



Faith communities and social cohesion: The case of congregations in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa

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Abstract

After 27 years of freedom and democracy, South Africa still struggles to make the ideal of a united, democratic, free, non-racial, non-sexist society a reality. International research indicates that the lack of social cohesion is not unique to the South African context, as other countries are faced with the same challenges. Faith communities and, in particular congregations, have a role to play in addressing these challenges. The study is interdisciplinary and investigates social capital theory to see how faith communities can be repositories of social, religious, and spiritual capital that bring about social cohesion; and interrogates intergroup contact theory to see how intergroup contact theory can reduce prejudice among diverse groups in faith communities. A qualitative methodology is followed and focus group interviews are conducted in multicultural congregations of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. The study finds that faith communities can provide much needed social capital to reduce prejudice in multicultural congregations that aggregate to social cohesion in society.

Keywords

faith communities; social capital; social cohesion; intergroup contact; congregations; social justice; reconciliation; transformation

1. Introduction

South Africa celebrates 27 years of freedom and democracy, but reports indicate that we are still struggling to make the ideal of a united, democratic, free, non-racial, non-sexist society a reality. The article aims to address the critical question of how faith communities can contribute to social cohesion in South Africa and to explore it in three sub-questions, namely whether social capital theory and intergroup-contact theory can assist to build social cohesion; whether contact between church members reduces or eliminates prejudice; and whether congregations contribute to social cohesion and, if they can, how they do it.

The article reports on a study that was done in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (hereafter AFMSA) and is situated within the field of practical theology and more specifically within the area of congregational studies. The study is interdisciplinary and includes the fields of sociology, social psychology, and theology in order to provide a literature framework and a theoretical basis for the research. From the field of sociology, the study of social capital provides insights into social cohesion and how it relates to faith communities; the field of social psychology offers through intergroup contact theory a lens to interpret the reduction of prejudice; and the field of practical theology provides an understanding of congregations and the role they can play as repositories of social capital. Intersectional analysis is used to describe the diverse contexts within which multi-cultural congregations exist, and the AFMSA is chosen as a case in point to illustrate it. The empirical part of the study reports on certain findings from the case and is further discussed to provide direction for further research.

2. Engaged practical theological research

Practical theologians define their scholarship as concerned or engaged scholarship, aiming not only to describe and analyse praxis, but also to improve it (Ganzevoort & Roeland 2014). Engaged scholarship bridges the gap between (practical theology as an) academic theology and real-life situations, where practical theological ecclesiology is not done in the so-called ivory tower but produces socially engaged knowledge (Botes 2005:1).

The study is situated in the academic field of practical theology and focuses specifically on the area of congregational studies. Schoeman (2015:65) states

that a practical theological ecclesiology (or a theory of the congregation) is concerned with the functioning of the actual congregation and helps to formulate a deeper understanding of the congregation. Burger (1999:128) recognises the church as a movement initiated, sustained, and led by the Spirit (pneumatological aspect) and by humans (anthropological aspect). The congregation becomes a unique, new creation of the Spirit, and thus an alternative or contrast community (Schoeman 2014:7).

3. Interdisciplinary and intersectional

3.1 Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinarity has a variety of ways of bridging and confronting the prevailing disciplinary approaches. Huutoniemi *et al.* (2009:180) regard interdisciplinary research as influential because it attempts to have a more synthetic mutual interaction and describe it as an all-encompassing concept that includes all activities that juxtapose, apply, combine, synthesise, integrate, or transcend parts of two or more disciplines.

Osmer (2008:163) describes it as a dialogue across disciplines, a special form of rational communication in which the perspectives of two or more fields are brought into conversation. Graham (2017:4) argues that no single methodology or interpretive framework does justice to an enquiry, and an intersection of discourses brings refreshing openness to new theological meanings. Manyaka (2014:3) states that multi-disciplinarity and transversal rationality brings an interweaving of many voices, and also the interplay of social practices in a study.

3.2 Intersectional

The concept of intersectionality explains the relationship between race, gender, class, and age the best. It encompasses in a single word the simultaneous experience of multiple oppressions faced by people. Westoby and Botes (2020:41) refer to race, gender, class, and age as key elements of domination culture. Multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender are described as *interlocking oppressions*, *simultaneous oppressions*, *double jeopardy*, and *triple jeopardy*. Smith (2014) states that intersectionality seeks to challenge both feminist and antiracist theory and practice that neglect to reflect accurately the intersection of race and gender. Critical social

science demonstrates that race, gender, class, disability, etc. are not just personal identity characteristics, but also social hierarchies that shape a person's power and capabilities (Petrova 2016:6). Intersectionality provides a useful lens to investigate the multicultural make up of congregations; the next part looks at the notion of multicultural congregations.

4. Multi-cultural congregations

Hendriks (2004:90) states that culture is central to the understanding of people and communities in Africa. Agbiji and Swart (2015:2) state that in an African worldview, religion permeates the political and socio-economic life of Africans, just like politics, economic activities and other vital components of life permeate religion. In light of this holistic view of life, it requires from African theologians to become catalysts and facilitators of change by leading the church and society to adapt to the new socio-economic and politico-cultural demands of society (Dames 2017:4).

Naidoo (2017:2) quotes Potgieter that a multicultural congregation is a place that “recognises, embraces, utilises and celebrates the racial, cultural, generational, gender, and other diversity represented in the community and the church.” Naidoo (2017:2) views multicultural congregations as interesting examples of spiritual and social transformation. Hendriks (2004:92) poses the question of whether a multicultural congregation is possible in light of the ecology or the context within which congregations exist. This question is pivotal to the study because the multicultural contexts within which AFMSA congregations find themselves are a case in point. All the congregations in the study were formerly classified as whites-only assemblies and they became integrated over the last 20 years.

5. Theoretical frameworks: social capital theory and intergroup contact theory

5.1 Social capital

Faith communities can be seen as the single most important repository of social capital (Putnam, 2000:66). Baker and Smith (2008:20) agree that *religious capital* as part of social capital can make a practical contribution to society by creating networks of trust, guidance, and support. Agbiji and

Swart (2015:11) regard religion as a key source in the development of social capital in Africa, providing a lens through which the public space can be re-imagined and developed, fostering values such as honesty, integrity, openness, forthrightness, and tolerance.

Spiritual capital is the spiritual values and vision for the future that we express in activities that motivate us to make a practical contribution to society (Baker & Smith 2008:20). It strives to give account for the range of values present or generated in society (Palmer & Wong, 2013). Iannaccone and Klick (2003:2) view it as helpful for the contemporary demands of religious pluralism, ethnic diversity, cultural sensitivity, and political correctness. Palmer and Wong (2013:17) state that it is a conceptually fruitful way to identify and operationalise the link between spirituality and capacity building. Social, religious, and spiritual capital are not mutually exclusive, but interconnected, and are all based on relationships that individuals, religious groups, and society can access for their well-being (Agbiji & Swart 2015:11).

Cloete (2014:4) states that religion is an important partner in social issues and public life and therefore also in the formation of social capital and social cohesion. She applies Putnam's contribution of religion as repositories of social capital on the role of congregational partnerships (Cloete 2014:5). Cox et al. (2014:2) regard social cohesion as a necessary condition for the sustainability of peace and religious institutions may create "bonding" social capital (strengthening within group ties) at the expense of supporting a state and a civil society that is based on "bridging" social capital (strengthening between-group ties). Burger and Van der Watt (2010:393) state that religious groups may be able to cultivate bridging ties between marginalised groups and those groups in the economic and social mainstream.

5.2 Intergroup contact theory

Gordon Allport (1954) formulated intergroup contact theory and maintained that contact between groups under optimal conditions could effectively reduce intergroup prejudice. Allport holds that reduced prejudice will result when four features of the contact situation are present, namely equal status between the groups in the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of authorities, law or custom

(Pettigrew & Tropp 2006:752). Findings reveal that contact theory applies beyond racial and ethnic groups to embrace other types of groups as well (Pettigrew 2006:786). Allport and Ross (1967:435) stated very early in the development of intergroup contact theory that “the inner experience of religion (what it means to an individual) is an important causal factor in developing a tolerant or a prejudiced outlook on life.”

Burch-Brown and Baker (2016:791) use the integrative model of barriers to peace-making, which suggests that factors through which religious communities can influence the intergroup attitudes of their members fall into a number of mutually influencing categories. In a study on xenophobia, Noort and Noort (2012:517) use intergroup contact theory to argue for the inclusion of the “other” as equally contributing to create a space to act justly and peacefully. They show that the transformative Christian tradition has resources to decrease xenophobic attitudes and to increase inclusion and cohesion.

The theoretical frameworks of social cohesion and intergroup theory provided us with dimensions and conditions that are indicators of social cohesion. These functioned as a barometer to measure the presence or absence of social cohesion when race, gender, class, and age intersect. The theological framework provided an essential link between practical theology and empirical methodology and is very relevant to the study of multicultural congregations in the AFMSA.

6. The case of the AFMSA: a multicultural congregation

The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa is linked to the Azuza Street Revival in America and its main impact on the early developments of the AFMSA was its ability to unite people beyond their differences of race, gender, age, and colour (Kgatle 2016:323). The AFMSA suffered division after the departure of the American missionaries, which lasted for more than 80 years, between 1908 and 1996, when the AFMSA became a united church (Kgatle, 2017:1). In 1996, the whole church was united under one name, the AFMSA, and the church no longer existed as sections divided based on race, which led to the integration of previously segregated churches with the AFMSA, and the historical legacy of apartheid was ended in the church structure. Kgatle (2017:9) expresses concern that although

structural unification took place, racial equality will take some time to be realised in the church, which forms part of the main focus of the study.

7. Methodology

7.1 Qualitative method

The study follows the qualitative methodology, which is an interpretative approach that is holistic and aims to understand the everyday life of people. It elicits the participants' accounts of meaning, experience, or perceptions, and produces descriptive data in the participants' own written or spoken words (Fouche & Delport 2002:79). The insider's perspective brings thick descriptions of reality, producing well-founded cross-contextual generalities (Babbie & Mouton 2001:271; Mason 2002). Ethical clearance was obtained from the necessary structures of the AFMSA (regional and congregational) and the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State. Consent was given by the participants to be part of the research; for responses to be recorded; to remain confidential; and where and whenever response data is used, it should be done anonymously.

7.2 Sample

The study uses purposive sampling in order to collect specific cases, events or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding (Nel & Schoeman 2015: 94). Strydom and Delport (2002:336) state that the overall purpose of the use of the relevant sampling techniques is to collect rich data, meaning a wide and diverse range of information collected over a relatively prolonged period of time.

The participants were purposefully selected from multicultural congregations representing diverse congregations as described by Naidoo (2017:2). Participants were selected with permission from the pastor and the governing body of the congregation; the influence of pastors in the selection of participants may represent a major bias in the study, but their buy-in was needed for the continuation of the study. These multicultural congregations were from the five regions of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa in the Western Cape Province, and they chose to be anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. The sample consisted of five focus groups, with 51 participants, divided as follows: 16

in congregation 1; 10 in congregation 2; eight in congregation 3; eight in congregation 4; and nine in congregation 5. The focus groups consisted of 33 females and 18 males; members from different race groups (50% white and 50% coloured, black and Indian); diverse economic backgrounds; and with ages from 14 to 74 years.

7.3 Data collection process

The study followed a focus-group interview methodology. The participants were organised into focus groups of six to 10 persons; an interview schedule was developed with structured interviews; and questions were detailed and developed in advance that fit a multiple case study of this kind. The focus-group interviews took place within the setting of the local congregation and the questions were administered by the moderator.

7.4 Data analysis

7.4.1 Organisation of the data

Nieuwenhuis (2007:92) explains that data is organised by its recording through the taking of notes, by capturing it through an audio and video recording, and the verbatim transcribing of the group discussion in order to prepare for data analysis. A computer-aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) is done through the Atlas.ti program that facilitates and enhances the indexing and retrieval process, enabling the researcher to index a large number of categories more efficiently (Mason 2002:151).

7.4.2 Coding

The responses of each focus group are transcribed and uploaded into Atlas.ti. The combined focus-group interviews were coded into groups around the themes into single data categories or families in Atlas.ti. The material for each family was sorted and resorted, comparing the excerpts from different code groups, and the results were summarised. After weighing the different versions, an integrated description was given.

Verbatim reports of focus-group interviews were generated and imported in the Atlas.ti as primary documents. Deductive coding was followed whereby the five focus-group interview responses from participants were grouped according to the four main indicators of race, class, gender, and age, and the responses from all five participating congregations were coded.

These codes were grouped along the main dimensions of social cohesion and the conditions of intergroup contact theory, namely belonging, inclusion/equal status, participation/cooperation, legitimacy/authority, shared values, and common goals in Atlas.ti.

8. Findings from the data

8.1 Race

The overall responses of participants to the question of how they experience racial integration in the congregation can be described as positive. Some participants admitted that it was not initially like that 20 years ago, but happened over time and developed spontaneously, acknowledging, honestly, that racial integration is not perfect. Participants mostly expressed their sense of belonging in words such as being at home, part of a family, having feelings of being welcome, warmth, freedom, etc.

Participants experienced a sense of inclusivity and equality of all race groups in their congregations. Participants said that all people are equal in the AFMSA and feel that they experienced respect for diversity. They can participate fully and cooperate in ministry and leadership; they feel that they are growing together, and their talents are developed. Some identified their areas of involvement not just in a particular ministry area, but overall in the church. Many participants pointed to their involvement in small-group ministry in the church as the place where real interaction between race groups took place.

Legitimacy and support from authority structures to integrate the church are mostly accredited to the involvement of the pastor and his/her spouse. Participants regard the role of the pastor as the one who cultivates a welcome and spontaneous environment in the church. One of the participants relates the lack of racism in the church with the leadership. The values of respect, tolerance, and equality are shared by participants from the congregations. Participants feel that they are part of a family where they are accepted. A common goal among participants is to be part of a church where the colour of people's skin does not matter, but rather who the person is.

8.2 Gender

Women from all generations experience a sense of belonging because they are incorporated in the ministry and leadership of the church. Participants feel that they are included in the ministry and leadership of their congregations. Women are included on an equal basis with men because of their talents and giftedness, not on the basis of their gender. The overall experience of women in the church is that they feel included and that they can participate on an equal basis with members in the congregation.

Participants regard the opportunities for women to participate as a sign of their acceptance and belonging to the ministry and leadership of the congregation. They listed various ministries where women are participating in their congregations and vary from prayer groups, welfare, cell groups, dance ministry, worship ministry, women ministry, youth ministry, etc. Women participants experience no discrimination and have the freedom to live out their spiritual ministry in the congregation. Women feel heard and get cooperation from those involved in the ministries that they lead. The preaching ministry that was only reserved for men in the past is also now shared by women.

There is legitimacy and support for the involvement and ministry of women in the congregation. In some of the congregations, women are leaders of specialised ministries and serve as members of the governing body, which is the highest decision-making body in the church. This is not the case in all congregations; in one of them, a participant observed that women are leaders of cell groups, prayer ministry and children ministry, but not of the governing body.

The value of respect and belief in the strength of women is expressed by participants. There is also the belief that women have a role to play in the ministry and leadership of the congregation. One of the participants said that he had respect for women and that they are heard in the congregation. When women feel they belong and are included, they more easily believe that they can participate equally with men in the church and feel free to cooperate in the various ministries of the congregation.

8.3 Class

Participants differed about the role that socio-economic status plays in the ministry and leadership of the church. One participant feels that members differ in their economic status and that some members feel a sense of entitlement or influence on certain positions due to their financial status. Other participants do not share such an experience, but state that money does not really play a role, rather within more urban than rural contexts. Participants experience a sense of belonging that is not defined or restricted to their economic status but being part of a family. Another participant feels that there is no need to know one another's income level because their relationships are determined by it.

Members of congregations are equally included in the ministry and leadership of the church, not on the basis of their economic status. Another participant stated that no one is excluded from congregation activities on the basis of affordability. Participants expressed care towards the needy, no matter what race. Members feel included and treated with equal care and support. Some participants in the groups revealed that they lived in high-income areas and others in informal settlements, but the latter did not feel excluded or looked down upon.

Members participated willingly because they did not experience cliques on the basis of income level. Participants confirmed this when they said that it is not just the wealthy who are involved in ministry, but everyone. Members who cannot afford to participate are sponsored. People's income level does not determine whether they can participate.

In terms of legitimacy and support by authority, participants ascribe their acceptance firstly to the pastor and the church council. The congregation is not divided socio-economically, because the leadership determines the pace at which members are accepted and supported. There is overall support from people in authority for the contribution of members to ministry and leadership on the basis of their gifts and talents and not so much by their income level. The values that members share, express an appreciation for the person and relationships rather than their income levels. Another value shared by all congregations is the support they provide to members who cannot contribute or afford to participate in the ministry of the church.

8.4 Age

Congregations have different experiences with regard to accommodating age groups. In one congregation, participants felt that the church does not do enough to create a sense of belonging for the younger age groups. In other congregations, young people find a space where they are welcomed and allowed to live their ministry and participate in leadership. Young people in these congregations say that they feel welcome.

All congregations have a common goal towards accommodating younger age groups and including them equally in ministry and leadership. Efforts to be more inclusive to young people include missional activities such as reaching out to youth from areas where drugs and alcohol abuse, gangsterism and other social problems are prevalent.

Participants see the dominance of older age groups in the church as a challenge to efforts by the church to be more inclusive towards younger age groups. In most of the participating congregations, both generations are included in all the activities and equal statuses are awarded to them. Young people from different age groups are included at various levels in the church and this led to explosive growth in the youth ministry. People in the more mature age groups welcome the inclusion of young people because it leads to transformation in the church.

Participants deem the role of the pastor to mediate a connection between age groups and accommodate them in the ministry and leadership of the congregation as important. In one of the congregations, the pastor provided leadership when he initiated talk shows about diversity in the congregation and also invited all age groups to participate. The exponential growth of the youth is ascribed to the involvement and the age of the pastor. A common value shared by congregants is the need for change in the traditional structure of churches if they want to retain all generations. Resistance to change should be addressed because it leads to conflict and confrontation between generations.

9. Discussion of the findings

From the findings, we can now draw certain conclusions in relation to the insights from the literature consulted in order to corroborate existing

knowledge. This is done with the belief that stronger support in evidence from the data results in a stronger interpretation and conclusion, bounded by the context of the participants.

Race

Participants responded positively to the question of whether they experience racial integration and a sense of belonging in the congregation. This integration happened over time and members participated spontaneously in ministry and leadership. Words like *being at home*, *being part of a family*, *feeling welcome*, *feeling the warmth*, and *feeling free* further confirm their sense of belonging. Du Toit and Quayle (2011) describe contact with multiracial families as an effective site for prejudice reducing, which adds to the idea that faith communities as a spiritual family can become such a prejudice-reducing space.

Views to the contrary were also presented when some participants said that racial integration is not perfect and another said that the relationships are felt on the surface, but not deep down. It is both encouraging and worrying. It is encouraging in the sense that it corroborates the insights from the literature that extended contact between in- and out-groups brings a sense of belonging after some time. The worrying side of it is that people of colour ignore the subtle forms of racism in order to fit in and keep the peace, which implies that belonging is superficial and not real. Longenecker (1984:46) delivers a reminder that we should be aware of our own prejudice and preferences based on the race and culture we were raised in. Naidoo (2017) goes further and criticises such a “colour-blindness” perspective, which states all cultures and races are the same, which leads to a reluctance to engage in dialogue with the powerful group and imposes assimilation on others.

Participants experienced a sense of inclusivity and respect for the diversity expressed in the race groups; there is equality among groups in their congregations. Members from other nationalities feel that the congregation offers a safe space. This is a very important indicator of social cohesion in light of the sporadic xenophobic attacks that happen every year in South Africa. This is especially felt by members from a multi-national congregation in a time where South Africa experienced a great deal of xenophobia. This confirms the studies by Noort and Noort (2012:517) that

the transformative Christian tradition has resources to decrease xenophobic attitudes. Nell (2009:239) submits that Christ was a refugee himself who became stateless and homeless, illustrating through his own life how love for God and neighbour creates spaces of peace. Phakhati (2010) reports how churches responded to the xenophobic attacks during May 2008, finding their mandate in the ministry of Jesus, who was a refugee himself, assisting displaced victims in various ways.

Legitimacy for a truly multicultural congregation starts with the leadership of the pastor and the team, which is then reflected in other places of authority. Naidoo (2017:5) agrees that diversity in church leadership makes a strong statement about the importance of diversity within the congregation and ministers should prioritise diversity as a core value within cross-cultural contexts and multicultural ministries, following a top-down approach to diversity. Nell (2020:200) confirms that religious leaders should have reconciling competency with the growing ethnic diversity that requires cross-cultural competency (the skills knowledge and motivation that empower individuals to adjust effectively in cross-cultural relationships).

Shared values identified by the congregations include values of respect, tolerance, equality, and acceptance. These are the values also envisioned in our country's Constitution and it is lived within the context of multicultural congregations. Naidoo (2017:2) views multicultural congregations as interesting examples of spiritual and social transformation because it is a place that “recognises, embraces, utilises and celebrates the racial, cultural, generational, gender, and other diversity represented in the community and the church.”

Gender

All women feel they belong due to their incorporation into ministries and leadership in the church. The preaching ministry that was only reserved for men in the past is also now shared by women. Women feel that their humanity as equal persons is recognised, and a first step to creating cohesive spaces where women operate on the same level as men is created. Nadar (2018) agrees that churches should stop writing a theology of male headship, supremacy, and female submission and, argues further that as long as churches remain environments where men have all the power, they groom and control women.

Women serve as members of the church council; they are not reserved for extramural ministry. There are calls for more senior positions of women in church leadership, especially in the AFMSA (Kgatle 2019), and these congregations show at the local level that it is possible. The value of respect and belief in the strength of women is expressed by participants. Petersen (2019) states that having respect for women and acknowledging their God-given human dignity will enable us to destroy the Siamese twins of white supremacy and patriarchy. It is evident from an intersectional approach that black women experience both racism and sexism, and multicultural congregations create spaces of contact where both can be addressed.

Class

The findings indicate that members have different views about the impact of socio-economic status on people's sense of belonging. The one view holds that some members might feel their socio-economic status determines their sense of entitlement or influence in the congregation. When that happens, a new form of apartheid is created because class prejudices make that only one subculture, language group, and socio-economic level are ministered to (Hendriks, 2004:92). Other participants feel that their sense of belonging is not defined or restricted to their economic status, but that they rather feel like being part of a family. Nel (2019:6) regards this as an embracing of the multicultural, interracial community that formed part of the early Pentecostal movement and specifically the AFMSA, to give a voice to the poor, both spiritually and socio-economically.

Some members express the view that class prejudice is more prevalent in urban than in rural contexts, but just like sexism, classism in rural settings has the same impact as in urban settings, because it reduces a person's human dignity to the person's socio-economic status. Classism, just like racism and sexism, inhibits the world's ability to be just, valuing people based on status, power, appearance, celebrity, and wealth (De Young 2009:107).

Participants indicated that no one is excluded from activities in the congregation based on affordability; instead, when there is a need, they will express care towards the needy persons without any discrimination. This confirms some of the findings in a study by Pieterse (2014:7) that people feel they experience God's love when there is care for the well-being of the

poor through community projects. Participants ascribe their acceptance as members of their congregation despite socio-economic differences to the pastor and the church council. Our findings indicate that where members are integrated socio-economically, there is a greater sense of belonging, inclusion, equal status, cooperation, participation, support from authority, and shared values.

Age

Where a balance is struck between accommodating both groups there is a greater sense of belonging from all groups. A “remixing” is needed where what is dear to the older age group is adapted to accommodate the younger age group, and greater sensitivity for the older age groups needs to be cultivated among the younger generation (Nel 2015). What is needed is a generation-interdependence perspective, which is the opposite of a war or conflict perspective, where inclusion leads to intergenerational solidarity between age groups (Bengtson & Oyama 2007:5).

It remains a challenge in more traditional settings to get young people to participate and cooperate in ministry and leadership. One of the ways that better cooperation between age groups is cultivated is through the hermeneutics of listening, as proposed by Swart and Yates (2012:1). Such an engaged dialogue with the youth can prepare future leaders who are spiritually intelligent and understand the need to “reframe” to yield better results (Zohar, 2006). In support of the above, current leadership is critical in the creation of an intergenerational balance, and participants saw the role of the pastor and the leadership as very important in that regard.

10. Conclusion

South-Africa is still struggling to be a more inclusive and cohesive society. Faith communities and more specifically congregations have a role to play as repositories of social capital that include valuable religious and spiritual capital. Through more contact between diverse groups, prejudice between groups can be reduced, and multicultural congregations offer a space where such a process can be facilitated. Congregations that are able to move beyond the legacy of the past, address the societal issues that prevent greater cohesion, and strive to be an “alternative community”, can become

spaces where real listening takes place. In such spaces, listening as a critical constructive dialogue is allowed, and actions directed towards personal and social transformation are encouraged.

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