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When God Beckons: Stories of the 'Call' in a Pentecostal Church

Maheshvari Naidu and Nokwanda Nzuza[1]

School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: <naiduu@ukzn.ac.za>, [1]<yoliswanzuza@gmail.com>

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ABSTRACT The biblical narratives are inspired texts to the Pentecostals, as they are to many other Christians. Most Pentecostals accept that these biblical narratives offer the guiding templates through which a religious worldview is constructed. This paper is informed by how 'narratives' are positioned within Pentecostalism, and similarly adopts 'narrative' as a methodological heuristic mechanism. To this end the narratives of a small group of individuals are used as a heuristic device to understand the 'call' to ministry, as received and understood by them as they go on to assume pastoral duties within the Church that they belong to. It is felt that such calls to ministry offer a rare window into a decidedly understudied phenomenon within black ministry.

INTRODUCTION: PENTECOSTALISM

According to Arlene Walsh (2003), the beginnings of Pentecostalism, which she describes as 'charismatic activity', are "rooted in the description of 'tongues of fire' that fell upon the heads of Jesus' followers who gathered to pray in Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Festival of Weeks".

The Book of Acts (2:4) describes it as,

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

The Book of Acts, along with Paul's commentary and instructions regarding the other nine gifts of the Holy Spirit, form the central (narratavised) tenets of Pentecostalism. According to Walsh, most Pentecostal activity in the early Church followed familiar biblical patterns focusing on prophecy, visions, healing, and exorcisms (casting out of demons) and descriptions of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). However, as most writers (see Flory 2013) note, several confluent streams 'created' Pentecostalism. The movement, which most scholars agree stretched historically back to the Azuza street revival in Los Angeles, has now reached and proliferated across the world in what can be perhaps described as a 'global spread of charismatic Christianity' (Lindhardt 2009: 47). That said, Pentecostalism owes much to the Christian streams of Methodist, Pietist, and the Holiness movements that stretch from the 18th to 19th century (Walsh 2003:4).

Christianity itself is arguably one of the most dominant religious beliefs in the world followed' by Islam (see Garneau and Schwadel 2013; Flory 2013). Christianity as a faith is rapidly expanding through conversion, especially on the African continent. This growth can itself be indexed through the rise of the charismatic churches and leaders (see Brodwin 2003; Birgit 2004; Brison 2007). There has been voluminous qualitative and quantitative research on religion as a whole, generating a vast canvas of literature that spans both ethnographic and theoretical work in various aspects of religion and across religions such as Christianity, as well as work on Christianity in an African context. However, there is arguably, less work that deals specifically with Pentecostal denominations in Africa, and Southern Africa, and from an ethnographic context. The qualitative works of Meyer (1995, 2003, 2004) on the Ewe in Ghana and Mbe (2002) and his work with Pentecostal Churches in Cameroon can be counted amongst the relatively small number of research that deals with Pentecostalism on African soil and embedded within African socio-cultural geo-political spaces. There is a small range of work that deals specifically with Pentecostalism and charismatic churches in a South African context (see de Kock and Wynand 2000, Maxwell 2005; Lyton 2007; Anderson 2010; Gifford and Nogueira-Godsey 2011).

Research that focuses on the Pentecostal Churches and more especially from a qualitative and ethnographic context is thus imperative, given that there is a projected annual growth of 8.1 % in Pentecostal churches. *Pentecostal or charismatic* Christianity can be counted as one of the 'great success stories' of the current era of cultural globalization (Benvenuti 1995; Lindhardt 2009). The quotation that follows further attests

to the phenomenal global stretch and reach and popularity and growth of Pentecostalism.

With its remarkable ability to adapt to many different cultures, Pentecostalism has become the world's fastest growing religious movement. More than five hundred million adherents worldwide have reshaped Christianity itself (Anderson et al. 2010).

Born again Christians, commonly describe personal salvation as a movement from the realm of darkness to the realm of God. Thus the personal move to "reject Satan and receive Christ as a saviour" is perceived and articulated as a defining point of rupture in their lives (see Lindhardt 2009: 48). And despite differences across Pentecostal Churches, Mbe points out that the Pentecostals consider themselves as belonging to a "sacred community whose identity and unity is aggressively promoted to those who are outside". They consider themselves to be 'born-again' and this aspect is seen as the "cornerstone of Christianity, requiring every individual to repent and 'give his life to Christ'" (Mbe 2002:362).

In South Africa, the rise of charismatic churches has been noted with a synchronous rise in the number of churches led by young or newly appointed pastors. Scholars have argued that Pentecostalism speaks a language of modernity and is attractive because it offers access to modern (Western) processes of cultural, economic and democratic globalization (Van de Kamp 2010) yet "without losing its transnational connections and international networks" (Anderson 2003: 66). The charismatic churches in South Africa are well known for having a relatively large number of young pastors and leaders, with more than 100 churches (many with young pastoral leaders) in Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa alone. In the Umlazi District of Durban, where one of the Christian Fellowship Church branches is located, there are more churches than there are schools. There are five churches in this area at an average of 300 meters from each other. Each branch of the Christian Fellowship Church or CFC (the main ethnographic focus of this paper) has a local pastor who conducts the service[1].

Pentecostals pay special attention and focus on what can be called 'spiritual life stories', as a way to corroborate the biblical sacred narrative. Such testimonies (while not superseding the Bible itself) take on a sacred nature because they are stories (perpetually) told and re-told to validate the ongoing active work of the Holy Spirit in the world. These narratives are claimed as having their own spiritual authority and can become part of the canonical canvas that Pentecostals view as sacred. For a Pentecostal, the call to ministry is confirmed by what is referred to as the 'gifting'. The 'call' (into ministry or pastoral duties) is often spoken of by pastors and members of the congregation alike as 'an inner urge or a strong impulse', where one is divinely inspired to accept the Christian Gospels as the Truth and Jesus as one's personal Saviour (Harris 1975). This description is similarly echoed by Reichard and Zygon (2013), in their work entitled, 'Of Miracles and Metaphysics: A Pentecostal-Charismatic and Process of Miracles and Relational Dialogue'.

This paper is intended as a contribution to the discussions on the Pentecostal faith in the South African context, but from the perspective of the pastors and their 'call' to service. The objective of the study is thus to offer a contribution from an ethnographic perspective that attempts to broker a rapport with the participants, and gather rich insider perspectives. The paper in turn proceeds through the narratives of seven pastors from various branches of CFC, who share with us how they received and responded to the 'call'. These narratives allow us to, not only look inside the lives of the pastors, but allow us to look over their shoulder and into some aspects of Pentecostalism itself.

One of the participants in this study (Pastor Zama) shares that there are many different biblical examples of the 'call'. Drawing from the literature of the Bible he tells us that;

- It may be a call to leadership like it was for Moses.
- It may be a call to conversion, as it came to Saul on the road to Damascus.
- It may be a call to disciple-making, as it came to Peter and Andrew, from Jesus.
- It may be a prophecy, as in the case of the boy Samuel.
- It may be a call to do missionary work, as it came to the unwilling prophet Jonah.
- It may be a call to motherhood, as it was for the young Virgin Mary.

Pastor Zama further shares that a 'call' implies that *"one hears a 'voice' from beyond, beckoning us to listen and respond*". Each of the individuals' personal stories that were

shared with us, show that there are both similarities and differences in how they 'heard' God's call. It was Richard Pitt (2012) and his insightful work with African American ministers and their divine calling, who introduces us to the notion that the 'call' is as much a social process as it is a spiritual one. Pitt delves into the narratives of these individuals to explore their work as active agents in the process of fulfilling their particular calling. In the context of this paper and Pentecostalism in South Africa, and the role of religion in postcolonial African societies, the narratives offer windows into the sociological, as well as the theological grip of Pentecostalism over many Black African followers in the country. Many scholars like Birgit Meyer (see Meyer 2004) argue that Pentecostalism is perceived as being markedly successful in replicating itself in canonical form everywhere it spreads, while conversely other scholars stress its ability to adapt itself to the cultures into which it is introduced. The paper takes its cue from the work of Meyer (2004) in acknowledging that Pentecostalism and Charismatic Churches possess cultural features that allow it to engage the host cultures in new spatial terrains (like the African cultures in South Africa) and engage with those cultures on their own terms, in other words in a way that allows Pentecostalism to be organically integrated into the host culture.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ENTREE

Narrative analysis was employed in this study. Narrative analysis, quite importantly, does not consider narratives as stories that convey a set of facts about the world, and is not primarily interested in whether stories are 'true' (see Naidu 2012). Narrative analysis views narratives, as interpretive devices through which people reveal and represent themselves and their constructed worldviews, to themselves and to those around them. This form of qualitative approach is particularly suitable as the interviews present the spaces where much of what is communicated in fact 'storied', in other words received in narrative form[2].

This paper works through a phenomenological understanding of religion which allows us to describe religious phenomena in terms of the believers' own understanding and acceptance. Phenomenology as a methodological approach is a vast and complex terrain, highly nuanced and it has a muscular lineage of critical contributors who all participate in a conversation that has both continuities and disjuncture. However, this study draws certain broad insights from phenomenology, particularly the methodological favourites of anthropologists who work with religions and religious people, especially the concepts of epoche and eidetic vision. Husserl's (1994) seminal contribution to the field of phenomenology is the concept of 'epoche' which entails a methodological bracketing, a setting aside of one's own metaphysical questions and observing the phenomena *in and of themselves*. His view on *epoche* is derived from the Greek verb *epecho* which means 'I hold back'. For Husserl, a phenomenologist is concerned with consciousness and so it does not matter whether the object of thought is real or not. Thus questions of validity and truth in the study of phenomena must be suspended or bracketed to allow the scholar to understand the religion being studied. This suspension of judgment or exclusion of presuppositions from one's mind is what he called methodological neutrality or objectivity. It is the suspension or bracketing of all prior beliefs, commitments, and value judgments when the subject matter of religion is concerned. The phenomenologist simply observes, describes and reports the various religious phenomena being studied (Ekeke et al. 2010: 271). All of this suits the orientation of narrative analysis which allows the stories to be told as they wish, rather than making any claims for the accuracy, reliability or veracity of the narratives.

Another concept, which Husserl introduced, is eidetic vision. The word eidetic is from a Greek word, *eidos* which means 'that which is seen', having form, shape, essence. Ninian Smart, the eminent comparative religionist, explains that eidetic vision is the capacity to grasp the essence of religious phenomena by means of empathetic and intuitive research processes. Such an empathetic listening is facilitated within the phenomenological approach (see Smart 1979). Phenomenology of religion is descriptively oriented. This means that evaluative judgments are not the concern but one seeks "accurate and appropriate descriptions of religious phenomena" (Ekeke et al. 2012:271). Yamane (2000) argues, quite rightly, that when scholars study religious experience, we cannot study the "ex-

periencing", as we are not in that 'space'. This is because religious experience happens in real time (for the believer) with its physical, mental, and emotional constituents. As researchers we thus end up studying retrospective accounts which are but linguistic representations of religious experiences of the participants.

Data Collection

Most qualitative ethnographic work is necessarily unpredictable, given that we are working with participants who have schedules and commitment around which the researcher has to negotiate time to conduct the interviews. Even though there was a set schedule for interviews, the fieldwork, (unpredictable even at the best of times) proved more challenging than usual. The sudden death of the Pastor of the main branch prompted, quite understandably, many emotionally charged situations and many members of the congregation were in deep mourning. Even though they had granted their initial consent in being interviewed, their space and privacy had to be respected, given their recent loss. The death of the Pastor also led to a change in the church leadership structure, which further complicated the research process as permission to conduct research and interviews had to be requested again and granted from the newly appointed Pastor[3].

All interviews were held in the local regional language and transcribed in *isiZulu* and thereafter translated into English[4]. This was time consuming even though one of the authors was literate and comfortable in both English and *isiZulu*. However, it was deemed vital that the informants were to free to answer in their mother tongue of *isiZulu*.

The study was carried over six months, between January and September 2010. The qualitative approach emphasises rich ethnography being gathered over a significant period of time, with sustained contact with the participants. All of this is crucial in anthropological studies. Employing qualitative methods assisted in gaining an insight into the 'culture' of CFC where attitudes and behaviours are best understood within their natural settings (Mouton et al. 2006). Most data was collected within the premises of the church, with one of the authors attending congregation regularly throughout the period of the research. Ethnographic insights gained during such observational visits were valuable in understanding the 'culture' of the church.

Work was thus undertaken by using observations, interviews and focus groups. Interviews were used with the pastors who were the study's key informants. These interviews were in turn cast against the responses from the church members. A total of 8 pastors spanning the age spectrum 21 to 58 years, served as key informants. Four of these pastors were revisited for follow up interviews. Structured and semi-structured interviews were used for this purpose. One of the authors also, as mentioned, regularly attended the weekly congregational gatherings and worship[5].

The study and research design framing the interview schedule of questions was guided by the theoretical lens of social constructionism, where the *a priori* premise is that individuals construct and create 'new versions' of knowledge (Burr 1995:4 and see also Burr 2003) which informed the manner in which the questions were asked and some of the data was analysed. However, the study is (consciously) written in an ethnographic vein and draws on rich ethnographic narratives of the participants. Rather than offering a 'thick' theoretical discussion of the narratives, in this instance we were keen to allow the study to be deeply descriptive and to allow the voices of the key informants, and some of the congregants to come through.

The 'Christian Fellowship Church' (CFC) in South Africa

Approaching the idea of religion as the 'central nexus' of African people allows us a window into understanding their worldview. This is because social life is largely guided by religion and religious ideological beliefs for adherents. For the sociologist Emile Durkheim, religion has a fundamental social origin and function (see Durkheim 1912). Here we are introduced to the premise that religion encompasses the social understanding of life, as the Durkheimian argument is that there is no facet of human life *that religion does not encompass (for those who believe in it).* This is the reality for a large number of believers in South Africa, where according to the 2001 census, approximately 80% of the population were Christians. More than 8 million people considered 'Black' or of African de-

scent in South Africa, are members of African Independent churches, which have at least 4,000 congregations, which gives some indication of the impact of religion within the secular context of South Africa. Notwithstanding the colonial roots of Christianity (See Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) the vast majority of Black African people in South Africa (including those who practice some aspects of African traditional religion and ancestor worship), consider themselves staunch Christians. This growth is (in no small part) claimed as being influenced by charismatic leadership within the churches. Giddens (2003:160) argues that charisma is "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he (or she[6]) is considered extraordinary and treated as being endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least exceptional powers or qualities". It is this 'charisma' that has led to the rapid growth of many Pentecostal churches. Charismatic leaders are seen as the 'link' between the church and the people, making known to the people, the promise of the Church, and the promise embedded in the doctrine. This is because these churches are characterized by the promise of being able to heal. The gift or promise to heal, functions as powerful 'healing narratives' that are seen as being able to give hope to people. Pentecostal churches are known as 'born-again' churches as they are based on the belief that when a person accepts Jesus Christ, that person is 'new', with a new spiritual and physical life.

Background to the Christian Fellowship Church in South Africa

The Christian Fellowship Church in South Africa was founded by Pastor NJ Sithole. It was first based in the Umlazi Township in the KwaZulu-Natal province and the primary branch is still located here. The genesis of the Church is rather interesting, (although not wholly unique), as this church was born out of an evangelical crusade popularly referred to as 'tent crusade', organized and led by Pastor Sithole. We were told that the crusade lasted for approximately three weeks and many people converted to Christianity during this period due to its powerful outreach and the charismatic preaching of pastor Sithole. The tented church was located in the grounds of the Fundakahle Primary school in Umlazi (a district in the KwaZulu-Natal province and an area designated through the notorious Group Areas Act as being only for Black African people). After the initial three weeks which was granted to Pastor Sithole to host evening services within the school premises, he asked for a classroom which he could rent to conduct his church meetings. He then began preaching and teaching the new converts about salvation and 'walking with Christ'. The branches continued to increase and his work increased exponentially. At present there are eight branches of CFC. As Lindhardt (2009: 49) points out in the context of his study, it is largely through activities such as fellowship, "bodily co-presence and emotional arousal" that the communities in Charismatic Churches are "bound together and shared religious realities are created".

Since 1990, many such 'charismatic churches (led by a leader who is perceived as having spiritual powers to heal and prophesise) have been established in the KwaZulu-Natal province as indeed throughout other parts of South Africa. According to interviews with the residents of Umlazi, the rise of these churches corresponded with the establishing of the Christian Fellowship Church. Each church has an average of 120 members, eighty percent of the congregation being drawn from the youth. These churches are founded by leaders referred to as pastors.

Pastors are charismatic leaders who claim that they are '*called*'. Prior to becoming a pastor, a person has to receive a 'call.' The 'call' is spoken of anecdotally, as "*when a person hears a voice or receives a vision*". Being 'called' has also been defined as having received an invitation to enter ministry from God, and this invitation may be received at any time and in any place. The term 'calling' thus refers to being divinely assigned to a particular duty, position, or responsibility. From the perspective of the individual, it is also seen as an inner urge or a strong impulse, especially one believed to be divinely inspired to accept the Gospels as truth and Jesus as one's personal saviour (Harris 1975).

In so called 'lay' terms, it can refer to, as Pastor Gama shares, "*an assignment that God has prepared you for*". Pastor Gama motivated his 'definition' with a quotation from The Bible; *"For I know the plans I have for you,"* declares the LORD, *"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"*

(Jeremiah 29, 11). The *isiZulu* term for the 'call' is *ubizo* which is literally translated as 'being called'.[7]

To some of the informants, being 'called' meant losing their "*individual identity"* and living to do the Lord's work. One of the pastors put it thus, "*You are meant to live for your congregation as you have to attend to their spiritual needs"*. It was Benvenuti (1999) who pointed out, that servant-hood was always the focal point of one's ministry calling. And as one of the participants shared with us, *"at times you have to wake up at night to go and pray if a member is sick*". According to these informants, being 'called' means you "*no longer live for yourself but for your community*".[8]

The Beckoning: Receiving the 'Call'

Based on the interviews with the pastors, it becomes apparent that receiving God's call to undertake pastoral duties manifests differently for everyone. The eight pastors and congregants shared that as far as they were concerned, the 'call' is to be seen as a personal experience that can only be truly grasped and understood *by the person who received it*, almost as a special kind of spiritual knowledge. Lillejord and Soreide (2003:89) refer to spiritual knowledge as a kind of 'indigenous' knowledge. By this they mean that this knowledge is part and parcel of the person's belief structure, inextricably embedded within the religio-cultural matrix and worldview of the person. In lay terms and in the words of the informants, it is the kind of knowledge that *"resides in the hearts and minds of people, their oral history, rituals or knowledgeable people such as priests and storytellers*".

In this instance the study participants are the pastors Gama, Jobe, Mazibuko, Mbatha, Memela, Miya, Nzama and Zondi.

Pastors Mbatha, Memela and Zondi shared that they received their 'call' through a dream, and tell us that *"God spoke to them"* in their sleep. Pastors Miya and Nzama share that they received the 'call' as a vision which they experienced while fully lucid and awake, while Pastor Gama tells us that in his case, his 'call' "*came through a bible verse*". Pastors Mazibuko and Jobe confide that they received the 'call' through "*the word of prophesy"* revealed to them by their church leader during one of the church services. The pastors tell us that they received the 'call' and then waited for a confirmation. 'Confirmation' is when God reveals the pastors' 'call' to a fellow Christian. All the pastors stated that their 'call' was confirmed by a prophet or a minister.

Even though to some pastors, undertaking duties has always "*been their passion*", some expressed that they have never wanted to be associated with the 'call'. Pastors Mazibuko and Memela openly reveal that they always wanted to become pastors and that for them the call was "*expected*". Pastors Gama and Zondi however, both claimed that prior to receiving the call they were *"not active strong Christians"* and that they attended church because they felt it was the right thing to do. Pastor Nzama exclaims that she never wanted to be associated with born again Christians or their "*vehement anti-ancestor beliefs",* so she did not expect the 'call'.

Pastors Miya and Mbatha were not sure whether they have always wanted to be a pastor but they tell us that they *"have always wanted to work"* for God. Pastor Jobe expressed that he always saw himself as a tent crusade evangelist. Because the call to pastoral duties is *"an assignment that God has created you for"* it may not be expected *"yet it's something that you are confronted with and you need to deal with it*", he says. *"It's impossible to sleep after receiving your call"* says Pastor Mbatha. Receiving the call is expressed as a "*shocking and mind blowing"* experience. Pastor Jobe states that he has been shocked by many things in his life but, when he was prophesied he was "*blown"*. All the pastors expressed that they were filled with disbelief after receiving their call. They claim that it was God's way of expressing His love and forgiveness; they felt God had given them a second chance to live their lives, this time as sterling examples to society. The most popular adjectives used to describe their feelings after receiving the call were 'shocked, happy, excited, full of fear, closer to God, guilty and humbled'.

The congregation had similar ideas about what it was to receive the 'call'. However, they referred to it as a 'personal experience' (between God and the individual being 'called') which they claimed "*cannot be expressed"*. From the focus group interviews, the congregants claimed that since the 'call' is a spiritual and personal experience, most of the pastors whose 'call' is revealed through a vision or a dream, cannot remember much except the bible verse or a voice that "*spoke*".

God calls into his service the educated and the illiterate; the single and the married; men and women; those respected by the community and those disrespected. God is not interested in our ability but in our availability (Bunch 2008: n.p.).

The 'call' can be revealed at any time to anyone. This finds echo and resonance with the pastors of CFC as they were called in different ways and at different times. It is also commonly held that the 'call' may be seen as a *"disturbance"* in one's life since it comes at any time. It is just as commonly held that the 'call' brings about fulfilment as one gets the chance of undertaking the duties which he was created for. This was asserted by pastor Nzama who had to make changes in her life when she received the 'call'.

For 'born again Christians' are not allowed to make sacrifices to the dead, the ancestors venerated in African Traditional Religions (and incorporated by many practicing African Christians in South Africa). Making such sacrifices was part of Pastor Nzama's lifestyle for many years, as she believed that all good and bad life encounters were attributable to the ancestors. Accepting salvation meant she would have to refrain from practicing ancestor worship. She confides that this was not well received by her family, but shares that there "*was a fire burning within*" her, and she did not know how to manage her feelings at that time. She tells us that she "*accepted salvation in 1999*" when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Pastor Nzama is amongst the many that were attracted to CFC because of the late pastor's charisma and power to heal. She shares vividly that the pastor prayed for her and asked her to go out and get herself some water to drink, and tells us that as she drank, she vomited green water. She tells us that this was the last time she felt any pain, and ever since she *"has never made any sacrifice to the ancestral spirits". She* was meant to have performed an ancestor sacrifice the weekend after her *"deliverance*" (from pain). However, she tells us that on the same day, she saw a vision of herself preaching, and this was when she received her 'call'.

Pastor Nzama's testimony serves as evidence of how being born again and receiving the 'call' may be seen as a *'disturbance'* in one's life, disrupting and destabilising a previously established worldview, but not necessarily to be construed as something negative. She tells us that she could no longer continue with her family tradition of performing traditional sacrifices even though she had (already) planned the whole ceremony. This caused friction between her and her family. She tells us that *"the 'call' can be received at any time of one's life"* and it may be expressed in different ways. "Just like that of *isangoma*,[9] it comes when one least expects it". Pastor Nzama's story reveals that to her the 'call' was a *'disturbance'* with positive benefit.

Pastor Mazibuko claimed that being 'called' means that "*God has searched your heart and he knows that you are weak in flesh but you can handle the church*". Pastor Jobe stated that *"being called is just a title that you are given, undertaking pastoral duty is the main thing that we need to worry about".* He continued that "*being called means you have an obligation to the congregation and the community as a whole, as you will have to solemnize couples you have never met and conduct funeral services for people who have been attending your church services".* Both Pastor Mazibuko and Pastor Jobe see being 'called' as a "spiritual phenomenon which cannot be fully explained through words", Pastor Jobe argued that *"one can only understand calling if he is called himself, even though we are called by the same God, the calling does not manifest in the same way."*

These pastors see themselves as 'shepherds' (which is an evocative and powerful analogy to which we will return later) and see their role as being that of leading or herding the church to salvation, which they see as being a preparation for the coming of Jesus. Pastors are in turn seen by their congregants as leaders, role models and teachers. This sense of leadership is influenced by the *charisma* that they possess as pastors. Christian Fellowship Church congregants refer to this charisma as 'anointing'.

Responding to the 'Call'

"Howsoever the invitation (call) comes ... you have to decide how you will answer" (informant 1).

"Becoming a pastor is different from consciously choosing a career as it is based on personal faith" (informant 2).

The narratives reveal that responding to the call requires one to be emotionally and spiritual-

ly 'ready' and that being a pastor refers to a complete lifestyle. One of the CFC leaders asserted that it is the *"most important decision that one will ever make"* as it changes one's lifestyle, affects one's finances, family commitments and *"makes one prone to spiritual problems as the devil will by all means try and attack a pastor and his family*". It is on this basis that it is recommended that prior to making the decision, one takes time off and 'communicates with God', reads spiritual books and share ones feeling with people close to oneself. Another church leader stressed the importance of asking God for a confirmation, saying that *"it's not enough to have a dream or vision and pastors need not follow their emotions, they have to pray and ask God for a confirmation"*. This confirmation, according to Phila, a congregant *"tells you exactly want you have been called for, whether God wants you to start your own church or he wants you to serve in a particular church*". This means that after receiving the 'call', one has to wait for a confirmation which is to direct one with regard to one's calling.

Just as the 'call' comes in different ways for different individuals as embedded in the stories of our informants, similarly, responding to the 'call' differs from person to person. The response is in turn shaped by each individual's spiritual beliefs and perceptions. However, all eight pastors share that their responses were motivated by the *"fear of God"* and "*not questioning His authority*". They stated that they waited for God's 'confirmation'. Pastor Zondi went on to fast for a continuous 21 days, even going back to his rural home, "*I wanted peace and to spend time with God while waiting for my confirmation*". He claimed that God had revealed that he needed to go away from all the pressures of city life. He received his confirmation on the 19th day of his fasting but continued as he *"had made an agreement with God*".

Pastor Mbatha and pastor Memela revealed that after receiving their 'call' (through a dream) they prayed continuously for more than 3 hours. Pastor Miya shared that he prayed *"from 11 pm till 6.30 am the next morning*" in his flat where he lived alone. Pastor Jobe claimed he could not pray after being prophesied, rather he read the bible, "*specifically the New Testament*". He shares that he chose this part of the Bible because he wanted to know how Jesus ministered and how the Lord lived. He claimed that God spoke to him using the New Testament as "*it's the practical part of the Bible*".

The exception to the general tenor of the pastors' narratives was the story shared by Pastor Mbatha who claimed that he did not want to become a pastor, and as a result he began by refusing to accept the 'call'. He claims that God 'dealt' with him in a very 'harsh' way. He shares that he and his wife of three years went through a divorce because of his disobedience and that he subsequently lost custody of his son. He associates these unfortunate events with God's punishment since he did not accept the 'call' immediately. "*After a while*", he too accepted the call, believing by then that it "*was the right thing to do*".

All the pastors claimed that after accepting the 'call' that they because "*serious*" (dedicated) in the activities of the Lord. They all took the initiative in being early for church services and they attended the church services regularly (one is tempted to say religiously!) unless they had a valid reason of illness or having to be away on ministry business. They seem to have a shared understanding of what could happen if one did not respond to the call. The pastors echo each other, telling us other that one can lose all one's material wealth and even health. One asserted that he knew of a man who "*died prematurely*" just because he did not accept his 'call'. Pentecostals believe in 'prosperity theology' (Mbe 2002:370) which teaches that the spiritual and material fortunes of a 'believer' are dependent" on their individual faith. Faith then equates to good fortune, and the inverse, lack of faith invites misfortune.

Another challenge associated with responding to the 'call' included telling ones family. Pastor Zondi could not tell his mother since according to him, "… *young pastors are known for being unemployed and surviving on the congregations offering*". His mother had always been against the 'calling', especially for young people. He did not tell his mother until a month before his ordination. Pastor Zondi argued that people have negative attitudes towards being 'called' because *"there are too many people who claim to be 'called' nowadays*". "*This sudden boom of churches that are led by young pastors has destroyed the reputation of pastors, most of the young pastors see being a shepherd as a career that they only attend to on a Sunday"* (Informant Mrs Mthembu).

Being a Pastor

The one sustained refrain from all of the pastors interviewed, as well as from many of the

members of the congregation is that "*the role of a pastor is similar to that of a shepherd*". This particular symbolic analogy is shared by both pastors and congregants. Thus, often pastors are seen to have qualities of shepherds as their role is to guide the flock (converts). This metaphoric comparison is prompted by Biblical scriptures, where Jesus refers to the church as the flock and Himself as a shepherd.

'Pastor' is the Latin word for shepherd, and the word shepherd suggests a person who protects, guides, or watches over a person or group. A pastor is said to be the officiator, but not the owner of a particular congregation. The most important characteristic of the shepherd according to informants from the congregation is that of loving his flock equally. *"The main function of a pastor is to watch over the church both spiritually and socially. They are the 'shepherds', their role is to lead the church to salvation, which is a preparation for the coming of Jesus"* (informant 3). In spiritual terms, the pastor attends to the needs of the congregations through preaching and teaching, praying and prophesying, The pastor is said to tend to the social needs of his congregation through attending to community matters, and acting as an advisor, not only to members of his congregation, but to the community at large. Harbaugh (1984:56) asserts that pastors acting as a shepherd caring for his/her flock should possess the greatest gift of God, which is the gift of compassion and love for the church.

One informant from the congregation shared this story:

"One Sunday the pastor arrived with groceries in her car, she then along with her daughter went to visit Granny (church member in her sixties) who lives in a one-roomed shack. We did not know this until the next week when Granny shared her testimony. We were all moved by this, not only because the Pastor did not 'show off' but because we saw the qualities of a good leader in her".

Similarly the congregants used the word 'shepherd' to refer to one being called to pastoral duties. They went to the extent of saying "*when you are called, it's like you have been employed as a shepherd, and your job description is to guide the flock that God has placed under your care".*

Pastoral duties are thus closely related and seen as almost synonymous to that of a shepherd. Even though not all pastors can perform all the necessary duties, they are still able to delegate some responsibilities to senior congregants. Having divisional committees ensures that all the church needs are attended to. Even though the pastors may be residing far from their congregations, committees are able to offer a hand to those in need at any particular time. Metaphorically, 'shepherd' refers to a man who nurtures, feeds and guards sheep. In his daily duties, the shepherd ensures that his flock are together at all times, and should one of his sheep go missing or get injured he carries it, hence ensuring that his flock are always together and within his sight. The pastors remind us that this analogy is used in The Bible during one of Jesus' teachings, where He says, 'I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep' (John 10:11). The informants explain that by this, the Lord was referring to His reason for coming to earth which was to take care of the flock.

Pastor Nzama shares that her branch has a group of people who visit hospitals, old age homes and prisons monthly, the arrangement having begun in April 2010, and that within a few months the congregation had made six hospital, old age homes and prison visits. She felt strongly that that she "*fitted the profile of the ideal functions of a pastor*". Three congregation members who were individually approached, all independently echoed each other that Pastor Nzama "*loves her congregation*" and they quoted many examples where she expressed her love and care towards the congregation, *"especially the elderly"*. The informants in the focus groups also reiterated that the role of a pastor is to "*lead the church services and to act as a shepherd*". This definition is shared by majority of the congregation members. They view a pastor as the leader of the church who is responsible for the church's spiritual growth.[10] According to Anderson (2003) a pastor's moral authority relies on public style and performance to connect spiritual power, moral sincerity, and economic potency.

CONCLUSION

The ethnography and personal narratives shared by each of the pastors reveal to us that being 'called' is a personal and intensely intimate experience, a kind of 'talking from God' that cannot be fully expressed or comprehended from an etic or outsider perspective, even by others in the same congregation, *who have not been* 'called'. The 'call' or beckoning from God differs

from one person to the other, even though all pastors are 'called' by (the same) God. The narratives reveal that the duties are not so much earned, rather people are 'born' to undertake duties to which God 'calls' or summons them at some point in their lives. Pastoral duties have been shown to be similar to that of a shepherd as pastors are expected to take care of or tend to the congregations' spiritual and social needs. The 'call' has been seen as a divine invitation, from the Divine. However, this does not suggest that pastors simply respond to an invitation. Rather, the understanding within the Christian Fellowship Church and amongst the pastors themselves, was that people who respond to this invitation were predestined for the sacred duty, and that the call is validated or confirmed by being communicated to someone else as well. Hence, the *invitation* is a 'call' that serves to prepare individuals for the duties they are to undertake. These invitations or call are in turn validated for the pastors by a spiritual confirmation before they begin their spiritual journey as pastors.

Being 'called' within such a faith is thus understood as a gift that one is born with, which God Himself controls. As Pastor Jobe points out by saying "*it's only our Creator that knows one's calling*". According to the pastors, being 'called' is not being 'special' before God, rather as the pastors put it, *"it means God has favoured you and trusted you with his flock"*. One informant summed it up well when he said, *"It is not awarded according to one's good deed; rather it is something that one is predestined for in opinion of God. It serves as God's purpose for the birth of an individual"*. Within this framework the Pastors are seen as a kind of spiritual glue holding the congregation (flock) together and thus contributing in no small way to the exponential growth of Pentecostalism and Pentecostalism Churches within South Africa through their personal 'public' or evangelical style and charisma.

NOTES

1. Each branch also has a church board and this board meets weekly to organize and monitor church performance and services. The Umlazi (Mother church) branch, the main research site, is headed by a male pastor. In a church with more than 800 congregants, there are 15 pastors, with some branches having single pastors leading them while others have more than two.
2. While pseudonyms are used in communicating the narratives in most instances and most ethnographic studies, in the context of this study, the actual names have been retained as the participants indicted that they did not require anonymity.
3. Conducting interviews after the death of the pastor was difficult as informants were still emotional. Some of the congregants cried during the interviews and focus groups. This led to interviews and focus groups being lengthy and sometimes having to be rescheduled out of respect for the participants.
4. The church secretary also advised against the use of any English words in some of the interviews.
5. Communication tools such as Facebook and MXit were also found by the authors to be opportune cyber communication tools for discussions and to 'fill gaps' where clarity was needed as CFC has a group on Facebook.
6. There were many gender dynamics and constraints communicated by one of the female pastors, as well as by many of the female members of the congregation. This paper however, is consciously delimited and gender dynamics form the thrust of a separate study with Pentecostalism in South African Churches.
7. Congregants differed when defining this term as some understood it to be a 'personal experience which cannot be expressed in words'. Themba, a male member of CFC further asserted that 'calling is when God speaks to you through a dream or vision and gives you an assignment'. Here he gave the impression of the Christian calling to be that of supernatural, that cannot be understood without having spiritual understanding.
8. Although not the main critical concern of the study, the surfacing of such observations prompted questions as to whether the pastors wives are accepting or not of such responsibility, as according to the informants the pastors do not have a 'life' and they have to share their time with the congregation. Pastor Jobe's wife said in no uncertain terms that she knew when she married her husband that such issues would arise from time to time so she married prepared for 'sharing' her husband. She claims that she understands the situation but she is concerned about her son who might grow up not seeing his father every day as is currently the situation. Pastor Mazibuko's wife however, is somewhat less accepting of this arrangement, and she reveals that she "*wouldn't advise any women to marry a person who is called*". She claimed that it's difficult when one "*has to share your partner with the whole church*".
9. The call to pastoral duties is sometimes compared to that of the *sangomas*, a healer in the African Traditional Religion, 'the difference between pastoral calling and that of a *sangoma* is that the former is called by God while the latter is called by ancestors'. In the context of the Church, being 'called' means being assigned to take care of the church's needs. Some refer to this as '*malusi*' (shepherd). To the pastors this is different from a *sangoma* where being 'called' means one has taken the role of being a leader and ensuring that the flock is well taken care of.

10. Congregants emphasised that there are 'ideal' roles of a pastor and that some (young) pastors do not undertake these 'ideal' duties. They are referred to as 'Sunday' pastors. The ideal includes 'visiting the sick in hospitals, visiting jails, managing the church, taking part in community activities (weddings, funerals). These are the ideal roles of a pastor as per the informants, which the church leader asserted cannot be easily performed as not all pastors reside in the same location as the congregation areas. This includes the distant flock at times. Pastor Jobe also responded to the ideal pastor functions positively by claiming that these are the most crucial duties even though it is not always possible to perform them. However, he wished that he could at least visit the sick and be involved in community activities even if only on a monthly basis. He noted that one of the CFC pastors lived in Durban Central, yet he serves as a pastor to the Gamalakhe branch, which is in Port Shepstone, on the South Coast of KwaZulu Natal and a few hundred kilometres from Durban.

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