things like kingdom, the value of people, the way people treat each other, relationships, what has value what doesn't and the how to implement that. So the gospel is itself there to bring about change. In relationships. In peoples walk with God. In the way we value stuff. The way we see other people. All of those kinds of things.*

Another minister applied this to the national context: *"And so I think a lot of my preaching and stuff really is around how do we grapple with the context of our country and our witness as church in this space and it not just about going out and being a nice Christians but how does that address injustice."*

The same minister who expressed concern about the pendulum swing between theologies that either exclude social justice or overemphasize it, highlighted that in his circles, concepts such as restitution and racial reconciliation have been labelled "*the social gospel"* and come under critique for neglecting the "*gospel of salvation".* And so he has done an immense amount of work on shaping what he calls a theological framework and discipleship process that brings together what he considers to be these polarised theologies. He describes this framework as "*Christology, eschatology, ecclesiology, soteriology … all coming together".* In summary, his theological commitments issue a warning to any Christian disciple not to ignore what he names the

“atoning work of Jesus’ death and resurrection”, or see this atonement as purely a personal issue: “*some people … say it’s purely a personal salvation, pray the sinner’s prayer, sign the commitment card and head to heaven after you get baptized you know, which is so clearly not the Kingdom of God.”*

4.3.2 The kingdom of God

The above shows how ministers described a theology that holds everything together rather than separating the fundamental concepts of the gospel. While naming this, the concept of “the kingdom of God” (often shortened to “kingdom’) was frequently used. The idea of the kingdom of God as described by the ministers seemed to be that this kingdom or realm exists as a conceptual space or place where God reigns and is something that can be brought forth. Or as this minister describes, extended: “*What does it mean to be kingdom people and where is our kingdom, if we are members of this community and how do we extend the kingdom?*

I regret not having the scope in the interviews to ask each minister more about what they meant by the concept of the kingdom of God, because I am certain that it would have nuanced meanings for each of them. But where they did naturally explain the concept in the conversation, some pictures, mostly congruent with each other and the literature in my study, started to emerge around the concept. Sometimes the kingdom of God was used interchangeably with the concept of heaven in their reflections:

> *…one of Jesus’ main things was ‘the kingdom of God is within your grasp’… ‘in your midst’… not an escapist theology that we're just living, this is where this world is not our home but that we're planning for some future heaven, but that God actually calls us to the here and now. So matter matters. Building for God's reign here and now.*

Another minister related this idea of building, to relationships between people: “*I live by the mantra that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of right relationships, … build the relationships and people will see Gods kingdom … the kingdom of God is for all, never just the church community”*

Bringing these thoughts very tangibly into his context, a minister spoke of their church's desire for greater racial diversity. He compared the predominantly White demographic of the congregation and neighbourhood to how he sees God's kingdom described in scripture, and simply stated "*we didn't feel our church reflected kingdom*". He continued that

> *It wasn't about the church reflecting neighbourhood, it was about the church reflecting kingdom. What we understood kingdom to be. You've got that Revelation picture of all the nations worshipping together and so we felt what we needed to do is to be intentional about that process.*

Very closely linked to the theological and biblical concept of the kingdom of God, but standing out distinctly was the idea of "a new creation" or a "new heaven and a new earth". Here ministers referred to Isaiah 65 (what one minister called *"the vision of the new dispensation"*) Revelation 21 ("*the new temple, the new city")* and 1 Kings 4:25 ("*everyone will be sitting under their own fig tree").* One minister synthesizes these:

> *The new creation mandate is predicated upon the community mandate, which is a creation mandate. You don't stop being a human when you become a Christian. In fact, you become more human. And so there's this engagement of these two worlds that simultaneously exist. It's difficult to separate that. You can only separate it in theory.*

In a later section, I reflect on how important such a biblical vision is for fuelling imagination for a different spatial reality in the suburbs.

4.3.3 Incarnation

While naming "holistic" and "kingdom" theologies, the idea that brought them into the human, located experience was described in the words of the minister who said of becoming a Christian: "*you become more human*". And this is where the idea of the incarnation, God becoming human, living in both the heavenly and earthly realms, can be layered on the previous reflections.

Quoting from a paraphrased version of the Bible called The Message, another minister links the theological concept of God becoming human in the form of Jesus, known as the incarnation and referred to in John 1:14: **"***he pitched his tent in our neighbourhood"* (Peterson, 2002). This minister called it an invitation into incarnational ministry, stating that *"Jesus .. dealt with … real issues that our church needs to deal with"*

Six ministers, some at length, discussed the person of Jesus, and the concept of incarnation or incarnational ministry as central to their theological thoughts inspired by the research questions. One acknowledged that it is a complex concept, reflecting that its complexity is *"part of the struggle"* and especially in the life and relationships of the church and neighbourhood:

> *We're here ministering to this community now today in an increasingly secular kind of environment. And so how do we even get into the homes of people who are around us let alone actually really deal with the injustices that exist around us overall?*

He applies this even further to the story told in the previous chapter:

> Minister: *Just that story of the two women in the congregation the one who now owns the house that the other grew up in, comes to mind. I'm not even really sure where to begin in terms of trying to have that conversation for both of them somehow. Cos I think that kind of we actually had a space in which that kind of conversation has the potential to take place with deep a sense that we doing this because God is present and God wants to hold our lives and carry us forward. So I think of incarnation as very much part of that*
>
> Me: *so the church incarnated in space as well as God incarnated in the world?*
>
> Minister: *the church as the incarnation of God in community I guess*

He also describes that after going through a Lent course designed to help churches engage with the world around them, a group from his church joined a local protest

happening on the nearby main road, linking this action with the concept of incarnational ministry*:*

> *There were some actual opportunities to go and stand on the street and join the protest. And actually say as church we are here not just individuals. And that again in the sense of being incarnational, being a presence for me is really important … I think with incarnation God is present and God is actually always present even if I've lost focus.*

A helpful distinction was made by a minister who compared the incarnational model with what he calls the isolationist model. In his discussion, he raised concerns that the *'new creation mandate'*, which I reflected on earlier, leads to "*the ecclesia as the 'called out people".* But in the calling out, churches become "*isolationist*" in his view. To be called out, he feels, is actually to be called in, to engage. And it is impossible in his eyes to honour the "*call-in"* to the world and its injustices if you have not been "*called out"* in your relationship with the incarnated God: "*you're called out, set apart to be called in, to engage because you don't have the power to engage until you are called out with a new creation mandate."*

Interestingly, one minster felt that the person of Jesus could be used to chastise church-goers on inaction in the face of injustice. He commented "*the actions of Jesus then just become another stick to hit the suburban church with"* The same minister speaks of the person of Jesus as "*the relaunch of the human race as God intended it"* and highlights that while this means he believes that Jesus is the only saviour of the human race, we should not fall into the trap of making Jesus so exceptional that his ethics become unattainable*:*

> *We look at his love for his fellow human being, his truth ethics, righteousness and justice are woven together, certainly in scripture, and so we don't get to say of Jesus 'his ethics were exceptional' … I would completely disagree with anything that separates the person of Jesus from the practice of life and so he is our example on how to love … how to fast and pray … how to be in community … how to do ministry.*

4.3.4 A theology of the neighbour(hood)

The notions of “the neighbour”, as referred to often when quoting the text “love thy neighbour”, and “the neighbourhood” were linked in several of the ministers' reflections, namely the people and the place were not able to be separated theologically or practically.

One minister spoke about the physical location of the church and the makeup of the buildings and said:

> *…we should be part of the common space, of the community. So that the church is for the community and in the community and with the community and isn’t like a little holy corner or huddle. That the community of people that live and work around us is a mission field but before they are a mission field they are just neighbours and we co-exist, co-live in this geographical area … that we are a place where the community should be able to find life and not just by coming to worship.*

He spoke of a weekly open house of prayer:

> *So our vision … was that anyone who lives and works in the area can just come find a place of oasis, just a place to come and chill at the end of the day, reflect and pray or just sit quietly and have a cup of coffee before going home or whatever… from a space point of view the property should be a place of sanctuary and peace and I guess of help, of assistance, of care.*

He links these intentions with the story of Jesus having a conversation with the woman at the well in John 4:1-26, and says “*Jesus says please draw me some water, and then I’ll give you living water” and the conversation develops. Just the sense of sitting at the well together.”*

A theme that cut across most of the voices was the idea of inclusion, that the church should be theologically and practically committed to inclusion of every person. In some cases, this was linked directly to the idea of correcting the divisive theologies and practices of apartheid. All the ministers described, in some way, the desire for the church to welcome all.

A minister said the following when recalling preaching with a contemporary Cape Town lens through replacing the character of the Samaritan woman (in Luke 10: 25-37) and replacing her nationality with Somalian: *"I'm doing it deliberately and asking ourselves how do you become an inclusive community and how do we become a centre that is for everyone?"*

How did ministers reflect on the inclusion of the other, the least of these, the poor in their midst? I found that when several ministers reflected theologically on the concept of "love thy neighbour", they inevitably returned to a discussion of homelessness and the question "who is our neighbour?" In one discussion a clear question was asked: "*is there a difference between our unhoused and housed neighbours?"*

After reflecting with some angst on homeless people living on church property a minister immediately reflected theologically: *"But the other theological thing is what are we doing about them, these are the least of the least and so how do we reach out to them?*

The minister who spoke of his hopes for his church to be an oasis describes what he calls "*our common theology as a local church*" which is to:

> *see everybody that we encounter in our area as being a neighbour … particularly within the homeless community, the unhoused community … We are not doing something for the homeless, we are connecting with people … who are our neighbours.*

He applies more specifically to the language they use to invite people to come to their weekly community suppers*: "it's all about just being neighbours. Come and sit and meet your neighbours, not come and help us do a soup kitchen, it's not about that. Please come sit just relax sit there come and chat with somebody."*

Speaking of homeless neighbours, one minister expands on his idea of inclusivity referring to thoughts provoked through reading a book "Encountering The Others" (cf Vanier 2005)*:*

> *Don't look just inside, look outside, and how those who are those that we think least about, that God also cares for them … How do you become the*

church that looks outside. Remember that in our community … when people speak about 'other', they tend to think that that is only happening in the township. Forgetting that we have people who are sleeping on our doorstep… and I always remind people. How then, do you become the one who encounters 'the other'?"

4.3.5 A theology of economic and land justice

In the introduction to the research, I directly linked the concept of spatial (in)justice to that of land and located this study within the struggle over land in South Africa. I did the same when inviting ministers via email to the study and it also came up in conversation and was available in the literature and written resources I shared with participants. It is therefore unsurprising to me that the themes of economic justice, land justice, and restitution for past injustices came up in the theological reflections of ministers, and for four ministers in quite some depth. The Old Testament image of "sitting under their own vine and their own fig tree" (in Micah 4:4) as a description of individual rights to land ownership or at least a safe place to live was touched on as was the concept of Jubilee (in Leviticus 25) that directly addresses the return of land that was generationally lost due to injustice and enslavement.

One minister wondered about these Old Testament concepts, what the role of the church should be as the "*dispenser of grace and accountability*" and asked the question:

When it comes to the land issue it is not 'whose rights should be upheld or protected?' because there are rights on both ends of the spectrum, those who have and those who don't … but where's grace and healing most needed?

He unpacks this point by highlighting parts of the New Testament, particularly the account of the discussion of Jesus with the wealthy man who asks in Luke 18:18: "what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?". He describes his understanding of Jesus' answer: *"sell your wealth and give it where grace is needed most. And that would have included his land."* He concludes this theological thought by fast-forwarding to the Acts of the Apostles in chapter four and describes the inclusion of land justice in the early church:

> *…where there is a spirit-driven and not an organizational driven and leadership-driven movement - but there is a spirit-driven movement that says social justice and resource reform includes land, is the work of the spirit as well.*

Another participant reflects that the conscientisation efforts of the South African Council of Churches during apartheid and more recently the Restitution Foundation helped him link economics, land and his faith as he reckoned with the "*cultural and emotional attachment to land."*

Also grappling with the idea of restitution (economic and/or land) a different minister refers to what he calls *"chosen freedoms".* What I understood from his in-depth reflection is the idea that restitution should not be an enforced action lest it become "*exploitative and guilt-inducing*" but says that you can "*completely over-restitute. It's lovely. Zacchaeus paid four times instead of just paying back and that was a chosen freedom too"*. He grapples with the interdependent concepts of restitution and reconciliation, as many scholars have, and claims that it cannot be an entitlement for someone who has suffered an injustice to receive restitution nor can reconciliation be something that someone who has been the perpetrator or beneficiary of an injustice demands. In his eyes if these entitlements or demands exist, a person does not understand the gospel.

Only one minister in the study referred to the wrestle of the presence of the poor in the neighbourhoods of the rich: "*the wrestle will always be there, the poor will always be with you."*

4.3.6 A theology of the church

A few ministers interspersed their reflections with questions on the nature of "the Church", like this one*: "my ecclesiology around what is the church? Is it a building for gathering, a training ground for mission or a hub for ministry to the community?"*

While one could answer this minister's questions by saying that the church can be all three (and more), in practice, many churches operate in one or the other paradigm. And when talking about the church, the conversation often turns to whether one is talking

about a building, a concept or a people. Since this study focused so heavily on space, place and neighbourhood, reflections on ecclesiology did relate to the people, the place and the buildings. In the previous section, I shared how one minister described their church as a well, a sanctuary in the city, and a physical place that people can come to and find rest. There were a few other instances where ministers reflected a similar idea:

> *I've always been of the belief that this is Gods church and Gods space and it needs to be used … it dare not just lie vacant for the week and only be used on a Sunday. When the church is alive there is activity. And it doesn't just have to be activity of its members it can be activity of whoever cos you are inviting people into a sacred space and that sacred space whether it is intentional or unintentional influences and touches people lives.*

The minister who said this, also commented that they found it important that those using the space, especially when it was a hall and not the actual church building, had a sense that they are in a church. His church's expression of this was to ensure that "*the church … looks nice because that is a witness, that is a testimony"* as well as to *"put a big cross on the wall in the hall to give the sense that you're in a church"*

One of the ministers spoke about how the theologies held by the congregants of his church do not necessarily line up with his own theological perspective. He asks:

> *what is church? … where I find my community at the moment … it's a very conservative, evangelical base, strong conservative, where church holiness and undefilement forms thinking about what church is, what the church building means and what it ought to be used for and what it ought to mean for the community.*

He recounts a time, during a church fundraiser that was planned during the season of Lent, when a congregant quoted John 2:13-17 (the story of Jesus driving money changers and salespeople out of the temple) and asked him "*how can you come and do fundraising in lent? What did Jesus say about those things?"* He concluded his reflections saying*: "what people believe … informs their thinking about … what we should do as a church".*

Other reflections moved away from the importance of the building in the neighbourhood. One minister, spoke about the influence of the monastic model on his idea of church. His opening statement really stuck with me and became a background question in my research:

> *And I say, I think there's a limited future for the church on the corner.*
>
> *… I have long been really drawn to the effectiveness of the monastic model … just reading church history, the way that Europe was evangelized through a holistic mission that involved bringing all of life under the wings of the church, farming, hospitality, worship, healthcare, education, crafts, and all sorts of things. So there's something there in our church history.*
>
> *Also, Acts 2:46 meeting from house to house, which raises the big question of the church intentionally confining itself to use specific buildings and disconnected from homes and households. We are currently … doing a lot of work with … a model that is smaller, highly relational or including and able to respond quickly and flexibly to ministry and mission opportunities … so far less involved with the model of church that's very building based.*
>
> *I've reflected on the Anglican parochial model … that in its time it was … helpful, but it's tended to define church assumptions and it's increasingly out of touch with the world that works with very different forms of connection.*

Bringing reflections on the nature of the gospel, alive and at work in what he calls "*the local church",* one minister described the church as an extraordinary "*agent of change*" in society. Even though he spoke of the local church, his reflections tended to be applicable to wider societal issues and did not describe tangible change through his local church in the neighbourhood in which it is located:

> *…the church is meant to be an agent of change that concept is huge for me. In that I think the church primary focus is the gospel but the gospel as a holistic … So I think there are political, social, societal models of change but what's the gospel model of change? And that the church has an influence in the change process itself in the way we do the gospel. The local church is*

> *God's primary agent of change… It's like the question we were discussing earlier – how do you address accommodation for people? There are a lot of models out there but to what degree am I not just wingeing about change but influencing how change occurs in that - in communities, in society in government all of these things? But primarily because of the gospel - that's the million dollar for me.*

Finally, I reflect on the words of a minister who wondered aloud whether her reflections were purely theological or more spiritual in nature. She distills her vision for what church should offer the world, but did not directly tie this to the location of the church, but more the ministry of the church, and her as the leader with those who attend:

> *I really would like to be a church that reaches out … Rooted in God's love … And to make it practical – not just theological jargon but practical love … When I came out of college, you're so clever, you're a theologian, but I've learned that … people just want to hear God loves them… no matter what colour or race, we all have our different challenges and problems, that is what we need.*

4.3.7 A theological imagination for spatial justice?

Imagery of a world (and even a city in the case of the book of Revelation) where human beings flourish in relationship with the earth, with God and with each other, featured in the ministers biblical reflections. These images are far away from the realities described in chapter three of the suburbs and churches in this study. That ministers reflected on these scriptural images points towards the start of a theologically inspired imagination of their contexts. This theological imagination was not developed in our discussions, and such reflections were absent in many of the discussions, but where they were present, I felt they pointed towards the foundations of a prophetic imagination.

Using imagery from the book of Ezra, that describes the first return of the Jewish people from exile to rebuild what had been destroyed, a minister imagines what it might look like if this happened in Cape Town:

> *It talks about them returning to their homes, to their towns … and I was trying to work out the gap … It's about a 50-year gap... It's just almost exactly the same as forced removals. So people left when they were little children and they returned when they were older adults ... And there's that verse … where it says, "and when the old Levites saw the temple foundations being built, they wept and the younger ones shouted with joy.*

Just one participant actually used the phrase "*a prophetic imagination*" and describes it as "*just challenging us to think about imagining a new and a different world where … we don't have these imbalances and injustices".*

One minister, while not naming it as any one particular theology, used strong language of imagination alongside a tangible description of what could be. As he spoke of the way the church space could be used, I detected the combination of prophetic unction, almost an unbridled dream of the (im)possible, and a very detailed practical sense of what this could look like, much like the description of a new heaven and a new earth in Isaiah 65:20-25[10].

> *If you imagine… so obviously for heritage reasons you would have to keep the façade of the church the way it is … but even the church building could be underneath a multiple story and even the building we are in* (referring to where we met for the interview- in his office) *could be multiple stories. So you would have a church on the ground floor with six-seven layers above and you could have these offices on the ground floor, but with seven-eight levels of affordable apartments above. … if we really engaged with it, I mean we have spoken about all of that before. And I think if we had enough of a dream and if we had a Christian developer with a conscience you would be able to partner to fund that development and make it pay for the developer and for the church and for the community.*

[10] Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21 paint a picture in detail of the new heaven and the new earth which describe a state where there is an end to human suffering from injustice

He also acknowledged that while direct land restitution might be preferable it isn't possible "*because it's not a large enough space to make any meaningful impact. Also it doesn't actually belong to us it belongs to our denomination*" and reflected that this provokes the need for more creative approaches to spatial justice in churches such as his.

4.3.8 Sources that influenced the theological reflections of the ministers

While the first half of this chapter engaged theologies that I as the researcher have engaged in my exploration of spatial justice, it was interesting to hear about the sources that have shaped the ministers' engagement with the topic.

The seven theological themes (holistic gospel, the kingdom of God, incarnation, neighbor(hood) theologies, theologies of economic and land justice, ecclesiological reflections, and a prophetic imagination) that I identified in the minister's voices came from four different places of influence: the bible, extra-biblical theological writing, denominational tradition and para-church organisations (FBO and academic). The biblical sources have been named throughout this section. Extra-biblical sources included a range of theological writing (both academic and popular) from male, predominantly White theologians from South Africa, The United States and the United Kingdom. Only three ministers spoke about the influence of denominational tradition, namely the Wesleyan Methodist and the Anglican Parochial model. Half the ministers referred to being influenced theologically by organizations including The Warehouse Trust (Warehouse n.d.), Restitution Foundation (RF n.d.) Isiphambano Centre for Biblical Justice (Isiphambando n.d.), and the South African Council of Churches (SACC n.d.).

4.4 Further Discussion of findings

In considering theologies that could foster a praxis of spatial justice, I note that there are both synergies and gaps between the theologies explored in the literature study and the theological reflections of the ministers.

The greatest overlap between the voices in the literature and the voices from the churches exists in direct biblical references and the themes derived from them, for example: the kingdom of God, incarnation, neighbour(hood), contextualizing biblical passages, economic and land justice. And in this, I venture that there is a foundation of space and place in the ministers' theologies: 'kingdom' and 'heaven' have a realm, the incarnation is about bodies in spaces, neighbours are people, neighbourhoods are places, land is a place, economic activity always has a location and a human face. Churches and people are always located.

There was also a strong commitment across the ministers to the concept of the 'holistic gospel' which highlighted action in the world and in some cases particularly social justice action, as part of a holistic theology. However, the kind of critical consciousness that social justice theories offer were not touched on theologically by the ministers. That is to say that there was no expressed theological basis for naming abuses of power in spatial terms.

The widest gap between the ministers' theological reflections and the literature existed around the theologies of spatial and land justice. There was almost a complete absence of black, liberation, urban, contextual and prophetic theology voices in the reflections of the ministers and the extra-biblical sources they cited as influential to them. This, despite how the influential organizations and conferences mentioned by ministers draw on these theologies. Although I note some contextual reflection of texts, there is an absence of locating biblical people and places in the socio-political context of their times, as proposed by Prinsloo, Mlambo, van Eck, Renkin and Ntakirutimana, and therefore an absence of deep theological reflection on the 'alternative spatial orderings' (Venter 2006:220) that exist when approaching the bible with the hermeneutics provided by these theologies.

At the end of chapter three, I reflected that one could place ministers and their churches somewhere on a continuum of spatial consciousness and critical consciousness or social justice. Here, I propose that they could also be placed on a continuum of theological reflection that is spatially conscious, and theological reflection that is critically conscious. I propose that an emancipatory approach with suburban, and

indeed other, churches should look for inviting and creative ways to introduce these less engaged sources of black and liberation theology, urban and spatial theology, theologies of land and spatial justice and new spatial readings of the text. This could increase both spatial and critical theological reflection to foster a praxis of spatial justice.

Perhaps, at the heart of the theological reflections and wrestling that the questions used in this study elicited is the question that a few of the ministers posed themselves, summarised in one of their honest comments:

> *There is a bit of a disconnect for many of between what we actually think about on a Sunday and pray about on a Sunday and actually what the content of our daily lives is … perhaps there's almost a sense of guilt that I don't have injustice more front and centre in terms of really dealing with it.*

Turning, in the next chapter to the final moment of the praxis cycle, I echo Katongole (2009:134) and the questions he asks of his own theological reflections:

> But who, what, where, why and how of the prophetic witness? … the gospel pragmatist in me wants to get down to brass tacks. Who is going to do it? What does it look like? When will it happen? Where and how? If we're going to make a prophetic posture possible in our own lives, we need to think through these very practical questions.

And with Katongole, I ask how social analysis and theological reflection express themselves in action in the world, in spatially just ways.

CHAPTER 5
A PRAXIS OF SPATIAL JUSTICE IN CHURCHES

In the previous chapter, I held a conversation between the literature and the voices of suburban ministers who wrestled theologically with concerns of spatial justice. In this chapter, I explore models of civic and faith-based praxis that address spatial injustice. Finally, I return to the voices of the ministers in the study who describe steps towards a praxis of spatial justice that their churches are taking, while also exploring the factors that promote and hinder such steps.

5.1 The praxis cycle: pastoral planning for action

Botman (2000: 202) builds on the work of Cochrane *et al* (1991) and suggests that their attempt to point towards a 'Practical Theology of Social Transformation' must be rooted in an understanding of the terminology 'social transformation' as referring to:

> the dismantling of the edifice of apartheid, the reconstruction of a new society free from division and domination and a practical theological process whereby society is "constructed to be increasingly consonant with the vision and values" of the rule of God.

The final moment of the praxis cycle is the movement into a lived faith response, into decision and action, provoked by the tasks of the previous moments identified 'pastoral planning for action' (Holland and Henriot 1983:9). The chief aim of the praxis cycle is transformation. For Banawiratma (2005:82), this means that communities engaging in the cycle will surface critical responses leading to transformative actions that forge contextual responses as a 'new way of being church'. He cautions that no blueprints can be offered but insists that 'as a human and limited reality, the church can only exercise its mission and become a dynamic community of faith if it becomes a community of dialogue and transformation' (Banawiratma 2005:82).

Scripture reading provides a resource for the Christian community to enter into a dialogue about social transformation. The Contextual Bible Study method follows a very

similar theological method to the praxis cycle, namely the see-judge-act method (cf Sands 2018, Makina 2013) following the same trajectory of analysis, reflection and action and is a helpful tool for practitioners involved in emancipatory work with faith-based communities (cf West 1993:12). I have found it transformative to ask contextual readers of the bible what new spatial lenses for biblical texts provoke in them for their own contexts and actions towards social transformation. Makina (2013:6) describes the way communities move into action through the see-judge-act method and the praxis cycle by describing that they discern ways to improve and deepen their ministry, name action steps, and identify obstacles. And goes on to comment that 'Pastoral planning goes with the saying that "faith without works is dead" (James 3: 26)' and adds that the praxis cycle without a response of action 'is a waste of time'.

5.2 The quest for an integrated Cape Town

As we consider social transformation in space through suburban churches in Cape Town, I locate the conversation in the wider quest for spatial justice in the city. Terblanche (2002:466-467) highlights that a 'distributive shift' needs to take place in post-1994 South Africa particularly focusing on 'radical and urgent land reform and property reform measures', calling for a new 'distributive collation' to be 'forged between the governing elite and representatives of civil society concerned with poverty'.

In Cape Town such a distributive coalition, that could move us towards greater spatial justice, is struggling to find its feet. Social movements are challenging the leadership of the City of Cape Town in public battles waged over media campaigns and sometimes in the courtroom regarding the slowness and injustice of urban land reform processes (cf Shoba 2018; Stent 2020; Charles 2021).

Unsurprisingly, transformative action is led from the arena of the dispossessed and landless in the city. Urban land movements have been active and highly networked in Cape Town throughout the fight against apartheid and since the start of post-apartheid democracy (cf Diani, Ernstson, and Lorien, 2018). In the past five years the peoples' movement *Reclaim the City* (RTC n.d.) has put spatial justice in the news and at the forefront of the consciousness of the residents and rulers of the city. As a 'movement of

tenants and workers campaigning to stop our displacement from well-located areas' they focus on securing access to decent affordable housing and declare:

> We believe it is time to take the struggle for housing to the centre of the city, to the heart of power, to the people who should live there, and to the land that matters. Land for people, not profit! (RTC, n.d.)

To advance their cause, RTC have occupied various vacant public buildings in Cape Town, providing safe residential space to over 1200 people in the inner city of Cape Town while holding to the commitments of a political occupation that highlight issues of spatial (in)justice to politicians and decision-makers (cf Robins 2021).

RTC operates within an ecosystem of highly organized movements for land justice in Cape Town, such as the Development Action Group (n.d.) Abahlali baseMjondolo (n.d.), the Isandla Institute (n.d.), Ndifuna Ukwazi (cf NU n.d.) and Social Justice Coallition (n.d.). Together they draw from, contextualize, and expand on the "Right to the City" ideology of Lefebvre (1996:57-64), each providing the needed skills, such as legal research and representation, community organizing and political advocacy, to challenge and undo the injustices of the apartheid city.

During 2017-2018, local university academics, community activists and representatives from the public sector met over a series of workshops following a process of analysis, imagination and planning, reminiscent of the praxis cycle, which culminated in the publication of *The Integration Syndicate: Shifting Cape Town's Socio-Spatial debate* (Pieterse et al 2017-2018). In a chapter addressing the dearth of well-located land and space for the development of affordable housing in Cape Town, Webster (2018:164-167) describes an imaginative proposal to use the periphery of public school premises for the development of affordable housing[11]. These and several other proposals in the report showcase creative approaches to urban land injustice, animating innovative

[11] This idea which would create a houses-as –fences model, reduce the cost of security at school properties, use underutilized and badly maintained land and solve the problem of space needed for affordable housing in Cape Town

thinking which could influence churches regarding urban land use, more specifically their urban spaces.

Of particular interest to the suburban focus of this research, Webster (2018:166) highlights:

> We know a fair amount about the under supply of public amenities in poorer neighbourhoods – where the need for housing is most desperate, where shack settlements require water and electricity, and where more policing is needed. We know very little, however, about the oversupply in wealthy neighbourhoods- where public swimming pools and parks are being enjoyed by only a handful of residents, or where swathes of well-located public land is used for nothing more than a round of golf.

Webster (2018:166) continues that participants in the *Integration Syndicate* argue for 'the necessity of intervening in wealthy neighbourhoods, even if it may be a much more contentious argument' and they assert that 'reclaiming public land and services in wealthy neighbourhoods for their social value … will depend on an as-yet elusive city-wide audit that reveals this kind of over-supply'.

The reality of urban land reform is a far cry even for these creative initiatives, with National land reform yet to significantly impact South African cities (cf The Urban Land Series). Civil society is agitating for a 'distributive shift' and pursuit of potential 'distributive coalitions' even with city leaders who continue to malign and exploit them (cf Hendricks & Hadebe 2020). What part does and can the church play with such a movement?

Soja (2010:73) cautions that seeking spatial justice can become an overwhelming and ubiquitous task. He emphasizes that we must always return to a 'specific examination of the uneven geographies of power and privilege to determine which forms of spatial justice warrant the greatest attention' in order to 'begin to differentiate between the consequential, as well as the feasible and unfeasible, in seeking spatial justice'.

5.3 Churches and a praxis of spatial justice

If the church heeds Soja's caution, it must consider and identify feasible ways of seeking spatial justice. There is no single defined model of a church-based praxis of spatial justice. Nor does this study put forward a recipe for a church to follow that will achieve spatial justice. Seeking spatial justice is part of seeking social justice through the development of a critical consciousness that can name and restitute for past and ongoing injustice. True and tangible justice, made manifest in space, place, neighbourhoods and communities can and will take on a multitude of forms.

This would move churches away from notions of church stewardship of land, space and place which le Bruyns (2009:75) describes as: 'individualistic, philanthropic and fund-raising matters coupled with its preservation of the status quo of poverty and injustice within the economic sphere'. Instead, he calls churches to follow through 'with an elaboration of the meaning of stewardship in the light of an ethics of care that is more responsive, conscientised, accountable and solidarity-oriented' (le Bruyns 2009:75).

What follows is not a proposal of one size fits all models but several stories, models, ideas and attempts which show the fostering of imagination for and movement towards spatial justice in, by, through and with churches. A look at a praxis of spatial justice in the faith-based sector includes the involvement of churches in lesser and greater ways. While there may not be one model to apply, clearly articulated pointers towards a spatial justice praxis for churches have been suggested.

Firstly, an audit of land and space as proposed by *The Integration Syndicate* (Webster 2018:166) is necessary and must include auditing of underutilized public land in wealthy neighbourhoods in Cape Town. Auditing quantifies just how much church land, property and space might be available for pursuing tangible spatial justice possibilities. The church land audits conducted by the Church Land Programme (CLP) were met with fears that church's 'private information was to be used for someone else's agenda' (Philpott and Zondi 1999:17-39). Since then, two denominations (Methodist and Roman Catholic) have published more comprehensive audits of their land and properties (cf Bolnick and van Rensberg 2005; Mlambo 2020). Though a need for transparency

around land ownership in the context of South Africa's history of land injustice is a moral obligation (van Donk 1994:1-21), we should also be mindful that:

> The fact that the church is part of the problem can evoke two crippling responses. Either the Church becomes paralysed by feelings of guilt, or the church becomes defensive and retreats in its small circle. To avoid becoming involved in land disputes, the church might even decide to get rid of the burden and sell the land to any willing buyer. (van Donk 1994:19)

It would be counter-productive to lose the church itself in conversations around church-lead spatial justice. It is therefore imperative that we invite the church to partner in these critical conversations, further supporting the need to adopt an emancipatory research approach for this study[12].

The Centre for Faith and Community (CFC) at the University of Pretoria (CFC n.d) convened gatherings in 2015 and in 2017 to draw input from researchers, practitioners, activists, and students on the subject of 'Spatial Justice and Reconciliation'. A 'resource list for churches on how to contribute to socio-spatial justice' (CFC n.d.) was produced that proposes three ways in which local churches may contribute to socio-spatial justice: 1) creative solidarities with different people's movements, 2) availing or sharing their own land and property, and 3) participating in acts of restoration/restitution (CFC n.d.). A further resource, *Faith Communities and Spatial Justice: Appetizers for engagement,* offers practical guidelines through thirty questions/provocations/suggestions that can be used by a church to move, through immersion, analysis, and reflection into action (CFC n.d.).

These calls to introspection, transparency and action do not entertain a superficial engagement with the realities of spatial injustice but name solidarity, presence, action, change, risk-taking, transformation as central to a church's praxis. Linthicum (1991: 21-

[12] At the start of my interest in research with suburban churches, I wondered about the potential of a church property audit for the Southern Suburbs, but through relationships with ministers, and discussions with the Church Land Programme I opted to pursue the emancipatory approach of this study and not include any quantitative auditing focus. I believe that, should churches decide to do audits, initiated by themselves, it could be a powerful activity for organising towards spatial justice.

23) offers three ways that a church can be in relationship with the city, and more specifically their local community and neighbourhood. He describes 'the church in the city' that is simply located in a place but feels no attachment to it, the 'church to the city' that is more present to the neighbourhood around it often out of a realisation that this is necessary for it to survive, and the 'church with the city' which he describes as a church that:

> incarnates itself in that community … enters into the life of the community and becomes a partner with the community in addressing its people's needs …it allows the community to instruct it and joins with the issues that the people have identified as their own. (Linthicum 1991:23).

Linthicum's ideas provide another lens with which to read the following stories from international and local contexts before a final return to the voices from the churches in this study.

5.3.1 International stories

The pursuit of spatial justice using land and space owned by churches in urban areas is a steadily growing global phenomenon, albeit slowly and with only a niche interest from the wider church and theological community. A focus on studies and stories from countries defined as having formerly been Christian nations[13] but are now considered secular states shows some interesting trends. The interest and concern coming from non-theological disciplines (*e.g.* architecture, geography of the built environment and urban planning) has shown significant interest in the role of spirituality and faith in urban and spatial justice (cf Sandercock 2006).

There is a growing body of scholarship focusing on church properties that addresses issues such as the variety of options for the

> Repurposing of churches, and the impact thereof on real estate in a neighbourhood and on losing "sacred" space to "secular" use in a city (cf Netch 2019; Amayu 2014; Hackworth, J. and Gullikson 2013) is a growing

[13] By this I refer to nations that historically had no separation of church and state, but for whom the modern political arena separates church and state

> discussion as societies are secularising, church attendance drops, and church buildings are underutilized (Netch 2019:153-159).

Hackworth and Gullikson (2013:84), speaking from an urban geography perspective, understand the complexity of a church congregation and its relationship with their building:

> Often when a congregation is facing declining numbers, the conversation about what to do with their place of worship is a complicated and emotional one. Many parishioners are viscerally tied to the structure or the mission of the church so the thought of selling the land to a developer who might turn their place of worship into a superficial museum to their faith is disconcerting.

They suggest mixed-use models that acknowledge these ties and suggest:

> While they may not be able to keep their church alive in its existing form, part of its central mission could live on in some form of housing advocacy … some churches find the conversion of their property to affordable housing not only to be a way to extend their mission but also as a practical way to generate the highest value for their property (Hackworth and Gullikson 2013:84).

In some cases, para-church organisations, with deep theological motivation, have grown alongside churches, advocating to them and then enabling them. Three international organisations provide some helpful pointers towards a church-based praxis of spatial justice. They share the common dual purpose of enabling local churches to act for spatial justice while addressing the housing crisis in their cities.

Making Housing and Community Happen is a Christian housing advocacy organisation based in Pasadena, United States, that ‘equips congregations, community leaders, and neighbours with practical tools needed to transform their communities, to end homelessness’ rooted in a theology for their housing activism and development. Their

logo is of the vine and fig tree referenced in Micah 4:4[14]: 'This biblical passage fits with our vision that everyone is to have decent, safe and affordable housing' (Making Housing and Community Happen n.d).

The YIGBY - *Yes in God's Back Yard* - organisation in San Diego, United States, has adapted the term NIMBY, 'Not in my back yard' that is used colloquially to describe residents who oppose the development of affordable housing in their suburb (cf Fischel, 2001). They 'address San Diego's housing crisis by activating abundant, under-utilized faith community properties suitable for multi-family residential projects.' Their vision is to:

> … be a resource to faith communities that want to use their surplus land to develop much needed affordable housing … to help congregations create a triple bottom line where they are providing mission driven housing solutions, using environmentally sustainable materials and contributing to their own financial well-being. (YIGBY n.d.).

Hope Into Action in the United Kingdom simply states that they exist to help 'Every church lovingly making a home for the homeless', and their mission is 'to mobilise, unite and unleash Christian prayer, investments, donations and relationships to fight the injustice of homelessness.' Interestingly, they define success as 'church members, out of their pews, striving to love, and tenants receiving and feeling loved.' And they add this final statement: 'We are as passionate about empowering churches as we are tenants. At least 50% of our mission is to churches.'

That these models focus both on the journey of churches and those suffering from the effects of spatial injustice is of particular interest to this study and to the ideas and commitments of mutual liberation.

[14] Micah 4:4 'Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.'

5.3.2 South African stories

5.3.2.1 Churches and movements for urban land rights

In Cape Town, the emergence of social movements for urban land and spatial justice has been met by mixed responses from churches. Yet, over time, bonds of friendship, solidarity and mutual support are growing between the movement, churches, faith-based NPO's and individual Christians. The Central Methodist Mission in Cape Town's inner city supports urban land and spatial justice movements. They have used their prominent location in the city to host destitute people and to amplify the case of social movements such as RTC. In response, RTC is quoted to have said (Figure 5.1) 'The Methodist (church) is right to be involved. It is unconstitutional; the government has a constitutional obligation to provide people with houses' (Charles, 2018).

*Figure 6: "Cape Town how I long to visit you, but there is no room for the **poor** in your **inn**er city" – RTC post on their social media about a banner hoisted by Central Methodist Mission during the 2018 Christmas season (cf RTC, 2018).*

I attended a public meeting of RTC, held in the Sea Point Methodist church, which hosts the weekly RTC chapter meetings. It felt like a worship service as we gathered in the church sanctuary, sang songs of resistance and courage, received teaching on citizen's rights and listened to land justice activists tell their stories of living in inhumane domestic worker accommodation in the basements of the high-end apartment blocks.

The Good Shepherd is a small Anglican church located on a site of forced removal demolitions in wealthy suburb of Bishops Court. Their resistance to land injustice saw residents removed in the 1960s returning weekly to worship at the church. This has forged a community of reconciliation and justice, walking with and advocating for the community as they endured a 21-year land claim journey (Good Shepherd n.d.).

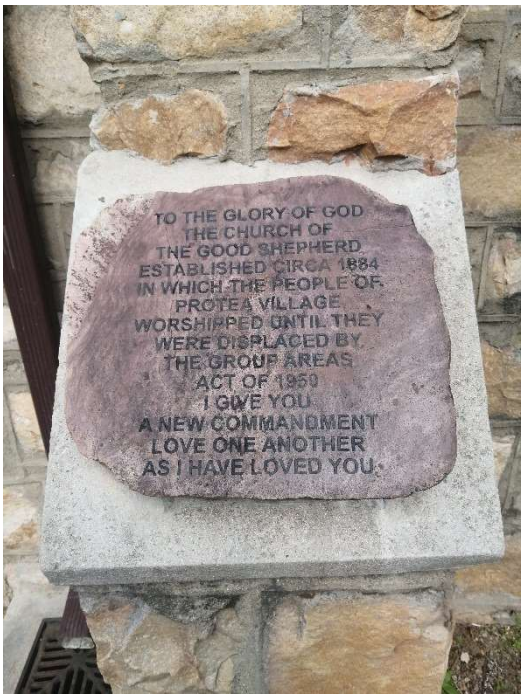

Figure 7: My own photograph of the stone plaque at the entrance to the Church of the Good Shepherd

People in the church and faith-based sector in Cape Town are slowly starting to look to social movements as teachers and voices of growing consciousness, even seeing them

as a prophetic voice in the city. Consequently, leaders in the movement have been able to turn to the faith-based sector in moments of need for psycho-social support, conflict mediation, leadership development, community development support in the occupations, and holding sacred space alongside other faith leaders at inter-faith events. De Beer (2017:10) suggests that if churches grow in consciousness and relationship with the landless leaders of justice we can, with humility, participate in actions to humanize people and places in the city:

> And we will start to recognise these are small steps only, crucially important as they are, towards a much deeper struggle or revolution for urban justice – indeed, a journey towards a new society, where theological education and the church will seize (sic) being custodians of the status quo, rather becoming mediators of a new order. (De Beer 2017:10).

5.3.2.2 A Housing Company motivated by Christian love, hospitality and justice

Yeast City Housing is a Christian Housing Company based in Tshwane that has, over the last 20 years, developed 1261 affordable housing units in the inner city, 198 of these in creative partnerships with churches. An inspiring example of this is the Methodist church in inner-city Pretoria that made roof space available on the first floor of their property for the development of 27 communal housing units, one institutional housing unit, complementing its creative combination of worship facility and a home to small enterprises, a day care centre, a HIV/AIDS care centre and a refugee office. George Mokadi, a resident and caretaker of this housing development called *Living Stones* shares that:

> This is a safe place and we look after the people who live here well. Some come for one year, some for three, and then they leave when they are able to. And some call this home - they say they feel safe when they are here (Yeast City Housing, 2018).

The Christian Reformed Church in Salvokop, Tshwane, sold their church far below market prices to Yeast City Housing who created a multi-purpose community centre,

day care centre and a high-quality block of flats with 88 self-contained housing units on the plot (Yeast City Housing, 2018).

5.3.2.3 When they said “stay at home”, we said, “where?”

In 2020, when the national state of disaster was declared in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and South Africans were instructed to “Stay at Home”, homeless communities and homeless advocacy groups asked “where?”. In Pretoria, the Tshwane Homelessness Forum mobilized churches to house people in eight inner-city and suburban churches (de Beer 2020:3). Though slower in Cape Town, three churches ended up hosting small groups of homeless persons, with the extensive assistance of experienced NPOs (cf Warehouse 2020, New Hope 2020).

During a winter storm in the middle of lockdown, the City of Cape Town evicted and demolished the homes of a community occupying land in Khayelitsha, rendering the residents homeless in the storm. A group of pastors from a neighbouring area responded by dismantling their church tent and relocating it to the site, providing temporary shelter and both spiritual and physical solace to the residents (cf Warehouse 2020). These solutions were temporary, and finding new accommodation for these communities afterwards was hard. With church buildings scarcely used in 2021, the opportunity remains for churches to rethink the use of their buildings in just and merciful ways.

5.4 Voices from the churches

In chapter three the ministers were naming, thinking, analysing and asking questions about their immersion in the suburbs. In chapter four they voiced theological thoughts, in some places reflecting on a theologically fuelled imagination for a different and more just spatial reality. In this chapter, I discuss ways in which the presence and action of their churches are seeking spatial justice in their context in greater or lesser ways. What follows are reflections on these nascent practices and the factors contributing to their action/inaction.

The following minister intentionally leads his church congregation to minister across societal divides to be an inclusive church (especially with their homeless neighbours), and yet he had these piercing reflections:

> *Is this purely an academic exercise that we're going through? Of course, South Africa needs to be rebuilt and of course, the church has got a role to play. But personally my role is distant and my role is advisory and my role is theological and academic … beyond that … you're not going to find me nearly doing anything practical to meet the need. And to be honest, I think that's where the majority of church people are. So if they were to sit around the table like this, they would agree with everything you are saying, but they wouldn't do anything about it personally. And that's the majority.*

These words provided a constant plumb-line especially when considering my methodological framework as emancipatory for the participants and other churches in Cape Town still seeking spatial justice. The next section combines the voices of the ministers with my voice as a practitioner in the field of church mobilisation. My reflections are animated by my ongoing experience in my local church, which was both the focus of my preliminary research into the same subject as well as one of the voices in the sample study, and with a variety of churches throughout the research period, which includes the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020[15].

5.4.1 Not just for a Sunday morning

> *I think what's important is just being seen as a church that serves the community and that doesn't exist only on the Sunday but serves the community throughout the week*

When conversations moved to the physical space and usage of the buildings and grounds, every minister eagerly promoted that "the church is not just for a Sunday morning", exuding a sense of contentment and pride when sharing how well utilised their spaces are. One minister reflected that:

[15] The empirical research period for this study spanned the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020

> *This campus does have a high demand on the space usage. But when things do stand empty, we try to find things that synergise with our mission. So the mom's group is not really something we are running for the church, there is not overt ministry component if you narrowly define that as teaching or whatever. But, for example, there is a Muslim lady that comes, totally unchurched people who come. We regard that as pre-evangelism.*

Three ministers said that sometimes they could not find a place to host a meeting as all of the spaces were occupied. However, the sanctuary was often reserved for religious purposes. Some churches generated rental revenue to cover outreach ministries, others used this income to help cover operations, and some did not generate any income, but may be availing their space to support outreach activities. With indoor spaces for community activities in short supply, large church building are often used to host larger group gatherings.

“Ecclesial use” refers to the use of the space for overtly religious activities, predominantly aimed at congregants. This included services (Sunday morning/evening, mid-week), groups (prayer, bible study, worship), celebrations (weddings, funerals, socials) markets/fetes, and hosting evangelical courses such as the Alpha Course.

Though three ministers spoke about the idea of a 24/7 church, there was no reflection on what that entails. One minister who joined the church a decade into their building renovation plans, speaks of the original vision for embarking on renovations to the church buildings*: “one or two people … talk about a 24/7 church and I don’t think anybody really understands what that means to keep going”.*

Income generating activities included use of venue for hosting a pre-school or meetings (body corporates, alcoholics anonymous, weight watchers, run/walk for life), event hire (weddings, film shoots), dance/exercise classes, workshops, student residence, and parking.

Despite one minister saying that their church property is used 80% of the time: “*Very seldom you will find downtime except after 10 pm”,* this would only relate to day-time

hours, as no one is resident on the property other than the rectory. He added that congregants were happy with this space usage:

> *Church people are aware that the church is used but it doesn't change their lives, they are just maybe aware of it and I'm sure there are people that are just totally oblivious, … it is there for a Sunday*[16]

The premises was made available at no cost to the local neighbouring communities as open grounds (recreational activities including support for elderly and walking dogs), safe space (debriefing during #Feesmustfall), office space for social enterprises, music concerts, parking, community kitchens, and to host courses to support families in communities (parenting, marriage, grief).

For one minister the appeal of open space was clear*: "We have an open gate during the day, during the week. So people just come and walk their dogs there. They come and sit under the trees and recently people came and asked for parking space".*

When referring to use of the property by body corporates, alcoholics anonymous, or for dance classes, one minister reflected that this had little to do with the vision/mission of the church, other than being available to the neighbourhood*: "So we're kind of involved with the community that way … but there's no porous involvement there".*

Activities hosted on the premises, coming from a sense of social or spatial justice includes office space for NPOs, pre-schools, respite accommodation for families in crisis, emergency shelter, after-school programs, clinics (for collection of medication and free baby and child consultations), longer-term refugee housing, and small scale urban farming.

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[16] While the interview and focus group exercises did introduce the ministers to the concept of a space-time usage inventory, they were not asked to fill it in - the nature of the research is not quantitative and therefore not seeking to know exactly how much space is used how much of the time, although this could be a very interesting follow-up study/ emancipatory activity.

5.4.2 The church, the community, the neighbourhood

5.4.2.1 A church for the neighbourhood

More than just being well-used in general, several ministers emphasized that the church should mean something good for its local neighbourhood, as the following four ministers reflect:

> *This is the question I am really grappling with, with this space, what does (name of church) mean to us, and what does (name of church) mean to our neighbourhood?*
>
> *We are a place where the whole community should be able to find life, and not just by coming to worship*
>
> *The Community sees it as their space, which is an amazing thing.*
>
> *So there's the thing that excites me the most about being a part of this particular congregation is that there's always activity and there's a commitment to serving the community as well*

This commitment from across the churches in this study to be available to their local neighbourhood stems from a theological commitment to being a witness to God in their contexts. This is an opportunity for the church to be a sanctuary in the community:

> *So our vision when we doing the open house of prayer every week was that anyone who lives and works in the area can just come to find a place of oasis, just a place to come…reflect and pray or just sit quietly and have a cup of coffee before going home… so from a space point of view the property should be a place of sanctuary and peace and I guess of help, of assistance, of care. As a fellowship of churches we had open days of prayer, especially around the time of fees must fall when there was a lot of unrest happening where each pastor took an hour slot and we just sat in the church and people could come in and pray and people did - students, lecturers, members of the public who were concerned*

But for the following minister it was less about the physical space of his church and more about the presence of the church in the wider community:

> *actually its more about trying to create the awareness of our penetration into our community in different spaces so you know some of our most key ministry connection points have been at school prizegivings or next to sports fields so creating a context where in different ways we and others in the church are engaging in the systems that run our community … whether that is having someone that does counselling at the police station, or people at the school … We encouraged our people to be involved in the shaping of our community just believing that the kingdom is bigger than conversion.*

After some discussion, one minister was reminded that their church is used by the local neighbourhood quite extensively:

> *We are running… a preschool, which is mostly accommodating the people who are working at Spar, Pick and Pay and the guys who are coming from outside South Africa… and we're starting to see now many locals bringing their own children. So the number is growing. They are running something called Nanny and Us. So you'll see many nannies who are working around coming on Fridays to be trained in our church. It was initiated by (another church) and then they came to us asking for space.*

Three ministers expressed how using the space added life to the premises. One added that when running an after-school homework club, it creates a safe space for learners to study and be tutored before returning home, suggesting: *"they come out of very unstable homes and they have a space where they can come and do their homework".*

For the ministers who reflected more deeply on homelessness in their neighbourhood, there was a sense that whether a person is "housed or unhoused" they are a neighbour. One shared about their winter shelter: ***"****That was our community, that was our own residents, who live in vulnerable situations who came to find refuge from terrible weather."* For three churches, this has led to offering a place to sleep inside church property during bad storms. This grew into ministries with the local homeless communities, including hosting regular meals.

> *We have a community supper that is open to anybody free to come. That's an ongoing attempt at connecting with the community, the immediate community. Mostly its word of mouth … we advertise in church, … some people would participate by donating ingredients, some by cooking, some come and serve, some come and eat. We are not doing something for the homeless, we are connecting with people … who are our neighbours and even the language that we use and the ways that we invite people to come to the community supper … it's all about just being neighbours. Come and sit and meet your neighbours, not come and help us do a soup kitchen, it's not about that. Please come, sit, just relax … come and chat with somebody. You'll be amazed at how much you can learn from somebody you thought that you would have to teach something to.*

One of the other ministers mentioned the significance of personal connection with homeless people when providing a funeral for a homeless man, a way to connect and serve the community:

> *the homeless community in (the area) rocked up for the funeral. And it was because one of the people in the church had connected with him, knew him well, to the extent that he'd actually taken out a funeral policy for him…*

Finally, one minister spoke about being located in a very wealthy neighbourhood and having a sense that the neighbours around the church want to help people in need but often don't know how to. And yet, when called to support, neighbours often respond in "*overwhelming ways*". He says *"I think we have become a … hub for the community, like 'here's a way to make a difference and we know these funds will be used to actually benefit others and not just to keep the church ticking over'".*Their buildings are frequently used to store all manner of donations to be distributed to other communities in need.

5.4.2.2 Churches that (could) change the community/ neighbourhood

There were a few ministers who spoke about a more intentional move towards actions that pursued "*diversity"* and "*racial reconciliation*". In chapter three I described "churches as the bridge" where several ministers shared praxis that made me ask whether

churches could play a bridging role between divides in society. Here I explore a bit deeper where some of this is intentionally happening.

I picked up a conversation with the minister who described Cape Town and the suburb in which his church is located as slow to change post-apartheid and asked him whether he thought churches could play a role in desegregating society. He proposed that churches could address racial and spatial divides with 1) conscientising efforts and 2) practical actions with their resources.

He describes a united action taken by a group of churches in the area:

> *we picked up that there was a lot of sort of racial acts… there was a gardener in the area who was whipped by somebody*[17] *and so as a fellowship, …we had posters made "rejecting racism" and had a focus in our Sunday services and as the churches, we made that kind of statement.*

When referring to use of resources, he shared the intentionality of running the pre-school on their property from a financial model that directly financed the running of the church to one that focused on expanding educational opportunities, especially to those who were disenfranchised due to forced removals:

> *the school money would go into bursaries and so we tried to link with a community where many of our were people moved to … and the idea was to create bursaries for some kind of tertiary education and to have a mentoring system running.*

When reflecting on how their local community perceives them as a church, he said: *"we park everybody in on a Sunday and I never have complaints from anybody so I think there's an awareness that we are trying to reach beyond ourselves".* It is interesting that he links the neighbours' tolerance of the traffic on a Sunday with the fact that they are a church that is trying to bridge various divides, economic, social, and racial.

[17] Over a period of 2014-2015, several racially motivated attacks took place on Main Road, in the Claremont area (Isaacs, 2015).

Another minister also referred to the pre-school run on their property as "*very mixed, intentionally*" but he did not reflect on whether the intentionally racially mixed pre-school has an impact on a racially homogenous neighbourhood.

In many churches, the minister lives near or on the church property in a church-owned house. This might mean that someone who would not normally live in that suburb becomes an active neighbour in the area. This was true for many of the ministers in this study. Some reflected that they would otherwise not be able to afford to live in the suburb or may not naturally have chosen to live there but see it as part of their calling to live as an active and engaged neighbour. I wondered whether this could start to shift narratives within an otherwise exclusive suburb, especially if the minister had a growing conscience and theologically fuelled imagination for social and spatial justice. For some, that meant being present and challenging racism or negative attitudes towards homeless people on neighbourhood groups, to others that meant sharing news about the churches activities and social outreach through neighbourhood platforms, inviting people to get involved.

Though housing refugees for an extended period was not intended to change the demographics of the neighbourhood, it did. This resulted in some churches hosting congregations of refugees from other African countries who run services in different languages.

Two ministers spoke of intentional processes to start to address the present-day effects of apartheid through story-telling initiatives and attempts at racial reconciliation. Both ministers reflect that these efforts increase the racial diversity of their churches, but not necessarily the neighbourhoods. One minister remarked that his church arranges buses and taxis on a Sunday for congregants who cannot afford to live in the area.

The question remains whether any of these intentions or actions are bringing spatial justice closer for the areas in which the churches are located. Perhaps these attempts are merely a start which if pursued with more courage, resources, perseverance, organisation, and collaboration, could lead to spatial changes in suburban areas.

5.4.3 Influencing factors

I have represented the general use of space and started to explore where this use goes beyond the purposes of congregational religious activity. Before discussing scenarios where churches are moving towards a praxis of spatial justice, I name eight influences identified as possibly helping or hindering this move. An additional five could explicitly hinder the movement towards a praxis of spatial justice.

5.4.3.1 Factors that could influence a praxis of spatial justice in either direction

The following influencing factors faced by the churches may cause movement closer towards or further away from spatial justice praxis.

a) A theological basis for socio/spatial justice:

In chapter three I identified a variety of theological concepts that have social justice as integral to ministers' understanding of the bible, their faith and their tradition. If given an explicitly spatial lens, these can flourish into new readings of both scripture and space and contribute towards a praxis of spatial justice in churches.

b) The minister

Very few ministers spoke directly about their role as influencing the praxis of the church, and yet ministers can have a significant influence on the decisions made by the church to pursue spatial justice or not. They usually decide who preaches, what is prioritized at church council, and discerning the vision/mission of the congregation. One minister spoke about "*planting seeds"* through his sermons, always asking the congregants to think about ways the Word influences their world. He drove home this point in saying:

> *a lot depends on the motivation from the minister. Unless you get a minister who says we've got to push this or that, it won't happen - unless the minister has a heart for it, it's not going to happen*

The following honest reflections spoke to how the posture of the minister and their view of their role shapes praxis:

> *I've got a lot to do, my role is to make sure that we survive financially and grow spiritually and you know so if you are going to ask me to do anything outside of that that takes time away from that…*

The minister who spoke about challenging his church board on the steep fees charged for hiring the church out for weddings, in the spirit of being what he calls an "*open church"* told another story of challenging his church board to *"think out of the box*". The church was approached by nearby businesses to use the church for parking during the week and the boards' immediate response was to refuse. The minister reflects on simply asking "*why say no?"* He made a case for a changed attitude towards the property and the neighbourhood and the board shifted their approach.

Similarly, the minister who spoke of the "*big dream*" for his church space, highlighted that while he would quite rightly get financial feasibility queries from the treasurer "*whose job it is to think about such practical things"* there might be others who say "*these are not the kinds of things church buildings should be used for"*. But he describes feeling confident that he would use his role as one of the key theological influencers in the space, to win them over to the vision for a just use of space.

c) The congregation

Several of the ministers spoke about the absence or presence of what they called "justice champions", "activists" or "do-ers". One minister reflected with gratitude about the "mercy and justice team" at his church:

> *they are totally on it. So I don't have to chase after that, I have a team of champions that go for that… what the team does is consciously connect outside and then they flag and then drag me along kicking and screaming into different spaces.*

Another minister thought beyond a small team and called it *the "critical mass needed to get things done". Yet a*nother minister described that rather than being the initiator, he preferred to be the one feeding ideas and then making sure that others are empowered to implement it. But this requires buy-in:

unless you get buy-in from the grassroots level in the church it's never going to happen. Unless you get somebody in the community becomes aware and says 'we've got to do this' only then it will happen.

Three ministers spoke about the idea of spatial justice being something that can be addressed by the assets that the church holds, not in its properties, but in the hands of its congregants. They had these stories to tell:

- *On a personal level, congregants have taken in these two real-life cases. They've taken in … families, both evicted … they didn't pay their rent, they just couldn't afford. Both were illegally evicted, furniture, benches, fridges put outside in the rain, everything destroyed. … And quite wealthy families, took these families in and the one was a single mother with six kids. Which for me is a bigger prize as a minister, that people are taking people into their own personal spaces and not just voting at the church meeting that we can accommodate them in church*

- *When there's been a need for accommodation we have a life group that had one of those families in their group . And that group used their capacity to buy a house for that family, they carry the bond, the people that they are helping pay the majority of the bond and I time they will hand the full bond over to them so that eventually the house becomes their possession*

- *We had someone in the church who inherited some money, bought a house and then opened up for those who can't find accommodation. People they were connected with through the congregation and in other ways. They bought it specifically for that reason.*

d) Money matters

The financial sustainability of churches and properties came up regularly. Different financial models are used concerning church space. For some churches, it is essential to make money off their properties to cover the maintenance costs of the buildings. While attempting to foster a praxis of spatial justice in suburban churches during

COVID-19 lockdown, I noted that the fear of this lost income was an important factor for churches as they decided whether to use their empty spaces towards spatial justice or not.

For some, the income generated through congregant contributions is enough to cover the costs of running the church and they can offer space free of charge to others to use. And others choose to charge for the use of properties to support various bursaries, ministries, social outreach/justice initiatives. For most, it is a combination of both. Church and money matters were illuminated by one minister who spoke of escalating costs from their "model of church":

> *the cost of a minister, the cost of a secretary, so personnel is always a major part of your budget, but close behind that is maintenance … of the buildings and grounds. It doesn't come cheap. Because you want it to look nice because that is a witness that is a testimony. It's about 10% of our budget.*

Some ministers briefly described how buildings were bought and sold over the years to suit the churches changing and perceived needs. For one minister the expenses related to maintaining properties are provoking many questions in his church about the ownership of property:

> *So there's a possibility we are going to offload some of our properties because more and more of our budget is going to maintaining them and we don't feel that that's our primary business is property, we feel our primary business is people. So … we are already looking at … getting rid of some of our properties. So that we can diversify those funds into other areas of ministry.*

The disparity between churches, some with multi-million Rand building projects and others facing severe financial challenges, was reflected as one minister relates:

> *The one thing I would like to have is to put up a decent fence, especially around the cemetery, but financially we can't afford it. We're a very small church so we often can't afford things.*

The intersection of money and mission can cause tension between a minister who feels the space should be used more freely during the week and congregants who believe church usage should generate income:

> *The use of the church buildings during the week … a passion of mine… one of the things I love about the current congregation is the preschool and aftercare … people keep asking the question 'shouldn't they be paying a small fee?' … they see it as a business venture and not as a ministry and I've really struggled to help them to understand that this is the churches mission to the community that … that level of education is vital in terms of the future of our country. And if we don't get on board with this, we're missing an opportunity... And yes, we are struggling as a church … and so they want to see this as a source of income. Is it a ministry and part of our mission or is this simply another way of earning some money?*

It struck me that the complexity of money issues faced by these suburban churches could be getting in the way of creative solutions to spatial injustice in the suburbs when this minister said:

> *If we had limitless resources I think the ideal usage of this property would be mixed-use and would probably involve parts of urban office space to bring in an income and partly for lower-income accommodation.*

e) Decision-makers

Though different decision-making models were represented, a common element included the church board holding ultimate responsibility for the fiduciary and property decisions of the church. Some included a congregational voting system for the "*big decisions"* such as buying, selling or adapting buildings. Others had to submit to the higher decision-making power of the denominational governing body.

The following minister describes how the vision that the church holds should always drive these decisions:

> *what is the vision of the church and our core values? …a core value is transformation so it's always a factor in how the properties are used. Is it being used in line with that policy and principle of transformation? …Then practically we put a team together to scope out a decision and present it to the church to vote on. That is …how we would decide to buy or sell a building*.

Several ministers described their role as providing theological and pastoral insights and leading the church, fostering the overall vision of the church to guide decision-makers. It has been my experience with churches that the internal culture of the church is what determines how much influence the minister has ultimately on the decisions that are made.

f) Location

For churches tucked away in quieter more exclusive spaces, their praxis of addressing social injustice tends to be further afield, reaching out in mostly charitable ways to communities far from the reality of their suburban context and usually involves only a small number of congregants:

> *I feel quite isolated in a certain sense here cos I just live in this very comfortable area whereas a lot of my ministry previously would regularly have me two or three times a week criss-crossing the city … Cape Town being Cape Town one doesn't seem to drive anywhere very far!*

In contrast, churches closer to the main road and some of the more economically stressed parts of those suburbs tended to make more tangible attempts to address the social and spatial disparity in front of them, reaching just beyond their church premises to the streets and people around them. For others, the immediate presence of homeless persons directly provokes a response, and an emerging praxis, from the church as 'a problem', 'an opportunity for outreach' or 'a member of the neghbourhood'.

g) The role of ecumenism

When a few churches in a geographical location work together towards addressing a local issue of injustice, the results can be long-lasting. There was very little mentioned by the ministers on the positive role that an ecumenical approach could play in addressing the spatial injustice in their shared neighbourhoods. Issues surrounding homelessness seemed to elicit the most ecumenical collaboration in the churches in this study. In a few cases, ministers explicitly stated that they do not work with other churches.

h) The role of FBOs, NPOs and other partners

Several of the ministers affirmed the role that various organisations play in helping churches think about "*these things*"[18] that "*continue to help us as church grapple with land and justice issues … and remind us to think beyond optimistic programs".* One minister described this as: "*Assistance to see things differently"* stating that he was aware that:

> *My horizon is limited to what I experience in this context and so having outside input … helps me to re-frame that. That's where the value is – reframing – we have blind spots according to where we grew up who we are and what you've been exposed to in life.*

Others pointed to the role of such organisations as having the ability to network, help churches cross-pollinate and share learnings and "*getting ministers together*" and also felt that a role they should play is to introduce churches to innovative models of pursuing spatial justice.

After discussing the renovations and building process his church is currently undergoing this minister noted:

> *I think once the building is happening we are going to actually need to have a conversation around how we are going to use it. We have this picture of*

[18] The following orgainsations were mentioned: The Warehouse, Isiphambano Centre for Biblical Justice, The Restitution Foundation, The South African Council of Churches

serving the community and I think there's a number of different pictures of what that actually looks like. So that kind of help from someone like you would … be really useful

During 2020, as some churches were considering opening their spaces as a shelter for homeless persons during lockdown and the winter period, I noted that in the four churches in Cape Town that sheltered people for some time, an NPO experienced in the provision of holistic services to homeless persons ran the shelter. The churches mostly availed the space, and some volunteers and supplies needed for the day to day running of the space, but the partnership with the NPO was essential to the successful running of the shelter.

5.4.3.2 Factors that could explicitly hinder a praxis of spatial justice

a) Apathy

One minister delved quite deeply into what he called the consumer mindset. He related it directly to the attitudes of suburban churchgoers. While he felt that there was huge potential for his church premises to be used for creative solutions to spatial injustice in his suburb, he reflected that the ***"****main opposition factor would be apathy and lethargy, that is just too big we can't even get our heads around that."* While this might be due to a sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the vision, he refers it more directly to the suburban church-goers attitude towards church-going*:*

the greatest barrier is having a critical mass of people who believe in the same vision of the church's mission and don't just see the church as something I come to…only for me…

And so the consumer mentality, and then the 'I have a bright idea why don't you do it' mentality. So people have great ideas which they will vocalise (and they really are great ideas) but then the church should do it. But, I say, 'hang on Bob, you ***are*** *the church!' … I suppose the more radical the idea the greater the push back would be, the more it stands to cost us or the more it messes with the fact that somebody has come to be comfortable with their privilege and that they have rights to this place of privilege ... then it comes to*

the 'you're giving me a headache pastor' territory…There's also the fact that as a mainline congregation we have older member who have more time on their hands but less energy and then our younger members have less time on their hands, loads of energy but too many commitments

b) Security concerns

Though security concerns did not come up often, when visiting the churches, I noted several security measures. Although most of them had tried to keep open access from the street to the church, the church building and offices were not free to just walk into. One minister spoke at length about security concerns*:*

I have one neighbor who is always asking 'what are you as a church doing to make it safer for us?'

… Its constant. And we just get vandalized. And in one month I had three break ins. The stained glass windows were broken and it costs us a lot of money. And its heritage and so we can't just do anything. That is the other challenge. We can't just put any security up because of heritage. The churches are scared - We as rectors are scared.

c) Does helping hurt?

Two ministers asked the question "*when does helping hurt?"* specifically with regards to addressing spatial injustices in tangible ways. For one, it was with regard to interventions with homeless persons, including things like offering a place to stay at the church and the concern that this would create a dependency and ultimately not be helpful towards them finding a "*step up in life".* For another, this question led to an in-depth conversation about the role that suburban churches could or should play in creating affordable housing with their spaces. He described the frequency with which people in his congregation would come to ask for help when facing evictions or homelessness for various reasons. He lamented the absence of working models[19]:

[19] Whenever this was mentioned I followed up with sending inspiring resources such as those that have been cited in this chapter

> *If the church had a model by which we could help people become accommodated which is one of the biggest needs it would be awesome. It's something I've been turning around in my mind, is it OK, should you just buy a block of flats and accommodate people?*

This question led to reflections on the phenomenon of unintended consequences in justice interventions. He spoke about how expensive the neighbourhood is and the conundrum he faced when assisting 'poor and disadvantaged' members of his congregation:

> *They get their kids into a place where they are getting decent education but they can't afford to live there Ok so now you have put them under even greater stress, they're getting the education, but they can't afford to live here. The nature of what's going on here it just keeps getting more and more expensive so at the end of the day I ask myself the questions …there's a sense in which you've helped them but there's a sense in which you are also hurting them massively because they don't have the resources to be able to function and it's not just accommodation its everything …everything you do here. Even I find it expensive, imagine someone who is not earning nearly the salary that I am? The people that you help to have access to these resources, they carry the pain of the change that I am going through with them. So if I accommodate them in this area they carry the pain of the sentiment of the community, they carry the pain of the cost of living. There's a cost and it's not only a cost to me. They carry a massive cost, probably more than me.*

We concluded our conversation with an open reflection on the role that churches could play to mitigate this cycle of exclusion, and I directly asked whether he felt churches could work towards changing the socio-economic demographics of a suburb, not just their church:

> *I get you …so looking at the long term thing but then the other thing you have to look at it is the community response to what you are doing and that's*

another massive massive issue. I don't know if you know down the road there's a massive piece of land … and they wanted to develop it into social housing. And everybody was up in arms about that, and they closed it down. I think one area we would have to work on would be to change the sentiments, or the feel of your neighborhood in terms of the peoples' willingness to be supportive of something like that, that would be a whole project on its own.

d) When things go "wrong"

Four of the ministers referenced times when availing their buildings for residential use to people facing spatial injustice led to difficult circumstances. For one this was the very unfortunate attack suffered by a homeless woman who was living in space in the church grounds that they had allowed her and her community to use for shelter. For another church it was a homeless community that pitched tents on the pavement in front of the church and refused to leave, leading to endless complaints from the neighbouring housed residents. And for another it was just the ongoing stress of the general mess left behind by people living on the church grounds. One minister reflected on damage to the church property that happened during a time when they hosted people seeking refuge from xenophobic violence and the difficulty the church had in finding alternative places for them to stay.

One minister told a story with some angst as it had not resolved in any action, and left her with theological questions about the role of the church. She describes a student in her congregation coming to her to highlight the cause of a group of people who had been occupying a building in a nearby suburb. They had just been evicted and were now living on the pavement outside the building:

Now I'm being brutally honest with you, I thought what can we do as the church? I phoned my church warden and explained. I didn't know where they were but afterwards I found out that they were evicted,… actually it was the people who were occupying the empty old age home that were evited. So the young woman said she's more concerned about the children and the women.

> *And then I said 'what if I allow them to come here, we only have the church hall and we only have 2 toilets for the men and 2 for the women and what then?' They said its only for the night, but what if it's not? And I asked, thinking maybe its ten or twenty and then they said its 200. I can't accommodate 200 people. For me that was really tough. As a pastor. As a priest. As we say we are reaching out to people. As we say we want to help people. And we are preaching to this student. But the issue now in town – the Methodist church – it's a worry.*

By the church in town, this minister was referring to the Central Methodist Mission that was described in the previous section of this chapter. Following their ongoing commitment to spatial justice in Cape Town and to people facing homelessness, eviction and land injustice, the church had opened their doors in late 2019, to a group of people protesting at the UNHCR in the inner city. Over 500 people came into the church for refuge and then the political complexities of the situation meant that they took up permanent and often highly conflictual occupation of the church building. At the time of our interview, the church was still occupied by hundreds of people and the situation had become dangerous and untenable.

e) "Not in my back yard"

> *And you know the area, they complain that because of the church looking like it does the property prices of their houses are going to deteriorate.*

This statement was made by a minister who struggles to keep their graveyard clear of the debris associated with people sheltering there. I note too, the words of the minister reflecting on local neighbours shutting down the proposals for a social housing project. And I reflect on my experience working in churches having to field calls from housed neighbours accusing the church of affecting the general aesthetic of the neighbourhood by encouraging the presence of homeless persons in and around the property.

I recall a meeting that my church held with its housed neighbours. We were preparing to hand over one of our buildings to an NPO to run a supportive community home for men who had come out of homelessness. We wanted to give the neighbours, who had

expressed concerns about the idea, a chance to ask questions. The NPO presented their plans and when the floor was opened for comments one disgruntled neighbour said “I thought we were here to say whether we agreed to this, but I can see that this idea is going ahead whether we are happy with it or not”.

For the remainder of the meeting, the minister and the NPO leader took great care to explain the benefits of such a home in the neighbourhood, emphasizing that it would go further to addressing the “*problem of homelessness*”. No further complaints were aired during this meeting, and I was struck that this church was not reversing their decision to house previously homeless individuals. Perhaps the “NIMBY” phenomenon does not have to be the only story of a suburb, when a church ventures to stand up to it. The initiative went ahead. And to date, there have been no further incidents, or complaints.

5.4.4 New hope in/from the suburbs?

I previously described the general use of church space and highlighted the firm belief held by all ministers that a church building and grounds should not stand empty for six days of the week. I also explored ways in which the churches serve their local communities and even start to contribute towards spatial shifts in their contexts. In this section I highlight a few ways I think these suburban churches may be starting to build a praxis of spatial justice.

5.4.4.1 Use of space explicitly for ministry purposes related to social inequality and injustice

As presented above, there is extensive use of church space for initiatives that seek to ameliorate the injustices faced by inequality in Cape Town: clinics, after school clubs, NPO offices, special needs schools, employment projects, respite care for people facing homelessness or awaiting a spot in a shelter or a rehabilitation centre, and vegetable gardening. These examples are all promising signs of creative use of church space in the greater story of city-wide injustice and inequality.

5.4.4.2 Stories of church space use that moves towards a praxis of spatial justice

Here I reflect on descriptions of church space usage where I identify potential building blocks that could point to a movement towards a praxis of spatial justice.

A church that doesn't have any answers yet but seems to be asking the questions:

> *For our centenary five years ago there's a big cross that's been put up in the church, … with a little plaque which was specifically put up to remember the people who had been moved out. And discussions around our building project have also included a real desire to say 'how do we hold that history?' …maybe to name the hall after the priest who was here just before the forced removals. But underlying that I think for a number of people in the community who in some sense just remain blissfully unaware of what's happened. But there are people who are actually saying 'what do we do about this?'. And I don't think any of us have answers. It's something that comes up and when we talk about the building and the cost of the building and it always comes back to, you know, an awareness of we now are this wealthy community in comparison to the community who actually built this all up.*

Seven of the churches in the study spoke about hosting people for extended periods, sometimes up to six months or longer, in 2008 during the "xenophobia crisis". For many, this was a transformative and positive experience.

> *We had people actually from our church community who were standing at stations who had been chased away from their homes, their places had been burnt down. We went to go and fetch them – and they lived here, we had 70 plus people who lived on site. Because we have houses over the road we were able to accommodate some people in the one house and others in the hall… I think in the future we would do it again, in the interim, we are not geared up for a permanent response to displacement…*
>
> *This church and many churches, opened their hall and had 20-30 people stay. They fondly talk about reaching out to people and being able to place them in employment, the congregation still remember it*

In two stand-out stories, more current actions were linked to a sense of possibility provoked by unused or underutilised buildings:

Our minister left. And so we turned the ministers house into a home for refugees … And I think that the really significant thing that's come through from them is "this is the first time we've had stability in our lives and we can see it affecting the growth of our children". We can now work with them on the employment situation. And then there's a big piece of land there and we said, we'll start farming … they've gone through a lot of trauma and just digging up the land and planting stuff was like reconnecting with their past. Now we're getting a new minister. Now we have to find alternative accommodation. We've got a lot of assets. We've got a lot of land …and I think the issue is going to be where's the money going to come from now to find the alternative accommodation? But it was a younger member of the leadership who said, money's not the issue, our ministry to the homeless and the foreigner is the issue. On what basis do we select in terms of the foreigner, the destitute…. are we just exacerbating the tensions around foreigners by constantly assisting foreigners and not dealing with South African restitution issues?

In the second story, this minister spoke about a time of discernment that his church has been through, to address the use of underutilised space in more just ways:

It began with inviting the congregation into general participation, encouraging people to imagine a desired future scenario and vision. And that was highly energizing … big picture stuff. Out of that we quickly moved to a decision to relocate our staff offices into an area that had been previously just kept aside for children's church and which remained largely empty for the rest of the week.

And the result has been that we now have a building that's available … and the dream for the use of that building had three elements to it: … Firstly, to be a point of connection and interaction with the wider community that flows around the church or to be a sort of porous space. Secondly, to be a place where community is formed that engages both the residents who would come to live in that building. And the community of the church. So porous in that

> *way. And thirdly to be a vibrant hub of ministry and missional engagement with our community. So that was where the dream distilled for the use of that building.*
>
> *But from the dreaming phase, we then encountered the call to proceed with deliberation and care to do this thing properly …and so that resulted in the formation of a working group … that would report and call for proposals from the congregation, and give due consideration to them and then come back to the congregation as a whole. So the church leadership wanting to be more cautious with the process… that became the next voice that spoke into this process…*
>
> *And now we are in the midst of that place. But the challenge I think for us and for me personally is having little in the way of models or the experiences of others to help us as we make this journey. So it does feel a bit like we kind of feeling our way, but blind as to how this thing will work and what it will look like.*

The story just recounted is from the church that I have attended for several years. When I first joined it was because I had been drawn to the community by the questions of space, race and justice they were asking about their role in the suburb. It was also around the time that I was embarking on the preliminary studies and research to this project and so my journey and that of the church has been very connected throughout and beyond the process that this minister described.

During the discernment and dreaming process it was heartening to discover how much of the prophetic imagination that I held for the church and the suburb was held and creatively articulated by the majority of the members of the congregation. At a time when the church was facing unprecedented financial strain, the congregation ultimately voted unanimously not to sell the building, valued at millions of Rands, but rather to keep it to use for a spatially just purpose in the neighbourhood.

The building itself, it's history and how it came to be sold to the church, is another whole story to be told. It is a Victorian heritage home with over 20 useable rooms, separate

flatlets and large grounds. Over the years, apart from housing the church offices, it provided space for many interesting and courageous initiatives: a temporary winter shelter, monthly dinners and counselling rooms for homeless individuals and women in sex work from the nearby main road, a respite room for people and families facing housing crises, vegetable gardening for people in rehabilitation, counselling and prayer ministry rooms. All of those activities, as the minister described in the above quote, were possibly able to be housed and expanded in the house space, within the context of a restorative residential community. Proposals fleshing out this possibility were submitted to the working committee.

The process, however led the church leadership to consider the request of a very prominent local NPO that focuses on pathways out of homelessness. The NPO made a bid to make full use of the grounds and buildings to run supportive community accommodation for previously homeless men. In the end, while the church leadership acknowledged that there were many church-run ministries and relationships looking for a home, the option of an organised NPO to run the space, which would fulfill the vision for a spatially just use of the house while not costing the church any further resources of time, money or skills, would be the wisest use for the property. The building was given to the NPO at no cost for a five-year trial period and the first residents moved in a few weeks into the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

The minister who had led the church through this discernment and I caught up just before he retired. We looked back on the process that had begun five years prior as we had mulled over the idea of a prophetic imagination for the church and some pictures of church-based affordable housing from Yeast City Housing in Pretoria (YCH n.d.). While it had not resulted in what either he or I had originally imagined, we marvelled at the fact that a church that had so many underutilised spaces just a few years back, was now availing a large and truly beautiful home space to previously homeless people. Thinking aloud about spatial justice in the suburb, the minister said these parting words to me: “*you know, Caroline, I think we have created the first affordable housing in our local neighbourhood!*”.

5.4.4.3 Across the divides of the city: further afield

I reiterate that a praxis of spatial justice is not limited to a church's immediate neighbourhood or to the buildings and grounds they occupy or own. In Cape Town the high levels of social disparity are so spatially set that many suburbanites have little cause to engage the realities of the poverty of communities on the outskirts of the city should they not choose or need to. So a spatial justice praxis in and from the suburbs would also involve meaningful acts of solidarity and justice with communities quite far away from its location.

All the churches in the study described some form of response to social inequality. In many cases these were based on a model of charity and mercy or developmental initiatives. Very few of the ministers reflected on initiatives or stories that were changing the spatial realities in the wider contexts where they were assisting nor did they reflect on ways these initiatives impacted back on their local spatial realities in their suburbs.

One minister described a relationship that his church had built with a church in a township approximately forty minutes' drive from their neighbourhood. The two churches met through denominational circles and he says:

> *over … probably seven or eight years we have intentionally tried to connect and partner with a church in a disadvantaged area and we have tried to help them set up what they don't have – we are in a project now with the church … they were meeting in a shack and we are helping them build something more permanent that will be a church and a community centre… We deployed all the skillsets of architects and all the people who were skilled in that way and then the church raised the money and we did it.*

He also reflects that they wanted the relationship to be reciprocal and interdependent, acknowledging that they need each other in this divided context:

> *What we have tried to do is not make it a one-way thing. We said we can help you but we want you to help us all well. So from time to time they have brought groups from their church to come and worship with us. So there's been a bit of mixing it up a little bit.*

He talks about the impact of such attempts at interdependence on suburban Christians in his church:

> *We also planted a church in another area and a few of our congregation joined them and became part of that worshipping community – their lives have been radically transformed – worshipping together, eating I each other's homes, becoming part of each other's lives. It's had quite an important knock on effect. Those are some of our most pro-active people today because of that.*

5.5 Further Discussion of findings

To discuss the identified themes in this final moment of the praxis cycle, I return to Linthicum (1991:21-23) and his three church postures. As I listened to the voices of the ministers, I found none that I would describe as a church merely existing in, totally disconnected from, and disinterested in the neighbourhood and city around it (Linthicum 1991:21). I venture that all the churches in the study existed firstly for the community of the church itself, but also in relation to its neighbourhood and the wider city.

I found the majority of the churches operated in different ways as 'churches to the neighbourhood' (Linthicum 1991:21), at least attempting to listen and know more about their contexts and I described these in the theme named "churches for the neighbourhood". It is interesting that some ministers highlighted a lack of porousness between their church's availability for the neighbourhood and the congregation itself. Churches available to or for the neighbourhood operated in mostly organised and controlled ways. They ran well organised outreach initiatives to communities struggling socio-economically, often in partnership with a well establishes NPO. Systems were in place by which members from the neighbourhood could approach the church for use of its space. In some cases, open times existed, like community dinners, open prayer events, or even set open times for free use of the grounds, that allowed for those who may not use the more official channels to be able to be in the church space. I also noted the minister who continued to challenge his church boards on the idea of a physically open church space – a concept that none of the churches fully implement.

When considering church activities that could change the neighbourhood, I also wondered about whether there were neighbourhood activities or identities that could change the church? This possibility was not explored by the ministers in the study.

However, the idea of a church ‘with the neighbourhood’ ‘in solidarity with the neighbourhood’ (Linthicum 1991:21) is an interesting one for the suburban churches in the study and especially when considering this from a lens of spatial (in)justice and neighbourhoods that were engineered around racial exclusion. If we engage the idea of a church standing with the community in partnership to address its own perceived needs, when holding that up against notions of critical consciousness, spatial (in)justice and the ‘right to a city’ one has to ask ‘whose neighbourhood?’ and ‘which voices are being listened to?” and ‘in whose city?”.

If a suburban church discerns the concerns of its community by listening to dominant voices that for example promote the need for safety and security over commitments towards desegregation and inclusivity, then the primary concern of the church will uphold an exclusive status quo. If a suburban church focuses entirely, for example, on outreach efforts across the divides of the city or only with the concerns of local homeless communities but does not attempt to mediate a growing spatial and critical consciousness with its immediate neighbourhood, spatial justice may never come to the very place where the church is located. If suburban churches make a move towards being churches ‘with the community’ this move would, in line with Linthicum’s commitments, need to be a move that considers the whole city, with all its competing concerns. And with that move, would include a commitment to listen to the concerns of those who have been removed or excluded from the neighbourhood of the church.

It is also important to consider who is listened to in church discernment processes around spatial justice. In local churches, and even more widely in denominational circles or ecumenical groupings, where the very people who were removed or excluded from the neighbourhood are present as members and leaders in the church community, surely there exists a key to a step towards spatial justice. Perhaps instead of asking for innovative models of praxis from other cities or neighbourhoods, ministers could be listening to some of their very own people to discover what meaningful restitution and

restorative action could look like. I think of the several examples given in this study of ‘untold stories’ or even of racial reconciliation processes that invite the stories of people who directly suffered from colonial and apartheid spatial planning and yet I did not yet see where these stories or processes were leading to tangible, desegregating spatial justice. In several anecdotes, ministers lamented the fact that for many of those telling their stories, they could still not return to where they were removed from or access neighbourhoods from where they were always excluded. A church ‘with the city’ in the case of suburban Cape Town requires deep listening with a will to give up the privileges that came as a benefit of our history.

And so I propose that if suburban churches employ lenses shaped by theories and theologies of spatial justice, their move towards being churches ‘with the neighbourhood’ can change the status quo of suburban exclusion instead of maintaining it. I also propose, along with many others, that following the moments and movement of the praxis cycle with courage and commitment offers the best framework for fostering a praxis of spatial justice in churches, in suburban areas and beyond.

CHAPTER 6
FUTURE(S) FOR THE CHURCH ON THE CORNER

> And, above all, we have to learn: A Church's future is determined by neither Synods nor Classes, but solely by the witness of its every congregation (Beyers Naudé:1960).

I recall the words of the minister who asked "*Is there a future for the church on the corner?*" while exploring what he considered appealing ideas of decentralised church, meeting like the early church in people's homes. He was the same minister that I reflected with, on the steps towards spatial justice taken by our church. It struck me that while he may imagine a future where the church no longer needs a building, the buildings still exist, and in some suburban areas, still exist on every other corner. And despite his hesitation about a lively future for such spaces, he led a church that spent much energy discerning a more spatially just future use for their underutilised buildings.

In this concluding chapter, I integrate the findings from Chapters Three, Four and Five by proposing a set of lenses for understanding the current praxis of the suburban church and fueling future emancipatory action with other churches (both suburban and in other urban areas). I then revisit the emancipatory goals of the research with a critical lens and finally propose future research that could continue to advance this agenda.

6.1 Lenses for a church-based praxis of spatial justice

The primary research question of this study asked 'what does a praxis of spatial justice look like in churches located in former Whites-only suburbs of Cape Town?' This question did not presuppose that there *is* such a praxis but was open to a variety of findings: Is such a praxis absent? Was there a flourishing praxis with creative expressions of spatial justice? Or a variety of scenarios between these? Literature offered ideas and stories from similar contexts further afield which layered onto the research question pictures of what such a praxis *could* look like.

The findings in the previous three chapters show that this question surfaced a variety of offerings - social analyses, theological reflections and practices - that when observed together could offer some foundations and building blocks towards the presence of or the fostering of a praxis of spatial justice. In fact, across the dataset, no one church stood out as a clear case study that could point to an established praxis of church-based spatial justice. Rather, the collective voices offered incremental steps towards such a praxis and provided ideas for lenses that could facilitate emancipatory praxis in the future.

Soja (2010:14-24) dissects the anatomy of spatial justice, dealing with the concepts of social justice or critical consciousness and spatiality or spatial consciousness separately in order to bring them together in the term spatial justice. In Chapter Three, I explored the literary lenses for this critical and spatial consciousness and then proposed that ministers in the study indicated having a *spatial consciousness* to a greater or lesser degree. I also noted that they had a *critical consciousness for issues of social justice* to a greater or lesser degree. Intersecting these two continuums, I offer the following diagram where a person or a group of people could locate themselves in one of four quadrants:

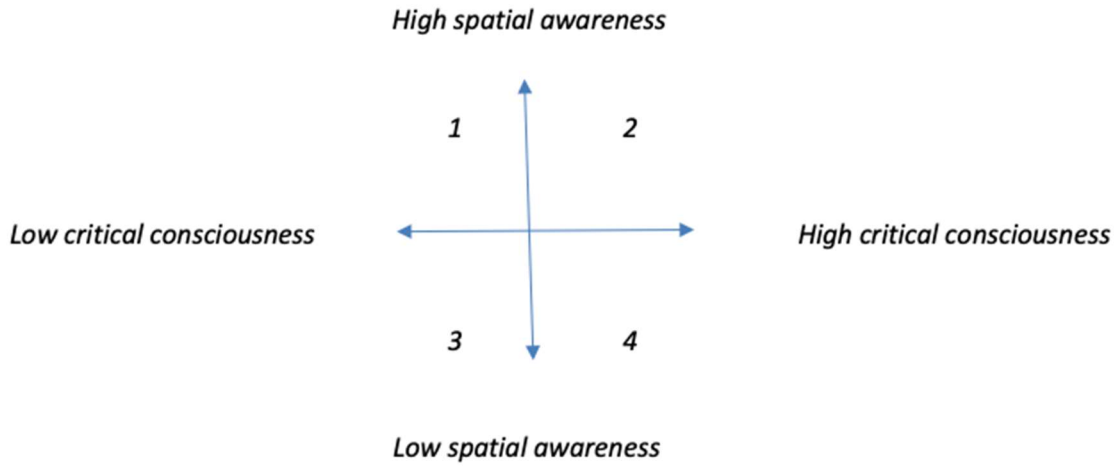

Figure 8: A lens for intersecting critical and spatial consciousness

In Chapter Four I identified theologies in both the literature and the voices of the ministers that could contribute towards fostering a praxis of spatial justice. I then noted that the theological reflections of the ministers could be placed on a continuum of *theological reflection that is spatially conscious* to a lesser or greater degree, and *theological reflection that is critically conscious* to a lesser or greater degree. Intersecting these two continuums, I offer the following diagram where a theologically thinking person or group of people could locate themselves in one of four quadrants:

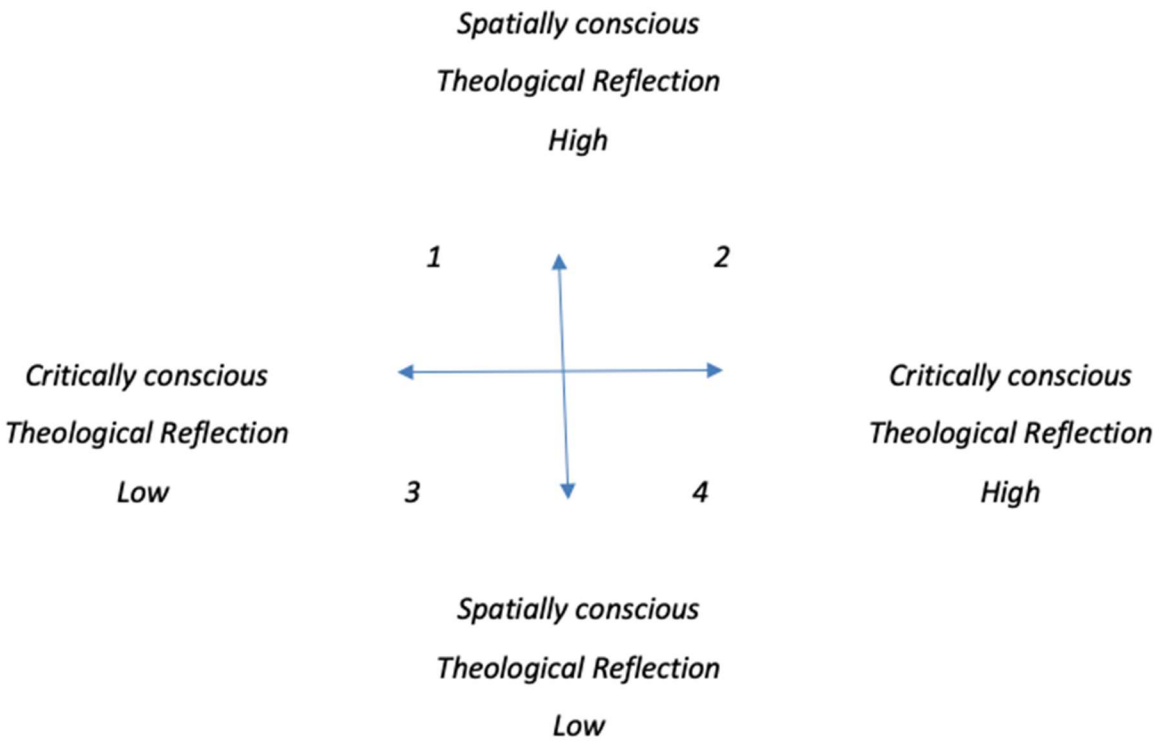

Figure 9: A lens for intersecting critical and spatial theological reflection

Of course, these two sets of lenses do not operate separately, instead there is a complex overlapping of the two. As people, specifically actors of faith and groups of people in churches as considered in this study, we live in complex and dynamically changing and interacting systems and therefore defy being boxed or plotted. In addition, over time, as one grows in understanding through experience and reflection, one is

constantly in motion between the different levels of consciousness and awareness. It is therefore important to note that the diagrams above are tools for conversation, rather than for a static diagnosis for comparison.

The findings in Chapter Five affirm this, as there were a variety of stories from across the dataset that did not directly correlate between analysis and theological reflection into action. Ministers frequently articulated a disconnect between theologically held convictions regarding socio-spatial (in)justice and the lived praxis of their church. And so, in an emancipatory research approach to churches and spatial justice, I propose the use of these lenses to help frame questions and shape actions for each other as actors of faith in churches. The aim of engaging these lenses would be to encourage each other towards ever-increasing spatial and critical consciousness as well as ever-increasing theological reflection with a socio-spatial lens. And then, not to stop there, but to actively engage the influencing factors, identified in Chapter Five, that would promote or hinder a praxis of spatial justice.

How then is this practically possible? Firstly, I return to the story in my own church to unpack one possibility. My church has some articulated theology of social justice and speaks about acting in more merciful and just ways. When faced with the use of their buildings and increasing financial concerns, however, it almost became a forgone conclusion that at least one large underutilised property would be sold. While questions of social and spatial (in)justice were being engaged from the pulpit, it required some more practical engagement with decision-makers to seek spatial justice practically with our resources. I and a few others who held similar views about the potential for spatial justice that was held within the church premises, joined the building committee. It was intimidating at first to join a team made up of financial thinkers, lawyers and built environment professionals. And yet, our presence in those meetings, probing with questions for a vision of possibility, I believe contributed significantly to the unfolding of the story as shared in Chapter Five.

I frequently meet activists who are deeply engaged in advocacy and liberative city-making processes and who, despite some disconnections that they articulate, still attend a local church. Often, they have not engaged theologically with spatial justice,

using the theological paradigms that I introduced in Chapter Four. As we help them to make more connections between their activism and their faith, the ideal would be for them to remain engaged with their church and bring their activist and community organising expertise into the leadership and congregational space.

For ministers who are theologically and socially conscious of spatial (in)justice and yet lament the disconnect in church praxis, we should engage them with ecclesial analysis tools that might help them name hindering factors and consider ways of overcoming these. In instances such as these, creative partnership with other churches and NPOs, as well as personal introductions to urban land and spatial justice movements, could unlock practical steps. For several ministers in the study, they experienced a lack of what they called ‘models’ of spatial justice and so accompaniment with churches should include the sharing of creative and hope-filled models.

Furthermore, in Chapters Four and Five I touched on processes that would contribute towards a movement of increased theological and socio-spatial consciousness with churches, namely *Faith Communities and Spatial Justice: Appetizers for Engagement* (CFC n.d.) and *Contextual Bible Study* (Ujamaa Centre n.d.). I also named the theological influences that I believe, if engaged well, will increase consciousness. Methodologies such as City Pilgrimages (cf Warehouse n.d.) and Mobile Classrooms (c.f. Headley 2018) where participants travel though the city as a classroom with a socio-spatial lens and spatially informed theological reflection are helpful conscientising activities.

In-depth process facilitation with churches going on justice journeys can provide a safe space to interrogate that which is blocking praxis (cf Warehpuse n.d.). Such processes must also provoke deeper commitment to listening to the voices of people in their own church families who were removed or always excluded from the neighbourhood, not only with the aims of racial reconciliation but with the desire to hear what needs to be done to mediate tangible spatial justice in the present. This requires work to create safe spaces where people are able to share their stories in a way that does not further traumatize nor marginalize them.

In order not to complicate application or attempt to apply these lenses where they are not helpful, these ideas must be continuously applied to real churches in real neighbourhoods to test their relevance and emancipatory potential. There are many people, ordinary church-goers and leaders, who carry heartfelt desires to see such a praxis being fostered into tangible expressions of spatial justice. We must continue to find, encourage, collaborate with and equip one another.

Another crucial factor to consider is that a church-based praxis of spatial justice will not be to arrive at a destination where one can say that it has been achieved. And so even the core questions of this research must continuously be engaged, to interrogate any set judgement that would declare a church as having arrived at a praxis of spatial justice or not, or predetermine exactly what this should look like.

In conclusion, the dynamic conversation that I presented between the voices of the ministers and those of academia as recorded in the previous chapters, unearthed the signposts towards a possible future for the church on the corner. Furthermore, when engaging in an emancipatory process, many possible futures emerge. This emancipatory research approach, when pursued by practitioners, researchers, church-goers and church leaders, will lead to the uncovering of possibilities where suburban, and indeed other, churches may start to think and act towards their presence in the City with spatially just lenses. In this future, I see local churches that will flourish, strengthen and grow, albeit perhaps not in ways that many might currently be imagining or framing church growth. In such a future I imagine as many models for a praxis of spatial justice as there are churches.

Conversely, should such lenses not be engaged and an emancipatory agenda not be embraced, the suburban church of Cape Town may watch a moment of profound prophetic potential to contribute toward the South African urban land and spatial justice question slip away.

6.2 Revisiting the emancipatory aims of this study

Emancipatory approaches to research presuppose an existing relationship with the subjects of the research, their involvement in the design and implementation of the

study, their ability to reflect on the outcomes and work with the recommendations and to experience a more emancipated reality as a result of partaking in the research project (Lynch 1999:41-69). I have already addressed some of this in chapter two. Here I will reflect on some of the feedback I received during the study and some of the obstacles and opportunities I have identified.

6.2.1 Feedback from ministers

Many of the ministers who took part in the study were known to me. Some even remarked that at first, they agreed to come to focus group to "*help me out*". But after going through the process every one of them remarked at finding it helpful. One minister shared:

> *I think …what's important, is that the land issue or the land question is far closer than what the political scene is making it to be… What this session has made for us is to break it down, say, how do we start it in small conversations such as this? And how do we start becoming aware of the land issue, space, property and church? And just to start that conversation and you're not intimidated…. But so that it becomes a reality check. So I appreciate that you made it a very local and comfortable debate.*

In one instance, after a one-on-one interview, a minister arranged for me to visit with his denominational area group and when he introduced me he said that he had found our conversation very helpful and challenging, even remarking that when he agreed to the interview he thought it would be over in twenty minutes but was surprised at how much he had to say on the topic and how much it made him think.

Towards the end of the groups and interviews, the ministers were invited to give feedback on the process. Several mentioned that it was helpful to meet with others to discuss what might otherwise have felt like a heavy topic, many asked for models or stories of church-based spatial justice and some advised about ways to improve the church space inventory survey as a self-help tool for churches to use themselves.

6.2.2 Researcher feedback

I remained in contact with many, but not all, of the ministers, throughout 2020 and into 2021. As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed there were several touch points to keep engaging the topic of this research. Each minister will receive a copy of this research report and be invited to comment on it before it enters the public realm. I am currently planning a feedback session with all the ministers who took part in the study and will encourage them to bring anyone with them who they feel would benefit from engaging with it.

6.2.3 Questions and commitments for future emancipatory research

Lynch (1999:60-61) proposes two techniques in emancipatory research that can further the aims of equality and liberation for the participants: ‘Research Coalitions’ where those being researched ‘would have the opportunity to define research agendas relating to their own lives and ‘Learning Partnerships’ which are ‘mutual education forums for academics, researchers and community personnel, so that each could share their definitions and interpretations of issues and events’.

I was recently told a story by a previously homeless man who described how two of his homeless friends had taken a long walk down what is known as Main Road, which runs through the Southern Suburbs. As they walked, they counted the churches and identified land and buildings that they felt could be well used to solve the issue of homelessness in the area. They would have walked past or very close to several of the churches in this study and dozens that were not in this sample group. Would a Research Coalition and Learning Partnership be possible with people like them and willing church partners? This of course begs a question about willing church partners.

Lynch’s commitments in emancipatory research are to mitigate the negative effects of extractive research done with oppressed communities (cf Lynch 1999) but Swartz (2016:263) also applies the method calling it ‘research as intervention’ with ‘those who are in a position to act on injustice’ meaning those with resources to use for restitutive purposes. Swartz (2016:263-264) describes a process of interviewing and research feedback where she aimed to not just get data from the participants, but also to draw people, if they were interested and willing, into new ways of seeing their positioning in

relation to injustice. I adopted a similar posture while interviewing and running focus groups.

I discovered that the primary obstacle to an emancipatory approach to research with such groups is to find participants who would name the need for research that may pinpoint ways in which they are operating in unjust ways or benefitting from injustice. I initiated this research from a sense that enough suburban churches were asking questions about spatial (in)justice to justify the emancipatory commitments of this project. That is to say, no one church or group of churches named a felt need for the research as I designed it, but I based the design on experience with churches over many years. But what of the churches who did not respond to my invitation and how might I reach them? And what of the thousands of other suburban churches in the city, for future engagements? For the research recommendations laid out in the following section to be feasible and worth pursuing, ongoing fostering work must take place such that churches, themselves, will start to identify the need for such research and emancipatory actions.

The aims of the emancipatory approach of this study extended long past the end of the interviews and focus groups. It was at the heart of my work with churches in 2020 with those who considered what to do with their ‘locked down’ premises and it continues with many other practitioners to this day, making me hopeful that we will be able to pursue some of these ideas together with churches as we collectively navigate the ongoing crises of inequality that has been so harshly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent with emancipatory approaches to research that are committed to research that serves social transformation, that remain committed to the approach until transformation occurs (cf Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge 2008:216-222).

6.3 Potential future research that this study has surfaced

In South Africa churches exist as a multitude of expressions in relation to land, property and space, and (in)justice. They may be land-owners with predominantly land-owning congregants, or landless with predominantly landless congregants, and a wide

spectrum of every kind of church space and every kind of congregant between these. This research has looked into one small part of the picture, through a sample group of suburban churches, to contribute to knowledge. Findings from this study can be tested and found applicable beyond this sample group. I propose an ongoing, refined and strengthened emancipatory research approach to the subject of churches and spatial justice with the explicit aims of continuing to foster the praxis, through employing the commitments of emancipatory research and the framework of the praxis cycle as a guide.

Following these frameworks, I propose further research be undertaken to contribute to even greater understanding and ongoing transformation. These research topics include:

- Decision-making in church leadership structures: how does this hinder or foster a praxis of spatial justice and who makes up the decision making powers of churches?
- Homelessness and the suburban church: how do suburban churches and homeless communities work with one another towards spatially just use of church spaces in addressing suburban homelessness
- Church building usage before and during the Covid pandemic and towards a post Covid world
- Futuring church space: A study into new church building projects, and how churches are approaching/ could approach new building projects with a spatial justice agenda
- An emancipatory approach to church land auditing in suburban areas towards a praxis of spatial justice with underutilized or unused buildings and space
- Suburb-specific research – identify all the churches in the area to journey through the praxis cycle in their neighbourhood with spatial justice as the lens
- Denomination-specific research – study the spatial justice praxis of individual denominations

- Interfaith collaborations towards spatial justice
- The relationship between churches and urban land rights movements

Collectively, this will greatly contribute to our understanding of spatial (in)justice and ongoing steps required for a church-based praxis ‘with the city’.

6.4 Conclusion

De Beer and Swart (2014:7) propose a ‘new urban theological praxis-agenda’ for the praxis of South African churches and theological institutions, emphasizing that the core task, and legitimacy, of such an agenda, depends on a concerted effort to ‘make a noticeable contribution towards meeting the existing gaps in knowledge’. This contribution needs to ‘expand its methodological scope and expertise, and to show a new willingness to, in a learning mode, involve itself in new spaces of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary scholarship’ (de Beer and Swart 2014:7).

Having identified gaps in this ‘urban theological praxis-agenda’ specifically regarding urban church-owned land, suburban churches in South Africa and more explicitly their relationship to notions of spatial (in)justice, I embarked upon this study drawing from a variety of areas of scholarship and using innovative methodologies to contribute to closing the gap. The integrated lenses offered in this chapter speak into this gap.

In Chapter Three I spoke about churches living with spatial amnesia and churches living as memorialized space. The reality that I discovered through this study is that most suburban churches hold a combination of both. Even more so, we live in a city where parts of our society live with this amnesia, willingly or otherwise, while the majority live with the painful memories, and current injustices, of decades and centuries of exclusion and removal. Late one afternoon, just after I had finished writing reflections on the social analysis of Cape Town’s spatial divisions, I took a moment of quiet on the balcony of my suburban apartment, a space I call home in a suburb from where many people were moved and even more were always excluded, and still are. Through the quiet of the moment, the sound of a man singing loudly and clearly as he walked down the street reached my ears:

I know the people of Hanover street,
I know their faces by the sound of their feet,
I have been sitting here for so many years,
But nobody sees a blind man's tears.

As his voice faded down the street, I tried to recall the origin of this familiar song. They were the words of a song from *District Six: The Musical* (n.d.). Hanover Street was the centre of District Six in the inner city of Cape Town, the location of forced removals and demolition, whose story is told in that musical. It is where the blind man who 'sees' sits and sings these words as a reminder of what can never be forgotten: the people, the places, the tears.

Perhaps I needed the reminder that long before this was an academic endeavour, this was a story about the tears and histories of the majority of people with whom I share the city. We too share the dream that there could be a story of redemption and justice told with and by the churches in our midst. I offer this study as one step closer to that dream.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP/ SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION:

- Introductions
- Goal of research
- Introduce history of the study and concept of spatial justice
- Explain informed consent form

DISCUSSION OPENER:

Describe a moment/s in your churches history when you most saw the physical space of your church (buildings and grounds) come alive in relationship to the immediate neighbourhood around you.

SCENARIOS EXERCISE:

Here are several scenarios describing different church points of contact with the subject of this research (in focus group they are stuck up on the board; in interview the eight scenarios are handed to the participant)

- read them through and pick one that you would like to answer, one that feels closest to home

- think about the response that you, with your church leadership, might give to the questions provoked by the scenarios.

- if there is nothing in these scenarios that feels familiar enough to reflect on then reflect on something similar that does, and describe it

- if there is a real case study that any of these scenarios remind you of (past or present) that you would be happy to describe, you may do that instead

Scenario 1

You recently did a survey with your congregation asking them what political and social issues concerned them the most. You were interested to hear that “Land Expropriation without compensation” and “an increase of street homelessness in the neighbourhood” featured in many of their responses. One family responded with a personal story of pain and deferred hope around a land claim from their time of being forcibly removed from their home during Apartheid that has still not been resolved. How do you think your local congregation can address these concerns?

Scenario 2

The “social transformation/outreach/justice and mercy” team at your church hosts regular discussion nights. They invite someone to come and speak about a topic pertaining to issues of injustice and then they host a panel from the church that responds to the topic with theological and pastoral reflections. Last month they hosted a speaker from a local urban land rights group and the discussion got quite heated.

Describe the kind of differing voices you think would emerge on such a night and what some of the panels responses might have been.

Scenario 3

You recently hosted a month of prayer and fasting at your church, with weekly gatherings for people to share what they sense about the future of the church. During this time, the topic of the church buildings emerged. Many people felt convicted that many of the buildings are not being used enough of the time. However, there were many different thoughts and suggestions that emerged about how to address this…

Describe a few possible suggestions you imagine would emerge from your church membership and leadership

Scenario 4

You are approached by a group of students in your church. They have been having conversations about land and spatial injustice and inequality in South Africa. They have some concrete suggestions for the church:

- that the church become actively involved in learning from and supporting urban land rights movements,
- some of the church buildings be available for affordable accommodation for those who could otherwise not afford to live in the area,
- that the church earnestly plan how to do restitution with the land they own

How do the leadership respond to these questions and suggestions?

Scenario 5

A couple in your church has a large property with several garden cottages and space indoors. They have recently felt that they should open their home to accommodate people without houses and they are asking the church to help them discern how best to do this.

What do you advise them?

Scenario 6

You have recently become aware of several congregants facing eviction from the nearby council houses that they live in, as well as ongoing evictions and demolition of “informal” dwellings in a nearby informal settlement that has developed under a bridge close to your church.

Several concerned congregants highlight this at a church meeting, asking what the church community is going to do about this?

What kind of response do you think your church leadership will discern?

Scenario 7

A family has just moved into the neighbourhood and they come to meet you for coffee at your church. Their grandparents were forcibly removed from the same

neighbourhood in the 1960's and they explain how their return to the suburb is one filled with mixed emotions. They are looking for a local church to attend and are interested to know how your congregation is journeying with the story of your shared history in the neighbourhood.
Describe the conversation that follows …

Scenario 8
A relationship is forming between your church and a church in Philippi when disaster strikes a week before Easter. A fire destroys the Philippi church buildings and even causes damage to some congregants' homes.
Several of the church members require emergency accommodation in order to keep their jobs in the City.

How do you see your church congregation and leadership responding to this?

SURVEY EXERCISE:
Here is a short survey about the community, location, physical space and usage of your church
As you look at the survey, please share some responses you may fill in for your church
Please also comment on what you think is missing or problematic in the survey

SHOW THE SURVEY ON THE SCREEN/LAPTOP

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScImfCMk9ar8K2t5V9okqiJC1ipr0mxRD0WZVhGHlH_QN82yg/viewform?vc=0&c=0&w=1

THEOLOGICAL QUESTION:
Thinking about our discussions to this point (stimulated by opening question, scenarios exercise and survey exercise):
(a) what theological ideas came to mind while you were reflecting?

(b) what theological ideas and resources do you think inform your responses?
CONCLUSION: Please share any more thoughts that you think are important I welcome your ideas, feedback, concerns, feelings about the subject of the research Are there opportunities for us to stay in touch about the content of what we have discussed? Personal: make notes about any resources or follow up to send individual ministers

APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Department of Practical Theology

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of study: "Fostering a praxis of spatial justice in suburban churches: An emancipatory approach "

Researcher: Caroline Powell **Student number:** 17395382
Masters research student
Contact details: Tel: 084 8591669 caroline@warehouse.org.za

You are cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely your role as a leader of a church in the sample area of the study. Please ensure that you have read, understood and signed this document *before* the start of the study. You are welcome to contact the researcher at any time for questions of clarification before signing this document.

- **Purpose of the study**: The purpose of the study is to understand the praxis of suburban churches in Cape Town with relation to the concept of spatial justice. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the findings on request. No participant's names will be used in the final publication.

- **Duration of the study**: The study will be conducted over a period of four months and the projected date of completing with be November 2019.

- **Research procedures**: The study will combine literature studies with a number of methods to be used in the course of the field work:

- One - two participatory focus group at the premises of The Warehouse Trust, in Wetton, Cape Town: participatory group sessions in which participants help construct understanding and knowledge around the topic
- In-depth interviews with up to ten church leaders

- **What is expected of you**: It is the hope that the process of research and the information and knowledge gathered will be of value to you, your church and community. Therefore, the research is designed to be participatory for those who would like to remain engaged. Once you have given your consent to participate, one or all of the following would be expected:
  - Participation in a **Participatory Workshop** (3-4 hours): this is a participatory discussion session in which the researcher will facilitate individual reflections, small group conversations and large group discussions around the topic
  - A **face to face interview**, which is an in-depth conversation with just you or a **small group conversation** with people from your church, no more than 6 people, including or excluding yourself

The researcher welcomes your full participation in the study through engaging with the questions and group work to the full extent that you feel able. You are free to discuss your participation with anyone in your church and are welcome, but not required, to gather their reflections prior to engaging with the study, or to invite them into the process. It is my hope that your involvement will inspire praxis and connection with others beyond the scope of this study. You will be invited to a presentation where the results of the study will be shared and discussed and the researcher will also be willing to present the findings to your church at your convenience.

- **Your rights**: Your participation in this study is very important. You may, however choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You, as participant, may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify any issues pertaining to this research. The respondent as well as the researcher must each keep a copy of this signed document.

- **Confidentiality**: The results of the study will be written up as part of a Masters dissertation that will be submitted to the University of Pretoria, and will be available publically in various forms through church-related networks associated with The Warehouse Trust and possibly through academic networks associated with the University of Pretoria (for example journal articles, public presentations, online links). Your name and the name of your church will be kept confidential in

the written report. However, in order to contribute to the body of work related to the specific area of study, the churches that take part in the study and the contexts in which they exist will be described alongside the emerging data. If requested by a specific person / organization, data will be treated confidentially during the group work. Should at any point you wish to withdraw from the study, the relevant data will be destroyed.

- **Benefits**: The researcher and related organisations and academic institute will not receive any direct financial benefit as a result of conducting this study, and there is no financial remuneration for taking part in this study.

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.
I understand that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Researcher contact details: Cell:084 859 1669 e-mail: caroline@warehouse.org.za

VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT *(Only applicable if respondent cannot write)*

I, the researcher, have read and have explained fully to the respondent, named

_____ and his/her relatives, the letter of introduction.
The respondent indicated that he/she understands that he/she will be free to withdraw at any time.

Respondent: _____

Researcher: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

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