



*P.C.J. Nel & W.J. Schoeman*

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# LEADERSHIP IN RURAL CONGREGATIONS AND COMMUNITIES: AN EXPLORATION IN THE NORTH-EASTERN FREE STATE<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Rural communities and congregations cannot simply be overlooked. Communities in the north-eastern Free State are typical rural towns with a strong emphasis on agricultural activities and less emphasis in terms of processing products and other activities. Over the past few decades, rural communities have experienced many changes in terms of depopulation, the decline of the rural economy, poverty, and unemployment. Congregations in rural communities and their leadership cannot escape these changes that affect their functioning and existence. The key research question is thus: What is the congregational leadership's opinion and argument about leadership in both the congregation and the community? The research indicated that a shift is taking place as far as the minister's role in the leadership of the congregation is concerned. The congregational leadership needs to develop a missional perspective that brings the wider community into the ministry of the congregation. Although there is an awareness in respect of the missional calling of the church and the congregation, the change is still limited and there is room for a greater and more deliberate involvement of the congregation and its leadership within the community.

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1 Part of this article is based on “'n Begrip van leierskap in die gemeente en gemeenskap binne die Ring van Harrismith: 'n Prakties-teologiese bydrae”, an unpublished MTh dissertation, Bloemfontein: University of the Free State by P.C.J. Nel, 2013.

*P.C.J. Nel, Research fellow, Dept. Practical Theology, University of the Free State, e-mail: [pcjnel@gmail.com](mailto:pcjnel@gmail.com)*

*Prof. W.J. Schoeman, Dept. Practical Theology, University of the Free State, South Africa, e-mail: [schoemanw@ufs.ac.za](mailto:schoemanw@ufs.ac.za)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural communities and congregations cannot simply be overlooked, as 37.8% of the South African population resided in rural areas in 2011 (South African Institute of Race Relations 2012:35). People who reside, worship and work in rural areas interact with each other. It is difficult to define rural communities simply in terms of population size. South African rural towns are characterised by their interaction with neighbouring commercial and agricultural communities (Toerien & Marais 2012:5). Communities in the north-eastern Free State are typical rural towns with a strong emphasis on agricultural activities and less emphasis in terms of processing products and other activities. They could be described as typical “church towns” from a previous century (Toerien & Marais 2012:11).

Over the past few decades, rural communities have experienced many changes, “rural depopulation, particularly by white people, and the associated contraction of small town services, were shown as examples of the rapid urbanization of the country and the decline of the once dominant rural economy” (Hoogendoorn & Nel 2012:22). Yet rural towns play an important role in providing welfare services and care for the poorer sections of the community. This leads to a redefinition of the functions and activities in rural communities. Congregations in rural communities cannot escape these changes that affect their functioning and existence (cf. Hendriks 2012). This article focuses on the north-eastern Free State and, in particular, on the role of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) congregations in the rural areas. *Kerkspieël* 2010 indicates that approximately 29.8% of the members and 45.7% of the congregations of the DRC reside in rural areas. In the Free State, 43.8% of the members and 54.9% of the congregations of the DRC reside in rural areas. There is thus, in the rural areas, a significant representation of members and congregations of the DRC, especially in the Free State.

Niemandt (2013:14-15) indicates that there is an urgent call for a new kind of leadership, including in the church. The church needs to take note of these leadership challenges. The Harrismith circuit<sup>2</sup> of the DRC includes the following congregations: Cornelia, Harrismith, Harrismith Kerkenberg, Frankfort, Memel, Tweeling, Villiers, Vrede, Vrede-Wes and Warden. This present research focuses on the congregations’ understanding of their role and leadership in the rural community. Congregations are contextual realities that cannot elude their missional call and interaction with their context (Schoeman 2014:e-source). The key research question is thus: What is the congregational leadership’s opinion and argument about

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2 A circuit is a group of local churches, served by a team of ministers.

leadership in both the congregation and the community? This addresses past and present changes and refers to leadership challenges facing the congregation and the community.

The background question, rightly or wrongly, is whether the DRC and its leadership are still in a key or central position in the rural areas, or have congregations retracted from the public sphere? It may be that congregations within the Harrismith circuit understand the management and maintenance of the congregation as their primary leadership function. This leadership direction increasingly focuses inwardly on the survival of the congregation. The congregations' focus on the community may no longer be from a holistic understanding of the *missio Dei*, but is most likely linked to social service and projects as part of a limited understanding of a congregation's mission. This limited understanding of the missional focus of a congregation is not alien to the positioning of the DRC congregations in a changing context (Schoeman 2012:e-source). The following question is subsequently raised: Is this an issue within the specific region and context of congregations in the Harrismith circuit? This highlights the first praxis movement (Browning 1991:7).

## 2. THE FIRST PRAXIS MOVEMENT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO PRACTICE

It is necessary to first examine the methodology of the first praxis movement before quantitatively and qualitatively exploring the specific practice. The geography, municipal areas, population and composition of the population, as well as unemployment figures of the Harrismith circuit shall be investigated quantitatively. From a qualitative perspective, the ministers in the congregations of the Harrismith circuit shall be asked to complete a questionnaire. The findings of both the quantitative and the qualitative data shall be reported to complete the first praxis movement.

### 2.1 Methodology of the first praxis movement

Action research was chosen as methodology with its focus on "the interaction between research methodology and solving local, practical problems" (Ebersohn *et al.* 2009:124), as research strategy for the first praxis movement. The following characteristics are, in this instance, suitable for action research: the practical nature of action research; participation in research; focus on changes; affinity with the reflexive nature of the praxis movement, and its use in communities of faith (Ebersohn *et al.* 2009:124-126). This first practical theology movement, with the option of action research, also matches Osmer's (2008:33) first task

of practical theology: the descriptive-empirical task – *What is going on?* Both the quantitative and the qualitative methods are used in order to answer Osmer’s descriptive-empirical task as part of the first praxis movement. We shall discuss first, the quantitative data of the context and general demography of the Harrismith circuit shall be discussed and, secondly, the qualitative data obtained from two rounds of questionnaires completed by ministers of the congregations under discussion.

## 2.2 Quantitative data: The context of the first praxis movement

The Harrismith circuit is geographically situated within the north-eastern quadrant of the Free State, *i.e.*, 10.6% of South Africa’s surface area. The following towns form part of the Harrismith circuit: Cornelia, Harrismith, Frankfort, Memel, Tweeling, Villiers, Vrede and Warden. These towns form part of two district municipalities, namely Thabo Mofutsanyane and Fezile Dabi, in which three local municipalities are responsible for the towns that form part of the Harrismith circuit:

- Maluti a Phofung: Harrismith
- Mafube: Frankfort, Villiers and Tweeling
- Pumelela: Cornelia, Memel, Vrede and Warden

Of the total population of South Africa, 5.37% reside in the Free State. Only 0.85% (less than 1%) of South Africa’s population reside in the municipal regions within which the congregations under discussion are situated. However, in terms of the total population of the Free State, it comprises 16.08% (Statistics South Africa 2012a:e-source). Although the article focuses on a small percentage of the total South African population, it may serve as case study of similar regions in South Africa.

Table 1 illustrates the composition of the population in the various municipality regions as well as the growth of the different race groups between the Censuses of 2001 and 2011, respectively.

Table 1: Composition of the population and growth of different race groups

Municipal regions	Black		Coloured		Indian		White		Total	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Maluti a Phofung	35 5207	32 9795	404	684	399	776	4 539	4 256	360 549	33 5511
	-7.16%		+69.3%		+94.49%		-6.23%		-6.94%	
Phumelela	48 352	43 773	101	193	24	167	3 452	3 499	51 929	47 632
	-9.47%		+91.09%		+595.83%		+1.36%		-8.27%	
Mafube	52 567	53 167	269	372	34	156	3 768	4 064	56 638	57 759
	+1.14%		+38.29%		+358.82%		+7.86%		+1.98%	
Total	45 6126	42 6735	774	1 249	457	1 099	11 759	11 819	469 116	440 902
	-6.44%		+61.37%		+140.48%		+0.51%		-6.01%	

As far as the changes in the various race groups between the two census records of 2001 and 2011 are concerned, it is interesting to note that both the Black (-6.44%) and the White (+0.51%) populations did not change drastically. The Coloured population increased by a very interesting 61.37%, and the Indian population increased by 140.48% in all three municipal districts. There is no doubt that these figures show that the composition of the population in the various municipal regions has changed and will most probably continue to change. The influence of urbanization, especially of the Black population, cannot be under-estimated.

How economically active are the residents of the three municipal regions? Table 2 illustrates the unemployment figure from the 2011 census (Statistics South Africa 2012b:e-source) for the 441,432 residents of the three municipalities in the Harrismith circuit, as a percentage of the population of the respective municipalities compared to 2001.

Table 2: Unemployment figures from the 2011 census

Municipality	Unemployment (%)	
	2001	2011
Maluti a Phofung	57.5	42
Phumelela	34.2	25
Mafube	45	33

It appears from Table 2 that there was a drop in unemployment figures between the two Census periods. However, on close inspection, there is cause for concern: the average annual total drop in unemployment is only 1.22% for the three municipal regions under discussion. DRC congregations

need to take note of the challenges that unemployment presents to them and the rural community.

### 2.3 Demographic information of congregations

In light of the broad geographical and demographic portrayal of the north-eastern Free State, the next question concerns the demographic changes within the congregations of the Harrismith circuit. Table 3 illustrates the demography of the congregations under discussion between 2003 and 2013 (DRC Yearbook 2003 and DRC Yearbook 2013).

Table 3: Demography of the congregations 2003-2013

Year	Congregations	Baptised members <sup>2</sup>	Confessing members <sup>3</sup>	Ministers	Church council members
2003	10	1578	5229	13	527
2013	10	1101	4228	11	414

The demographic profile and changes in the municipalities under discussion portray a different picture to that of the DRC congregation’s membership. Table 3 indicates a decrease in the total number of members. However, this cannot be attributed to the depopulation of the rural areas. As indicated in Table 1, the White population increased by 0.51% in the three regions. The decreasing DRC membership cannot be explained in terms of a decreasing White population.

Nel (2013:24-38) indicates that, over the past five years, the congregations had a worship attendance averaging 50% of the total membership for the month of February. Nel also indicated, for the same period, that the income of 9 of the 10 congregations increased. The sharp rise in income since 2010 cannot be attributed to an inflation adjustment, but rather to good agricultural conditions over the past few years. With reference to Hendriks (2004:179), this rise in the congregations’ income may reflect on the dedication of the members.

The demographic data from the three municipal districts and the data from the DRC congregations of the circuit of Harrismith provide the

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3 Baptized members, in the case of the DRC, refer mostly to youth members that were baptized as infants, before their confirmation at approximately the age of 16 years.

4 Confessing members, in the case of the DRC, refer to members older than 16 year after confirmation.

background for the first praxis movement. The first praxis movement is an exploration of leadership in the rural congregations and communities of north-eastern Free State.

## 2.4 Qualitative data: The first round of the investigation

Congregations have a theological identity, but are also situated within specific geographical and contextual realities (Schoeman 2014:e-source). Congregations are realities that exist within specific contexts and this was explained by the quantitative demographic data. The second stage of the first praxis movement is to examine the congregations in more detail. During a circuit workshop on 5 March 2013, the ministers of the DRC congregations completed a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to answer the question as to what is going on (Osmer 2008:33) within congregations as far as leadership in both the congregation and the community is concerned. This research builds on the research conducted by Van Schalkwyk and Schoeman (2013:781-799) in the southern Free State using the same questions. Each minister had to respond to the following open-ended questions:

Regarding the *congregation*:

- What real changes/shifts took place in terms of resources?
- Describe the role and change of leadership.
- What are the biggest challenges in your congregation?

Regarding the *community*:

- What real changes/shifts took place in terms of resources?
- Describe the role and change of leadership.
- What are the biggest challenges in your community?

The responses of the ministers were processed and summarised. The same questions and the processed summarised responses were again sent to the ministers concerned, with a request for them to react. Observations, from the two rounds of questions,<sup>5</sup> by the ministers of the congregations are summarised below with a view to answering Osmer's first question of praxis as a reflection on the first praxis movement. The summary reflects the various sections of the questionnaires.

*Resources* (congregation and community): The ministers quantitatively confirmed the drop in membership numbers as provided by the quantitative

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5 For the comprehensive responses of the two rounds, see Nel 2013:22-37.

data, and attributed this to members passing away, an increasing number of weekend farmers, emigration, and inactive members. Although finances increased in nine of the ten congregations, the ministers raised concern about the substantial increase in expenses. Resources in the wider community are also under pressure. They mentioned the general decline in service delivery, with specific reference to the decline in tertiary road maintenance. Infrastructures are not maintained. People are simply regarded as resources. They mentioned that the changes and growth in poverty and unemployment present great challenges for the communities.

*Leadership* (congregation and community): From a qualitative perspective, ministers still play a key leadership role within the congregations. In some instances, ministers are expected to fulfil this key role as leaders within the congregations. The ministers must also fulfil a strong leadership role as far as empowerment and equipping of new leaders are concerned. In three of the congregations, it was positively mentioned that members come forward and take up leadership positions, for example ministry leaders and the chairman of the church board who is not the minister. It was also mentioned by way of information that the challenge in terms of leadership in congregations does not mean the absence of leaders. There are potential leaders in the congregations, but for various reasons, these leaders do not come forward to take on leadership. Even in the *communities*, there are leaders who do not come forward. Poor leadership in the community is an indication that leaders do not want to take up the role of leader or do not feel fit for the task.

*Challenges* (congregation and community): Strong mention is made of the challenges in respect of spiritual growth and care of members within the congregations. This growth and care is also linked to leadership, as this task is left to the minister. The result is obvious from the qualitative data: no time to pay attention to those members who are not involved. It was predominantly mentioned that the challenges of the community are also the challenges of the congregations. These challenges are expressed in the drop in number of members and finances. It appears that involvement in, and with the community is something for which the ministers show a specific awareness and sensitivity, but congregations themselves are changing direction. Poverty in the *communities* is one of the greatest challenges – government pensions, people with physical, mental and emotional needs as well as children suffering from poverty. A shortage of work opportunities and a government that does not comply with its responsibilities are two reasons for the challenges in respect of poverty. The violence observed in the communities often goes hand-in-hand with poverty.

### 3. SECOND THEORY MOVEMENT: INVESTIGATION INTO THEORY

According to Browning (1991:7), the next movement of praxis is the movement of practice to theory. Osmer's (2008:4) second and third tasks of practical theology complement this movement to theory: the second task of practical theology is the *interpretative task* that examines the theoretical reasons for what is observed in practice. The normative task of practical theology (the third task) asks what is supposed to happen in practice. These two tasks of practical theology are related to each other and are discussed as part of this second theory movement. We shall first examine a missional framework and then some points of departure of leadership in an attempt to interpret the practice of the first praxis movement in light of this theory.

#### 3.1 A missional framework

Guder (2000:9) explains the development of a missional theology as a reaction to the Christendom paradigm, which understood the mission of the church as "the outward expansion of the Christian culture that was the established religious force in Europe". World War I (1914-1919) challenged this understanding of the mission of the church in the world. The western countries that took the Christian faith into the world are now responsible for large-scale, unkind war, pain, murder, suffering and injustice. This challenges the church to reconsider its missional understanding and role in society. This ultimately culminated in Karl Barth's description of mission, at the *Brandenburg Missionary Conference* in 1933, as *missio Dei* – the mission of God to the world.

Within the *missio Dei*'s framework of mission, the church is no longer the sender of mission, but mission is "an activity of God Himself [and] an attribute of God" (Bosch 2005:389-390). *Missio Dei* is a movement by God to the world in the recreation of His Son Jesus Christ; in sending the Holy Spirit, and in the resultant sending of the church into the world. Claassen and Niemandt (2012:4) point out that the sent church should discover that God is, under all circumstances, working in the world. The mission and joy of the church lies in the discovery of God's work in the world and how He is using the church in this regard.

What then is the relevance of the *missio Dei*? How does mission make a concrete difference in the world? Bosch (2005:379) puts this question in the context of the consequences of World War I when, he believes, the world in dire need and the church need to rediscover the local church. The local congregation, as part of the *missio Dei*, could make a difference by means

of medical, food and other means of care. Claasen and Niemandt (2012:7) call this “missional community – that is people who come together to live out the mission to which God has called them on earth”. The relevance of a missional theology, the point of contact between the *missio Dei* theory and praxis, is the call and instruction of the local congregation. This provides congregations with a framework in which they can realise their call in the world, also in the north-eastern Free State.

### 3.2 Some points of departure in terms of leadership

The definition of leadership is not so straightforward, because context and culture are two variables that consistently influence a definition of leadership. This is not an attempt to develop a comprehensive definition or description of leadership, but rather to examine two points of departure for all leadership styles, definitions and preferences, namely leadership influences the individual and leadership is a reaction to contextual changes.

Leadership aims, among others, to influence individuals or groups (Gibbs 2005:25). Dalglish (2009:6) talks of leadership as a “process of influencing”. Irrespective of whether a leader prefers an autocratic, bureaucratic, ministering, transformative or transactional style, a process of influence operates behind this choice of style and approaches leadership. By using various methods and activities, a leader attempts to influence people and send them on a particular course. Congregation leaders cannot avoid this.

Leaders are persons who must react. The “leader in today’s world will need to know how to respond” (Caroll 2006:128). Leaders must be able to articulate, interpret and react appropriately to the reality around them. As mentioned earlier, the leader’s reaction has to do with the process of influencing people, and interpreting and reacting to the context. One of the most important tasks of leadership is to define and describe reality; to ask questions to describe the commitment that is required and the kind of behaviour that is needed in order to fulfil a certain task (cf. Jacobsen 2009:1). “A set of circumstances must be interpreted, and will be interpreted, before we can respond to it appropriately” (Shuster 2009:17). The congregational leaders must interpret the changing context and should react to it in an appropriate way by asking questions and testing commitment.

In light of the above theoretical background, the praxis of the first movement can be interpreted by referring to the missional framework and some aspects of leadership.

### 3.3 Interaction between praxis and theory

The empirical data of the first praxis movement should engage with the theoretical insights of the second movement. This interaction between praxis and theory should contribute to a better understanding. As mentioned earlier, the ministers indicated that the drop in membership numbers of the various congregations constitutes a challenge. One could expect the drop in membership numbers to be linked to the depopulation of the rural areas, or not? It is surprising to note that the White population numbers increased in the three municipal regions, whereas the numbers of Coloured and Indian populations increased the most. It appears that the “depopulation” of the rural areas does not provide a straightforward answer to the decline in the membership of the DRC congregations.

A missional understanding of the ministry and role of the congregation widens the scope and work-space of the congregation. The critical question, in this instance, is: Do the congregations in the Harrismith circuit fully understand their missional call? Are the congregations and their leadership fully in touch with the changing situation?

It is obvious from the first praxis’ empirical findings that leadership’s role and influence in the congregations and communities are not adequate. This is not an indication that there are no leaders; however, various factors are mentioned that may prevent leaders from coming forward and taking up leadership: no time; fear of criticism, and a feeling of incompetence. This is another point of contact with the second theory movement – leadership’s endeavour to influence people to move from one place to another, especially within a changing context. The critical question is whether the congregational leadership correctly understands the community as a reality to engage with. If leadership only focuses on maintaining the congregation, the community context at large will likely not be adequately understood. This could explain the lack of growth. Unfortunately, the first praxis round does not provide sufficient information for further understanding the role of leadership. For this reason, the third praxis movement attempts to further explore and understand the meaning of leadership in the congregations.

## 4. THIRD PRAxis MOVEMENT: A SECOND INVESTIGATION INTO PRAxis

The second investigation into the praxis consists of focus-group discussions. The choice of two congregations will first be motivated; this will be followed by a brief explanation of the nature of focus-group research and the questions that were asked in the focus groups. Thirdly, some

conclusions, within the framework of the third praxis movement, will be discussed in order to enhance the credibility of this research.

#### 4.1 The DRC congregations of Warden and Memel

The second investigation into the praxis is necessary to further explore the empirical data of the first investigation; a richer understanding of the role of the leadership in the congregation is needed. Two congregations of the Harrismith circuit were selected with whom focus-group discussions were held. In this instance, the point of departure was more appreciative (cf. Schoeman & Van den Berg 2011); therefore the focus on growing congregations. The DRC congregations of Warden and Memel were chosen from a perspective of appreciative research: both rural congregations have a growing income basis and have experienced qualitative and quantitative growth over the recent years.

#### 4.2 Methodology of focus-group discussions

Bryman (2001:347) as well as Berg and Lune (2012:171) indicate that the media and marketing research encouraged focus-group discussions by focusing on audiences' reactions to television and radio programmes, films, and news articles. The aim was to establish the public's reaction and opinion. The premise of focus-group discussions is that interaction between members of the group will offer a range of responses that will inform a specific topic (Nieuwenhuis 2009:90). Focus-group discussions are not group interviews; they do not focus on a question-answer method for obtaining data; they are rather a form of discussion that focuses on the "interaction within the group who discuss the topic" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2010:376). Interaction between members of the group forms part of the method of data-gathering (Berg & Lune 2012:164).

The next question to be answered is: Why make use of the method of focus-group discussions in this third praxis movement? Botma, Greeff, Mulaundzi and Wright (2010:211) explain that focus-group discussions support data that rely on another primary source for obtaining data; focus-group discussions can also form part of a mixed-methods methodology that includes two or more methods to collect data. For the purposes of this research, focus-group discussions are used, because they serve as supporting method for the rounds of questionnaires to be completed by the ministers, and also form part of the mixed methodology for collecting data.

For further answers as to the reason for the use of focus-group discussions, refer to Berg & Lune (2012:176) who are of the opinion that focus-group discussions are especially suited in the following areas:

“Organizations and organizational structures, social roles among group members”. The advantage of focus-group discussions is that “participants are able to build on each other’s ideas and comments to provide an in-depth view not attainable from individual interviews” (Nieuwenhuis 2009:90). This presents possibilities for further exploring the research as part of the third praxis movement.

### 4.3 Composition of focus groups and questions

In order to achieve the aim of the research, the leadership of both congregations was approached for a focus-group discussion. Each of these leaderships consists of six management committee members: leader and deputy leader elder, leader and deputy leader deacon, minister of the congregation, and the church secretary. All six members of the management committee were present at the focus-group discussion with the DRC congregation of Warden. Not all the members of the management committee of the DRC congregation of Memel were present, because the deputy leader deacon and church secretary could not attend the meeting.

The focus groups of both congregations were asked the following questions:

- As leaders of the congregation, what do you think about the role of leadership of/in the congregation?
- As leaders of the congregation, what do you think about the leaders and leadership within the community? What role should both the congregation leaders and the minister play in the community?
- What is/should be the role of the congregation in the community?

### 4.4 Some findings based on focus-group discussions

The data of the two focus-group discussions were transcribed and coded (Nieuwenhuis 2009:89-90). The following is a brief summary of the groups’ responses to each of the three questions.<sup>6</sup>

*As leaders of the congregation, what do you think about the role of leadership of/in the congregation?* The focus-group discussions show a sensitivity to the minister’s leadership role. There is a shift away from a central leadership role and management of the congregation to allow the minister to focus on that for which s/he is equipped to do. Both focus-group discussions highlight continuity and empowerment: leaders must be equipped and empowered to take the lead in future.

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6 For a comprehensive report on the focus-group discussions see Nel 2013:62-73.

*As leaders of the congregation, what do you think about the leaders and leadership within the community? What role should both the congregational leaders and the minister play in the community?* It is noteworthy that both groups did not incisively mention leadership in the community. The discussions easily deviated from the specific question. It is possible to conclude that hardly any consideration or attention is given to leadership in the community. From the responses to the question, it would appear that the interest in a leadership role for, or by the congregational leadership in the community is not a priority for both focus groups.

*What is/should be the role of the congregation in the community?* It is noteworthy that both focus groups referred to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The DRC congregation of Memel uses this parable as proof that the congregation does not consider boundaries in its involvement in the community. The DRC congregation of Warden uses this parable with reference to a song by Coenie de Villiers – “Katedraal” (Cathedral) – the church has no walls and the message of the church must thus be realised in the community. Both leaderships use the parable of the Good Samaritan as instruction from God to be a neighbour for those in need. The leaders may use and understand the role of the parable, but as indicated in the previous question, a community role is not a priority for the congregational leadership.

## 5. SOME CONCLUSIONS ON LEADERSHIP IN RURAL CONGREGATIONS

The central question in this research addresses the congregation leadership’s role in the congregation and, more specifically, in the community. The contextual framework of the research includes rural congregations in the Harrismith circuit that form part of the north-eastern Free State. On the basis of the praxis-theory-praxis movements, the following remarks may apply:

- The minister’s role in congregations in a rural context is still determined by his/her fulfilling a central leadership role in the congregation and seen as such by the community.
- The internal growth and stability of the congregation is an important priority for the leadership. The empirical research indicates that there appears to be a strong emphasis in the congregational ministry on caring for the congregation, for the sake of survival.
- The context of the first praxis movement indicated that the White population was stable between 2001 and 2011, but the congregations

within the circuit of Harrismith experienced a decline in their membership. There are indications that their leadership role is changing. As members take up certain leadership positions and form part of the congregational leadership, they need to be empowered and equipped, as indicated in the focus-group discussions.

- The rural congregations' involvement in the community does not derive from a *missio Dei* perspective, but is linked to charity, with a specific leadership role within the community at large. The parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, is an important indicator of an awareness, but it should be translated into more concrete actions and behaviour.

The research indicated that a shift is taking place as far as the minister's role in the leadership of the congregation is concerned. The congregational leadership needs to develop a missional perspective that brings the wider community into the ministry of the congregation. Although there is an awareness in respect of the missional calling of the church and the congregation, the change is still limited and there is room for a greater and more deliberate involvement of the congregation and its leadership within the community. The search is for a new and contextual description of missional leadership (Niemandt 2013:50-51).

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