

The role of Biblical and Church festivals in the faith formation of children in Dutch Reformed rural congregations in eastern Mpumalanga

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Abstract

Faith communities underestimate the importance of the role of including children in their festival celebrations with a view to form (“mould”) their faith. This study investigated the present state of including children in the festival celebrations of four Dutch Reformed rural congregations of the eastern region of Mpumalanga by means of two qualitative methods, namely focus groups and in-depth interviews. Analysis of the focus group and interview data revealed that children mainly are observers during the festival practices. It also indicated that festivals may enhance the faith formation of children in a playful, friendly, loving and caring faith community. Four social theories, namely the social learning-, enculturation-, ecological system-, and socio-cultural theory were used to explain the present celebration practices. The role of Biblical festivals in the faith formation of children from the perspective of the festival calendar as presented in the book of Deuteronomy was explored and theological norms that can guide faith communities’ festival practices were deduced from it. In the final section, strategies to enhance the faith formation of children during festival practices were recommended in the light of the theological norms.

Opsomming

Geloofsgemeenskappe onderskat die belangrike rol wat die insluiting van kinders by kerklike feeste in hul geloofsvorming kan speel. Hierdie studie het deur middel van twee kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes, naamlik fokusgroepe en persoonlike onderhoude vier plattelandse gemeentes in Mpumalanga-Oos se feespraktyke ondersoek. Analisering van die fokusgroep- en persoonlike onderhouddata het aangedui dat kinders hoofsaaklik blote waarnemers in gemeentes se feespraktyke is. Die data toon verder aan dat feeste kinders se geloof kan laat groei indien dit in ’n speelse omgee en vriendelike omgewing plaasvind. Vier sosiale teorieë, naamlik die sosialeleer-, enkulturasie-, ekosisteem-, en sosio-kulturele teorie is gebruik om die huidige feespraktyke te verklaar. Die rol van Bybelse feeste in die geloofsvorming van kinders is vanuit die perspektief van die boek Deuteronomium se feeskalender verder ondersoek. Teologiese norme, wat geloofsgemeenskappe se feespraktyke kan rig, is aangedui. Laastens is strategieë, wat kinders se geloofsvorming gedurende feeste kan bevorder, aanbeveel

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

1.1.1 Background

The following three events led me to become interested in the role of festivals in the faith formation of children:

- In 1996 I joined Petra Institute at White River as a staff member in the Department of Research and Development. Shortly after my appointment a Dutch Reformed youth pastor's wife approached me to assist her with the development of guidelines for families and cell groups to celebrate the Easter season.
- The *second event* took place at the beginning of 2008, while I was mentoring facilitators of the Child Development Training and Research Centre (CDTRC) in Addis Ababa. I had the privilege of attending an epiphany¹ festival celebration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Processions from different faith communities walked with bright colourful clothes from their church buildings through the streets of Addis Ababa. Every procession was led by a group of adults and children, singing and playing joyful music with different instruments while they were marching towards a very large open space on the outskirts of the city. The celebrations, with hundreds of adults and children, started from late that afternoon and continued through the night. That day I was deeply touched by the joy on the faces of the children, while participating together with the adults.
- The *third event* took place during our next visit to the CDTRC later in 2008. Twenty participants of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia attended a diploma Course in Children's ministry. During that visit I started noticing two different spiritualities among the participants of the course. One group had a humble and servanthood attitude with a very deep and indescribable respect for God. I

¹ *Epiphany* is a Church feast that originated in the Eastern Church before the 4th century. It is celebrated every year on the 6th January (Talley, 1991:118).

sensed that the other group's attitude in approaching God was more in a rational way. I shared my observation with two of the CDTRC's leaders. Both leader's explanations were more or less the same – the participants with the deep respectful attitude were as children brought up in the Orthodox tradition and the others in the evangelical tradition. I identified a woman from the Orthodox Church and interviewed her on her childhood experiences in the church. She recalled wonderful, positive memories regarding it and concluded the interview by saying: "The most special times were the church festival celebrations, together with my family"

The above three events influenced me to start asking the following questions:
What is the purpose of Biblical and Church Festivals? What role do Biblical and Church festival celebrations play in the faith formation of children?

1.1.2 Problem Statement

There is a growing tendency among scholars to shift from the differentiation² Children Ministry model, to a more integration or intergenerational³ model in the faith formation of children (Coetsee, 2013; Grobbelaar, 2008; May, 2005:139; Prest, 1999:1).

Although many church leaders and pastors agree with this shift, the question is: How should this model be implemented? The implementation of a model of integration is not an easy task. It very often requires greater skills and creativity (Grobbelaar, 2008:483).

On the other hand, there is also an increasing trend in the Christian tradition to motivate Christian families to celebrate the original intergenerational festivals of the

² In the Differentiation Children's Ministry Model children are separated from the adults and divided into age groups according to their needs and understanding level. Only adults that specialised in Children Ministry interact with the children.

³ Prest (1999:1) states that "intergenerationalism goes deeper than various groups of people simply being together. It insists on a definite interaction, relationship and conversation between three or four generations present. It carries strong concern of 'bridging' generations into acceptance, belonging, communication and conversation that provides maximum potential for the interflow of interpersonal faith".

The Integration or Intergenerational Model emphasizes the relationships between different generations and encourages mixed-age activities.

Old Testament. Zimmerman (2004:16) motivates families to celebrate Biblical festivals not as a set of rules “to earn God’s favour, but to be used as teaching tools to help our families to honor God”. This trend raises the question: Why is there in the Christian era a need to celebrate the festivals of the Old Testament? Is there something in the Old Testament festivals that the Reformed tradition has lost?

The above questions led me to the following research problem and questions related to the problem:

Research Problem:

What role should Biblical and Church festivals play in the faith formation of children in the Dutch Reformed church of eastern Mpumalanga?

Questions related to the Research problem:

- To what extent do children in rural eastern Mpumalanga form an inclusive part of Dutch Reformed faith community festival celebrations?
- What are the reasons for /theories behind the present festival celebration practices of Dutch Reformed congregations in eastern Mpumalanga?
- What perspectives does the book Deuteronomy give on the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?
- How can inclusive church festival celebrations enhance the faith formation of children in the Dutch Reformed congregations in eastern Mpumalanga?

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

1.2.1 Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the role of church festivals, which include children, in the faith formation of children.

1.2.2 Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- determine to what extent children in Dutch Reformed rural congregations in eastern Mpumalanga are inclusive part of the faith community's festival celebrations.
- investigate the reasons for/theories behind the present festival celebration practices in eastern Mpumalanga Dutch Reformed congregations.
- determine the Book of Deuteronomy's perspective on the role festivals play in the faith formation of children.
- explore how inclusive church festivals may enhance the faith formation of the children in a rural Dutch Reformed congregation in eastern Mpumalanga.

1.3 The Central Theoretical Statement

The central theoretical argument of this study is that a faith community, which includes children in their festival celebrations of the great deeds of God, enhances the faith formation of the children in a Dutch Reformed congregation in eastern Mpumalanga.

1.4 Methodology

The researcher approached this study from the perspective of the reformed tradition. Osmer's approach to practical theological interpretation is used to formulate the questions related to the research problem. Osmer proposed a model with four tasks:

- the descriptive-empirical task asks: What is going on?
- the interpretive task asks: Why is it going on?
- the normative task asks, What ought to be going on?
- the pragmatic task asks: How might we respond? (Osmer, 2008:4)

The following methods were applied to answer the different research questions:

- to determine to what extent children form an inclusive part of faith communities' festival celebrations, different focus groups of four rural congregations (in the Dutch Reformed Church of eastern Mpumalanga) were used as a principal

method for collecting data from leaders, parents and children⁴. (Osmer's first question: What is going on?)

- to investigate the reasons for and theories behind the present festival celebration practices, additional data were collected from personal interviews with the pastors⁵ of the four congregations. (Osmer's second question: Why is it going on?)
- to explore the perspective on the role of festivals in children's faith formation in the Book of Deuteronomy, the built-up structure of Deuteronomy 16 was analysed by means of discourse analysis (De Klerk & Van Rensburg, 2005). Important structure- and meaning- carriers were investigated theologically in the contexts of the Book of Deuteronomy and of the New Testament. Deuteronomy's three pilgrim's festivals (Passover and Unleavened Bread, Harvest and Shelters) in the festival calendar are chosen, because repeatedly the importance of children's walk with God is emphasised⁶ (Grobbelaar, 2008:247). Eckhart Otto views Deuteronomy as the centre of the Old Testament and also the starting point of Old Testament theology (Le Roux, 2009). (Osmer's third question: What ought to be going on?)
- to determine how inclusive feasts may enhance the faith formation of children, the collected data was screened and categorized through analysis, interpretation and synthesis. (Osmer's fourth question: How might we respond?)

1.5 Explanation of key concepts

In the proposed study the following key concepts will be explained:

- Children
- Faith Formation
- Church Festivals
- Biblical Festivals
- Inclusive

⁴ The focus group methodology is especially useful when working with disempowered groups, such as children because they may be reluctant to express their concerns in a one-to-one environment (Liamputtong, 2012:116).

⁵ Conducting a separate pastor's interviews apart from the leadership group avoids the possibility of creating different authority relationships in the group dynamics that may inhibit some participants in contributing to the group discussion (Hennink, 2011:150).

⁶ For example, the phrase *וּבְנֵיךָ וּבְתוּרֵיךָ* ('your son and your daughter') in Deuteronomy 16:11 and 14 is repeatedly used in other passages in the Book of Deuteronomy.

1.5.1 Children

*Children*⁷ in this study are defined as any person between infancy and 12 years. The focus of the research was on children between 6 and 12 years⁸.

1.5.2 Faith Formation

I use *Faith Formation*⁹ to refer to the process of being formed and transformed to know, love and serve the Triune God. This process is done through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is an overall process and also includes all the people, micro- and macro influences and processes that are consciously or unconsciously involved.

1.5.3 Church Festivals

In the broadest sense *Church festivals* can be interpreted as the celebration of any past events in the Christian tradition or congregation. In this study, church festivals refer to specific festivals celebrated in the Dutch Reformed tradition during a church calendar year. These festivals include Advent (Christmas), Easter, Pentecost, Holy Communion and Baptism.

1.5.4 Biblical Festivals

⁷ The word 'children' is often understood differently. Burke (2004:3) notes the following about defining 'children': "A child has been defined as any person below a notional age of majority, but this has been variously interpreted and there have been many differences throughout history in the ways that societies have come to recognize the exact beginning and end of childhood."

On the one hand the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has identified childhood as that stage of life experienced by any person between birth and fifteen years. On the other hand Article 1 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child is any person under the age of eighteen. Childhood has thus been identified as a stage of life, associated with chronological age, located between infancy and youth, including adolescence. The term 'adolescence' normally refers to children above 12 years (Grobelaar, 2008:35). Adolescents or teenagers are not included in this study.

⁸ The children between six and twelve years often are referred to by scholars as 'middle childhood' (Hill et al, 1996:131).

⁹ Prins (1993:21) also uses the term *faith formation*. He describes the process as "n totale proses waardeur 'n kind leer om die Here te ken, lief te hê en te dien. Dit sluit dus alle persone, invloede en prosesse in wat bewustelik of onbewustelik daarby betrokke is of betrek word."

Other scholars use different terminology to describe the same process. Grobelaar (2008:456) prefers *spiritual formation* or *guidance*. Breedts (1994:2) describes it as *faith upbringing* (*geloofsopvoeding*). Allen (2012:21) uses the term *Christian formation*. She defines Christian formation as a process of "Christians being formed, transformed and conformed to the image of Christ".

Biblical festivals refers to the three pilgrim festivals that are celebrated in the context of the book Deuteronomy.

1.5.5 Inclusive

*Inclusive*¹⁰ describes the active inclusion of children in all the festival practices of the faith community. The inclusion assumes an active interaction between children and adults.

1.6 Ethical considerations

The researcher followed the ethical guidelines of the North-West University during the empirical research with the children's focus groups.

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The study will generally follow the sequence of Osmer's approach to practical theological interpretation (1.4).

Chapters two and three are descriptive-empirical and answers the question: What is going on in the festival practices of the four Dutch Reformed congregations?

Chapter two describes the empirical research design and procedures which were implemented in collecting the data with regard to the question as to what extent children are included in the congregation's festivals. **Chapter three** examines and analyses the focus group and interview data for insight into the children and adults' perceptions.

Chapter four is interpretive and investigates the reasons for and theories behind the present festival celebration practices. The results in chapter three are interpreted using additional data from the focus groups, the personal interviews with the pastors and current social theories.

Chapter five is normative and explores the perspective on the inclusion of children and the role of festivals in children's faith formation in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Chapter six is pragmatic and discusses the implications of Chapter five in the light of the results of Chapters three and four. Possible strategies to influence the current festival practices will be recommended to enhance the faith formation of children.

¹⁰ The Oxford Dictionary defines 'inclusive' as follows: "Not excluding any section of society or any party involved in something"

Finally, **Chapter seven** makes a conclusion of the study by making a synopsis of the findings of the research and makes recommendations for future research.

The Chapter division is as follows:

- Introduction
- Inclusion of children in church festivals I – Empirical research and design
- Inclusion of children in church festivals II – Empirical results
- Some macro perspectives on including children in the present situation
- Some macro perspectives on including children in the Book of Deuteronomy
- Children and Church Festival future strategies
- Conclusion and recommendations for further research

CHAPTER 2

INCLUDING CHILDREN IN CHURCH FESTIVALS

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DESIGN

2.1 Introduction

This study investigates the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children in Dutch Reformed rural congregations of eastern Mpumalanga practically theologically. The first question, related to the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children, is: What is the present state of the inclusion of children in the festival practices of a faith community? To what extent are children included in the faith community's festival celebrations?

Osmer (2008:4) argues that the first task of practical theology is *descriptive-empirical*. Practical theology begins with episodes, situations, or contexts that call for interpretation. Therefore, practical theology invites interpretation of the texts of contemporary lives and practices. He grounds the descriptive task of practical theology in terms of 'a spirituality of presence' (Osmer, 2008:33-34). Spirituality of presence is a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations. He refers to such attending as priestly listening (Osmer, 2008:35-37)¹¹. The first task of this study is to answer the question: What is going on? What is going on in the festival practices of congregations concerning children? How are children included? How do children feel about celebrating festivals together with adults? An effective approach to formally¹² listen to children¹³, adults and leaders of congregations is by using one which is qualitative by nature.¹⁴

¹¹ The term is based on the idea that true intercessory prayer involves more than praying for people; it involves listening closely to their needs so that one can represent their needs to God. In other words, it begins with priestly listening (Osmer, 2008:35).

¹² Osmer (2008:38) uses the term formal attending, which he defines as 'investigating particular episodes, situations, and contexts through empirical research'

¹³ Researchers have been criticised in the past for dealing with children as 'objects of study' taking little account of what is regarded by children themselves as being meaningful and significant. There were investigations *on* rather than *with* them. Hill et al. (1996:130) argues that children should have opportunities to exercise influence in discussions which concerns them.

¹⁴ Qualitative research methods do not necessarily treat people as objects, and are consistent with priestly listening (Osmer, 2008:38).

Chapter 2 describes the what, how and why of the qualitative research methods which were being used to listen attentively to children and adults with the aim of addressing the first question of the dissertation. The chapter focuses on the research context, methods and instruments used. It also describes the sampling design and selection processes; as well as the data collection and analysis procedures utilized in the investigation.

2.2 Research context

The study was conducted in a specific area and denomination context. The area was the eastern part of Mpumalanga in South Africa and the denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church. The research was done during March and April 2014 at four congregations situated in smaller towns or communities in the eastern area with a member range between 80 and 480. The study was conducted by the researcher and his wife.

2.3 Empirical research design

2.3.1 Design

The study design used the strategy to mix two qualitative methods. The two methods were focus discussion groups and in-depth interviews. This study design was suitable for this research due to the following reasons:

The focus group will help to identify different views¹⁵ on:

- The inclusion of children in the festival practices of a specific congregation; and
- The benefit of festivals in people's faith formation

The in-depth interviews¹⁶ will help in obtaining the individual perceptions and beliefs of the key influential leaders regarding the festival practices and its role in the faith formation of children.

2.3.2 Participants

The participants that participated in the study were children, parents, congregation leaders and the local minister of each of the four congregations. Although the study

¹⁵ Hennink et al. (2011:53) argue that 'the objective of focus group discussion is to identify a range of opinions on a specific issue or to seek community norms and values'.

¹⁶ Hennink et al. (2011: 53) notes that in-depth interviews identify individual perceptions, beliefs and experiences.

was in the first place designed to hear the children's voices on the festival practices in the congregation, all the others were included to gain additional perspectives.

2.4 Data collection methods

Focus groups¹⁷ were used as the primary data collection method for generating data to answer the question: What is going on? This method of data collection is very helpful when generating descriptive empirical data (Hesse-Biber et al., 2011:173). The generated data from the focus groups was also used to bring perspective on the *second* question: What are the reasons¹⁸ behind the answers to the 'what' question?' (compare Chapter 4). The value of focus groups is to get a group's¹⁹ perspective on the inclusion of children in church festivals. The in-depth interview²⁰ method is used as a secondary method to follow-up specific data generate from the focus groups.

2.5 Research instruments

The instruments being used in the focus group discussion and the in-depth interviews play an important role in the generation of the data concerning what is going on. Two discussion guides for the focus groups were designed, as well as one interview guide for the in-depth interview. Much research has been done during the past six decades to avoid errors in the construction of appropriate instruments (Mouton, 2001:103-104).

2.5.1 Focus group discussion guide

The discussion guide is a critical component in the success of a focus group (Hesse-Biber et al, 2011:182). Two separate discussion guides were designed' one for the children and one for the adults. Although the principles followed for both discussion guides are the same, it was applied differently.

Both discussion guides had a clear and logical structure. The guides also followed a funnel structure, beginning with broad questions, moving to more specific questions

¹⁷ A focus group is an interactive discussion between four to eight pre-selected participants focussing on specific issues (Hennink et al., 2011:136; Hesse-Biber et al., 2011:178; Liamputtong, 2012:3).

¹⁸ Liamputtong (2012:5) states that focus group methodology 'is useful in *exploring and examining what people think, how they think and why they think* the way they do about the issues of importance to them without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus.'

¹⁹ The *primary aim of a focus group is to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group* of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Liamputtong, 2012:3).

²⁰ Hennink et al. (2011:109) defines an in-depth interview as a 'one-to-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth.'

and finishing with broader closing questions (Hennink et al., 2011:142-145; Hesse-Biber et al., 2011:182-183; Liamputtong, 2012:75-77).

2.5.1.1 Parents and Leaders' discussion guide (see Addendum A)

The adults' discussion guide was structured as follows:

- Introduction – cognition to the participants, what to expect
- Introductory or opening questions – rapport and feel at ease
- Transition questions – transfer participants to the focus topic
- Focus or key questions – central issue of the research
- Closing questions
- Conclusion

The questions in the discussion guide were:

A. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

1. Just to kick off. Let's just hear something about yourself.
 - Who are you? and
 - How are you involved with children?
2. Write the following words on a flip chart – Festivals.
 - What comes to your mind when you see the word 'Festivals'?

B. TRANSITION QUESTIONS:

1. Think back to your childhood. Imagine you're 10 years old again.
 - What Festival celebrations come to your mind?
 - How did you experience those festivals?

C. FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. What are your views on Church festivals?
2. What kinds of festivals are celebrated in your congregation?
3. How are children involved?
4. Discuss one of the following two statements:
 - "With children it is better to first teach the great deeds of God to them than to celebrate it together, through festivals."
 - "Celebration with adults, especially where children feel welcome and special, enhances their faith"
5. How do the kids in your congregation feel about church festivals together with adults?

D. CLOSING QUESTIONS:

1. Let's summarize what has been said...
2. What are the implications for your church in light of our discussions?

2.5.1.2 ***Children's discussion guide*** (see Addendum B)

The children's discussion guide followed the same sequence as the adults' guide but with a slight difference (Hennessy, 2005: 245-247):

- Introduction
- Ice breakers
- Transition questions – picture prompts of different church festivals
- Focus questions – Projective pictures of emotions, drawing²¹ and clay activities
- Conclusion

The influences affecting focus groups with adults are also relevant to children, such as the need for establishing rapport, ensuring confidentiality or posing questions clearly and concisely, but also additional factors need to be taken into consideration. Hill et al. (1996:133) state that communication with children "needs to be adapted to their level of cognitive and linguistic development; to make use of materials, techniques and settings which they were familiar with; and convey instructions in a manner that makes sense from a child's perspective. "Flexibility and creativity are essential when running a focus group because it helps the children in maintaining concentration and interest throughout the discussion (Hennessy, 2005:247). I have used a variety of exercises and activities to stimulate the discussion. I adapted some of the techniques professionals use to fit the purpose of the research. The construction of instruments for stimulating the discussion and for assisting the children in expressing their feelings was:

- visual prompts to identify different church festivals (see Addendum C).
- Pictures expressing positive and negative emotions, creative art with drawing and playing with clay to help the children expressing their feelings about the different festivals.

The questions in the discussion guide (see Addendum B) were:

²¹ Children's drawings are increasingly being used as a means for researching children's inner experiences. Drawings is a method that can bring insight into a child's inner experiences (Veale, 2005:261)

1. INTRODUCTORY QUESTION:

Method: Projective technique using 16 picture associations of five church festivals (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Baptism, Holy Communion) and a birthday celebration.

Process:

- Display the 11 pictures (see Addendum C) and let the children look at it.
 - *I wonder which picture is special to you.*
- Prompt questions:
 - *What in the picture makes it special to you?*
 - *Tell me more about the picture.*

2. TRANSITION QUESTIONS

Method: Continue to use the previous pictures (Introductory questions), except the birthday celebration. Add 5 pictures of Jesus' life on earth (Birth, baptism, crucifixion, resurrection and Ascension).

Process:

- *Do you think we can combine these pictures in different groups?*
- Help me and try to see if you can put some of the pictures together.
- Children discuss how they will combine the pictures and motivate their reasons.
 - *I wonder if you can give the groups names*
 - *Which group of pictures is for children the most important?*
 - *What makes this group of pictures the most important?*
- Children prioritise the rest of the groups
 - *Which group of pictures is for children the most enjoyable?*
 - *What makes this group of pictures the most enjoyable?*

3. FOCUS QUESTIONS 1:

Method: Emotion picture (Doll on a chair).

Process:

- Put a doll on a chair and introduce her to the children: "This is Simone and she loves God very much"
- Choose one of the festivals which the group indicated as the most important, for example Christmas.

- Start first with the positive emotion. “During Christmas time Simone goes to the church”. Show the positive emotion (Happy/Glad/Excited).
 - *How does Simone feel now?*
 - *What makes her feel like this?*

4. FOCUS QUESTIONS 2:

Method: Continue with emotion picture (Sad) – Doll on a chair.

- Now choose one of the festivals the group indicated as not so important, for example Holy Communion. Next use a negative emotion facial expression: “Simone goes to communion in the church”. Show the negative emotion (sad).
 - *How does Simone feel now?*
 - *What makes her feel like that?*

5. FOCUS QUESTION 3:

Method: Draw a picture or mould play clay

Process

- Allow the children to choose to draw or to mould something with clay
- *How should the adults (Pastor, elder, deacon) at the church be, so that children will feel very special during feasts?*

6. CLOSING QUESTION:

Method: 4 emotion pictures – glad, sad, mad and frightened

Process

- Display the four emotion pictures
 - *If Simone will be together with the BIG people in your church next Sunday, how will she feel?*

2.5.2 In-depth Interview guide for local ministers

The in-depth interview guide’s structure is very similar to the focus group guide in 2.3.1. The type of focus questions are also the same as in the focus group (compare Addendum D).

The questions in the discussion guide were:

1. INTRODUCTORY QUESTION:

- 1.1 If you would use a metaphor or a sketch to picture your children's ministry, how would you do it?

2. TRANSITIONAL QUESTION:

2.1 Church festivals - What is your view on Church festivals?

3. FOCUS QUESTIONS:

3.1 How important is the liturgical church year for you?

3.2 What types of church festivals are celebrated in the congregation?

3.3 How are children involved?

3.4 How do you feel about the following statements?

- "Churches should organise separate church festivals for kids."
- "With children, it is better to first teach the great deeds of God to them than to celebrate it together through festivals."

3.5 How do the kids in your congregation feel about church festivals together with adults?

4. CLOSING QUESTION:

4.1 Is there anything else you would like to say?

2.5.3 Pilot-testing

Pilot-testing a discussion guide is critical²². One of the most common errors made while constructing new instruments is that no piloting or pre-testing is done. The different interview guides were pre-tested on three occasions in an English-speaking congregation similar to congregations where the research was done (see the research schedule – Addendum E). Four girls from seven to nine years were present with the pre-testing of the children's guide. Minor alterations were made. Some of the data collected in the children's focus group were included as a story into the parents and leadership guide (Addendum A Focus Question 5) as well as in the ministers' in-depth interview guide (Addendum D Closing Question 5.2). Eight participants attended the parents and leadership pilot testing group. Afterwards minor alterations were also made to the discussion guide.

2.6 Sample design and Methods

Sampling addresses the question: Who are the people participating in the research project? To make sure the research design requisites are met, the following people and collection methods were included in the research design:

- Children focus groups

²² Hennink et al. (2011:149) states that it is often 'difficult to predict how participants will interpret the questions in the discussion guide.'

- Parent and Leader focus groups
- Congregation minister in-depth interviews

2.6.1 Sample selection criteria

Two basic sample selection procedures were followed in this research:

- Locating appropriate churches
- Determining the children, parents and leaders to participate in the focus groups

2.6.1.1 Locating appropriate churches

The study focuses on a specific denominational and sociological context, namely the Dutch Reformed Church and the rural area of Eastern Mpumalanga. Statistics SA (2004:14) defined rural areas as 'any area that is not classified *urban*. Rural areas are subdivided into tribal areas and commercial farms'. Besides the above criteria, the following four criteria were used to identify the four congregations for the research:

- Less than 500 members
- Preferably only one pastor
- Pastor has an interest in the liturgical year.
- Congregation follows the church calendar and celebrates at least the following festivals: Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Holy Communion and Baptism

The motivation for above criteria was to involve small congregations with a small number of children. My assumption was that in these types of congregations children are not differentiated from adults and are often present in the adults' festival practices.

2.6.1.2 Selection of focus groups comprising children, parents and leaders

Morgan (in Hesse-Biber et al., 2011:178) identifies sampling as one of the key components in a focus group design. Inattention to recruitment is the single greatest of focus group failure. Two separate focus groups for every congregation were planned. The first consists of children and the other of parents and leaders. The reasons for a separate children's group were to:

- acknowledge the children participants as experts (Levine and Zimmerman in Hennessy, 2005:238)
- hear the voices²³ or perspectives of the children without intimidation of adults
- use developmentally appropriate techniques for exploring the children's own feelings and perspectives (Mayall, in Hill et al., 1996:130).

The children's focus group were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Children between six and twelve years²⁴
- Four to eight children per congregation²⁵
- Both sexes represented²⁶
- Regular attendance of Sunday School
- Children familiar with each other

The second focus group consisted of parents and congregational leaders. The reason was to get a crucial group perspective²⁷ on the inclusion of children in the festival practices of a specific congregation. This focus group was selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Parents must be an active member of the local congregation and have at least one child in middle childhood (seven to eleven years)
- Leaders active in a leadership role
- Inclusion of both sexes
- Size of the group – four to eight people per congregation

2.6.2 Sample selection process

²³ The focus group methodology allows researchers to pay attention to the needs of those that have little or no societal voice (Liamputtong, 2012:4).

²⁴ There are two reasons for focussing on this age group. First, children in middle childhood are a neglected life-stage group compared to those in the pre-school and teen years groups – life periods which are usually presumed to be characterised by more rapid and socially significant changes and adjustments (Hill et al., 1996:131). Secondly, it is difficult for pre-school children to express themselves in a focus group because they take longer to feel safe. The Most successful children's focus group in the past was run with children from eight years and above (Hennessy, 2005:239). The evidence of the value of using focus groups with younger children is limited and contradictory (Hennessy, 2005:241).

²⁵ Focus groups vary in size but typically consist of four to eight participants (Hesse-Biber, 2011:178).

²⁶ Most scholars suggest that homogeneity is the best (Hennessy, 2005:241; Hesse-Biber, 2011:179). However, when children know each other well, as in Hill et al.'s (1996) research, mixed groups worked equally well depending on the sensitivity of the issue discussed. I chose mixed groups because "festivals" is not a very sensitive issue.

²⁷ I work with the assumption that a leader and parent's focus group will represent an important perspective in the congregation.

The sample selection process started in the beginning of 2013. Eventually, in February 2013 I located four churches which fitted the criteria listed in 2.2.1. For purposes of confidentiality, the four churches were renamed after those in the New Testament. In this study, these churches are known as Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi and Colosse. I know the context of most of the Dutch Reformed churches in the eastern area of Mpumalanga very well. During my eighteen years of living in the Lowveld, I had regular contact with various congregations. I was also often asked to lead worship services during holidays and special events. In the first quarter of 2013 during March and April I contacted (telephoned) the local ministers of three congregations to explore the possibility of conducting research on church festivals. These congregations were Galatia, Philippi and Colosse. All three ministers were very positive and willing to participate in the research project. The pastors then imparted the following information:

Galatia²⁸

The local minister was very positive about festivals and mentioned his emphasis on baptism as a church festival. He follows the church calendar during the year and was willing to participate in the research.

Colosse²⁹

For a few years the congregation presented a Passion play during the Easter season and children were included in it. In the beginning, the local minister was unsure whether he would participate. He mentioned that the congregation only has a few children and he doubted whether the children would add value to the research. I assured him that the number of children was not an issue because the research would focus on small congregations. At the end the minister was very positive to help in the research because, to him, church festivals are an important issue.

Philippi³⁰

The local minister was very positive and excited about the research. He mentioned that he put a lot of effort into celebrating church festivals such as Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and Advent. The minister also asked me to write an email to his church board to explain the purpose and implications of the research.

²⁸ Field notes 9th April 2013 at 10:08 – 10:19.

²⁹ Field notes on 9th April 2013 – 10:25-10:40.

³⁰ Field notes on 8th March 2013 – 10:55-11:07.

After my conversations with the three ministers, I decided to postpone the empirical research until Lent and Easter 2014. At that stage I was convinced that the empirical research would be more beneficial in the context of preparation for Easter.

At that stage I didn't contact the minister of the Ephesus congregation; the reason being my close relationship with the just-mentioned congregation. My relationship with Ephesus started in 2007 when I was invited to preach six times during the Dutch Reformed Pentecost week. In addition to this, they often invited me to lead the Sunday services when the local minister was on holiday. I was positive that the congregation would not have any objections to the research I intended doing. However, the local minister of Ephesus accepted a calling to another church at the end of November 2013. On 5 January 2014, after leading a Sunday worship service in Ephesus, I had an informal meeting with two people from their key leadership about the research. They were very enthusiastic and positive about the matter and requested me to write a letter to inform their church council about the purpose of the research and to ask their permission to conduct the research in the congregation. I also followed up on my previous discussions with the other three congregations, Galatia, Philippi and Colosse. The minister of Philippi then again asked me to write an email to his church council. The email (Addendum F) was sent to Philippi with the request to do the research during Easter time. This email was also sent to the ministers of Galatia and Colosse as well as to the key leadership of Ephesus. It was also followed up with three telephone calls to the local ministers of Philippi, Galatia and Colosse to explain the criteria for the two focus groups and arrangements needed for the meeting, date, time and place. The personal interviews with the ministers were also scheduled for directly after the focus group meetings. The ministers were willing to take responsibility for identifying participants according to the selection criteria.

The leadership of Ephesus also responded very positively. Ephesus' congregational manager contacted me during February and scheduled the focus groups during March. He volunteered to ask the Sunday school teachers to select children in accordance with the selection criteria.

2.7 Data Collection and Field work process

The data collection process took place during the two months of Lent and Easter (see Addendum E – Time Schedule). The first data collection started with a children’s focus group on 2 March 2014 in Ephesus and the last ended on 5 May with a personal skype interview with the previous minister of Ephesus. It can be noted that all the focus groups took place during Lent and ended two weeks before Easter on 13 April 2014. The sequence of the data collection in every congregation was: first, the focus group with the children, then, with the parents and leaders and lastly, with the interview with the local minister.

2.7.1 Focus groups

All the focus group venues were on the premises of the four different congregations respectively. All the discussions were held inside small, comfortable rooms.

2.7.1.1 Children focus groups

Three of the children focus groups took place on a Sunday, either during the church service or thereafter. The Philippi group was on a Wednesday afternoon before the community children’s club. The group discussions were held in an environment familiar to the children. For the congregations of Galatia, Colosse and Ephesus it was in a Sunday school classroom setting and for Philippi, in the sitting room of a flat next to the church. The children felt relaxed and comfortable³¹. In all four settings, the children were seated in a circle on a carpet. This contributed to the creation of a nice informal and relaxed atmosphere. The children also chose their own seating arrangements close to a friend, brother or sister with whom they felt comfortable³². The duration of the different child groups was approximately one hour. My wife acted as moderator for all the groups and followed the guidelines in the interview guide.

2.7.1.2 Parents and leaders focus groups and minister’s interviews

Three of the parent and leaders focus groups were conducted around a table in the church board meeting place of the congregation and one in a circle in the liturgical space of the church. I facilitated the different groups while my wife took notes on the

³¹ Hennessy (2005) states that children “are likely to feel most comfortable when they are in a familiar environment and whenever possible, children’s familiarity with the location.”

³² In comparison with adults it may be more important to encourage children to choose their own seating (Hennessy, 2005:245).

discussions. The personal interviews with the ministers were also done by me. Two of the interviews took place in the minister's house, one in the church office and the last one over Skype.

2.8 Data analysis procedures

2.8.1 Data capturing and transcribing

All the data of the focus groups, except Ephesus' first children's group, were recorded in audio format on two cell phones. An extra cell phone was used as a back-up. The children's focus groups were also video recorded to capture the non-verbal aspects of the discussions. After the first focus group discussion I realized that the children often responded by head nodding, body postures and facial expressions that were difficult to note. Although the camera may be intrusive and affect the spontaneity of adult groups, I found it not to be a problem with the children's groups. The camera was on a tripod without anyone behind it resulting in the children totally forgetting about it. In the pilot-testing of the parents and leaders' discussion guide I found the video camera to be disturbing for the adults. Therefore, during the parents and leadership focus group discussion, only an audio recording was made. However, the recording was supplemented by taking down notes on the discussions by an assistant moderator. Emerging themes, overall dynamics and non-verbal aspects were noted. An audio recording was also made of the personal interviews with the local ministers.

The focus group and the in-depth interviews were transcribed in written form shortly after the meetings. The focus group transcripts (see Addenda L, M, P, Q) represent the accounts of what actually happened during each interview³³. I applied Blake Poland's (cited in Liamputtong, 2012:167-167) method for transcribing the group interview word by word. The transcripts also include all the informal conversation style and emotional expressions, including pauses, emphasis, laughter, sighing and sounds like 'hm', 'oh', 'ah' (see Addendum K).

³³ Blake Poland (cited in Liamputtong, 2012:167) recommends that interview transcripts be transcribed verbatim. It should not be edited or 'tidied up' to make it 'sound better'.

2.8.2 Data analysis approach

Different approaches to the analysis of qualitative data exist as well as ways of analysing focus group data (Hennessy, 2005:247; Liamputtong, 2012:172-173). The thematic and interaction analysis approach was used during the data analysis of the focus group discussions³⁴. The interview data analysis was only directed by the thematic analysis.

2.8.3 Data analysis process

During the thematic analysis the following steps were used in analysing the data:

The *first step* was to develop a project-specific plan of analysis during the transcription of the first focus group discussion that would guide me through analysis of the data and lead me to answer the research questions (Hennink, 2011:234).

In the beginning I used the following initial questions to guide my analyses.

Extent to which children participate in the festival practices

Questions to explore

- To which extent do children participate in the festival practices of the faith community?
Children's *involvement* in the festivals with adults – are they ignored, observers, participants, take the lead)?
What is Children's involvement like during the festivals in the presence of adults (Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Holy Communion, Baptism)?
- How do children feel in the presence of adults during the festival practices (Accepted, Happy, Sad, Neutral, Nice, Excited, Bored and Scared)?
- What made the children happy or sad during festival practices (Attitude of the adults; Parents not being present; Participation together; Friends; Nature of the festival)?

³⁴There has been some debate regarding an appropriate way of analysing focus group data. Some suggest that data generated by means of the focus group method can be analysed similar to other qualitative methods, particularly thematic analysis (Davidson et al., as cited in Liamputtong, 2012:172).

Others argue otherwise, for example Andrew Parker and Jonathan Tritter (as cited in Liamputtong, 2012:172) argue that it is inadequate to analyse focus group data as is done in other conventional qualitative research. They advocate that 'attention must be paid to the dynamic aspects of interaction within the group, for it is this dynamic nature which is at the heart of focus groups and which endows them with the power to generate insight often negated by other methods'.

- How do children experience the language used during the festival practices (Understandable; Big words)?
- Does any relationship exist between the children's participation in and understanding of the festivals?
- Where does the focus lie during the festival practices (Experiential; Informing – Explanation of the festivals)?

Reasons for the festival practices

Question to explore:

- How does leadership understand its children's ministry – with the:
 - Emphasis on instruction (cognitive approach) or experiential?
 - Emphasis intergenerational or differentiated?
- What is leadership's (Leaders, Pastors, Parents) understanding of the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?
- What model does leadership follow in their children's ministry (Differential or Intergenerational)?

The *second step* was to transcribe the discussions as soon as possible after each group discussion to ensure that the emotional tone was still freshly remembered (Hennessy, 2005:247). During the transcription I made a recollection of the discussion in order to identify and summarize major themes emerging apart from the possible themes planned in the first step.

The *third step* was 'unitizing' the data – finding units of information that will form the basis of defining the categories (Hennessy, 2005:248).

The *fourth step* was categorizing the units - Grouping the units into common features. During this stage I periodically reviewed the categories for overlap and completeness. At this stage I started to use the software program NVIVO to ease the process.

The *fifth step* was to look at the data at individual and group level to establish whether differences occurred in the perspectives of the individuals and the groups as a whole³⁵.

³⁵ Barbour (2007:131) suggests that it is useful to analyse data at the individual level because this can assist researchers in further exploring differences within the group. She contends: 'Focusing on individual voices, however, is particularly helpful in determining the extent to which a perspective is a collective one'.

The sixth step was finally to do an interaction analysis to gain a clear perspective through the group dynamics on the group's view pertaining to the inclusion of children³⁶.

2.9 Ethical considerations

During the empirical research process, all the ethical aspects were constantly adhered to (Hennink, 2011:62-77). The three local ministers of each congregation and the manager of Ephesus declared themselves willing to act as gatekeepers to recruit the participants for the different focus groups. A full information package was sent to them indicating what the research would entail. The package included the letters to:

- the local minister covering every aspect the research entails (Addendum F).
- every parent, whose child participated in a focus group (Aim, purpose, confidentiality, anonymity and permission) as well as a personal letter to the child (Addenda I and J).
- every parent and leader that participated, to explain every aspect of the research (Addendum G).

Before starting the various focus group discussions and personal interviews the issues concerning confidentiality, consent, anonymity, permission for recordings etc. were discussed (Addenda A and B).

2.10 Data quality and study limitations (Shortcomings and errors)

The following shortcomings were identified in the research design and process:

2.10.1 Research design

In-depth interviews as a follow-up after the children's focus group – A shortcoming in the design was that it would have been beneficial to follow up the children's focus group with in-depth interviews with the children on specific aspects that came to the fore during in the focus groups, especially the children's personal views on their inclusion in the festival practices.

³⁶ Karen Willis (as cited in Liamputtong – 2012, p. 175) argues that focus group data has three layers: 'the individual, the group, and the group interaction'. In order to properly analyse these three slices, it is necessary to pay attention to the forms and scopes of expressions (both verbal and non-verbal), the interactive nature of the discussion, the context in which interaction occurs, and the contents produced by the group. This way reveals not only the dynamics of the discussion which can inform the strength of perspectives held by the participants and the level of agreement or disagreement in the groups, but also how the agreement or disagreement is derived.

Mixed method approach – The qualitative methods of focus groups and interviews could have been supplemented by a quantitative survey to test whether the focus group’s perspective on the inclusion of children is representative of the rest of the faith community.

2.10.2 Research process

The recruiting strategy – Although in some churches, such as Ephesus and Galatia, more than were needed for the group had shown up – there was no planned strategy to handle the rest. The unplanned strategy was ‘first come first served’ or ‘everybody joins’. The consequences of this strategy were that the criteria were not always met. Galatia’s group consisted of girls only and the group of Ephesus of boys only.

The age difference – The age difference between seven and eleven years is too huge. The huge difference repressed the group participation of the seven-year-olds. They only responded to the direct questions of the facilitator.

2.11 Summary

The primary aim of this chapter was to describe how the researcher formally, attentively listened to the children, parents, leaders and local ministers in order to answer the first question of this dissertation: What is going on in the festival practices of the Dutch Reformed Churches in eastern Mpumalanga and to what extent are children included? This chapter has described and explained the research design and the instruments applied in measuring it. The sample design and the criteria used in the choice of the sample design are explained as well as the sample processes. The chapter concludes with the data collection and analysis procedures followed in the research investigation. In the next chapter, the results of attentive listening to the children, parents, leaders and local ministers will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

INCLUDING CHILDREN IN CHURCH FESTIVALS

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

This study investigates practical theologically the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children. The first task of this study is to answer the question: What is going on? (Osmer's first question) What is going on in the festival practices of congregations concerning children? How are children included? The first question, related to the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children, is: To what extent are children inclusively part of the faith community's festival celebrations?

In the previous chapter the research design and procedures being used to listen attentively to the children and adults, to answer the above mentioned question, were explained and discussed.

This chapter describes the results of the empirically listening process. Chapter 3 focuses on the demographics and context of the congregations and the sample profile of the different focus groups and the personal interviews. The results concerning the inclusion of children as perceived by the children and adults will then be described and summarised by using tables, graphs and excerpts from the focus group and interview data obtained. Main trends and patterns will be discussed with reference to the question: To what extent are children included in the festival practices of the faith community. In the last section the most important findings will be drawn together and a conclusion will be presented.

3.2 Sample profiles

The demographics and context of the four congregations will first be discussed and then the sample profiles of the children- and leader-parent focus groups. For purposes of confidentiality, the four churches were renamed after those in the New Testament and the research participants' names were also changed.

3.2.1 Demographics and context of the four congregations

3.2.1.1 Galatia³⁷

Galatia is situated in a small town that is over-crowded during holiday seasons. The economic activities are mainly tourism and forestry. Job opportunities are limited for whites because of affirmative action at the local industries.³⁸

The congregation consists of 268 professing and 35 baptized members. The congregation is divided into two language groups, Afrikaans and Zulu speakers. Galatia is an aging congregation. The Afrikaans-speaking members' average age is approximately 60 years. The two language groups are worshipping separately, also in different church buildings, because of the language barrier. During the Afrikaans faith community's worship service, the children also have a separate children's worship service, which is led by one of the Sunday school teachers. The catechesis classes (Sunday school) are divided into three separate groups, namely pre-school, grades 1-3 and grades 4 and 5. The local minister has been less than ten years pastoring the congregation for less than ten years. He follows the church calendar during the year and places great emphasis on baptism as a festival. To the question, during the in-depth interview, about his view on church festivals he responded:

"Ek voel dit is baie belangrik. Die hele ding van om fees te vier het vir my gekliek, wat ek dink, 'n mens moet benut ... Ons wil dit uitbou."³⁹

The smaller Afrikaans-speaking children from pre-school pre-Grade 3 have their own separate Holy Communion service, parallel to the others. In the Zulu-speaking service adults and children are worshipping together.

3.2.1.2 Colosse⁴⁰

Colosse is a two-pronged congregation, 30 kilometres from each other. The members are factory workers, farmers or involved in the forestry industry. There are 471 professing and 167 baptized members. Once a month the children have a separate service in the church hall that is led by one of the Sunday school teachers. The rest of the month they attended the faith community's service. Every Sunday,

³⁷ Field notes 9th April 2013 at 10:08 – 10:19 and in-depth interview.

³⁸ In-depth interview with the local minister on 16th March 2014.

³⁹ English translation: *"I feel it is very important. The whole thing about celebrating festivals for me clicked, I think, one should use it ... We want to develop it further. "*

⁴⁰ Field notes on 9th April 2013 – 10:25-10:40 and in-depth-interview.

the pre-school children have a separate service. The minister, who has served in the congregation for more than 20 years, is very passionate about celebrating church festivals. He notes:

“ ek het al l-a-a-n-k terug gesê ons moet baie meer doen met ons feeste.”⁴¹

He started in 1993 to emphasise Easter, especially the last week before Easter. The congregation then also started to celebrate Holy Communion more regularly. A few years later the congregation presented a Passion play in which the children and adults participated together.

3.2.1.3 Philippi⁴²

Philippi is situated in a very close and small community. This congregation consists of 80 professing and 20 baptized members. There are a few children in the congregation, only seven are in the primary school. Adults and children are together during the Sunday worship service. After the service a catechesis class takes place for all the primary school children. During the week some church members run a community children's club with over a hundred children participating. 80% of the primary school's children are attending the club. The minister, who has also served this faith community for longer than 20 years, views festivals as follows:

“Ons maak moeite daarmee ... ons ouens weet van Advent, Epifanie, Lent, As-Woensdag, lydingstyd, Pase, opstanding, Pinkster. So ons ouens is veronderstel om daardie goed op die punte van hulle vingers te ken ... oor die aflope klompie jare 12 jaar plus-minus [het] ons iets besonders, selfs meer as dit van As-Woensdag, ...van die lydenstyd, selektiewe vas en al daai klas van goed, [gemaak]. Ons ken dit en doen dit.”⁴³

3.2.1.4 Ephesus

Ephesus is situated between the mountains. The congregation consists of 480 professing and 80 baptized members. The children attend the faith community's worship service. The children's catechesis is organised into three groups, namely pre-school, Grades one to grade three and Grades four to six. The minister, who

⁴¹ English translation: "I said long ago that we must do much more with our festivals"

⁴² Field notes on 8th March 2013 – 10:55-11:07 and in-depth-interview.

⁴³ English translation: "We put effort in it ... our guys know Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Resurrection, Pentecost. So our guys are supposed to know it very well ... we started A few years, plus minus 12 years, ago to make something very special of Ash Wednesday ... of Lent, selective fasting etc. We know it and do it. "

has served more than 25 years in the congregation, states his view on church festivals:

“Ek is eintlik ’n voorstander daarvan ... [dat] ’n mens moet nie die kinders en die ouers skei nie. Daar moet aandag aan gesinsdienste [gedurende Pinkster] gegee word dat hulle as gesinne die dienste bywoon en dat die hele aanbieding van byvoorbeeld van ’n Pinksterreeks die liturgie so in te rig dat dit ’n kindvriendelike liturgie is, met ander woorde ten opsigte van die musiek die kinders ... moet akkommodeer ten opsigte van musiekinstrumente. En dan ook in jou prediking jou kinders ook te betrek ... in die verskillende elemente van jou diens byvoorbeeld die Skriflesing, deurkollekte [ens].”⁴⁴

3.2.2 Demographics of the Research participants

The demographics of the gender and age of the children- and leader-parent focus groups in the four congregations will be discussed.

3.2.2.1 Children Focus Groups

Congregation	Gender		Age				
	Male	Female	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years	11 years
Ephesus	3	0	0	0	1	2	0
Galatia	0	5	1	1	0	1	2
Colosse	3	1	1	1	2	0	0
Philippi	4	1	2	2	1	0	0
Total	10	7	4	4	4	3	2

Table 1: Children Focus Group – Gender/Age Sample

Seventeen children between ages six and twelve years participated in the research. Ten were boys and seven girls. The focus group size varied from 3 to 5 participants. Two of the focus groups were only boys or girls. The other two were of a mixed gender with the majority being boys. The graph below (see Fig 1) shows the gender distribution in the different congregations.

The age bracket also differs in the separate congregations:

- Colosse and Philippi from 7 to 9 years

⁴⁴ English translation: "I'm actually an advocate of ... [that] we should not separate children and parents. We should encourage family services [during Pentecost] so that families attend the services. For example a Pentecostal Series liturgy must be presented in such a way that it is child-friendly, in other words the music must accommodate the children ... regarding musical instruments. And then in your preaching to engage children... and in the different elements of your service, for example in the Scripture reading, taking up of the offering, [etc.]. "

- Galatia from 7 to 11 years
- Ephesus only 9 and 10 years

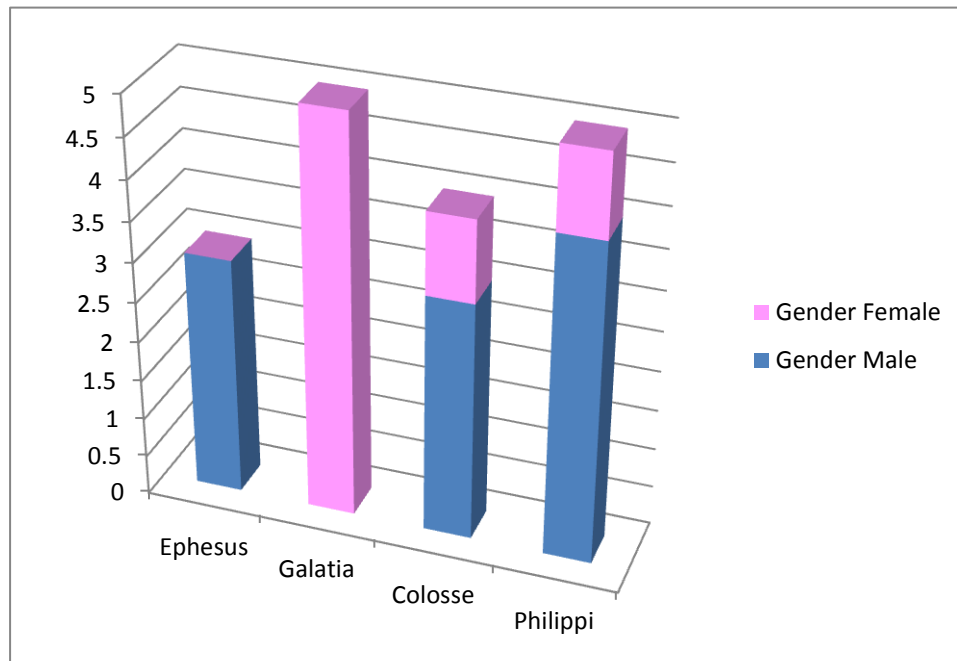


Figure 1: Children Focus Group – Gender/Congregation

3.2.2.2 Parents and Leaders Focus Groups

Congregation	Gender		Age				Ratio Sample	
	M	F	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	Leaders	Parents
Ephesus	4	1	0	3	2	0	4	1
Galatia	3	5	5	1	2	0	4	4
Colosse	5	3	1	0	4	3	6	2
Philippi	3	2	1	2	2	0	4	1
Total	15	11	7	6	10	3	18	8

Table 2: Parent-Leadership Focus Group -Gender/Age Sample

Twenty seven leaders and parents participated in the focus groups. The leaders were in the majority, namely eighteen and the parents eight (Fig. 2). From the twenty-seven, fifteen were men and eleven women. The graph below (Fig. 3) indicates the gender distribution in the different congregations. The age range of one congregation differs from the other three. Seven of the Colosse congregation's participants were over fifty years compared to the average of two in the others.

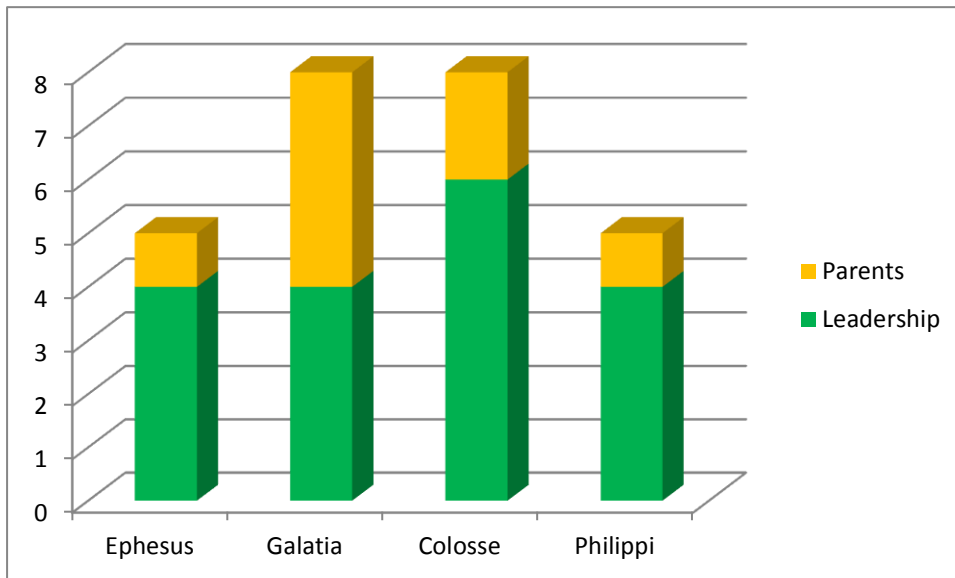


Figure 2: Parent-Leadership Focus Group – Parent/Leadership Sample

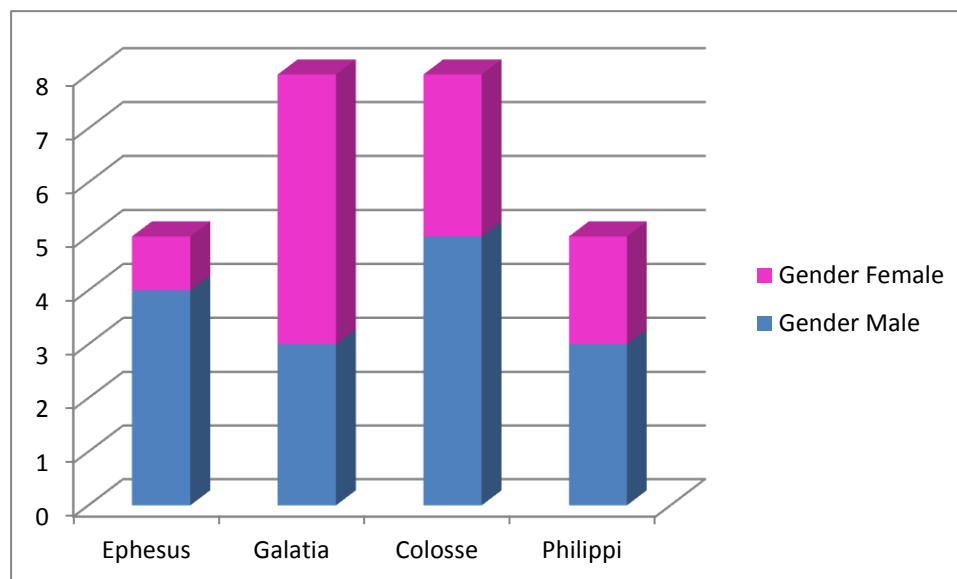


Figure 3: Parent-Leadership FG – Gender Sample

3.3 Empirical results

The results of the empirical listening process will be discussed next. First, the perspectives of the local minister and the parents-leader group on festivals and the inclusion of children. Secondly, the perspectives as indicated in the data on festivals, as perceived by the children, will be explained.

3.3.1 Adults' perspectives on festivals and the inclusion of children.

Tables 3 to 6 below present a thick description⁴⁵ of the data concerning the different festivals in the faith communities. Each congregation's festivals, as mentioned by the ministers, the parents and leaders, are listed. The thick description indicates each congregation's festival practices in the local context, the emotions and expressions while being discussed, the occurrence of the festivals during the discussion and participation of the children in the festivals as perceived. Each congregation's results will first be discussed separately and then rounded off with a general conclusion at the end.

3.3.1.1 Philippi congregation

From all the festivals listed (see Table 3) by the parent-leader group, the Lent – Easter festival is perceived by the participants as a special spiritual experience. During the discussion, the group frequently referred back to this festival. Participants, especially the women, responded with excitement and emotional words such as very nice, special, incredibly special and wonderful. The following excerpt from the discussion indicates something about the participants' feelings about Lent-Easter:

Andrea:

Kyk, ek voel doodeerlik; ek het nie regtig so in diepte van die feeste geweet, tot voordat ons hier gekom het meer as twintig jaar terug nie. Ek ... ek is eerlik, ek het GLAD nie van As-Woensdag byvoorbeeld geweet nie. Ek het geweet van Pinkster Sondag en van Palm Sondag en sulke klas van goed, maar dit [het] baie selde soveel aandag geniet ... ewe skielik vandat ek dit HIER GELEER het, nou dink ek net maar JOE, dis wonderlik. Ek is BAIE bly [vir] daardie blootstelling, ... geestelik, dink ek, beteken dit vir 'n mens baie ... dit is goed dat 'n ou TYD daaraan spandeer VERAL omdat ... dit aan jou verduidelik word. En jy weet dit is nie net 'n ritueel nie. Jy kom nie net vinnig en maak maar net iets daarvan nie. Jy maak iets daarvan en daar gebeur iets. Omdat dit vir jou BETEKENIS kry, dink ek, is dit vir jou spesiaal.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The term 'thick description' is developed by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz explained that it involves not only describing a particular behaviour, but also the context within which behaviour occurs (Hennink et al.(2011:238). This description allows a researcher to notice connections and relationships between issues that become useful when developing explanations (Hennink et al. 2011:239).

⁴⁶ English translation: *'I feel honestly, I do not really know so in depth of the festivals until before we came here more than twenty years ago. I'm honest, I did not know about Ash Wednesday, for example that. I knew of Pentecost Sunday and Palm Sunday and those kind of things, but it very rarely receives much attention ... all of a sudden since I have learned here, I think just now but Wow, that's great. I'm very happy [for] this exposure ... mentally, I think it means a lot ... it is very well-spent time on it ... ESPECIALLY because it is explained to you. And you know it is not just a ritual. You are*

Clarissa:

Veral Paasfees na die veertig dae vastydperk en die Paasnaweek... die Vrydag met Jesus se afsterwe, gaan ons stil by die kerk uit en hanteer dit stil. En Sondagoggend kom ons in en SKIELIK dan is die ligte aan en dis VROLIK en die OPSTANDING en REGTIG WAAR dit is, dis baie belangrik vir my... Ek wil sê dat dis amper so erg, dat as ons planne maak vir die vakansie en Paasnaweek, is deel daarvan. Dan sê jy: N-E-E, ek wil nêrens heengaan nie, ons wil HIER wees. Hulle [die familie] kan maar kom kuier maar ons wil HIER wees⁴⁷.

The data from Philippi's participants indicates a deep spiritual experience and spiritual growth, during the festivals. The mentioning of the muted and bright lights and silence, as well as the crosses, palm leaves etc. during the discussions, emphasise the value of the atmosphere and symbolism during the festival practices. It is also significant to notice that, in many of the festivals food (a picnic, meal, eating together etc., see Table 3) played a role during or after the festivals.

The parent-leader group perspective on the inclusion of the children during these festivals is recognised in die following discussion:

Francois:

... [hulle] is baie min, maar ek dink ons skep vir hulle [geleentheid gedurende die feeste] as ek nou een voorbeeld kan noem soos die opneem van die dankoffer, wat tog ook 'n dankie se geleentheid is. 'n Paar keer, dan reël ons voor die tyd die twee diakens: 'Kyk vandag vat jy hierdie graad eentjie en jy vat daardie graad eentjie,' en hulle neem die dankoffer op. So, hulle is dadelik deel daarvan. Hulle word betrek by die Kerssangdiens...⁴⁸

not in a hurry and just make something out. You make something of it and something happens. Because it is meaningful, I think, it is special to you.

⁴⁷ English Translation: 'Especially after the Easter forty days fasting and when it is then Easter Friday ... with Jesus' death, we stop at the church and deal with it quietly. On Sunday morning we come in and suddenly then the lights on and it was merry and the resurrection, and it is really true, it's very important to me I'd say it's almost as bad, if we make plans for the holidays and Easter, are part of it. Then you say, 'No, I do not go anywhere, we'd be here. They [the family] can only visit but we would be here

⁴⁸ English Translation: "... [They] are very A few, but I think we create for them [opportunities during the festivals] if I mention one example, the taking up of the offerings, which is also a thank you occasion. A few times, we arrange before the service two deacons: "Look now you take this grade one, and you take that grade one, and they take up together the offering. So, they are immediately part of it. They are involved in the Christmas Carols ..."

Congregation	Festival	Role	Context	How was the festivals discussed? (Emotions, expressions, emphasizing etc.)	How often is this festival mentioned in the discussion?	Children's participation
Philippi	Advent	Parents and Leadership	Service. Festival of gratitude. Not a one-day event. Built up over weeks. Involve the community. Picnic afterwards.	Emphasised words: Very NICE and SPECIAL	Many times	Participate and sing Christmas songs.
		Minister	Follow for 4 weeks Advent cycle. Use colours and explain the meaning. Light candles	Very enthusiastic	A few times	Involve children in candle lightening
	Epiphany	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Mention the day and give an explanation in church bulletin	-	A few times	-
	Lent	Parents Leadership	Celebrate Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday. Climb a hill with palms and read Bible verses. Thursday night a night of prayer	Use words such as: It is WONDERFUL and nice. Because it has meaning it is INCREDIBLY SPECIAL. The exposure has much spiritual value	Frequently	Children participate together with adults. Children's club discussed the meaning and do the rituals of Ash Wednesday
		Minister	Special service on Wednesday. Putting crosses with ashes on the forehead. Encourage selective fasting	Very passionate	Frequently	Children participate on their level.
	Easter	Parents Leadership	Friday service atmosphere quiet and gloomy – Sunday bright lights – Rejoicing after 40 days of selective fasting	REALLY the resurrection is true. So Important, want to stay home for the Easter weekend	Frequently	-
		Minister				
	Pentecost	Parents Leadership	Pentecost services during week and Sunday Pentecost festival. Eat together after the services and chat on the lawn at the church	Very excited	A few times	Children together with the adults
		Minister	Not mentioned	-	-	-

Table 3: Philippi congregation festival practices (1)

Congregation	Festival	Role	Context	How was the festivals discussed? (Emotions, expressions, emphasizing etc.)	How often is this festival mentioned in the discussion?	Children's participation
Philippi	Baptism	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Siblings gather with the parents at the Baptism		Once	All the children come to the front.
	Holy Com	Leadership	Families come and receive as a family the bread. Socialize together afterwards	-	A few times	Children come with the family to the front to receive the bread
		Minister	Break bread with family	-	A few times	As above

Table 3: Philippi festival practices (2):

Andrea:

Hulle gaan saam. Dit kan ook ander vorme aanneem [byvoorbeeld] met Palm Sondag. Hulle kom met hulle eie palmtakke [saam met die grootmense].⁴⁹

Danie:

Hulle word betrek deur in die erediens by geleentheid uit die Bybel te lees.

⁴⁹ English Translation: "They go together. It may also have other forms [for example] with Palm Sunday. They come with their own palm leaves [together with the adults]"

Hulle is betrokke en word raakgesien⁵⁰.

The parent-leader group viewed the inclusion of children in a positive light. Children are intentionally but also informally included in the festival practices of the faith community. The local minister's view on the inclusion of children is from a somewhat different perspective:

Kyk ons fokus nie spesiaal op hulle [kinders] nie, hulle kom saam met hulle ouers. Ek sal van tyd tot tyd vir 'n kind sê om die kers in die kerk aan te steek, [en] daai tipe van ding. Al die goed [betekenis en rituele in die feeste] gaan deur die [kinder]-klub⁵¹ maar hulle sien ook hoe al hierdie goed neerslag vind in die erediens... Ek sou sê [hulle is] tussen waarnemers en deelnemers [in die gesamentlike feeste]⁵².

It is clear that the minister includes the children from time to time in the faith community festivals. The learning of the meaning of the festivals and the rituals take place separately in the children's club or in the family context.

Conclusion:

The data from the parent-leader focus group and the personal interview with the minister indicate the following:

- The minister and the leaders are very passionate about the role of festivals in the faith formation of the entire faith community. Emphasis is especially placed on Lent and Easter.
- From time to time the children are intentionally and actively involved in the festival practices of the faith community.
- The parent-leader group did not list baptism as a festival.
- Philippi's children's participatory level in the festival practices lies between observers and participants.

3.3.1.2 Galatia congregation

Of all the festivals (listed in Table 4 by the parent-leader group) in Galatia, the festival most often mentioned during the discussion, was Christmas. One of the

⁵⁰ English Translation: "They are involved in worship and by reading from the Bible ... They are engaged and they are noticed."

⁵¹ The children club is meeting on Wednesday afternoons during school terms and also includes the children from the community.

⁵² English Translation: "See, we do not put special focus on them [children], they come with their parents. I will from time to time ask a child to light a candle in the church, that kind of thing. All the things [the meaning of festivals and rituals] are part of what happens at the [children's] club. The children also see how all of this translates into the worship service ... I would say [they are] between observers and participants [in the joint festivals]."

participants emphasised the festival by sharing an emotional response of her best Christmas in Galatia:

... die lekkerste fees, wat ek nog in die gemeente gehad het, was so twee, drie Kersfeeste terug, toe ons kos gemaak [het]... Ons het mense van die straat af hier (by die kerk) 'n ete gegee. Toe die son na ete laer was, is ons na die plakkerskampe ... [om] brood uit [te] deel en hulle kos te gee... dit was vir my een van die lekkerste Kersfeeste, wat ek nog hier gehad het. Daai van gee en so daar het heeltemal 'n klemverskuiwing gekom waaroor 'n fees gaan... nie meer soseer oor ... 'Wat kry ek? Wat se present? Wat is in daai pakkie?' Maar, dis nou vir my baie lekkerder om meer opgewonde [oor] iemand anders ... se reaksie is oor wat daai een kry.⁵³

Most of the time the participants discussed the liturgical festivals in a mellow tone. However, the festivals some of the participants repeatedly mentioned enthusiastically, apart from the liturgical festivals, were the Pine-⁵⁴ and Taste⁵⁵ festivals.

Words that were used are “rejoicing, joy, celebration, sharing etc.” The most interactive part of the group’s discussion was near to the end when the issue of involving children, with a festival approach, in the congregation was discussed.

During the personal interview, the local minister acknowledges that during festivals symbolism in the festivals is not emphasised. He shares his views on the church liturgical year:

Ja, ons volg die kerklike jaar. Ons maak nog baie min van die simboliek gebruik, [en] wat daarmee saamgaan. Maar ons volg die kerklike jaar, lig dit uit⁵⁶.

⁵³ English Translation: “...the best festival celebration I had in this church, was about two, three Christmases ago, when we prepared food ... We invited street people for a meal here (in the church hall). When the sun was lower after dinner, we went to the squatter camps ...to distribute bread and to also give them food ... It was for me one of the best Christmases I've had here. The thing of giving... and so there was quite a mind shift about what a festival was all about ... not so much about on ... What will I get out of it? What type of present? What is in that package? But, now it was much nicer for me to be excited about someone else's reaction ... about what he received.”

⁵⁴ The Pine festival is the congregation’s annual ‘Bazaar festival’.

⁵⁵ The ‘Taste’ festival is where each family brings different types of food and wine for the other to taste, also called in other contexts ‘Bring and share meal’.

⁵⁶ English Translation: “Yes, we follow the church year. We make a little use of symbolism, [and] what goes with it. But we follow the church year, lift it out.”

Congregation	Festival	Role	Context	How was the festivals discussed? (Emotions, expressions, emphasizing etc.)	How often is this festival mentioned in the discussion?	Children participation
Galatia	Advent	Parents and Leadership	Once prepared food for the needy in squatter camps Christmas Carrol Service	Emphasised words like: Very NICE, Best Christmas	Many times	Children didn't participate Involved in Christmas Carols
		Minister	Christmas Carols service together with two other reformed churches. Use a family to light the candles		A few Times	Participate in the Christmas play. Involve children in lightening of candles.
	Lent	Parents Leadership	On Thursday evening in Holy week the last Supper Communion		A few Times	
		Minister	Holy communion in the Holy week		Once	Children are not involved
	Easter	Parents Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Nothing mentioned except normal service	-	-	-
	Pentecost	Parents Leadership	Drink soup and eat bread	-	A few Times	-
		Minister	During Pentecost organised on Friday hamburger evening for families	-	Once	Minister share with the children the meaning of Pentecost
	Baptism	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Call the grandfather and mother to be present at the Baptism. Use data projector to introduce baby to faith community	-	Once	Children are not involved
	Holy Communion	Leadership	In the past organised a 'braai' after service – not any more	-	A few times	
		Minister	Separate Service for children from 3 years to Grade 3	Not very enthusiastic	A few Times	Smaller children separate included

Table 4: Galatia Congregation festival practices

Although the minister viewed festivals as important, it seems that the minister follows unintentionally a more rational approach to the church festivals.

The perspective on the inclusion of children in Galatia's festivals, as perceived by the parent and leader group, was expressed by one of the leaders, Franli, in the following excerpt:

Ek dink dit is die enigste een [Kerssangdiens] waar hulle r rig aktief betrokke is en het hulle 'n DEFINITIEWE bydrae, voel ek, gemaak. Die ander is die Dennefees [Basaarfees]. Hulle neem deel en hulle jol en hulle speel ... en hulle eet ...⁵⁷

The minister confirmed this perception by adding:

Tot 'n groot mate [is die kinders] nog waarnemers met 'n klein bietjie deelname. Dit is maar iets wat ek weer beseef ...[dat] 'n mens dit weer moet indril en moet s : 'Onthou! Jy het maar net nie werklik daarby uitgekอม om daardie stap te neem nie [om die kinders in te sluit nie]. Selfs daardie stap om jou preek meer kindervriendelik te maak.' 'n Mens dink net nie altyd daaroor nie.⁵⁸

The minister and the parents-leadership group of Galatia viewed the participation of children in the festival practices mainly as observers. The Christmas Carols service is the only intentional practice where children were actively involved in the festivals of the faith community. In the general festivals, for example the congregation's Pine festival, which is not linked to the church liturgical year, the children participate informally because of the food, games, atmosphere etc.

Conclusion:

The data from the parent-leader focus group and the personal interview with the minister indicates the following:

- Although the data indicates that Galatia focuses on Christmas and Holy Communion as a festival, it is not clearly evident.
- Galatia's festival experience is mainly based on non-liturgical festivals such as the Pine Festival.
- Although the parent-leader group mentioned Baptism as a festival in the

⁵⁷ English Translation: "I think it is the only one [Christmas Carols] where they really are actively involved and where they have made a definite contribution, I feel. The other time is the Pine festival [Bazaar festival]. They participate and they enjoy and they play ... and they eat ..."

⁵⁸ English Translation: "To a large extent [the children] are mostly observers with very little participation. This is just something I realized again ... I again must drill myself and say: "Remember! I have just not really got around it to take that step to take the children into consideration and to include them. Even to preach more child-friendly. You just do not think about it always. "

beginning, it was not listed as a church festival.

- It seems that Galatia follows unintentionally more a rational approach, to some of their liturgical festivals.
- Galatia's festival practices allow children to be mainly observers of the festivals.

3.3.1.3 Colosse congregation

From all the festivals listed (see Table 5) by the parent-leader group and the personal interview with the minister, they indicated that the Lent – Easter festival is perceived as the most important festival for them in the church calendar year. The importance of Easter was especially emphasised by the minister of Colosse:

... ek wil in die grootste nederigheid sê hoe belangrik Paasfees vir my is; dat ek in die 24 jaar, was ek nog net EEN Paasnaweek nie hier in die gemeente nie. Selfs toe my ouers nog geleef het. Ons het nie vir hulle gaan kuier nie, maar hulle het hier kom kuier. Paasfees is 'n fees wat hier gevier moet word. Ek probeer vir die gemeente die voorbeeld stel ... Dit is DIE FEES wat 'n mens nie sommer moet mis nie⁵⁹.

The Passion and the focus on Easter were also noted in the group discussion. The discussion was lively and very interactive. Megan's contribution articulates the views of the group best when she said:

Ek dink nie daar is soveel aandag aan kerkfeeste gegee soos vandag nie. Ek kan nie eers onthou daar was Paasfees nie. Paasfees het gekom en gegaan en as kind is jy nie inge'zoom' of bewus gemaak daarvan nie. Jy het net saamgedros. As daar kerk toe gegaan is, gaan jy maar half saam... Jy karring maar net aan. Ek is persoonlik net nie bewus daarvan gemaak nie, wat gebeur het [en] die ooploop. Dit het definitief vir my 'n baie groter betekenis as toe ek 'n kind gewees het en dis baie lekker en ons kinders wat met die 'journey' saam was. As ek kan terugkom na die 'journey' en die passiespele⁶⁰. Kyk, die INDRUK wat dit op ons kinders gemaak het, hulle was sewe, agt en nege jaar oud, is 'FOR LIFE'. Dit het REGTIG 'for life' betekenis gehad. Dit [die passiespel] was 'n 'AMAZING' tyd vir die volwassenes en die kinders en elkeen wat daarby betrokke was, het 'n ONGELOOFLIKE ervaring daaruit gehad. Ook die mense wat [na die Passie spel] kom kyk het⁶¹.

⁵⁹ English Translation: "I want to ... in the greatest humility say how important Easter is for me. In the 24 years that I am in this church, I missed out on being here only one Easter. Even when my parents were still alive, we did not visit them, they came here to visit us. Easter is the festival that is to be celebrated. I tried to set the example for the church... This is the feast that no one should miss"

⁶⁰ As a faith community, Colosse prepared and conducted a Passion play for a few years. It was conducted in different congregations and also in other places, like the nearby caves, during Easter.

⁶¹ English Translation: "I do not think (in the past) there was so much attention given to church festivals, as is done today. I cannot even remember Easter celebrations. Easter has come and gone"

From the group discussion it was clear that the involvement of the adults and the children, during the preparation and presenting of the play, had a tremendous spiritual impact on adults as well as on the children. It also brought more cohesion in the faith community.

Another significant similarity between the parent-leader group and the minister's interview is the lighter emphasis both placed on Christmas. When the local leader was prompted to air his view on Christmas, he responded:

N-E-E wat ... ek het in 'n huis groot geword waar ons Kersfees kerk toe gegaan het en ons het op Kersdagoggend dalk ons geskenke [gekry]. Ons het eintlik nooit 'n kersboom [gehad nie]. My pa was dalk nie lief daarvoor nie en ons het nie DAAI tipe tradisie gehad nie ... In hierdie gemeente doen ek nie die meeste moeite met Kersfees nie... maar ek het NOOIT die dag, Kersdag, self iets spesiaals gedoen nie... dit [is] maar net [n] LEKKER wonderlike feesviering [en] atmosfeer⁶².

During the focus group discussion the following was noted from one of the participants:

"Kersfees word nie ernstig in die gemeente gevier nie" ⁶³

The parent-leadership group perceived the inclusion of children in the festivals to be mainly in the role of observers. The local minister also agrees with this view and says:

*"... ek dink rîrig, om met skaamte te sê (lag), ek dink ons lê daar tussen waarnemers en deelnemers... met gewone dienste [is] hulle ... waarnemers. Feeste, meer betrokkenheid maar (hulle) neem nie baie leiding nie."*⁶⁴

In the normal Sunday services the children play mainly the role of observers, but in the festivals they are more involved.

and as a child you were not 'zoomed in ' or made aware of it. You just trailed along. If there was something going on in the church, you were just there ... I personally, was never made aware of what happened. Now it definitely has much greater meaning to me than it had when I was a child. It's been very nice also for our children who were part of the 'journey'. If I could come back to the 'journey' and the Passion play, it made a huge impression on our children. They were seven, eight and nine years old the effect of it is FOR LIFE. It REALLY affected them for life. It [the Passion play experience] was an 'AMAZING' time for the adults and the children. Everyone who was involved in it, even the audience, had an AMAZING experience."

⁶² English Translation: "N-o-o ... I grew up in a house where on Christmas we went to church and we perhaps received gifts on Christmas morning. We actually never had a Christmas tree. My father might not have fancied it and so we did not have THAT type of tradition ... In this congregation, I do not put a lot of effort into celebrating Christmas ... but I have NEVER on the day, Christmas Day, done something special to celebrate it ... it is just a NICE wonderful celebration [and] atmosphere."

⁶³ English Translation: "Christmas is not seriously celebrated in this church".

⁶⁴ English Translation: "... I really think with shame ((laughs)), I think we will be lie between observers and participants with regular services ... they (are) ... observers. With Festivals, more involvement but (they) do not take the lead."

Congregation	Festival	Role	Context	How was the festivals discussed? (Emotions, expressions, emphasizing etc.)	How often is this festival mentioned in the discussion?	Children participation
Colosse	Advent	Parents and Leadership	Christmas not seriously celebrated	Emphasise: 'Not so seriously celebrated'	A few times	
		Minister	Children participate in a Christmas play with the Carrol service Advent wreath. Manger in church	Emphasis: 'I put not much effort in Christmas day.'	A few times	Children present a play or are involved in role-play or dance during Christmas Carrols
	Epiphany	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Not mentioned	-	-	-
	Lent	Parents Leadership			Frequently	
		Minister	Ash Wednesday prayer service In the past a Passion play with adults and children Thursday – Bible food supper Palm Sunday – palm leaves		Frequently	Children carried Palm leaves Join adults with Bible supper
	Easter	Parents Leadership			Frequently	
		Minister	Go to great lengths and put much effort in	Emphasise: This is the <i>one festival not to be missed</i>	Frequently	In the past involve children and adults in a Passion Play
	Pentecost	Parents Leadership	Praise and worship with different music instruments		A few times	
		Minister	A Praise and worship service	Put emphasis on Pentecost and Easter	-	
	Baptism	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Receives a candle and Bible	Think about possibilities to use children to welcome	Once	Children not involved
	Holy Com	Leadership	Monthly Holy Communion	Use words: It was NICE to have together HC	A few times	
		Minister	Often Holy Communion Family with children sit at the table	-	Frequently	Involve children Creed on their level

Table 5: Colosse Congregation festival Practices

Conclusion:

The data from the parent-leader focus group and the personal interview with the minister indicates the following:

- Colosse's special focus on the Lent-Easter festival.
- The similarity between the example of the passion and emphasis of the spiritual leader and the emphasis of the faith community.
- The experience of the Passion play in the past, where children and adults actively participate together, may enhanced the faith of the adults as well as that of the children.
- The participatory level of Colosse's children in festival practices lies between observers and participants.
- The parent-leader group didn't list baptism as a church festival.

3.3.1.4 Ephesus congregation

It is significant to note that from the festivals listed (see Table 6) in Ephesus, Advent, Easter and Pentecost received the most emphasis. The parent-leadership group responded enthusiastically to these festivals during the discussion with words and phrases like "Passion to make it a special", "Put much effort into". "Contribute to my spiritual growth" etc. The group also returned most frequently to "Lent" and "Easter" as well as many times to Advent-Christmas. The following excerpt from the discussion shows something about the participants' feelings about the Lent and Easter⁶⁵ festival in the congregation:

⁶⁵ Dirk, one of the organisers describes during the discussion the process during this festival as follows: "This year we had for the first time an Ash Wednesday. [On] Ash Wednesday, we just came together and had a meditative service in the church. It was not a formal program, basically just [to] explain what Ash Wednesday means, what the significance of the day is and where the tradition comes from. Then [follows] the six Lent Sundays with the Menorah, where we have a candle every Sunday blow ... Palm Sunday [is] the palms [placed] in the church. The Sunday evening, Palm Sunday, there is an Easter worship service ... The Wednesday [evening] before Easter, is now the church [Easter] dinner, a church dinner for the members ... We get volunteer hostesses who decorate the tables. It's an Israeli meal. The dinner is with mutton, dry and bitter herbs, unleavened bread and salt... Yes, [during the dinner] we have a program based on the tradition. The father of the house asks the older people in the congregation to pray a Shabbat [prayer], as well as the mother. So, the children were again not involved. The Thursday night there is a Holy Communion service in the church. The crucifixion Communion [Friday morning] is a gloomy occasion when we commemorate Jesus' death. Then there is no music, no lighting, no overhead [projector], and just the preacher's microphone. The power is off and [the service] is in the dark. And then Sunday morning at six is the Resurrection service. Everything is bright 'and clear, singing and thus a festival. So the program

Albert :

Wel ek wil nou net sê, ons is nou die laaste 15 jaar betrokke by die NG Kerk en die eerste paar jaar het dit NIE gebeur nie [Paasfees] ... die feeste ... [wat] die afgelope paar jaar aangebied [is], het verseker vir my 'n verdieping in my geloofslewe verseker... want tydens Paasfees het ons nou die verskillende stasies [verwys na uitbeeldings van die lydings pad van Christus waar daar geleentheid gegee word om na te dink en te bid], jy weet, so dit is 'n spesiale tyd en ek dink jy kom net in 'n ander VERSTAAN van wat dit alles behels vir my persoonlike groei.⁶⁶

The Lent-Easter festival process, with all the events that had taken place during that time, contributes to the spiritual growth of those that participated in this festival. The role of the leadership, that also put much effort in organising the festival, is also acknowledged by the following:

Karen:

Ek dink ook omdat ... meer aandag ge[gee word] aan Paasfees, Kersfees het altyd AL die aandag gekry, wel, nou word Paasfees ook opgelig. Dit maak 'n GROOT verskil en ek dink net meer mense besef die BELANGRIKHEID.⁶⁷

During the focus group discussion concerning the inclusion of children in the festivals, Dirk, the coordinator for the congregation's liturgical festival group, admitted the following about the inclusion of children in the festivals:

Ek moet eerlik daarby sê, dat die kinders nie daarby betrokke is nie. Hulle is baie min by Paasfees betrokke, glad nie by Pinkster nie en ook nie by Kersfees nie. By die Kerssangdiens probeer ons 'n program daarstel dat dit nie gewone 'praise' en 'worship' is nie en ander musiek en gedigte voordra en voorlees, maar die kinders is nie daarby betrokke nie. Op hul beste net waarnemers.⁶⁸

[during the last week before Easter] from the Wednesday evening at six until six o'clock Saturday night, that is 72 hours, then the cross stations is set up in the church. There are fifteen stations set up in the church and the church is open 24 hours a day.... There is such an itinerary that takes you step by step to every place, to the specific cross stations and it also explains the meaning in each specific cross station. "

⁶⁶ English Translation: "Well I just want to say, we are now involved in the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) for the last 15 years and the first few years this did NOT happen [Easter] ... the festivals ... [that] were presented the past few years, surely enriched my faith ... During Easter we have now the different stations [see depictions of the Way of the Cross where there is opportunity to think and pray], you know. So it is a special time for me and I think you come to a different understanding of what it is all about for my own personal growth."

⁶⁷ English Translation: "I also think because more attention is given to Easter, Christmas has always got ALL the attention, well, now Easter is also highlighted. It makes a BIG difference and I just think more people realize the IMPORTANCE".

⁶⁸ English Translation: "I must honestly admit that children are not involved in it. They are minimally engaged with Easter, not at all during Pentecost and also not during Christmas. At the Christmas service, we try to put together a program that is not similar to the normal "praise" and "worship". Other music, poetry reciting and reading is part of it, but the children are not involved. At their best they simply are observers."

Congregation	Festival	Role	Context	How was the festivals discussed? (Emotions, expressions, emphasizing etc.)	How often is this festival mentioned in the discussion?	Children participation
Ephesus	Advent	Parents and Leadership	Advent candles. In the past Christmas plays. Christmas Carrol Service	Passion to make a SPECIAL occasion	Many times	In the past children participated in plays
		Minister	Decoration of the liturgy space and use of colour Christmas Carrol service Advent candles	'Make much' of advent	Many times	
	Lent	Parents Leadership	Ash Wednesday meditative. Palm Sunday with Palm leaves Holy week – Prayer stations Prayer vigil of 24 hours Wednesday – Easter supper Biblical feast like Pasha	Very enthusiastic 'Contribute to my spiritual growth'	Frequently	Children did not participated
		Minister	Holy week- Biblical feast families involved Holy Communion fathers gave the signs to their families	Emphasises the words: TOGETHER as families	Frequently	In the past children involved through families
	Easter	Parents Leadership	Sunrise – Resurrection service	Passion to make a Special occasion	Frequently	Children not involved
		Minister		Important accent the past 3 years don't go away for Easter	Frequently	
	Pentecost	Parents Leadership	Pentecost services	Passion to make a Special occasion	A few times	Children not involved
		Minister	Pentecost services – special speaker	'Put much effort into it'	A few times	Children not involved
	Baptism	Leadership	Not mentioned	-	-	-
		Minister	Not mentioned		-	-
	Holy Com	Leadership	Not mentioned		-	
		Minister	Only mentioned Easter		-	

Table 6: Ephesus Congregation festival practices

Although the Ephesus congregation put so much effort into the festivals to really make it an experiential spiritual experience for the faith community, the children were not actively involved in this experience.

Conclusion:

The data from the parent-leader focus group and the personal interview with the minister indicates the following:

- Ephesus' special focus is on three festivals, namely Advent-Christmas, Lent Easter and the Pentecost festival.
- The role of the leadership in creating a culture of the importance of celebrating festivals in the faith community.
- The parent-leader group didn't list baptism as a church festival.
- Ephesus' festival practices allow children to be mainly observers of the festivals.

3.3.1.5 Final conclusion on the four congregations

After having analysed the data of the four congregations' focus groups and in-depth-interviews, the following can be concluded about children and festivals as perceived by the ministers, parents and leaders:

- Two congregations, namely Philippi and Colosse emphasised the Lent-Easter festival while Ephesus extended it also to Advent and Pentecost. It seems that Galatia indicates Christmas and Holy Communion, but it was not clear from the data.
- There are similarities between the example, passion and emphasis on a particular festival of the spiritual leadership and the faith community.
- The parents and leaders of all four congregations did not perceive Baptism as a festival celebration of the faith community.
- The festival practices of the majority of the congregations mainly allow children only to be observers during the events where all the generations are together. The degree of participation varies from nothing to very little for a few events. In one congregation, Philippi, it seems to be more often than usual. In another congregation, Colosse, children were more actively included in the festival practices of the past. The adults testify of spiritual growth in the children as well as the adults during that time.

3.3.2 Children’s perspectives on festivals.

Although many aspects of the children’s perspectives on festivals were covered in the focus groups, the results of the following themes will be discussed because it is relevant to the research question:

- The most important festivals as perceived by the children
- The most enjoyable feasts for children
- Indicators in festivals that make children feel special
- Some observations regarding the children’s spirituality

3.3.2.1 The most important festivals for children

This study focuses on specific church festivals in the liturgical church year, namely Advent (Christmas), Lent and Easter, Pentecost, Baptism and Holy Communion. During the focus group process, association pictures were used to help the children in identifying the six festivals. None of the four focus groups were able to identify the Pentecost festival. The graph⁶⁹ (Fig. 4) below gives an indication of which festivals the children rated as being the most important.

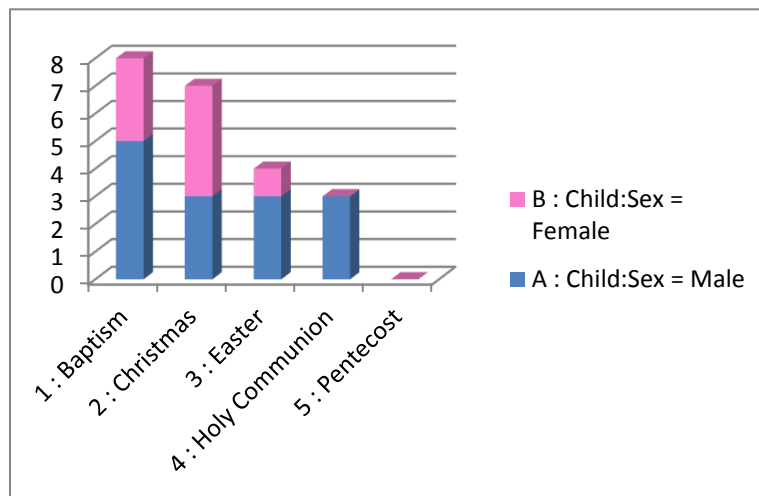


Figure 4: Children Focus Group – Important Festivals

Many of the children consider the Baptism festival to be the most important one, more Christmas, some Easter and a few, Holy Communion. When the children were

⁶⁹ The graphs in this study must not be understood in a quantitative sense; it is only a visual indication of the number of responses the children gave on a specific issue.

asked, 'what makes the mentioned festival for yourself the most important festival?' the responses were in general the following:

Baptism:

Gerhard (9): *"omdat jou naam gedoop word"*⁷⁰

Sakkie (8): *"om seker kinders groot te maak"*⁷¹

Marie (10): *"Want Jesus het ons almal gedoop."*⁷²

Pieter (8): *"want ons is gedoop eendag"*⁷³

Eben (7): *"want as babas gedoop word, dan raak Jesus bly, dan kry Hy nog 'n kind wat hy vir Hom [is]."*⁷⁴

A few children's responses were: "Ek weet nie."⁷⁵

Christmas:

The responses were more or less the same: *"because it is Jesus' birthday"* or *"because Jesus was born"* or *"because God's Son was born"*

Easter:

The reasons were: "because Jesus died" or "because Jesus is crucified". One mentioned "because Jesus cleansed our sins"

Holy Communion:

Of the few that mentioned Holy Communion, the seven-year-old Eben explains the meaning of Holy Communion as follows:

*Weet Tannie hoekom? Toe Jesus dood gegaan het, toe kan ons brood en wyn drink, dan kan ons Hom onthou, want die wyn is sy bloed en die brood is om te onthou*⁷⁶.

⁷⁰ English translation: *"because your name is baptised"*

⁷¹ English translation: *"in order to raise children"*

⁷² English translation: *"because Jesus baptized us all"*

⁷³ English translation: *"because we are baptized someday"*

⁷⁴ English translation: *"If babies are baptized, then Jesus becomes glad and then He gets another child who is for Him."* -

⁷⁵ English translation: "I don't know."

⁷⁶ English translation: "Do you know why, Aunty? When Jesus died, then we can drink bread and wine, then we can remember him, because the wine is his blood and the bread is to remember."

Concluding remarks:

Although many children mentioned that the Baptism festival is for them the most important festival, they find it difficult to explain the reason why they say so. That was not the case with the other three festivals. However, during the discussion of the Easter festival, the children more often emphasised Jesus' death than the resurrection.

3.3.2.2 Enjoyable festivals for children

To the question, 'Which of the four festivals are the most enjoyable for you?' many of the children answered Easter and less Christmas (see Fig. 5). However, a few children could not decide which one of the two.

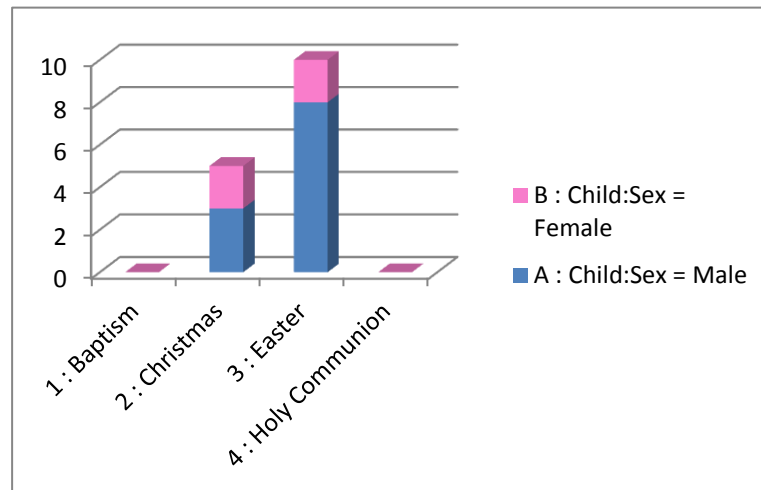


Figure 5: Children Focus Group – Enjoyable Festivals

3.3.2.2.1 Easter

The children that indicated that Easter is for them the most enjoyable festival said it is because of the eating of chocolates and the egg scavenger hunt together with relatives. Many noted the scavenger hunt and less the eating of the chocolates. The following excerpt from one of the focus groups articulates the views of the children:

Fasiliteerder:

*Watter een van hierdie feeste ... is vir kinders die LEKKERSTE?*⁷⁷

⁷⁷ English translation: "Which of these festivals are for children the most enjoyable?"

Pieter (8):

*Die Paasfees ... En vir EET ...*⁷⁸

Robert (8):

*Om te soek is ook lekker*⁷⁹ ...

Pieter (8):

*... ek kan nie wag vir Paasfees, dan gaan ek en my ma die eiers wegsteek, en dan gaan ek en my maat (maak met sy vuiste soos 'n verkyker op sy oë) 'peep-peep got one' (Peter gaan plat op sy rug op die vloer lê)*⁸⁰ ...

Eben (7):

*... en ek, uhm, toe dit Paasfees gewees het, het ons by my ouma, (ek) en my niggie eiers gaan soek - ek het omtrent TWINTIG eiers gekry*⁸¹

Fasiliteerder:

*Sjoe, dit is baaie eiers wat jy gekry het*⁸²

Magda (9):

*Ek het net twee gekry*⁸³

Fasiliteerder:

*Net twee gekry. Jy gaan na ouma toe en die niggies en nefies is daar en jy soek eiers. Dit is verskriklik lekker*⁸⁴.

Pieter (8):

*Ek het dertig by my ouma gekry (..) so ses in een potplant en dan is daar nog baie*⁸⁵ ...

It is noteworthy in the excerpt that the children also mentioned the presence of an adult, for example a grandmother or mother. Analysing the rest of the data indicated that the children often mentioned that they were in the presence of a father or mother or grandmother etc. when they did the scavenger hunt. The interaction with an adult or adults through a playful activity (scavenger hunt) and also eating together

⁷⁸ English translation: "Easter ... and eating ..."

⁷⁹ English translation: "To search is also nice ..."

⁸⁰ English translation: "I ... cannot wait for Easter, then my mother and I hide the eggs, and then I and my friend (with his fists like a pair of binoculars to his eyes) 'peep-peep got one' (Peter down on his back on the floor)."

⁸¹ English translation: "And ... I, uh, with Passover, we at my grandmother's place, (me) and my cousin looked for eggs - I got about twenty eggs"

⁸² English translation: "Wow, you got many eggs."

⁸³ English translation: "I just got two"

⁸⁴ English translation: "Only got two. You were going to grandma and the cousins are there and you were looking for eggs. It is very nice."

⁸⁵ English translation: "I got thirty from my grandmother (..) six in a pot with plants and then there were many more..."

something special (Easter eggs), make the children to experience this event as very special and enjoyable. However, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the source of our joy was only once indirectly mentioned.

3.3.2.2.2 Christmas

The children that indicated that Christmas is for them the most enjoyable festival gave a variety of responses to ‘why’ as Figure 6 below showed.

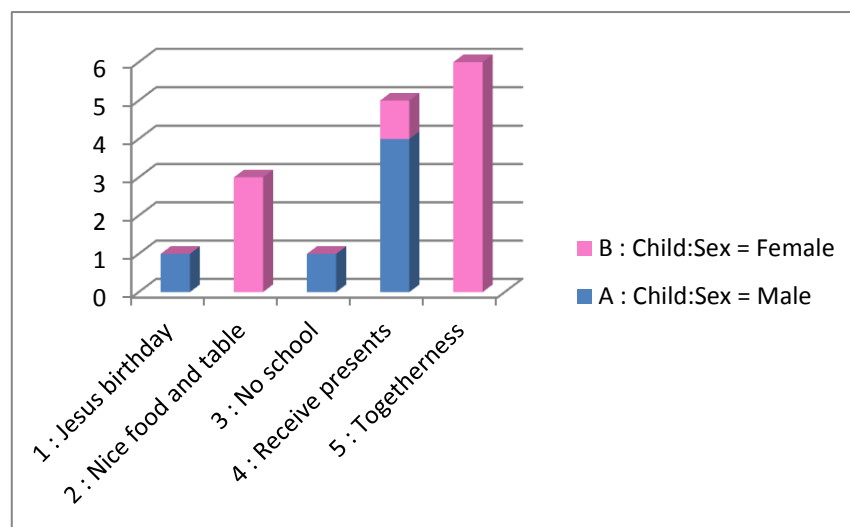


Figure 6: Children Focus Group – Reasons why Christmas is enjoyable

Most of the respondents noted that it is because of the togetherness with loved ones, less indicated the receiving of presents, a few described the atmosphere at the Christmas table and the food and very little reasoned that it is because of Jesus’ birthday and the fact that it is holiday and there is no school.

Sally (11) expresses her feelings about the joy of Christmas in the following manner:

Ons gaan altyd na ons ouma toe [met Kersfees], en hulle bly in Knysna, en dit is BAIE VER, ... en ons SPEEL en LAG S-A-A-M (..) en ons gaan SEE toe⁸⁶.

Fasiliteerder:

Dit klink vir my LEKKER, julle ry VER, dis by jou ouma en dis by die SEE en julle SPEEL⁸⁷.

⁸⁶ English translation: “We always go to our grandma [for Christmas], and they stay in Knysna, and it is VERY FAR AWAY ... and we PLAY and LAUGH TOGETHER and we go to SEA SIDE.”

⁸⁷ English Translation: “It sounds NICE to me. You drive a LONG way, and it’s to your grandmother’s place at the SEA and you PLAY.”

Sally (11):

En dis die hele familie⁸⁸...

Nicole (8): (Sally's sister):

En ons ry Julie af en Desember⁸⁹...

Sally (11):

... ons niggie is daar, so dan speel ons in die tuin. My oupa het in 'n nuwe huis ingetrek. So hy het daar agter 'n GROOT 'Y-A-A-RD', dan speel ons altyd saam daar binne⁹⁰.

It is clear that the togetherness and the interaction of the nuclear- and extended family as adults and children during Christmas create enjoyable memories around this festival. This was especially said by the girls in the focus-groups. Some children also mentioned exciting activities such as 'fireworks', drawing crackers, riding tubes with father and mother etc. A few noted the Christmas decorations at the table and the nice food on Christmas day. Also a few mentioned the birth of Christ as the reason of our joy.

3.3.2.2.3 Conclusion

The data regarding Easter and Christmas, as being the most enjoyable festivals for children, indicates the following:

- Occasions where playful interaction occurs between adults and children
- Occasions are accompanied by special food that is not usually available during the normal rhythm of the year
- The joyful festivals are primarily experienced in family context
- The real meaning of the Christmas joy is only mentioned a few times, and Easter very rarely.

⁸⁸ English Translation: "And that's the whole family ..."

⁸⁹ English Translation: "And we drove there in July and December ..."

⁹⁰ English Translation: "... Our cousin is there, so then we play in the garden. My grandfather moved into a new house last November. So he has a big 'YAA-RD' at the back [of the house], then we ALL play together in the 'y-a-a-rd'."

3.3.2.3 Indicators in faith community festivals that make children feel special.

Data were also generated through two projective techniques to determine what in the faith community's festivals will make children feel special. Figure 7 shows the indicators that were often mentioned during the discussion.

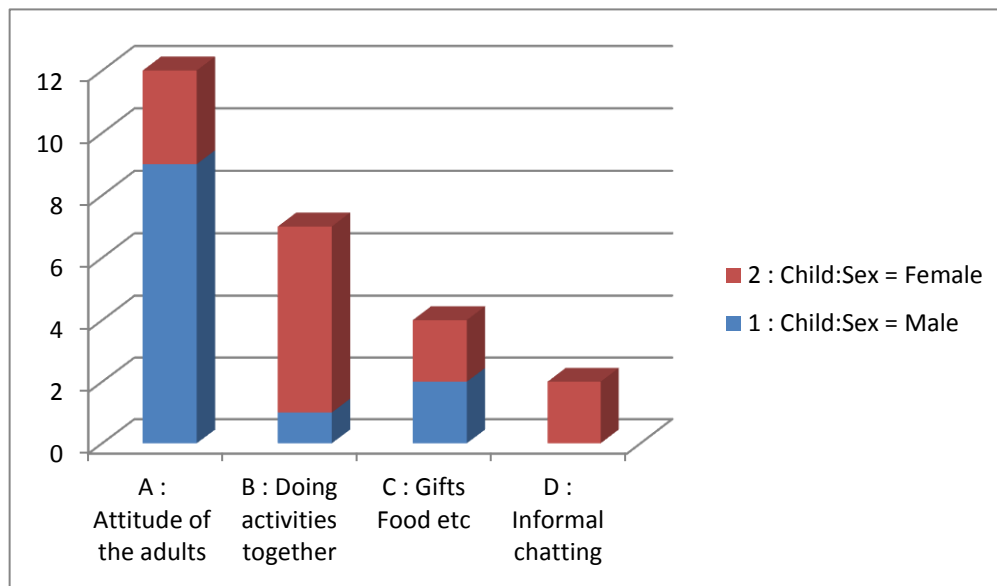


Figure 7: Indicators that made children feel special

Most frequently the attitudes of the adults were mentioned. Less indicated were the activities that adults do together with the children. A few noted the food, the gifts and informal chatting together. Figure 8 below shows which attitudes of adults the children refer to often, make or will make them feel special during the festival practices of the faith community.

The most frequently mentioned attitude is adults being friendly with the children. Gerhard, nine years old, made the following clay display when he was asked: "How should adults be or what must they do during festivals to make children feel special?"



Figure 8: Gerhard's Clay Display

When Gerhard (9) was asked to explain his clay display his response also articulated the responses of many of the other children:

Al die mense moet met die kinders mooi wees ... hulle moet mooi goed vir die kinders sê ... en hulle moet nie net vriendelik wees met die grootmense nie, hulle moet ook vriendelik wees met die kinders⁹¹.

Gerhard emphasises two aspects during festivals, namely that adults must show the same friendliness to children as were shown to adults and they must also use encouraging words to build children up.

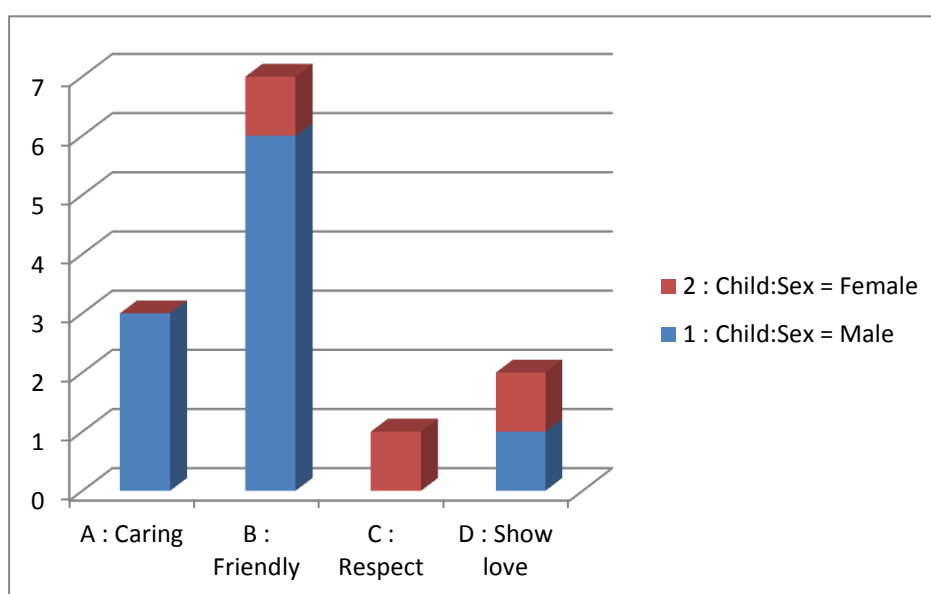


Figure 9: Perceived Attitudes of Adults towards children

⁹¹ English translation: "All the people should be nice to the children ... they have to say nice things to the children ... and they should not only be friendly with adults, they should also be friendly with the children."

Less indicated than the attitudes of adults is the doing of activities together with the children. The seven-year-old Karen responded as follows when she explained her clay Easter egg. She said that she will feel special in the faith community's Easter festival when the adults:

Die eiers [paaseiers] gaan wegsteek en saam [met kinders] daarna te gaan soek, maar nie soos by die huis, waar pa dit net wegsteek nie⁹²

Karen's words accentuates that children don't want adults only to let them do certain activities or tasks, but to do things together with them (the children). This was also stressed by the following clay display of the seven-year-old Eben.

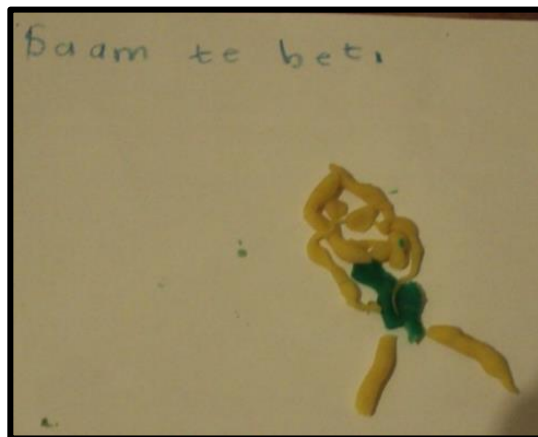


Figure 10: Eben's Clay Display

Eben explains his clay figure titled 'Pray together' as follows: 'This guy pray. Grown-ups must pray together with children'

To conclude, the data indicates the following needs of the children to feel special during the congregation festival practices:

- Loving, caring and friendly attitudes of adults and
- Interactive involvement between adults and children.

3.3.2.4 Some observations regarding the children's spirituality.

During the children's focus group discussions of the four congregations my wife and I noticed that one congregation's children displayed a deeper awareness of God and expressed themselves easily and spontaneously, without any prompting or questioning. I later compared the data of the different congregations and discovered that the children of Philippi more often expressed themselves in terms of their awareness of God and their relationship with Him. Compared to the other

⁹² English Translation: "Hide the [Easter eggs] eggs and then together [with children] go looking for it, not like at home where dad just hide it [the eggs]."

congregations' children, they speak more personally about Jesus, for example: "Jesus is very special to me" and "Jesus is special". Furthermore, they also discussed the spiritual aspects with more passion in their voice tone and expressed a deeper understanding of the meaning of the festivals. To mention only a few examples, the following:

Robert (8) mentioned in the beginning of the discussion, without any prompting and questioning, that the picture of the wine and the bread is very special to him because the bread and the wine help him to remember Jesus.

When the group members were asked whether there are some of the pictures that they can combine, Robert (8) said with passion the following:

*"Hierdie een en hierdie een want Jesus is BAIE SPESIAAL. Hy was eers op die kruis, toe skree hy en gaan hy dood en toe sit hulle hom in die grond en toe word Hy weer wakker"*⁹³

Facilitator:

*Okay, sit hulle bymekaar soos jy dink. Jy sê hierdie twee.*⁹⁴ (wys na prente 13 en 14)

Pieter(8):

*Ja, want Hy (Jesus) is BAIE SPESIAAL VIR MY!*⁹⁵

The following discussion took place when the facilitator asked Markus, 'What makes Christmas so enjoyable for children?'

*Want die kinders kan dan presente kry*⁹⁶

Pieter (8):

*Dit is nie NET vir presente nie*⁹⁷

Gerhard(7):

*Maar Tannie, Tannie dis nie net oor die presente nie!*⁹⁸

⁹³ English translation: "This picture and that picture for Jesus is VERY SPECIAL. He was first on the cross and then He screamed and died and then they put Him in the soil and then he woke up again."

⁹⁴ English translation: Okay, put them together as you think. You said these two (pointing to pictures 13 and 14)

⁹⁵ English translation: "Yes, because He (Jesus) is VERY SPECIAL TO ME!"

⁹⁶ English translation: "For the children can get presents"

⁹⁷ English translation: "It's not just for presents."

⁹⁸ English translation: "But Auntie, Auntie it is not just about the presents!"

Pieter(8):
(overlapping) JA⁹⁹

Gerhard (7):
*Ons moet ook vir God en vir Jesus sê...*¹⁰⁰

The data concerning the children of the congregation of Philippi indicates that the children express themselves in a group setting more in terms of their personal relationship with God and also reveal a deeper understanding of the meaning of the festivals.

3.4 Final conclusion

After having analysed the data of the children and adults' focus groups, as well as the in-depth-interviews with the pastors, the following can be concluded regarding the inclusion of children in the festival practices of the four Dutch Reformed congregations from the perspectives of the ministers, parents and leaders:

- All four Congregations emphasise different liturgical festivals. There are similarities between the spiritual leaders' accent and the local congregation festival practices.
- Most of the children research sample in the four congregations perceived Baptism to be one of the most important church festivals. The opposite is true for the parent-leader sample that does not perceive the Baptism festival as a festival celebration of the faith community. Although most of the children in the sample rated this festival important, they portray a lack of proper understanding of the festival.
- Of all the festivals celebrated by the different communities, the children do not experience Pentecost as a festival.
- With a few exceptions, the festival practices of the majority of the congregations allow children only to be observers during the celebration events where generations are gathered together. On the other hand, children perceived

⁹⁹ English translation: *(overlapping) "YES"*

¹⁰⁰ English translation: *"We also need to say to God and Jesus..."*

enjoyable festivals to be occasions where a loving playful interaction exists between adults and children accompanied by special food and atmosphere.

- Only two of the five festivals, namely Christmas and Easter, are the most enjoyable for children. The source of the joy of Easter is mainly founded in the playful interaction and activities.
- Children experienced enjoyable festivals mainly in the context of the family and very rarely in the context of the faith community.
- Children have a need for a friendly, loving and caring adult community to celebrate together the faith community's festivals.
- Children have a need to feel special during the festival practices through their interactive involvement with the adults.
- The empirical results also indicate a tendency that festivals may enhance children's spiritual growth.

3.5 Summary

The primary aim of this chapter was to describe the empirical results of process of attentively listening to the children, parents, leaders and local ministers to answer the first question of this dissertation: What is going on in the festivals practices of the Dutch Reformed Churches in eastern Mpumalanga? This chapter has described and explained the sample profile of the different focus groups in the four congregations as well as the context. The results concerning the inclusion of children and main trends and patterns were described and issues concerning the inclusion and faith formation of children were identified. In the next chapter the issues will be explained and will draw on theories from the social and other sciences.

CHAPTER 4

SOME MACRO PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUDING CHILDREN IN CHURCH FESTIVALS AND THEIR FAITH FORMATION

4.1 Introduction

This study investigates the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children practical theologically. In the previous chapter we discussed the results of the formal attentive listening to children, parents, leaders and pastors concerning the inclusion and faith formation of children in the faith community's festival practices. The results revealed certain issues such as the lack of recognising Pentecost, the importance of baptism, accommodating children in most cases only as observers, the need to have interaction with friendly adults etc.

Osmer (2008:4) argues that the second task of practical theology is *interpretive*. The interpretive task seeks reasons for the phenomena that were observed in the descriptive task. Now the key questions become, 'Why is it going on? What are the reasons?'

The questions that emerge from the empirical results are the following:

- Why did many of the children perceive baptism as one of the most important feasts, but they cannot explain the meaning as they do with a feast like Christmas?
- Why were all the children not able to identify the Pentecost feast, celebrated annually?
- Why did some children get excited about Easter and Christmas' real meaning while others are only excited about chocolate Easter eggs and a scavenger hunt?

Osmer (2008:83) states that the issues embedded within the episodes, situations and contexts which have been observed must be identified and draw on theories from the arts and sciences to assist in understanding the issues. This process is referred to as 'sagely wisdom'¹⁰¹.

¹⁰¹ Osmer (2008:83-84) notes that sagely wisdom requires the interplay of three key characteristics: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation, and wise judgement. *Thoughtfulness* is the quality of a leader who is committed to reflecting deeply about the questions life throws at him, especially when experiences of being brought up short challenge his congregation's pre-understandings. *Theoretical interpretation* denotes the ability 'to draw on theories of the arts and sciences to understand and respond to particular episodes, situations, and contexts. Osmer further emphasises the fact that all theoretical knowledge is fallible and is grounded in a particular perspective, and must be used with a full understanding of these limitations. *Wise judgement* is 'the capacity to interpret episodes,

This chapter (Chapter 3) will explain some of the above phenomena that surfaced during the research. A few social, cultural and religious theories will be discussed to explain some of the phenomena. After each specific theory has been discussed certain conclusions concerning the explanation of the phenomena will be made. During the discussion specific other data, which also surfaced during the research, will be taken into consideration.

4.2 Theoretical Theories from social sciences

The following theories will be discussed to explain some of the above-mentioned phenomena:

- Social cognitive learning theory
- Religious enculturation theory
- Ecological Development theory
- Social cultural learning theory

4.2.1 Social cognitive learning theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory may help to understand why many of the children in the sample group view the Baptism festival as the most important festival, although they do not have a proper understanding of the festival. Bandura has emphasized the strong role of observation and modelling in acquiring the basic protocols and customs of a culture as well as in acquiring a personal lifestyle and values. A basic assumption in Bandura's work is that persons need not learn everything through direct experience. He argues that psychological theories have traditionally emphasized learning from direct experience, but "if knowledge, values, and competencies could be acquired only by trial and error, human development would be greatly retarded, not to mention exceedingly tedious and hazardous" (Bandura, 2003:167). Fortunately, Bandura says, humans have advanced cognitive capacity for observational learning that enables them to shape and structure their lives through the power of modelling. Children can also learn many things through observation and modelling. In his recent work, Bandura extends his social learning

situations, and contexts in three interrelated ways: (1) recognition of the *relevant particulars* of specific events and circumstances; (2) discernment of the *moral ends* at stake; (3) determination of the most *effective means* to achieve these ends in light of the constraints and possibilities of a particular time and place' (Osmer, 2008:84).

theory into the spiritual realm, centring on the ‘influential role of modelling in transmitting values, spiritual belief systems and spiritual lifestyle practices (Allen, 2012:92). Bandura connects several social modelling concepts to spiritual modelling. For instance, he notes that abstract principles alone are poorly applied in particular situations. Congregations provide multiple models of behaviour and reinforce lifestyles patterned on them in close associational networks (Bandura, 2003:171). Modelling influences can have diverse psychological effects. One of the effects from models often expresses emotional reactions that tend to elicit emotional arousal in the observers. Through such vicarious arousal, people acquire attitudes, values, and emotional dispositions towards persons, places, and things (Bandura, 1989:23).

Conclusion:

The social cognitive observational learning theory through modelling may explain why children, although they are not experiencing the festival of Baptism as an enjoyable festival, view Baptism as a very important church festival. As observers present during the baptism practices, they can easily pick up emotional cues, tones and attitudes of the minister and the adults that they admired and then cognitively interpret baptism as a very special festival practice. It is interesting that if the data of the different congregations were compared with one another, the children of the congregation of Philippi most often mentioned the importance of Baptism as a festival (see Figure 11).

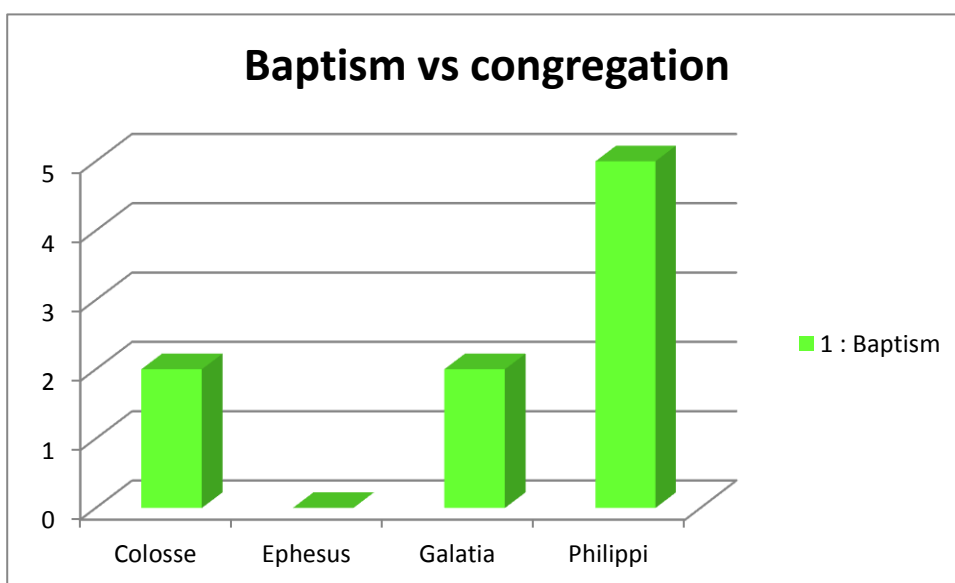


Figure 11: Importance of Baptism in congregations

In Colosse and Galatia only a few children mention Baptism as an important festival. It is also significant that the minister of Philippi mentioned that during the baptism practice, he would call all the children to come to the front row to be able to observe closely what is happening during the baptism ceremony.

4.2.2 Faith ‘enculturation’ theory.

The religious educationist John Westerhoff’s “faith enculturation” theory may help us to explain why Pentecost is not viewed as a festival, as well as the children’s need to feel special in a loving, caring and friendly atmosphere of adults. Westerhoff was at first influenced by James Fowler¹⁰², the developmental theorist, with his theory on the stages of faith¹⁰³. However, he took another direction regarding his own understanding of faith formation, not in a developmental sense but in an expanded sense. He called the faith formation process, a process of enculturation. Enculturation is defined as a process of interaction between and among persons of all ages in the faith community. It focuses on the interactive experiences and environments, within which persons act to acquire, sustain, change, and transmit their understanding and ways (Westerhoff, 1976:80). Enculturation emphasizes what one person has to bring to another and the dialogical relationship between equals (Westerhoff, 1976:80). In sum, Westerhoff states: “Shared experience, storytelling, celebration, action, and reflection between and among equal “faithing” selves with a community of faith best helps us understand how faith is transmitted, expanded and sustained.” (Westerhoff, 1976:88.)

Westerhoff (1976:91) views faith as an action which includes thinking, feeling, and willing. It is transmitted, sustained and expanded through the interactions with other faithing selves in a community of faith.

¹⁰² In the first edition, in 1976, of ‘Will our children have faith’, Westerhoff distinguished between four styles of faith, namely experienced faith, affiliative faith, searching faith and owned faith. Westerhoff notes that “[this] conceptualization is not original, and I was first influenced to think about a stage theory for the development of faith through the important research of my friend James Fowler” (Westerhoff, 1976:89).

¹⁰³ James Fowler has woven strands of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg (as well as Freud and, theologically, H. Richard Niebuhr) into a developmental theory of faith structures. Fowler (1981) distinguished between six progressive stages of faith, namely intuitive/projective faith (2-6/7 years), mythical/literal faith (6/7 – 11/12 years), synthetic/conventional faith (11/12 years into adulthood), individuating/reflexive faith, paradoxical/consolidative (conjunctive faith) faith and universalizing faith.

Westerhoff (2012) further explains the process of the faith formation in a faith community, by using the metaphor of a pilgrimage. Children in the faith community are pilgrims and the adults are co-pilgrims. The process of faith formation is one of a shared journey, together over time. Westerhoff notes: “[T]his metaphor ... provides us with a new way to understand people and learning.” (Westerhoff, 2012:loc.1627). Using the pilgrimage metaphor for the characteristics of human life, Westerhoff identified three distinct pathways to God, namely the experiential, reflective and integrated path. The experiential path is a slow, easy path in which people choose to participate in the life of a faith community, family-like, caring, nurturing, intentional community, which retells and re-presents its sacred story, its memory and vision, through each cultic life. This path seeks to focus on the intuitive way of thinking and knowing, nurtured by participation in the arts and expressed through symbols, sacred stories, and rituals. Westerhoff (1976:91) states that “during the pre-school and early childhood years, children typically act with ‘experienced faith’. That is to say faith is first experienced inactively”.¹⁰⁴

The reflective path seeks to search for meaning and purpose in life. The focus is on believing and understanding. The quest is for intellectual knowledge that results from the rational reflection on experiences and is expressed in terms of signs, concepts, and moral actions. The integrated path combines both the intuitive and the intellectual ways of knowing and finding meaning in both contemplation and action in a world understood as having two dimensions – the sacred (emphasizing the nonmaterial and pre-rational) and the secular (emphasizing the material and rational). Westerhoff notes that from the characteristics of life point of view, childhood encompasses the experiential way, adolescence the reflective way and adulthood the integrated way. Each leads fully to God; none is superior to the others. He continues: “While it is natural and wise for persons all ages to begin with the first, each way may be travelled at any time, in any order according to personal capability, interest or need. Similarly, persons may return to traverse any trail at will, if the need or desire exists... the third trail holds in creative tension the other two (the experiential- and reflective path). In some cases our capabilities may limit us to one pathway, if this occurs, nothing essential is lost. However, if we are able to travel all

¹⁰⁴ To understand this style of faith we need to remember that children initiate action and respond to our actions. The child explores and tests, imagines and creates, observes and copies, experiences and reacts (Westerhoff, 1976:91).

three paths and we choose not to do so, something in our lives is lost, for pilgrims are those that find meaning in the journey as much as in the journey's end" (Westerhoff, 2012:1631)

Westerhoff states further: "People on the experiential path keep those on the reflective path from going too far afield; those on the reflective path keep those on the experiential path from going far enough. Each, therefore, is in need of the others; each contributes to the life of others. A healthy community of faith has people on all three paths, encouraging one another as they journey together in community (Westerhoff, 2012:1662)."

For Westerhoff experience is fundamental to faith. A person first learns to know Christ not as a theological affirmation but as an affective experience. For children and adults, it is not so much the words we hear that matter most, but the experiences we have which are connected to those words. Language and experience are interrelated. Experiences of trust, love and acceptance are important to Christian faith and regardless of age, the need is always present (Westerhoff, 1976:92).

We experience and express faith through our interaction with others. The meaning of our vocabulary of faith is directly related to our experience with the words spoken to express that faith (Westerhoff, 1976:93).

To live with others in Christian ways, to put our words into deeds and our deeds into words, to share life with one another, to be open to influence as well as to be influenced, and to interact with other faithing selves in a community of Christian faith is to provide the necessary environment for experienced faith (Westerhoff, 1976:93).

Conclusion

Westerhoff emphasises the loving and friendly participatory interaction experience of children and adults that creates the right environment for spiritual growth for both children and adults. It is this perspective of Westerhoff that explains why children want to feel special in the presence of loving and friendly adults. The data in the research indicates that children's experiences of the most enjoyable festivals are those where adults and children interact in a playful and loving way. Christmas and Easter are linked to this loving and interactive involvement, especially in the intimate home set-up, but that is not the case with Pentecost. The experiential path that

seeks to focus on the intuitive way of thinking and knowing nurtured by participation in the arts and expressed through symbols, sacred stories, and rituals is well established during Christmas, but not during Pentecost.

4.2.3 Ecological system theory

The Ecological system theory, of the Russian-born American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner with the focus on the interconnections, could shed light to explain partially the influence of the broader context on the faith formation of children. Bronfenbrenner (1993) created a holistic model of human development, asserting that human development is influenced by several environmental systems:

- **Microsystems** are the social settings in which an individual interacts mostly, such as the family, the school, neighbourhood, church and peers. These are the systems that influence the child's day to day living.
- **Mesosystems** refer to interconnections between the different microsystems and their influence on one another, for example when a parent attends a child's school event or a family attends a neighbourhood church along with other neighbourhood families. The interrelationships of a child's microsystems influence the child's development. The healthiest environment for child development is one with many interconnections between the child's microsystems (Allen, 2012:93).
- **Exosystems** are external environmental settings that only indirectly affect development. The child is not directly in contact with these systems, but it affects the child indirectly, for example the parent's work environment or friendships. The child's experience at home may be influenced by his mother's experience at work. Bronfenbrenner notes: "One of the most significant effects of age segregation in our society had been the isolation of children from the world of work. Whereas in the past children not only saw what their parents did for a living but even shared substantially in the task, many children nowadays have only a vague notion of the nature of the parent's job, and have little or no opportunity to observe the parent, or for that matter any other adult, when he is fully engage in his work." (Allen, 2012:95.)
- The **Macro systems** are the overarching patterns and structures that contribute to the sociocultural values and beliefs in communities, for example individualism and self-sufficiency. It also includes the national economy, individual

socioeconomic status, political culture, ethnicity and various subcultures (Allen, 2012:95; Grobbelaar, 2008:426).

Bronfenbrenner theorized that connections across the various systems enhance development of growth. A Child who knows his parents' co-workers or a child who relates with her teacher both at school and church is more likely to develop his or her full potential than children whose systems are more disconnected. The interconnection of systems promotes intergenerational relationships; without this interconnection, social discord and the eventual demise of society can occur. Churches are natural places for cross-system connections for children, youth and adults.

In sum, Bronfenbrenner's theory indicates that activities, roles and interpersonal relationships within one system affect the other systems, for good or ill. Allen (2012:96) argues that the good news is that intergenerational interactions within faith communities may be one significant step towards changing the ideology of age segregation and its resulting negative stereotyping of people and another generation.

Conclusion:

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory accentuates the fact that more connections between the different systems in which a child functions open up more possibilities for positive growth – emotionally and spiritually. This explains why the congregation of Philippi's children expressed themselves more in terms of a personal relationship with God.

The community in which the congregation of Philippi is situated is an example of interconnections of the different micro, meso and exosystems. The data also indicate the close relationship between the congregation, school and the community as a whole. In the parent-leader group Andrea, one of the teachers at the primary school, mentioned the following:

Ek dink Francois (skoolhoof van die Laerskool) speel ook 'n groot rol daarin – Hy laat (noem die naam van die leraar) toe om 'n spesifieke oggend gedurende 'n spesifieke fees soos Pinkster met die kinders by die skool te kom praat. So, hulle kry hulle eie Pinkster feesie. Die paar kinders in die gemeente, dink ek, wanneer hulle dan op 'n Pinkster Sondag kom, dan moet dit vir daardie kind 'n klein bietjie duideliker wees waaroor dit gaan ... dit [is] baie mooi op hulle vlak. Hulle hou tog Pinkster met 'n

*bietjie agtergrond daarvan. En as dit nie by die skool is nie, dan die Woensdag by die [kinderklub]. Die wat dan Sondag kerk toe kom het dan die agtergrond.*¹⁰⁵

The congregation also involves the whole community in their festival practices. The following excerpt shows it clearly:

Andrea:

*... ek wil weer terugkom na die Kerssangdiens. Ek dink wat daar ook vir ons almal baie lekker is, ons betrek die hele gemeenskap. Of jy laat die kleintjies 'n bietjie sing of Ingrid (die musiek onderwyser) laat die laerskoolkinders optree. Daar kom dan nou Pa's en Ma's wat andersins NOOIT naby 'n kerk uitkom nie. Party jare (...) ... is daar die 'grandste' uitnodigings ... Dit word vir ... elke gemeenskaplid uitgedeel. Wat daai opkoms so lekker maak is dat ons somer die hele gemeenskap bymekaar het. Dit is nie beperk tot die gemeente nie.*¹⁰⁶

Francois:

*Net om hierby aan te sluit, alhoewel ons die NG Kerk baadjie aan het, probeer ons met al die feeste ... die Engelse gemeenskap ook [betrek]... [Hulle] word ook uitgenooi, enige een, enige van die susterskerke en buite die susterskerke. Dit is nie net 'n 'ons doen dit net op die NG manier nie'... [Die dominee] het ook 'n baie ... openheid rondom die bediening van nagmaal wat ook in 'n mate 'n fees is.*¹⁰⁷

The interconnections between the different microsystems (exosystems) through the festival activities and interaction opportunities between the school, church and community creates an environment for the children for optimal growth. The children

¹⁰⁵ English translation: "I think Francois (Principal of the Primary School) also plays a huge role in it - he involves (mention the name of the minister) during a special celebration such as Pentecost to talk with the kids at the school. So they get their own smaller Pentecost festival. The small number of children in the church, I think, when they come on a Pentecost Sunday, it must be a little clearer to them ... it [was] nicely done on their level. They then celebrate Pentecost with a little bit more background. And if it's not at school, it is on Wednesday at the [children's club]. Now those who come to church on Sunday, come with that background."

¹⁰⁶ English translation: "... I want to come back to the Christmas Carols. I think it is very nice for all of us, because we involve the entire community. Or you let the little ones sing or Ingrid [the music teacher at the school] involves the primary school children. There now are dads and moms who attend, who otherwise NEVER come near a church. Some years there are grand invitations distributed ... for every community member. What is so nice about it is that we have the whole community together. It is not confined to the congregation."

¹⁰⁷ English translation: "Just to add, although we are a Dutch Reformed Church we also try to involve... the English community with all our festivals ... [They] are also invited... any one, any of the sister churches and outside the sister churches. This is not just a 'we just do it the DRC way' ... [The minister] has a lot of ... openness about serving communion, it is also in a way a festival."

are also exposed to the working environment of their fathers and mothers. The workplace setup of this small community is also the same. It can be concluded that the data supported the ecological development theory that the interconnections of the different systems, especially also during the congregation's festival practices may contribute to the enhancement of their faith.

4.2.4 Social-cultural learning theory

The situative-socio-cultural perspective introduced by the Russian Psychologist Lev Vygotsky and developed and elaborated on by contemporary educational psychologists and scientists can also from another angle explain why the children of Philippi indicate a spiritual growth that is not so evident in the other three congregations. This perspective on knowing and learning places stronger emphasis on the social interaction of the learning environment than do the cognitivist and behaviour theories and promotes the idea that the social setting itself is crucial to the learning process (Allen, 2012:99)

Vygotsky wrote most of his works on human development and learning during 1924 until 1934. After his death in 1934, his work was suppressed during Stalin's reign. His works began to be published in the 1950s in Russia, but only in 1978 with the publication of his works in English did Vygotsky's way of thinking start to widely impact on educational thought and practice in the West. His insights regarding the importance of the social aspects of learning were especially instrumental in the discussions about mainstreaming and inclusion in public education in the 1990s (Allen, 2012:101).

Vygotsky believed that for a person to learn concepts, they must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in authentic, complex learning environments.

Vygotsky describes three zones of developmental activity:

- The zone of actual development: Where the learner actually is developing;
- The zone of potential development: Where the learner potentially could or should be; and
- The zone of proximal development: The amount of assistance required for a learner to move from the zone of actual development to the zone of potential development (Vygotski, 1978:86).

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a subset of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The concept of ZPD is that when a person is ready to learn the next thing, the best way to learn it is to be with those who are just ahead on the learning journey. Wertsch and Rogoff (as cited, in Allen, 2012:102) have conceptualized the ZPD as being: "that phase in development in which the [person] has only partially mastered a task but can participate in its execution with the assistance and supervision of an adult or more capable peer. Thus the zone of proximal development is a dynamic region of sensitivity in learning skills of culture; in which [persons] develop through participation ... with more experienced members of the culture".

Allen (2012:102) notes that the socio-cultural learning perspective views persons to be members of their community when actively participating in that particular social community, learning alongside those who are further ahead in the journey.

The congregation of Philippi functions in an intergenerational setting that is authentic, complex, formative environment, made up of individuals at various stages in their faith journeys, teaching some and learning from others as they participate in their community of believers. The children participate equally in many of the festival practices of the faith community, for example Ash-Wednesday, Palm Sunday, and Holy Communion etc. The children also are afforded the opportunity of serving together under the guidance of an adult.

That was also the experience of the congregation's parent-leaders group of Colosse in the past when the children participated together during Easter along with the adults in the Passion play. The testimony of Megan, in the previous chapter (see 2.3.1.3) that the participation of her three children was affected for the rest of their lives is evidence to it. During that time, due to the adults and children participating together in the passion play, both groups grew.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural theory explains that the faith formation of children who are practising their faith under the guidance of others who have travelled further in the faith journey is enhanced.

4.3 Concluding interpretations

From the four different theories discussed to explain the 'why' of certain phenomena emerging from the data, the following conclusion can be drawn:

- The social-cognitive learning theory explains that children have the capabilities to learn through observational learning and the modelling of spiritual leaders and other members of the faith community during the festival practices. This explains why it is possible that they can pick up the non-verbal emotional tones through observing the adults during baptism and come to the conclusion that it is a very important festival although they often cannot explain what the reasons behind the practice are.
- The enculturation faith theory explains why children, through their interaction with loving, caring and friendly adults, experience that they are special, which creates the ideal environment to transmit, sustain and expand faith formation, especially during festival practices. This experiential path also emphasises that experiential participation during festivals is fundamental to their faith journey. It can be concluded that the reason why the children did not recognise Pentecost as a festival is that an experiential participatory experience of Pentecost was lacking.
- The ecological system theory explains what the impact on the child's spiritual growth can be if there are more interconnections between the systems in which he/she functions. The church, especially in the festival celebration practices, can create an intergenerational culture to enhance the interconnections of children.
- The socio-cultural theory explains the reason why children's faith is enhanced when they participate interactively in the presence of others that have progressed further on their faith journey.

4.4 Summary

The primary aim of this chapter was to explain the issues that came to the fore from the empirical research concerning the inclusion and faith formation of children in the four Dutch Reformed churches in eastern Mpumalanga. Different theories from the social sciences are applied to understand these phenomena. In the next chapter the Scriptural perspective from the Book of Deuteronomy will be discussed.

CHAPTER 5

SOME FESTIVAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

5.1 Introduction

This study investigates practical theologically the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children. In the previous chapter we investigated the reasons or theories behind the present festival celebration practices.

Osmer (2008:4) argues that the third task of the practical theology is *normative*. The normative task enquires into what ought to be going on. The third question related to the role of church festivals in children's faith formation, is: What ought to be going on about children in the festival practices? What is God's will for the present festival practices? Osmer refers to this task as *prophetic discernment* (Osmer, 2008:135). Prophetic discernment is an activity of seeking God's guidance amid circumstances, events, and decisions regarding life (Osmer, 2008:137). To be able to reflect on the inclusion of children and their faith formation in the festival practices of the different faith communities, it is important to first have a theological interpretation¹⁰⁸ of the present perceptions of the children and the adults in the four different congregations. In the previous chapters the festival practices have been described. However, now the following questions come to the fore:

- What are the norms to reflect on in order to guide the festival practices?
- What are the perspectives in the Bible about the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?

Although there are many references to children and festivals in the Bible, this chapter will investigate Deuteronomy's perspective on the role of festivals in the faith formation of children.

This chapter (Chapter 5) will describe the researcher's assumptions and methodology used in investigating the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 16:1-17 will then be explored to analyse the perspectives on the role of festivals in children's faith formation. Furthermore, the built-up structure of Deuteronomy 16 will be analysed by means of discourse analysis. Important structure- and meaning-

¹⁰⁸ Osmer defines theological interpretation as 'the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations and contexts' (Osmer, 2008:131).

carriers will be investigated theologically in the context of the Book of Deuteronomy and the New Testament.

5.3 Assumptions

It is important for a researcher to make known his own presuppositions about the Bible. There are two extreme approaches to the authority of the Bible. On the one hand is the fundamentalism approach that holds the viewpoint that one's own understanding of the Bible is the real understanding of the Bible. On the other extreme is the relativism approach that maintains that the Bible has no meaning at all; it is the reader of the Bible that gives it meaning (De Klerk et al., 2005:5-7).

My presuppositions as the researcher are as follows:

- I accept that the Bible is the inspired Word of God in human language.
- I believe that the Bible is time directed but not time bounded.
- I believe that the Holy Spirit has a specific purpose for every portion in the Bible.
- I also acknowledge that human understanding of the Bible is fallible work.
- I am a reformed theologian and acknowledge that my interpretation will also be influenced by this tradition.

5.4 Methodology

The built-up structure of Deuteronomy 16 will be analysed by means of discourse analysis. I will broadly follow the approach of De Klerk and Van Rensburg (2005). First, the text will be analysed synchronically and then diachronically.

5.5 Deuteronomy 16:1-17

5.5.1 Pericope Choice

Deuteronomy is the book in the Bible that refers to children the most. The word 'children' (בְּנָיִם - literally 'sons') and the word 'small children' (הַטְּוֵהִים) occurs 47 times¹⁰⁹ and 7 times¹¹⁰ respectively in the book. No single book of the Scripture attends more directly and so often to the faith formation of children in the community of faith, than Deuteronomy (Miller, 2008:62). From the beginning (Deut. 1:39) to the end

¹⁰⁹ The word בְּנָיִם occurs in the following verses: Deut. 1:39; 4:9, 10, 25, 40; 5:9, 14, 29; 6:2, 7, 20, 21; 7:3, 4, 11:2, 19; 21; 12:12, 18, 25, 28, 31; 13:7; 16:11, 14; 18:10; 21:15, 16, 17, 18, 20; 23:8; 24:16; 28:32, 41, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57; 29:21, 28; 30:2; 32:5, 20, 46; 33:9 and 24.

¹¹⁰ The word הַטְּוֵהִים occurs in the following verses: Deuteronomy 1:39, 2:34, 3:6, 3:19, 20:14; 29:11 and 31:12.

(Deut. 32:46) it gives prominent attention to children and especially how to guide them in their walk with God¹¹¹.

5.5.1.1 Motivation for Deuteronomy 16:1-17

Of all the festival calendars¹¹² in the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy), it is striking that the festival calendars of Deuteronomy and Exodus are the only two that specifically refer to children. The festival calendar in Deuteronomy 16 is chosen because of the broader context of this book and its strong emphasis on the faith formation of the faith community, especially that of the children. The calendar gives directives for three festivals, namely the Passover-Unleavened Bread (v. 1-8), the Feast of Weeks (v. 9-12), and the Feast of the Booths (v. 13-15). Only the Feast of Weeks and Feast of the Booths refers to children specifically¹¹³. The Passover-Unleavened Bread narrative is also included in this study because it is foundational to the rest of the pericope and is closely linked to the other two festival narratives.

5.5.1.2 Pericope delimitation

De Klerk and Van Rensburg (2005:15) define a pericope (also called a paragraph) as a part of a book that can be seen as a unit in itself. A unit communicates an independent message in conjunction with the rest of the book.

In the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia the *setuma* and *petuha* paragraph markers of the Masoretic system divides Deuteronomy 16:1-17 into three smaller pericopes:

- Deut. 16: 1- 8
- Deut. 16: 9 – 12
- Deut. 16: 13 – 17

The pericope can also be divided into the following smaller units because of certain words that are connected syntactically:

¹¹¹ Grobbelaar (2008:251) used the term “wandel met God”

¹¹² The **feast calendars** in the rest of the Pentateuch can be found in Exodus 12; 13; 23:14-17; 34:18-26; Leviticus 23:1-44; Numbers 28:16-19:14.

¹¹³ The phrase **וְבִנְךָ וְבִתְּךָ** “your son and your daughter” occurs in verses 11 and 12.

Verses	Unit	Words	Appearance
1 – 8	Passover-Unleavened	פֶּסַח “Passover” מַצּוֹת “Unleavened”	v. 1, 2, 7, 8 v. 3, 8
9-12	Feast of Weeks	חַג “Feast” שָׁבֻעוֹת “Weeks”	v. 10 v. 10
13-15	Feast of the Booths	חַג “Feast” הַסֻּכּוֹת “Booths”	v. 13, 14, 15 v. 13
16-17	Conclusion directive	חַג “Feast” מַצּוֹת “Unleavened” שָׁבֻעוֹת “Weeks” הַסֻּכּוֹת “Booths”	v. 16 (3X) v. 16 v.16 v. 16

Verses 16 and 17 are a conclusion directive that repeats the three mentioned festivals.

5.5.2 Micro- and Macro Context

5.5.2.1 *Place of the pericope in Deuteronomy*

What is the place of Deuteronomy 16:1-17 in the bigger structure of the Book of Deuteronomy? It is not an easy question to answer because understanding the structure is vital to understanding the message of the book itself (Vogt, 2006:15). There have been many varied attempts to describe the structure of Deuteronomy. Wright (Wright, 1996:1) aptly notes that the book is “so rich in content and texture that, like a rich fruitcake, it can be sliced in various ways”.

The variety of approaches undoubtedly stem from the book itself. In general there are three main different approaches¹¹⁴ to the structure of Deuteronomy:

- ‘Superscriptions or Speeches of Moses

¹¹⁴ Wright (1996:4) distinguishes four approaches. The fourth approach is called an expanded Decalogue. The researcher argues that the fourth approach can be categorized under the covenant form.

- Covenant/Treaty form
- Literary Concentricity pattern

5.5.2.1.1 *Superscriptions or Speeches of Moses*

One of the most natural ways of understanding Deuteronomy is as a record or collection of the speeches of Moses. The structure is identified by markers used to introduce these speeches. These include the similar phrases such as:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים

“These are the words” (1:1),

וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה

“This is the torah” (4:44),

אֵלֶּה דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית

“These are the terms [lit. words]” (29:1).

Wright (1996:2) divided the book according to the superscriptions, into three sections:

1:1 – 4:43 *Historical review with a historical exhortation*

4:44- 28:68 *Exhortation to covenant loyalty followed by the law, covenant renewal, blessings and curses.*

29:1-30:20 *Summary and concluding challenge* (Wright, 1996:2)

This is then followed by a kind of epilogue of the last acts of Moses and his death.

Other scholars such as Clements (1989), Miller (1990) and Olsen (1994) identify extra markers in the book to expand the structure.

Millar (1990:xii) identifies the marker in Deut. 33:1:

וְזֹאת הַבְּרִכָּה

“This is the blessing”

The structure was expanded to a fourth division with the heading “PART FOUR – The death of Moses: A Final Blessing and Farewell” (Deut. 33-34).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵The full structure of Millar (1990:ix-xii) is: PART ONE – Moses’ First Address: Journey to the boundary (Deut. 1-4); PART TWO – Moses’ Second Address: The Law proclaimed (Deut. 5-28; PART THREE – Moses’ Third Address: The covenant at Moab (Deut. 5-28) and PART FOUR: The Death of Moses: Final Blessing and Farewell (Deut. 33-34).

Olsen (1994:5) identifies another marker in Deut. 6:1:

וְזֵאת הַמִּצְוָה הַקְּדוּמָה וְהַמְשֻׁבָּטִים

“This is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances ...”

Olson (1994:17) sees **Chapter 5 as the pivot of the whole Deuteronomy structure** and divides the book as follows:

This *torah* (summarized in Deuteronomy 5) moves from:

- The community-forming story of God’s grace from the past in Chapters 1-4 to
- The community-shaping law to guide the present in Chapters 6-28 to
- The community-sustaining provisions for a new covenant with future generations in Chapter 29-32 to
- God’s ultimate blessing of the community as it moves through death to life in Chapters 33-34.

Especially in the structure of Olson, the central function of the *torah* (*instruction*) is clear. Vogt (2006:23) argues that this structure emphasises Moses’ role as mediator, messenger and teacher of Yahweh’s Torah.

5.5.2.1.2 Covenant or treaty form

Since Mendenhall’s seminal work in 1954 on his analysis of the late bronze age Hittite suzerainty treaties and recognizing the significance of the Ancient Near East treaty structure for understanding the Old Testament, much scholarly discussion has centred around the relationship between it and Deuteronomy (Fuhrman, 2010:44; Vogt, 2006:25). Kline (as cited in Wright, 1996:3) applied this approach to the book of Deuteronomy. He argues that, as a whole, it has the form of the second-millennium treaties.

This provided another way of structuring the book:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1:1-5 | <i>Preamble</i> : Identifying the speaker and addressees |
| 1:6-4:49 | <i>Historical prologues</i> , relating significant events in the relationship with the parties |
| 5-11 | <i>General Stipulations</i> , outlining of the broad terms of the treaty |
| 12-26 | <i>Detailed stipulations</i> , the specific requirements of the imperial state on its vassal. |
| 27-28 | <i>Blessings and Curses</i> , as sanctions and motivations for observing the Treaty. |

Others¹¹⁶ see closer analogies in the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon in the second-millennium treaties. Although there are remarkable parallels between the Ancient Near East treaty forms and Deuteronomy, Vogt (2006: 26) argues that it is also undeniable that Deuteronomy in its present form is much more than a treaty document.¹¹⁷ Millar (1990:10) comes to the conclusion that Deuteronomy has an explicit literary structure centred around the superscriptions, substructure based on a treaty pattern and a theological structure focus on the Ten Commandments and the Shema. The use of the treaty pattern then suggests an attempt to highlight the supremacy of Yahweh as the Great King, to demonstrate His authority, to impose obligations and demands loyalty of His people (Vogt, 2006:28).

5.5.2.1.3 Literary Concentricity pattern

A very different approach is taken by Christenson. Christenson (1991:xli) argues that Deuteronomy in its essential nature is a work of literary art in poetic form and is best understood as having a concentric pattern of five parts:

A THE OUTER FRAME: A Look Backward (Deut. 1 – 3)

B THE INNER FRAME: The Great Peroration (Deut. 4 – 11)

C THE CENTRAL CORE: Covenant Stipulations (Deut. 12 – 26)

B' THE INNER FRAME: The Covenant Ceremony (Deut. 27-30)

A' THE OUTER FRAME: A Look Forward (Deut. 31-34)

Each of these five major parts of the book of Deuteronomy may in turn be divided into somewhat similar concentric structures¹¹⁸ (Christenson, 1991: xli). This view

¹¹⁶ Weinfeld (Fuhrman, 2010:45) strongly argued that the Neo-Assyrian treaties, particularly the Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon (872 BG; discovered in 1956) provided a more appropriate background for understanding Deuteronomy, due to close affinities in form, structure, and phraseology, especially the curse list of Deuteronomy 28.

¹¹⁷ Much longer than any of the extant ANE treaties; includes material that is not present in ANE treaties, such as poetry, itineraries, admonitions and parenesis; the extensive legal section of Deuteronomy (Chaps.12-26) is not present in ANE treaties.

¹¹⁸ This feature of concentricity is sometimes called chiasmus (Wright, 1996:3). The technique arranging material in a balancing order in which a number of points are made and then, after a central point is established, the original points are repeated or balanced in reverse order. There is thus a movement “in” to the centre and then back “out” to the frame again. It is often found in the visual arts, in music, and in poetry. Christensen argues that, although Deuteronomy is not strictly poetry in the same form as for example the Psalms, its rhythmic prose and repetitive phraseology point to a poetic,

takes into account the apparent unity of the book in its final form. The final chapters of the book are not viewed as an appendix to the main thrust of the book but are central to the argument of the book as a whole, as the author looks forward to the future of Israel (Vogt, 2006:29). The theological centre of the book is Deuteronomy 12 - 26.

The significance of Deuteronomy 12 – 26 is emphasised very clearly in this structure of Christensen. In Chapters 1-11 there is a progression that highlights the importance of what is about to come in Chapters 12-26 (The terms of the law). The first eleven chapters highlight the importance of obedience and loyalty to Yahweh. Voigt (2006:30) argues that Deut. 12-26 is at the centre because keeping the ‘terms of the torah’ described there, is precisely the means by which Israel will demonstrate loyalty and obedience to Yahweh. This structure implies that the authority of Israel is the Torah. Loyalty to Yahweh, expressed through adherence to the Torah, is what will define the nation in the context of surrounding nations and will ensure Israel’s continued existence in the land (Deut. 4:5-8, 26-28).

5.5.2.1.4 Conclusion

Looking at the three different approaches to the whole structure of Deuteronomy, Vogt (2006:31) comes to the conclusion that the three different views of the structure have in common the emphasis on the supremacy of Yahweh and the importance of the Torah. This suggests that these themes should be seen as central to the book as a whole.

Deuteronomy 16:1-17 fits into Deut. 12 to 26. Although Deuteronomy can be approached from different angles, there is consensus among scholars that Chapters 12 to 26, also known as the Decalogue Code, plays a very central role in the book. The purpose of this corpus is to bring every aspect of the public life of Israel¹¹⁹ under the aegis of God (Brueggemann, 2001:141). Chapters 12 to 26 spell out the implications of the Torah that will show loyalty and obedience to Yahweh in every

and possibly a musical, composition of which the form facilitated its memorization and preservation (Christenson, 1991:lix-lx).

¹¹⁹ There is a long scholarly debate concerning the shape and arrangement of this extended corpus of ‘statutes and ordinances’ (Deut. 12:1). On the one hand, many scholars believe that the collection is almost completely random; particular commandments must be taken each on their own terms. On the other hand, there are scholarly proposals, already with John Calvin, suggesting that this corpus is intentionally arranged in correspondence to the Ten Words (Commandments) of 5:6-21, so that the sequence of each part correlates with more or less exposita a command (Clements, 2001:53; Olson, 1994:62-25).

sphere of life. The guidance and instruction of the children in the Torah plays an important role in the whole book, as will be discussed later on.

5.5.2.2.1 Deuteronomy's place in the Bible

Deuteronomy is the fifth book in the Bible, the last in the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Olson (1994:1) notes that “the book of Deuteronomy forms both the capstone of the Pentateuch and the introduction to the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy – 2 Kings).” The Old Testament scholar Eckhart Otto views Deuteronomy as the centre of the Old Testament and also the starting point of any Old Testament theology (Le Roux J, 2009).

The Theological stamp of Deuteronomy is evident throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament (Block, 2012:33)¹²⁰.

5.5.3 Genre of Deuteronomy 16:1-17

Literature theory distinguishes various genres. It is generally accepted that each genre has its own interpretational rules. The type of literature will influence the way the text will be interpreted (De Klerk et al., 2005:19). Deuteronomy 16:1-17 can be seen as a micro-genre of the cultic law¹²¹ genre in Deut. 12 to 16:17. McConville (2002:271) refers to this as laws on worship that began in chapter 12, and particularly the group of laws in 14:22-16:17, which share an interest in the structure of Israel's time¹²².

The genre of Deuteronomy as a whole has been discussed in 2.4.2.1. The whole genre of the book has occasioned much discussion and debate over the past decades. Scholars defined the book in five basic forms, namely covenant¹²³, sermon¹²⁴, law code¹²⁵, constitution¹²⁶ and a program of catechesis¹²⁷.

¹²⁰ It is very clear in the so-called Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to 2 Kings) in its style and theology (Block, 2012:34). In the latter Prophets, especially Hosea and Jeremiah, it is very evident.

¹²¹ Chapter 12-26 is also seen by the researcher as ‘torah’. The Christian usage of the term ‘torah’ is characteristically mistranslated as “law”. Torah is better rendered as “instruction” or teaching that gives guidance (Brueggemann, 2003:16-17).

¹²² The annual feasts connect with the ‘year by year’ of 14:22; 15:20, as well as focusing on the weekly sabbatical rhythm (McConville, 2002:271)

¹²³ Already discussed Deuteronomy as a treaty document in 2.4.2.1.2

¹²⁴ Gerhard von Rad argued that Deuteronomy appeared in the form of a homiletic instruction for the laity (Von Rad, 1966:23)

¹²⁵ The identification of “the book of the law” found by King Josiah in 2 Kings 22-23 prompted some scholars like Julius Wellhausen to translate the Deuteronomy book of the ‘torah’ by “the book of the law. (Olson, 1994:9)

¹²⁶ S. Dean McBride proposed that Deuteronomy was the ‘torah’ in the sense of being the national “polity” or “constitution” of the people of Israel (Miller, 2008:45-46)

Millar (2008:46) states that the book Deuteronomy has a dual character. On the one hand it has a didactic character with the genre as catechesis and on the other hand it is a polity or constitution of the covenant people. The book is in fact both polity and instruction, constitutional and catechetical.

Therefore, this dual character is important for one to understand Deuteronomy and its importance, especially with regard to children. The book is 'torah' and that also means instruction, guidance and the nurturing of the people of God. The verb 'yarah' in the term Torah means to direct or point or to give direction (Brueggemann, 1997:582). It is this aspect of the character of the book that makes it especially applicable to children and their faith formation.

5.5.4 Hebrew Masoretic Text

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1990) Hebrew text is used as basis for the micro-analysis of Deuteronomy 16:1-17. Before the micro analysis was done, relevant text-critical evidence¹²⁸ in the text-critical apparatus of the BHS was used to analyse which evidence¹²⁹ is the most relevant to influence the English translation of Deuteronomy 16. The most relevant notes will be discussed as footnotes in the English translation of the text. The following Hebrew text was used:

שְׁמוֹר אֶת־חֻדְשׁ הָאָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ פֶּסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בַחֻדְשׁ הָאָבִיב
הוֹצִיאָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לַיְלָה:
² וְזָבַחְתָּ פֶסַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ צֹאן וּבָקָר בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה לְשִׁכְן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם:
³ לֹא־תֹאכַל עָלָיו חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל־עָלָיו מִצּוֹת לַחֵם עִנִּי כִּי בַחֲפוּזוֹן יֵצְאֶת מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:
⁴ וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שֹׂאֵר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלְךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְלֹא־יִלֵּין מִן־הַבֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר תִּזְבַּח בַּעֲרֵב בַּיּוֹם
הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבָקָר:

¹²⁷ Olsen (1994:11) argued that Deuteronomy as 'torah' must be understood as a program of catechesis. Catechesis in this broad sense is the process of education in faith from one generation to another.

¹²⁸ Tov (2012:1) states that: "textual criticism deals with the nature and origin of all the witnesses of a composition or text ... This analysis often involves an attempt to discover the original form of detail in a composition, or even large stretches of text, although what exactly constitutes (an) 'original text(s)' is subject to much debate."

¹²⁹ Tov (2012) distinguishes the Hebrew texts between direct and indirect textual evidence. Direct textual evidence consists of three categories, namely the Proto-Masoretic and Masoretic texts, Pre-Samaritan Texts and Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Biblical texts found in the Judean Desert (Qumran scrolls). The indirect textual evidence are the following ancient translations, namely the Septuagint (Greek), Revisions of the Septuagint (Greek), Targumim (Aramaic), Peshitta (Syriac), Vulgate (Latin) and translation of Saadia (Arabic).

⁵ לֹא תֹכֵל לְזַבַּח אֶת־הַפֶּסַח בְּאֶחָד שְׁעָרָיִךָ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:
⁶ כִּי אִם־אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁכֵן שָׁמוֹ שָׁם תִּזְבַּח אֶת־הַפֶּסַח בְּעֶרֶב כְּבוֹא
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מוֹעֵד צֹאתָךְ מִמִּצְרָיִם:
⁷ וּבְשִׁלְתָּ וְאָכַלְתָּ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ וּפְגִיטָה בִּבְקָר וְהִלַּכְתָּ לְאֵלֶיךָ:
⁸ שְׁשֵׁת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצֹּאת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עֲצַרְתָּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה מְלֶאכֶה: ס
⁹ שִׁבְעָה שָׁבַעַת תִּסְפְּרֶלְךָ מֵהַחֵל חֲרַמְשׁ בַּקָּמָה תַחֲלֵ לְסַפֵּר שִׁבְעָה שָׁבַעַת:
¹⁰ וְעָשִׂיתָ חֹג שִׁבְעוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִסֵּת נִדְבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר יְבָרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
¹¹ וְשִׁמַּחְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶתָּה וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר
וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֲלֻמָּנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׁכֵן שָׁמוֹ שָׁם:
¹² וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי־עָבַד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרָיִם וְשִׁמַּרְתָּ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה: פ
¹³ חֹג הַסֵּכֶת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בְּאַסְפֹּף מִגִּרְנֶךָ וּמִיִּקְבֶּךָ:
¹⁴ וְשִׁמַּחְתָּ בְּחֻגְךָ אֶתָּה וּבְנֶךָ וּבִתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֲלֻמָּנָה אֲשֶׁר
בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:
¹⁵ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחֲג לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה כִּי יְבָרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל
תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְיֶךָ וְהָיִיתָ אֶךְ שִׂמַּח:
¹⁶ שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים | בְּשָׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל־זְכוּרְךָ אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר בְּחֹג
הַמִּצֹּאת וּבְחֹג הַשִּׁבְעוֹת וּבְחֹג הַסֵּכֶת וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה רִיקָם:
¹⁷ אִישׁ כְּמַתְנֵת יָדוֹ כְּבִרְכַת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לָךְ: ס

5.5.5 English Translation and relevant text critical notes

An English translation of text of Deuteronomy 16:1-17 was done as closely as possible to the Hebrew text with consideration of the most relevant text critical evidence as footnotes:

Deuteronomy 16: 1-8

¹Observe the month of Abib and therefore made a Passover to Yahweh your God. For it was in the month of Abib that the Lord brought¹³⁰ you out of Egypt in the night.

² And therefore you shall sacrifice to Yahweh your God¹³¹ a Passover, sheep and cattle, in the place which Yahweh shall choose to make his Name dwell there.

¹³⁰ Most LXX texts read “you came out” against the MT that reads “the Lord brought you out”. It is difficult to determine which variant represents the older formulation (Altmann, 2010, p. 185): against MT is its similarity with other texts which agrees with Deut. 16:3, Exod. 23:15, and 34:18; against LXX is its general conformity to the biblical notion of Yahweh leading the Israelites out of Egypt. It is better to stick to the MT.

³You shall not eat with it anything leavened. You shall eat with it for seven days unleavened: bread of affliction, because you came out of the land Egypt in great haste so that you shall remember, all the days of your life, the day that you came out of the land of Egypt.

⁴No yeast shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days and of the meat that you shall slaughter on the evening of the first day nothing will remain until the morning¹³².

⁵You shall not be able to sacrifice the Passover offering in any of your gates (towns) that Yahweh your God is giving you.

⁶But only in the place¹³³ that Yahweh your God chooses to make his name dwell there. There¹³⁴ you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening when the sun goes down at the time of your going forth from Egypt.

⁷Cook¹³⁵ it and eat it in the place Yahweh your God shall choose. And in the morning turn and go back to your tents.

⁸For six days you shall eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day an assembly for Yahweh your God. You shall not do any work¹³⁶.

Deuteronomy 16:9-12

⁹You shall count off for yourself seven weeks. Begin¹³⁷ when you put the sickle to the standing grain. You shall begin to count seven weeks.

¹³¹ Two Hebrew manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX, as well as the Targumim codex manuscripts and Vulgate add אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, “to Yahweh your God, your God” and not only יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, “to Yahweh your God” as in the MT. This reading can’t be accepted because this clause appears many times in Deuteronomy 16:1-17 (Verses 5,6,7,8 etc.)

¹³²The Samaritan Pentateuch reads “between the evenings” in the place of the MT “in the evening” (בֵּינְיָרֵב). The SP harmonizes this text with Exod. 12:5. There is not enough evidence to support this reading. Gordis (as cited in (Christensen, 2001, p. 334) argues the Hebrew phrase “on the day preceding the first day” (בַּיּוֹם הַרְאֲשׁוֹן לַבֹּקֶר) is a Biblical example of a common expression in rabbinic Hebrew, as in such phrases as *ereb sabbat* with the meaning “the day *before the Sabbath*”.

¹³³ The Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac, Targumim and Vulgate read “in the place” for the Masoretic text “to the place”. The reading of MT is retained as *lectio difficilior* (*very difficult*), but the meaning is more or less the same as that of the other text versions. Though the preposition אֶל usually suggests motion or direction, it is also used metaphorically as “in regard to, the range of meaning for prepositions in any language is difficult to capture in translation (Christensen, 2001:329).

¹³⁴ The SP and LXX add one extra שָׁם reading שָׁמָּה שָׁם שָׁמָּה, “[He made] his name [dwell] there. There ...” It seems that one שָׁם dropped off MT by haplography if Deuteronomy 12:11 is taken into consideration.

¹³⁵ Most LXX texts add “and fry” reflecting the tension between Deut. 16:7 and the corresponding command to “roast” in Exod. 12:8. Altmann argues that the notion of cooking as boiling is a development by the Deuteronomy Code to bring Passover in line with other cultic feasts; this conclusion is supported by opening up the choice of meat to include beef, the removal of the celebration from the villages and placement of it at the central sanctuary, and the use of the verb z-b-h (Altmann, 2010:185).

¹³⁶One Hebrew manuscript (69 in Kennicott’s list), some LXX witnesses and Syriac text adding *kol* “any” before מְלָאכָה, “work”. The Samaritan Pentateuch adds a-b-d-h at the end of the verse. The LXX adds ἐν αὐταῖς πᾶν ἔργον, πλὴν ὅσα ποιηθήσεται πάσῃ ψυχῇ, “in any work, save what must be done by anyone,” from Exod. 12:16b. Text evidence supports the adding of *kol* in the text.

¹⁰ Then made the feast of the weeks to Yahweh your God, (offering) an appropriate freewill offering¹³⁸ which you shall give according to (the measure with) which Yahweh your God blesses you.

¹¹ And rejoice before Yahweh your God – you and your son and your daughter, and your male slave and your female slave, the Levite that lives in your gates (towns/cities), and the resident alien, and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst – in the place that Yahweh your God shall choose to make his Name to dwell there.

¹² And therefore, remember that you were a slave in Egypt and keep and do these statutes (decrees)

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

¹³ Keep the feast of the Booths for seven days with your in-gathering from your threshing floor and wine vat (press).

¹⁴ And rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, and your male and your female slave, and the Levite, and the resident alien, the orphan and the widow that lives in your gates (towns).

¹⁵ You shall keep the feast to Yahweh your God for seven days in the place that Yahweh shall choose. When Yahweh your God blesses you in all your produce and in all your work, you surely be joyful.

Deuteronomy 16:16-17

¹⁶ Three times a year all your males are to appear in the presence of Yahweh your God in a place that he will choose: at the feast of the unleavened bread, the feast of the weeks and the feast of the booths and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty handed.

¹⁷ A man shall give as he is able according to the blessings of Yahweh your God that he is given you.

5.5.6 Analysis of the thought structure

The analysis of the thought structure in a pericope is usually done on micro- and macro level. The micro-level structure shows the syntax of the different words in a sentence, phrase or a clause. The different relational components can be seen. A micro-level relational component is a word or a combination of words (phrase) which has a significant relation with another word or phrase in a sentence. Such relation-components can form a thought unit, which can stand in a relation with another word or thought unit (De Klerk & Van Rensburg, 2005:35). The macro-level structure focuses on how the syntax of the sentences, phrases and clauses contributes to the

¹³⁷ The SP, LXX and Syriac text read, “when you have begun (to put).” The MT read מִמְּהֵל “from when first [you put].”

¹³⁸ The word תָּסִיף (translated *sufficient*) is a *hapax legomenon*. The sense of “sufficient/adequate” is determined by the clause at the end of the verse: “according as Yahweh your God shall bless you”. The sufficiency of the offering a person made was determined not by its inherent value or its size, but its relation to the provision of God in the harvest (Craigie, 1976:245).

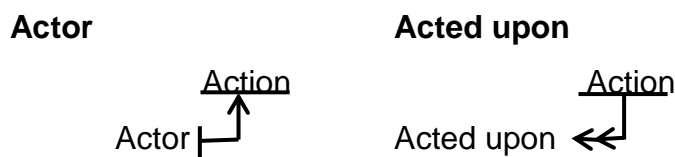
formation of several paragraphs that form the total block of the text or unit of thought (Kaiser and Moises, 1994:34)

Deuteronomy 16:1-8 and 16:9-15 will be separately analysed – first on micro-level and then on macro-level. It is done because the first unit is foundational for the second. The focus point is the second unit, where children are mentioned in the Feast of Weeks (v.11) and in the Feast of the Booths (v.14). The last two verses (v. 16-17) formed a conclusion which is connected to verses 1-8 and 9-15 with the words

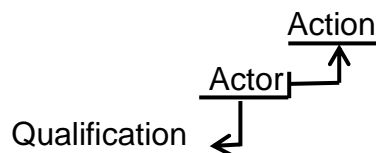
חַג “Feast”, מַצּוֹת “Unleavened”, שָׁבֻעוֹת “Weeks” and הַסֻּכּוֹת “Booths”.

The micro-level analysis will be done in Hebrew to see clearly the built-up structure of every sentence or thought. The English translation of the verse will be given after the micro analysis of the verse.

The different relations between components in a sentence will be shown by using the following symbols:



All the other relations such as a qualification of the actor, those affected by the action, stipulation of the action, linkers etc. will be shown as an example as follows:

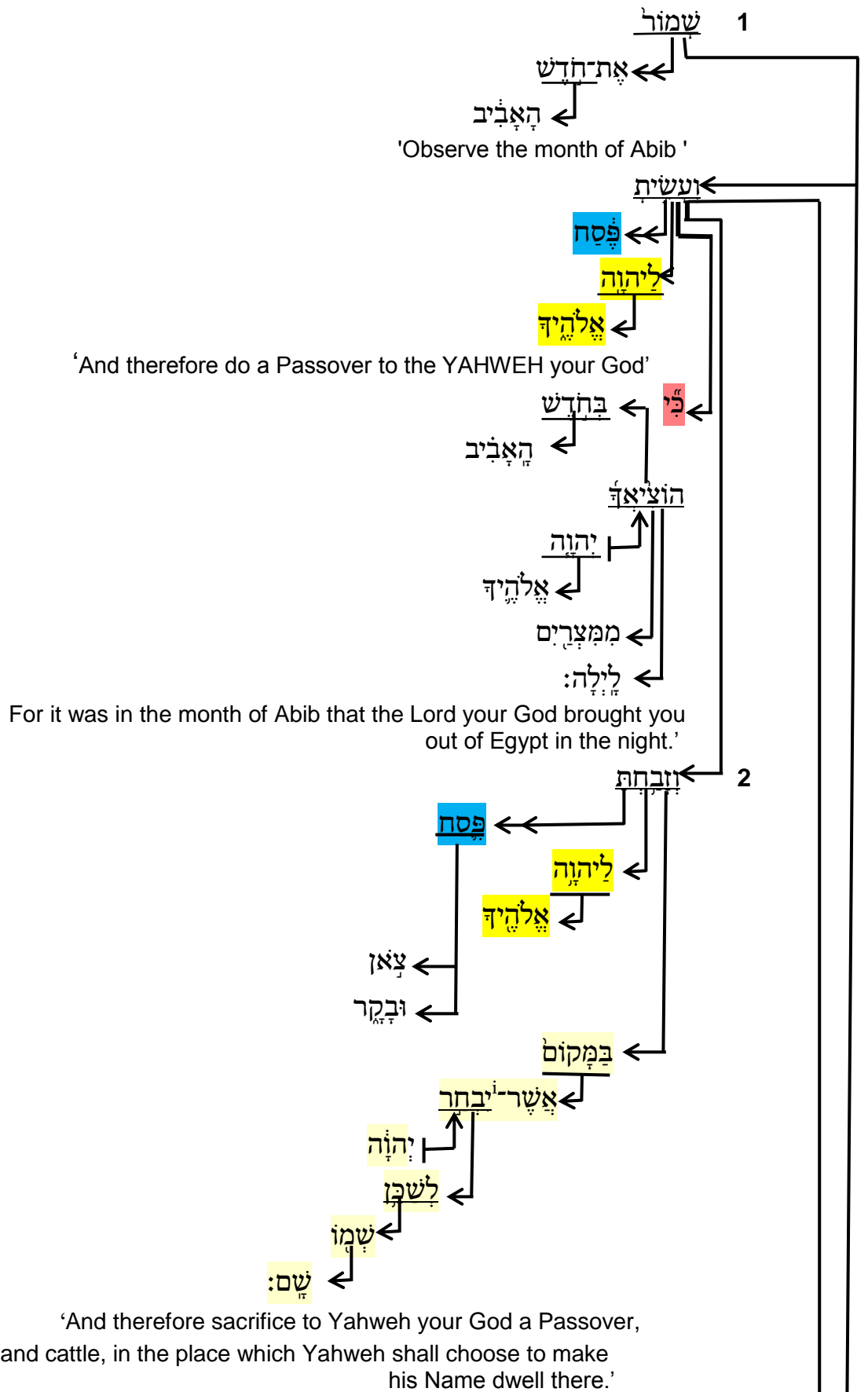


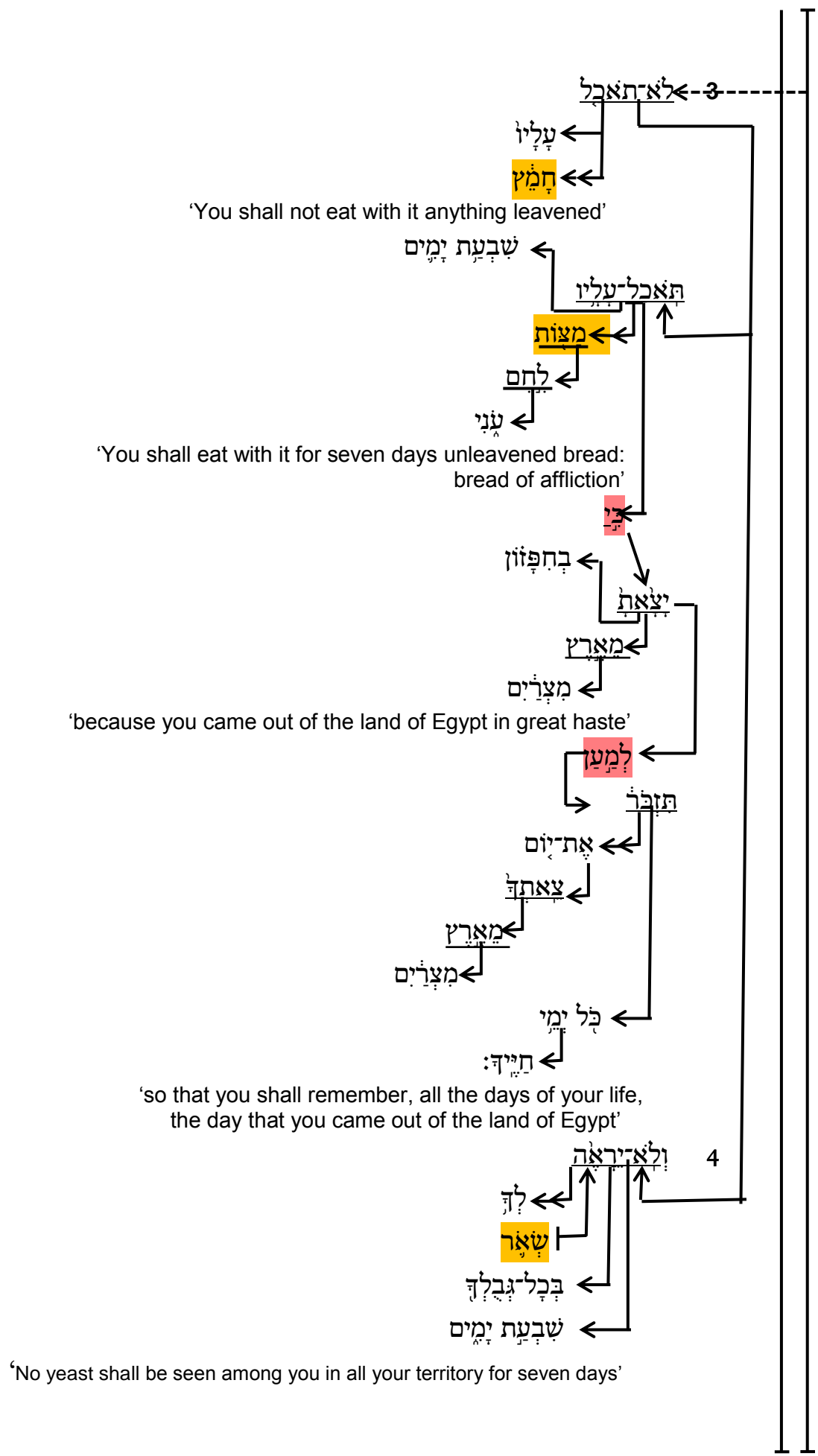
Some words or clauses that are significant meaning carriers in the pericope will be highlighted, for example **חַג** (Passover).

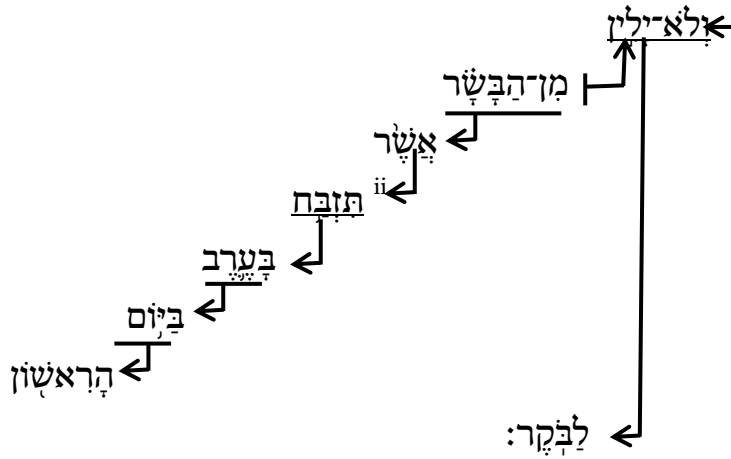
The macro-level analysis will be done in English. After the three pericopes have been analysed, the macro-level of Deuteronomy 16:1-17 as a whole will be discussed.

5.5.6.1 Deuteronomy 16:1-8 Micro- and Macro-analysis of the thought structure

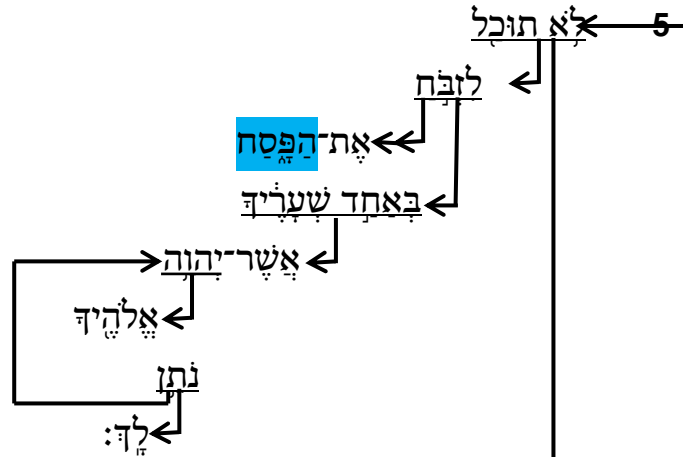
5.5.6.1.1 Deuteronomy 16:1-8 Micro-analysis







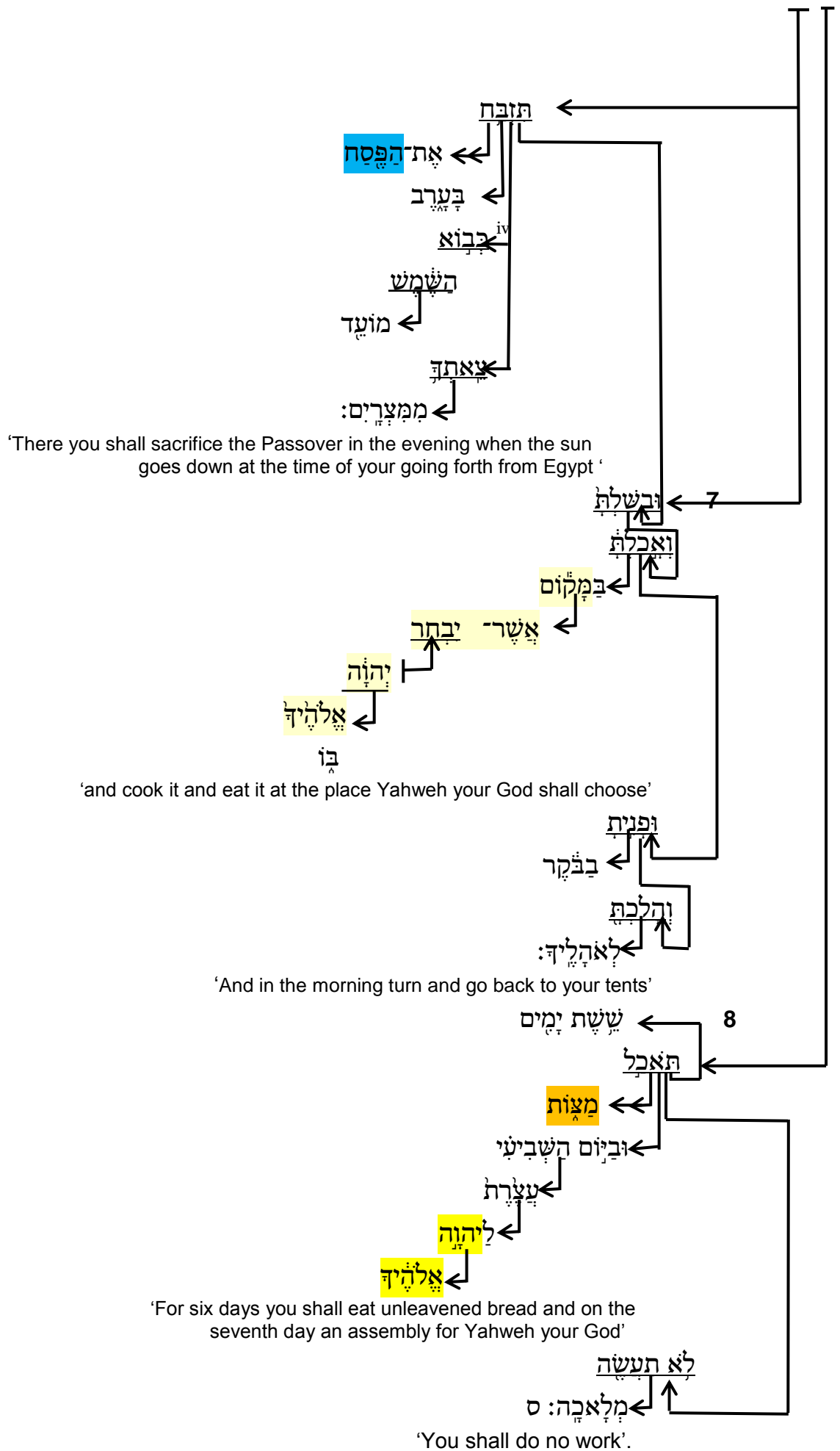
‘and of the meat that you shall slaughter on the evening of the first day nothing will remain until the morning’.



‘You shall not be able to sacrifice the Passover offering in any of your gates (towns) that Yahweh your God is giving you’



‘But only in the place that Yahweh your God shall choose to make his name dwell there.’



5.5.6.1.2 Deuteronomy 16:1-8 Macro-analysis

Basic command

16:1a: Observe the month of Abib

Result (1) of the basic command: A directive - Make a Passover

16:1b: and therefore do a Passover to Yahweh your God.

The reason for the directive

16:1c: For it was in the month of Abib that the Lord brought you out of Egypt in the night

Further details of the directive to do a Passover – Sacrifice a Passover offering

16:2: and therefore sacrifice to Yahweh your God a Passover, sheep and cattle, in the place which Yahweh shall choose to make his Name dwell there.

Result (2) of the basic command: A directive – eat no leavened

16:3a: You shall not eat with it anything leavened.

Positive implication for the directive to eat anything leavened with a time indication

16:3b: You shall eat with it for seven days unleavened bread: bread of affliction,

The reason for this directive to eat unleavened bread

16:3c: because you came out of the land Egypt in great haste

The purpose of the directive to eat unleavened bread

16:3d: so that you shall remember the day of your going out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

Further implication: Restriction on the directive to eat unleavened bread

16:4a: and no yeast shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days

Restriction on the directive - when sacrificing a Passover

16:4b: and of the meat that you shall slaughter on the evening of the first day nothing will remain until the morning.

Further directives for the Passover offering (1) – Where Not in your own towns

16:5: You shall not be able to sacrifice the Passover offering in any of your gates [towns] that Yahweh your God is giving you.

Condition for the Passover offering – Yahweh chooses

16:6a: But only in the place Yahweh your God shall choose to make his Name dwell there.

Further directives for the Passover offering (2) - When

16:6b There you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening when the sun goes down at the time of your going forth from Egypt

Further directives about the Passover offering (3): Preparation and where to eat

16:7a: and cook [boil] it and eat it in the place Yahweh your God shall choose.

Directive after the Passover offering – Go to the tents

16:7b: And in the morning turn and go back to your tents [homes].

16:8a: For six days you shall eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day an assembly to Yahweh your God.

16:8b: You shall do no work

5.5.6.1.3 Deuteronomy 16:1-8 Thought structure explanation

The pericope gives directives for Passover-Leavened bread festival regulations in the Deuteronomy festival liturgical calendar.

The pericope starts with a *basic command*¹³⁹ in verse 1a to observe the month Abib.¹⁴⁰ The result of the basic command implies two specific directives, namely to do a Passover to Yahweh (v. 1b) and to eat nothing leavened with it (v. 3b).

The *first specific directive* (v. 1b) is motivated in verse 1c¹⁴¹ by the reason that Yahweh brought them out in the month of Abib from Egypt. In verse 2¹⁴² the directive is further explained by giving more details concerning the 'what' and the 'where' about the Passover. The Passover is specified as a Passover offering with a 'where' conditional clause. The sacrifice shall be at the place Yahweh shall choose.

The *second specific directive* (v. 3a) not to eat anything leavened with the Passover offering is positively formulated in verse 3b by eating unleavened bread with a time indication of seven days. This bread is specified as bread of affliction. Verse 3c¹⁴³ is a motivation clause that gives the reason for the eating of unleavened, bread of affliction, because they came out of Egypt very quickly. Verse 3d¹⁴⁴ indicates the purpose of eating the bread of affliction (v. 3b) to remember the going out of Egypt for the rest of their lives. The second specific directive ends with expansion in verse 4a to the whole territory of Israel, that no yeast shall be seen.

¹³⁹ The verb שָׁמֹר, "observe" is a Qal infinitivus absolutus and functions as an imperative (Van der Merwe et al. (1997:121).

¹⁴⁰ The month Abib is the first month in the Jewish year calendar and occurs March-April during springtime in the Northern hemisphere.

¹⁴¹ The directive in Verse 1b 'to do a Passover' is a result of the basic command in verse 1a. The כִּי conjunction (v. 1c) is a motivating clause to give a reason for the directive in v1b 'because the Lord brought you out from Egypt'.

¹⁴² Verse 1b and 2 is related as a conjugation to each other because of the two waw consecutives וַעֲשִׂיתָ "do" and וְזָבַחְתָּ "sacrifice". The two verbs are both in second person Qal imperfectum and function in this context as directives of requests or commands (Van der Merwe et al., (1997:111).

¹⁴³ The כִּי (v. 3c) is a conjugation conjunction that is a motivating clause to give a reason for the directive in verse 3b 'because the Lord brought you out from Egypt' (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:248).

¹⁴⁴ The לְמַעַן (v. 3d) is a subordinate conjunction that indicates a purpose for an action (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:249).

The Passover offering (v. 2), in the *first specific directive* (v.1b) of observing the month Abib, is taken up again in verse 3b by a restriction on the time ‘when’ to eat the Passover. The eating is only during the night after the slaughtering. Verses 5 – 7a give further directives for the Passover offering. Verses 5 and 6a focus on the “where” and verses 6b and c on the “when” and the “how”. Verse 5 gives a restrictive directive that it must not be in any of the participants’ own towns. Verse 6a is a condition clause which is repeated here for a second time, in the place which Yahweh shall choose. The “when” of the offering directive is in the evening when the sun goes down (v. 6b). Verse 7a explained how to prepare the meat and where to eat it and by that, repeating the condition clause for a third time (cf. v. 2, 5). Verse 8a connected again with the second specific directive namely, eating unleavened bread. It ends with a Shabbat directive to have an assembly to Yahweh with the command that no one do their daily work (v. 6b).

The pericope from verse 1-8 contains repeated words and phrases such as the following:

- לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ “to Yahweh your God” verses 1b, 2a, and 8a
- פֶּסַח “Passover” verses 1b, 2, 5a, 6b,
- בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר יְהוָה לְשִׁכְּוֹ שְׁמוֹ שָׁם “the place which YAHWEH shall choose to make his Name dwell there” verses 2, 6a, 7a
- שִׁבְעַת “seven” verses 3b and 8

The repeated words in verses 1 to 8 indicate two possible chiasmic patterns or structures:

The first chiasm is the usually Hebrew **a b b a** pattern:

A Yahweh: “to Yahweh your God”	16:1
B Place: “in the place which Yahweh shall choose	16:2
C Rituals: Passover offering and unleavened bread	16:3-5
B’ Place: “in the place which Yahweh shall choose	16:6-7
A’ Yahweh: “to Yahweh your God”	16:8

The pericope begins with the affirmation that the festival is “to Yahweh your God” (vs 1). This is matched at the conclusion (v. 8) with a “solemn assembly to Yahweh your God” (vs 8). The festival is kept focussed upon the exclusive Yahweh agenda.

This focus on Yahweh alone is reinforced in verses 2, 6-7 with the accent on the place. Attention is paid to the place in Deuteronomy as an assurance of focus upon Yahweh (Brueggemann, 2001:173). The accent on Yahweh and upon place provides two envelopes for the core statement of verses 3-5 concerning the actual rites.

Christensen (2001:330) offers an alternative menorah chiastic pattern for verses 1-8. He outlined the pattern as follows:

A	<i>Keep the Passover in the month of Abib</i>	16:1
B	<i>Offer the Passover sacrifice in the place Yahweh chooses</i>	16:2
C	<i>No leaven for seven days</i>	16:3a
X	<i>Remember your exodus from Egypt</i>	16:3b
C	<i>No leaven for seven days</i>	16:4
B	<i>Offer the Passover sacrifice in the place Yahweh chooses</i>	16:6, 7
A	<i>Eat leaven bread for six days, assemble on the seventh</i>	16:8

The outer frame enjoins the people to keep the Passover (1, 8). The next frame (v 2, 6 and 7), the Passover sacrifice, must be offered in the place where Yahweh shall choose. The inner frame (v. 3a and 4), no leaven was to be found for seven days at any place. At the centre of this structure is the motivation for the celebration: the people are to remember their hurried departure in the day that they left the land of Egypt for the freedom.

5.5.6.1.4 Conclusion

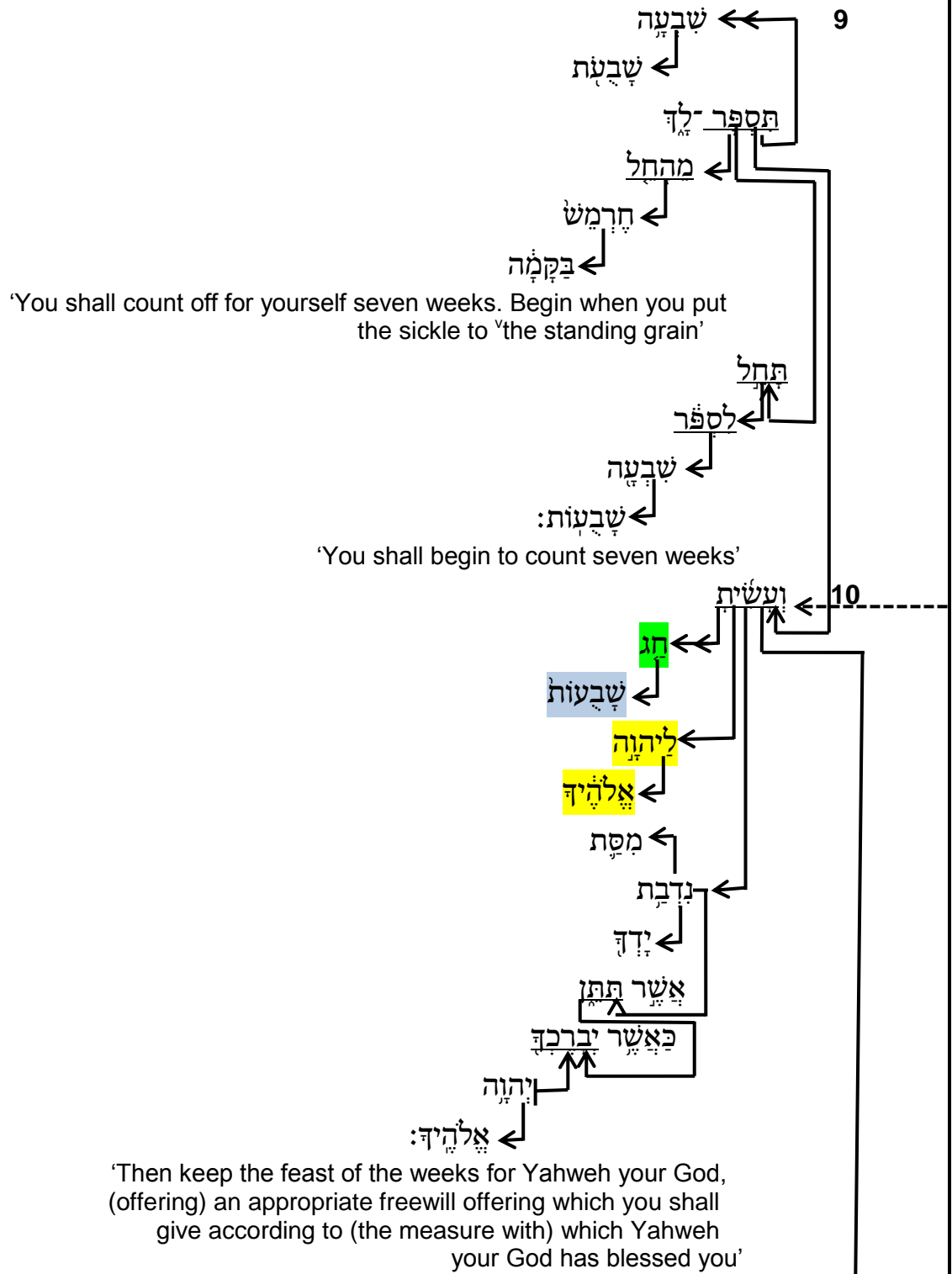
The following conclusion can be drawn concerning the two chiasms:

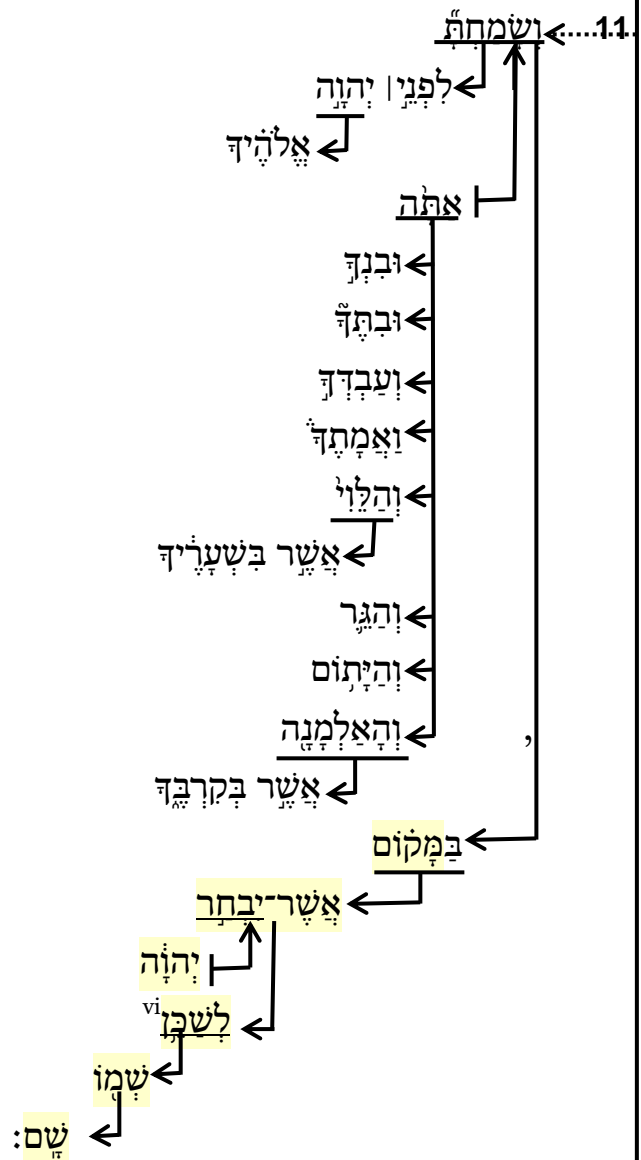
- The overall focus of the festival practice is on Yahweh and on Him alone. The festival is a testimony of gratitude on what He has done and is still doing.
- The festival is a re-enactment and re-experience, remembering what Jahweh has done in the past.

- The literary structure of Deuteronomy combined leavened bread and Passover offering as one festival.
- The beginning words 'observe' (v.1a) and 'seven' (v. 3a,4) and the final phrasing of verse 8 situates the festival in the rhythms of the Sabbath¹⁴⁵ (Brueggemann, 2001:174; McConville, 2002:271).
- The primary purpose of the festival in the light of the bigger genre of the book of Deuteronomy as an instruction, guidance and nurturing of the young is to inculcate the young into the defining memory of the community. Such purpose is likely, both because of the explicit pedagogical interest of Exod. 12:26-27; 13:8. 14-15 on which we see Deut. 6:20-25, and because of the deep concern for children in Deut. 6-8. The festival is to assure that there is continuity into the next generation of the Exodus memory and that the Exodus vision that gives force and authority to the statutes and ordinances that intend a self-conscious ethic of covenantal neighbourliness (Brueggemann, 2001:174).

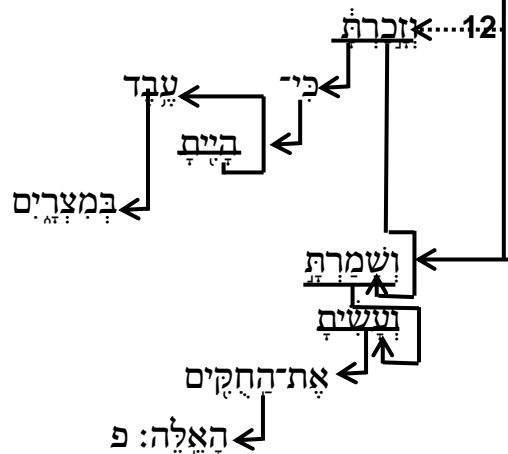
¹⁴⁵ The opening, 'Observe the month of Abib', reminds readers of the fourth Commandment in Deut. 5:12 'Observe the Sabbath day' (McConville, 2002:271)

5.5.6.2 Deuteronomy 16:9-17 Micro- and Macro-analysis of the thought structure





'And rejoice before Yahweh your God – you and your son and your daughter, and your male slave and your female slave, and the Levite that live in your gates (towns), and the resident alien, and the orphan and the widow that are in your midst - at the place Yahweh your God shall choose to make his Name to dwell there.'



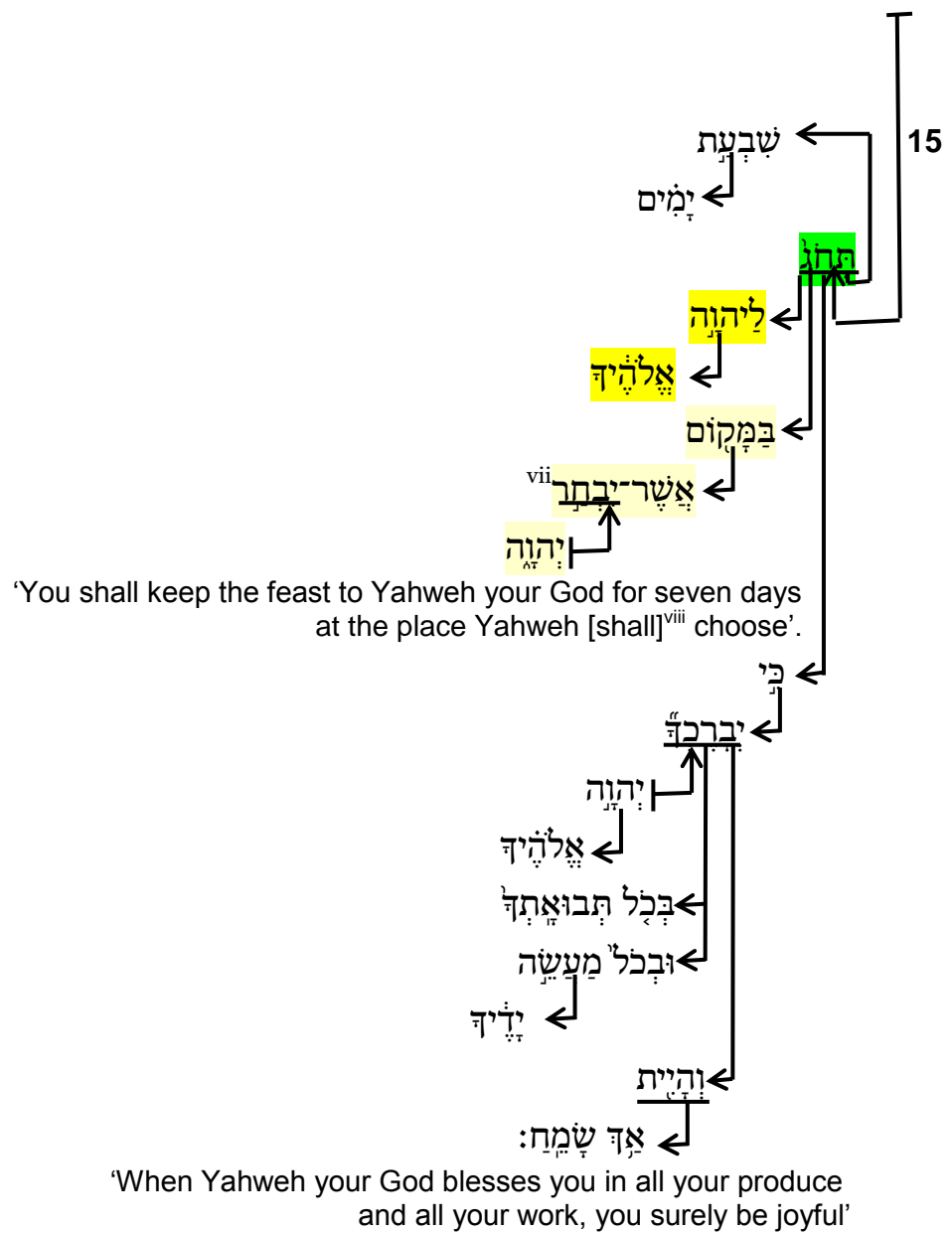
'Therefore, remember that you were a slave in Egypt and keep and do these statutes.'

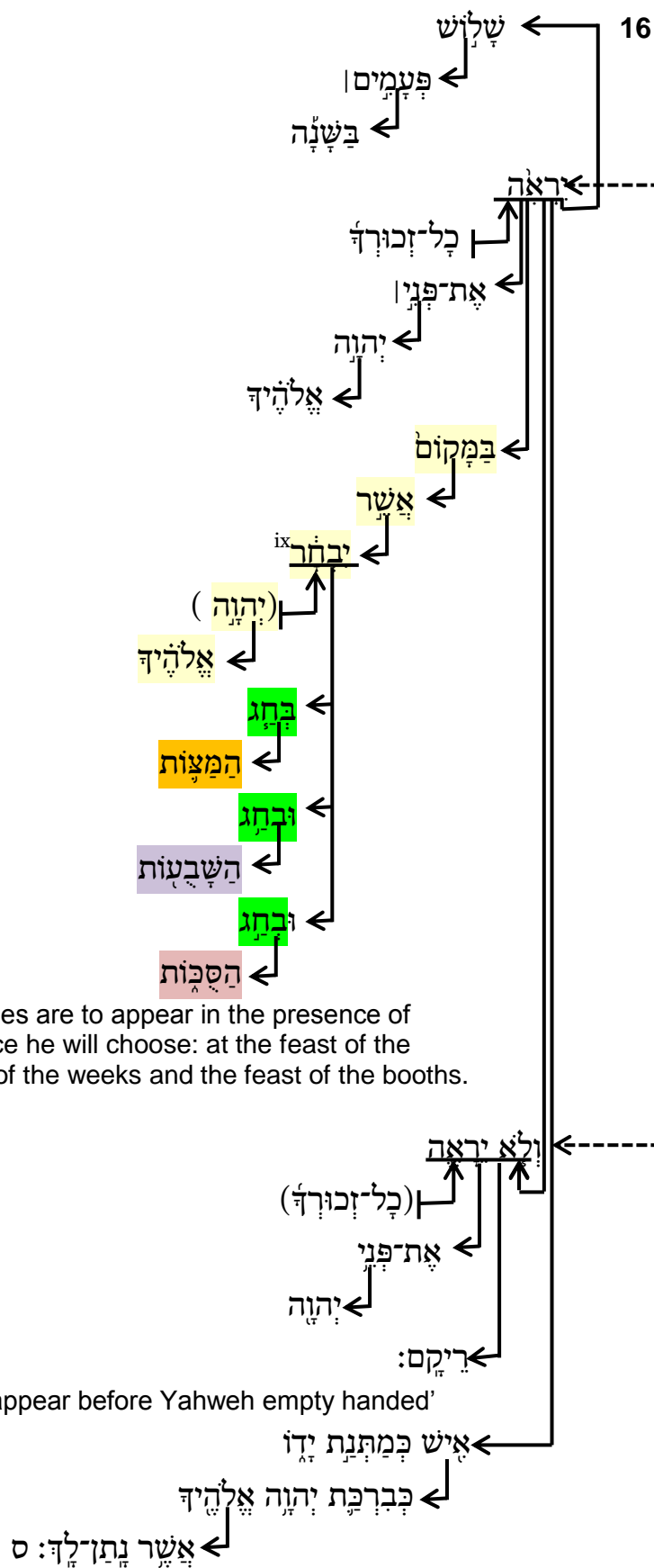
13
 תָּגִיץ
 הַסֹּכֶת
 תַּעֲשֶׂה
 לָךְ
 שִׁבְעַת
 יָמִים
 בְּאֶסְפְּךָ
 מִגֶּרְנֶךָ
 וּמִקְבֶּךָ:

‘Keep the feast of the Booths for seven days with your in-gathering from your threshing floor and your wine vat (press)’

14
 וְשִׂמַחְתָּ
 בְּתִגְדְּךָ
 אַתָּה
 וּבִנְךָ
 וּבִתְךָ
 וְעַבְדְּךָ
 וְאִמְתְּךָ
 וְהַלְוִי
 וְהַגֵּר
 וְהִיתוּם
 וְהָאֵלְמָנָה
 ,
 אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ

‘And rejoice in your feast - you and your son and your daughter, and your male slave and your female slave, and the Levite, and the resident alien. and the orphan and the widow that live in your gates (towns)’





'Three times a year all your males are to appear in the presence of Yahweh your God at the place he will choose: at the feast of the unleavened bread, the feast of the weeks and the feast of the booths.

'and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty handed'

Deuteronomy 16:9-17 Macro-Level Analysis

Deuteronomy 16:9 – 12

Directive leading up to the main directive - Count

16:9a: **You shall count for yourself off seven weeks.**

Explanation of the directive 'when' to start counting

16:9b: **Begin when you put the sickle to the standing grain**

Explanation of the directive of the duration of the counting

16:9c: **You shall begin to count seven weeks.**

Result of the counting - Direct directive to make a feast of the weeks

16:10a: **And therefore make the feast of the weeks to Yahweh your God,**

Implication of the direct directive – freewill offering

16:10b: (offering) an appropriate freewill offering which you shall give

Comparison of the directive (freewill offering) with God's blessings

16:10c: **according to (the measure with) which Yahweh your God blesses you.**

Additional directive (!) in conjugation with the direct directive - inclusive rejoicing

16:11: **And therefore rejoice before YAHWEH your God – you and your son and your daughter, your male and your female slave, the Levite that lives in your gates (towns/cities), the resident alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your midst (who live among you) – at the place that YAHWEH your God shall choose to make his Name a dwelling place.**

Additional directive (2) – Remember the past

16:12a: **And therefore, remember that you were a slave in Egypt**

Additional directive (3) - Obedience to the torah

16:12b: **and keep (these statutes)**

Additional directive (4) - Practice the torah

16:12c: **and do these statutes [decrees].**

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

Directive to make the feast of the Booths

16:13a: **You shall do the feast of the Booths for seven days**

Description of the time when the directive will be taking place

16:13b: **with your in-gathering from your threshing floor and wine vat [press].**

The direct directive for inclusive joy – especially the vulnerable

16:14: **And therefore rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter your male and your female slave, the Levite, the resident alien, the orphan and the widow that live in your gates [towns/cities].**

Directive to keep the feast, the duration and the place.

16:15a: **You shall keep the feast to Yahweh your God for seven days at the place YAHWEH shall choose.**

Motivation for the directive to keep the festival of the Booths

16:15b: **because Yahweh your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your work,**

The implication of the reason for the basic command

16:15c: **And you shall be joyful indeed.**

Deuteronomy 16:13-15 Macro-Level Analysis

Concluding directive for all 3 festivals – All males appear in the presence of Yahweh

16:16a: Three times a year all your males are to appear in the presence of Yahweh your God in a place that he will choose:

- at the feast of the unleavened bread,
- the feast of the weeks and
- the feast of the booths

Condition for the appearance

16:16b: and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty handed

Measure: According Yahweh's blessings

16:17 A man shall give as he is able according to the blessings of Yahweh your God that he is given you

5.5.6.2.1 Deuteronomy 16:9-12 Thought-structure explanation

The festival of weeks¹⁴⁶ is the second great festival in the festival calendar. Verses 9a, b and c are a directive to begin to count off seven weeks that will be leading up to the main directive to do the feast of the weeks¹⁴⁷. The structure form is a beautiful example of a chiasmic pattern.

A “Seven weeks”	שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעוֹת	9a
B “you shall count for yourself”	תִּסְפָּר-לְךָ	9a
C “Begin when you put the sickle in the ... grain”	מֵהַחֵל תִּרְמַשׁ בְּקִמָּה	9b
B “you shall begin to count”	תִּתֵּל לְסֹפֵר	9c
A “Seven weeks “	שִׁבְעָה שָׁבָעוֹת	9c

The result of the counting leads to the main direct directive in verse 10a “to do”¹⁴⁸ a Feast of Weeks. Verse 10b is a further description of the direct directive in verse 10a with the implication of “a freewill offering which you shall give”. The

¹⁴⁶ The name “weeks” derive from the number “seven”, so that the festival calendar is a complex rhythm of seven, reflective of the sabbatical principle (Brueggemann, 2001:174). It is possible that the rhythm of the agricultural seasons is behind that. In Exod. 23:16 the same celebration is termed a “harvest festival” and in Num. 28:26 “the day of first fruits”. There is no doubt that it is related to the harvest and the crops which, in an agricultural society, are the make-or-break occasion when the entire income of the year is produced (Brueggemann, 2001:174). The Feast of the Weeks celebrates the grain harvest and takes place seven weeks after the ceremonial waving of the first sheaf of barley during or shortly after the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (Christensen, 2001:340).

¹⁴⁸ תַּעֲשֶׂה “to do” is in the 2nd person perfectum. The waw consecutive plus the perfectum can express a modality to give direct direction (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:128)

measurement of the freewill offering is described in verse 10c according¹⁴⁹ to which Yahweh blesses you. Four additional direct directives¹⁵⁰ related to verse 10a, to do a feast of the weeks, were given in verses 11 and 12. The first additional direct directive emphasizes in verse 11 that everyone in the household should rejoice¹⁵¹ during the feast. The command to rejoice is not exclusively for certain people only, but inclusively for everybody, especially the children and the most vulnerable in society.¹⁵² The additional 3 directives in verse 12a, b and c emphasise the remembrance of the slavery in Egypt, and the keeping and doing of the festival decrees.

This pericope contains the following repeated phrases that also occur in the previous pericope (Deut. 16:1-8):

- לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ “to Yahweh your God” verse 10
- בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה לְשֵׁבֶן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם “the place which Yahweh shall choose to make his Name dwell there” verse 11
- שִׁבְעָה “seven” occurs two times in verse 9a and 9c

5.5.6.2.2 Deuteronomy 16:13-15 Thought-structure explanation

The third festival in the calendar is the feast of the Booths.¹⁵³ The pericope starts with the directive in verse 13a “to do” a Feast of the Booths.¹⁵⁴ The clause¹⁵⁵ in verse 13b indicates the time of this festival during the ingathering of the harvest. As

¹⁴⁹ כְּאֲשֶׁר is a comparison clause to measure God’s blessings

¹⁵⁰ The four direct directives in verses 11-12, verbs are in the perfectum plus a waw consecutive.

¹⁵¹ וְשִׂמְחָתָּ “to rejoice” is in the 2nd person perfectum. The waw consecutive plus the perfectum can express a modality to give direct direction (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:128)

¹⁵² Brueggemann (2003:88) states that in Deuteronomy 24:17-21 a series of brief provisions are concerned with the protection, dignity, and well-being of orphans, widows, and resident aliens. This group designates the most vulnerable and exposed persons in a patriarchal society that depended upon male advocacy. The tradition of the Torah in Deuteronomy is insistent on the claim that the faith community is obligated to protect the vulnerable that are unable to protect themselves.

¹⁵³ The Feast of Booths (or “Tabernacles” or “Huts” is also called the Feast of Ingathering (Exod. 23:16). Brueggemann (2001:176) states that it is likely that this festival was originally agricultural, perhaps with arbours built to protect jeopardized crops from the hot sun. The accent on harvest (v.13) and the blessings for produce (v. 15) point to such an agricultural origin. The booths become replications for the tenuous living quarters of the Israelites in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land (Neh. 8:13-18).

¹⁵⁴ תַּעֲשֶׂה “to do” is 2nd person imperfectum which express a modality of a directive. It can be a request, command or a call (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:113)

¹⁵⁵ בְּאִסְפָּדְךָ “with your in-gathering” is a status constructus with a preposition.

in Deuteronomy 16:11, verse 14 gives a similar direct directive “to rejoice”¹⁵⁶ to include everyone in the household during the Feast of the Booths. The inclusivity of everyone, especially the children and the most vulnerable is also emphasised, as in verse 11.

The pericope from verse 12-15 contains the following 2 phrases that also occur in Deut. 16:1-8 and 9-12.:

- לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ “to Yahweh your God” verse 15
- בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר יְהוָה “the place which Yahweh shall choose” verse 15

The word וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ “and rejoice” occurs also in Deuteronomy 16:9-12.

5.5.6.2.3 Deuteronomy 16:16-17 Thought-structure explanation

Verse 16 and 17 summarised the pericope (Deut. 16:1-17) with a concluding final directive not to appear before Yahweh empty handed at the three above mentioned annual festivals. The measurement for the appropriate offering is described in verse 17 according¹⁵⁷ to which Yahweh blesses you.

5.5.6.2.4 Conclusion

The Feast of the Weeks together with the Feast of the Booths consists of a five-part concentric pattern (Christensen, 2001:340-341):

<i>A</i>	<i>At the feast of the week bring an offering, as God has blessed you</i>	16:9-10
<i>B</i>	<i>Rejoice before Yahweh in the place he chooses</i>	16:11-12a
<i>C</i>	<i>Be careful to keep and do these statutes</i>	16:12b
<i>B'</i>	<i>Celebrate seven days before Yahweh in the place he chooses</i>	16:13-15
<i>A'</i>	<i>Do not appear empty-handed in the three pilgrimage festivals</i>	16:16-17

The outer frame moves from the command to “do the feast of the weeks to Yahweh” to the summary injunction, to observe all three pilgrimage feasts (v.16). Both

¹⁵⁶ וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ is a 2nd perfectum plus a waw consecutive emphasise that, “you shall rejoice”. The waw consecutive plus the perfectum can express a modality to give direct direction (Van der Merwe et al., 1997:128)

¹⁵⁷ כְּבִרְכַּת “according to the blessing” is a comparison clause to measure God’s blessings

sections include the command to appear with the appropriate offerings “according to the blessings of Yahweh your God” (vv. 10b, 17b). The inner frame addresses the question of where and who. The people are enjoined to celebrate “rejoice/feast before your God” (vv. 11 and 15). The ‘where’ is the familiar repeated clause that is found throughout verses 1 to 17, namely “in the place that Yahweh your God will choose (vv. 11b and 15a). The two parallel sections include an almost identical list of participants: “you and your son and your daughter, and your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is in your towns, and the resident alien and the orphan and the widow” (vv. 11. 14). The structural centre of the familiar summary injunction is to be careful to keep and to do the stipulations of the torah.¹⁵⁸.

Concluding Characteristics

In summarising the built-up structure, the following are characteristic of the Festival of the Weeks (v. 9-12) and the festival of the Booths (v. 13-15):

- The occasion of joy (vs 12). The festival was to be a time of rejoicing for it celebrated the goodness of the Lord in the provision of food for another year at harvest time (Craigie, 1976:245)
- The joy of the festival is inclusive of the entire community. All the members of the community, regardless of their social or economic status, were invited to participate in the festivities. The most disadvantaged among them were, in fact, especially welcomed (Merrill, 1994:254). In addition to the Levites also invited are the slaves (as in the Sabbath provision of Deut. 5:14), and the most vulnerable, namely the stranger, widow, and orphan, and then also the children. All are included in the bounty of celebration and are entitled to share, even when they have no produce of their own (Brueggemann, 2001, p. 175).
- The celebration is at the place where God chooses to be present. Brueggemann (2001:175) states that the celebration is under the kind of supervision that will keep the festival firmly devoted “to Yahweh your God”.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Deut. 12:28; 13:1, 5, 19; 15:5; 16:12; 17:19; 26:16-18 Etc.

- The festival is linked to the Exodus memory. The tradition of Deuteronomy cannot imagine any devotion to Yahweh that is not Exodus orientated for this is the God ‘who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ (Brueggemann, 2001:175). In the midst of their rejoicing the faith community must remember the time in the past, when they had been in servitude in Egypt (Craigie, 1976:175). It was to be the basis of generosity towards those who are the most vulnerable. Children are supposed to see and experience this generosity.
- The great accent of the festival is upon blessing¹⁵⁹. The feast was a celebration, essentially of the gracious provision of God in the harvest. Deuteronomy requires a ‘freewill offering’ in proportion to the amount harvested; thus once more articulates it’s theology of grateful response to Yahweh’s blessings (McConville, 2002:275). Wright (1996:199) notes that the command of verse 10b, that giving should be in proportion to God’s blessing, was (and remains) a vital principle. All our ‘doing’, should be a grateful and obedient response to the prior blessing of God.
- The feast is to take place ‘in Yahweh’s presence’ (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה). The accent of the Feast of the Weeks’ celebration was essentially of the gracious provision of God in the harvest (Craigie, 1976:244).
- The necessity of a response of exclusive loyalty and obedience to Yahweh (v.12 , “keep and do these statutes”). In other words, it means total dependence on the grace of God (Housten, 2009:12).
- The Feast of Weeks is also related to the Sabbath¹⁶⁰ commandment (v. 9, “seven weeks”).

¹⁵⁹ The blessing means the material abundance in the land, because of the productivity of the land. Westermann (as cited in Brueggemann (2001) notes that the accent on blessing most broadly connects the festival to creation and the goodness of the creator. The one who redeems, is the one who creates. The prosperous land is a foretaste of the new creation that Yahweh will surely bring in due course.

¹⁶⁰ Olson (1994:97-98) argues that the Feast of Weeks is an interruption after the hectic activity of the harvest. Just as the Sabbath commandment’s primary concern is to give rest to the dependent

5.5.7 Socio-Historical Context

The Old Testament originated in and bears the marks of other cultural, social and religious situations (De Klerk & Van Rensburg, 2005:51). The period when a book originated had a definite influence on the meaning and understanding of the words. The events in the book of Deuteronomy are intertwined with the social and political realities of the period in which the book was finally written. The power of the biblical message of Deuteronomy 16 can only be fully understood when a valid construction is made of the probable socio-historical context. This construction, during the probable time of the origin of the book of Deuteronomy, is not an easy task. The researcher follows an emic approach¹⁶¹, on the situation of the period that Deuteronomy probably finally came to being, as we have it in the canon today.

5.5.7.1 *Dilemma with the origin of Deuteronomy*

One of the problems to make a valid construction of the social and cultural situation is that scholars haven't had consensus about when Deuteronomy developed into its final form. On the one hand, scholars dated the book as early as the thirteenth century BC¹⁶² and, on the other hand, others¹⁶³ dated it as late as or after the Babylonian exile. The majority of scholars¹⁶⁴ dated the book during the seventh century BC (Wright, 1996:6).

Millar (1990) and Van Rooy (1999) present a helpful way of understanding the book. They note it is better to recognize three possible periods in Deuteronomy. The *first period* is the one given by the book itself as its setting, namely the time immediately preceding the initial settlement of the land. The book presents itself as a record of some speeches of Moses to Israel shortly before his death. It is done in the context

and powerless people of the community (Deut. 5:14), so the Feast of Weeks makes special provisions for the community's most vulnerable and dependent members (Deut. 16:11).

¹⁶¹ The emic approach analyzed data and phenomena and describes it in terms of their functions of the society of the particular period. The data and phenomena therefore almost dictate the investigation (De Klerk & Van Rensburg, 2005, p. 57). Some researchers follow an etic model. This model studies the situation of a particular period in terms of current theories and models. The investigation is then dictated by the particular theory or model.

¹⁶² Block (2012:31) states that a reasonable earliest possible date would be during the tenure of Joshua, after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan and the latest possible date would be the ninth century prior to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha after which the style of prophetic preaching seems to have changed dramatically. McConville (2002:34) notes that Deuteronomy or at least a form of it, is the document of a real political and religious constitution of Israel from the pre-monarchical period.

¹⁶³ See Olson (Olson, 1994)

¹⁶⁴ (Millar, 1990; Brueggemann, 2003) etc.

of a renewal of the covenant on the plains of Moab before the people of Israel crossed the Jordan and settled in the land. These events can be dated during the thirteenth century BC (Van Rooy, 1999:192). During this time many groups were living in the Promised Land. Egypt, from where Israel escaped, was the most important political power of that time. Egypt's power was decreasing and social and political chaos reigned.

The *second period* was one to two hundred years before the Babylonian destruction and captivity during the time of King Josiah in the seventh century. The book had a significant influence and ignited a reformation during this time (Cf. 2 Kings 22 and 23). It was during the Assyrian period when Israel was a vassal state. Juda's period of subjection to Assyria exposed them to an alternative and incompatible world view that had the destabilizing effect of calling into question the legitimacy of its own world view (Mayes, 1996:239).

The *third period* was during and after the exile when people experienced the judgement and the loss of their land and the temple (Van Rooy, 1999, p. 192). It was in these circumstances that Israel was devastated and asked many questions: Why did God allow the exile? Why did it happen to us? Did God forget us? They were a community that saw themselves as displaced people, exiles, poised to re-enter the land, but still landless (Brueggemann, 2003:22).

We can summarize: The different periods of the book Deuteronomy, were the times when the social and political circumstances of Israel's identity, as people of God, was at stake. It was a time of social and political chaos, pressures of the foreign power and the possibility of losing or actually losing their land. .

5.5.7.2 *Cultic meals in the context of festivals*

This study focuses on the role festivals play in the faith formation of children. The following questions can be asked: What role did festivals play in the Ancient Near East culture? What role did food play in their festival practices? What was the purpose of it? What was their conception of cultic meals?

The daily diet of the common people in the Mediterranean lands in biblical times was generally rather poor (McDonald, as cited by Houston, 2009:4). It mostly consisted of bread, with little fruit and vegetables if available, or perhaps some sour milk; fresh meat was generally only eaten at certain times of the year when the flocks and herds needed to be culled (Gamsey, as cited in Houston, 2009:4). Food supplies were

most abundant immediately after harvest, provided no famine was experienced, and it dwindled steadily through autumn and winter. The opportunity for a really ample meal, especially one with meat and wine, would be seized with both hands, but it surely did not come every day. A feast in these circumstances is no mere enhancement of the everyday diet; it differs from it radically in the type of food and drink, being based on fresh meat and wine (Houston, 2009:9).

Altmann (2010:115) describes the ancient near Eastern conception of cultic meals and feasts, in ritual and narrative texts, as an important additional perspective. He used it for the interpretation of Deuteronomy's cultic festivals, especially its socio-political implications for divine and human realms. Some of the festival ritual texts from Emar and Ugarit reveal that festivals were used to build the unique identity and social cohesion between a community and the divine. It was especially in circumstances where their cultures and worldviews were at stake (Altmann, 2010:115-138). One of the examples is a ritual text which comes from a late second millennium Syrian state, with the name of Emar (Altmann, 2010:120). Emar was a small vassal state at the edge of the Hittite empire. Annually a seven-day celebration of eating and drinking was organized at a specific collective inhabitants of the city gathered together to place outside the city. The festival promoted a city-wide communal ritual in which the focus on one high deity at a particular location. The festival was conducted by the whole city to reaffirm the worldview of the city (Altmann, 2010:130). This festival, called the Zukru, was the pinnacle of the Emar's religion. The festival was likely the most expensive celebration at that time and the main part of the celebration day was spent feasting outside the city (Altmann, 2010:118). The presence of the entire community was expected at their festival ritual events. Emar's particular identity is dramatically re-enacted on a yearly and seven-year cycle. They also reflect a culture, separate from the rituals and traditions of the larger Hittite and Mesopotamian cultures (Altmann, 2010:131).

In conclusion, the festival practices in the ancient near east, during the three possible periods in which the book of Deuteronomy originated, were often used to build the identity of communities extradited to dominant powers. It motivated them to be loyal and to stay committed to their values.

5.5.8 Important concepts and phrases

The following two words and one phrase in Deuteronomy 16:1-17 play an important role in the pericope and will be discussed in the context of the rest of the book:

- שָׂמַח - “to rejoice” or “be glad” (Dt 16:11, 14 and 15)
- זָכַר (zakar) - “to remember “ (Dt 16:3 and 12)
- וְשָׂמַרְתָּ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַחֻקִּים “Keep and do these statutes (decrees)”

5.5.8.1 Rejoice (שמח)

The word שָׂמַח “rejoice”, which occurs three times in Chapter 16, especially in the instructions of the Feast of Weeks and the Succoth, is noteworthy¹⁶⁵. The directives given for both feasts in verses 11 and 15¹⁶⁶ are more or less the same:

¹¹And you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God – you and your son and your daughter, and your male slave and your female slave, the Levite that lives in your gates (towns), and the resident alien, and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst – at the place that Yahweh your God shall choose to make his Name dwell there.

Similar injunctions to ‘rejoice’ occur in six¹⁶⁷ other places in the Deuteronomy, usually adding a list of other participants that are to rejoice along with the addressee. However, the list of the other participants in the above-mentioned verse, are the most extensive and the only ones mentioning the widow and the orphans. The injunctions to rejoice with the list of participants, in 16:11 and 14 are not found in the festival calendar in the Book of the Covenant, Exodus 23:13-17. Scholars have different views on the meaning of the term ‘rejoice’ in the context of the cultic festivals in Deuteronomy 16. Anderson (as cited in Houston, 2009:2) points out that the command to rejoice is to an extent parallel with the command to love God (Deut. 6:5). The intention of the injunction is not to have a certain emotion but to show

¹⁶⁵ Most scholars on these verses have focused on the place of pilgrimage, list of participants and the phrase ‘before Yahweh’. Little attention, relatively speaking, has been given to the injunction to rejoice in itself (Houston, 2009:1).

¹⁶⁶ Verse 14 reads ‘... rejoice in your feast’ and the clause ‘at the place that Yahweh your God shall choose to make his Name to dwell’ is left out.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Deut. 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26-27; 26:11 and 27:7.

loyalty and fidelity to Yahweh and obedience to his commandments¹⁶⁸. In the same direction the German scholar Braulick states that the joy of the feast arises from gratitude to Yahweh for his bounty, but the joy is not directly expressed in the enjoyment of his bounty (Houston, 2009:3). On the other hand, Altmann (2010:119) argues: “This command to rejoice implies something that could be materially expressed and reflected in the actual practice of eating and drinking (rather than an imperative to ‘feel joyful’ or something of that kind). However, in several instances when ‘rejoice’ in a cult context is mentioned in Deuteronomy, the verb immediately preceding ‘rejoice’ is ‘you shall eat’. It is like this in Deut. 12:7, 18; 14:26 and 27:7 while in Deut. 26:11 it says that “you shall rejoice in/with all the good things Yahweh has given you’. Deuteronomy 14:26 connects ‘rejoice’ and ‘eat’ in the cult by saying:

²⁶Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice. (NIV)

The above description in Deut. 14:26 gives a representative sampling of the food and drink options from which one might choose – according to one’s own desires – and caters to the notion of physical fulfilment for the meaning of the verb *שמח*”. Houston (2009:3) argues that when people are exhorted to rejoice at festivals the reference is to feasting. They are to eat, and certainly also to drink.

The association of the cult with joy is not confined to Deuteronomy. It appears frequently in the Hebrew Bible and in post-exilic literature. There is of course also a wide range of actions that might be described as joyful, associated with festivals and the cult in general like singing, dancing, praising God etc. However, in Deuteronomy the connection with sacrificial and other offerings and with eating and drinking is invariable. The connection with eating is particularly strong (Houston, 2009:2).

Deuteronomy invites the faith community to celebrate together and joyfully the great deeds of God. The very nature of a feast is exemplified by communal feasting in the presence of the Lord. Altmann (2010:202) notes that Deuteronomy’s feasts are specific actions (eating, drinking and rejoicing) at a special place (“before Yahweh”

¹⁶⁸ Anderson sensibly suggests that ‘celebrate’ might be a better translation in English than ‘rejoice’, because it better suggests a concrete action (Houston, 2009:2)

and “at the place Yahweh chooses”) where the Israelites articulate their particular identity as “Israel”. It is in this context of feasting together with the adults that children are guided and nurtured to discover their own identity as people of God.

5.1 Remember (זָכַר)

The word זָכַר “remember” occurs twice in Deuteronomy 16. The first in the context of the Passover-unleavened festival (verse 3) and the other in the Feast of the weeks (verse 12). Israel should remember Egypt - how they were brought out of Egypt (verse 1), how they left Egypt in haste (verse 3) and how they were slaves (verse 12). Israel must remember their past, what God has done for them and who they are. The purpose of the remembering experience is to motivate Israel to live a life of obedience¹⁶⁹ (Deut. 16:12). In the broader context of the book, Israel is repeatedly reminded to “remember”¹⁷⁰ the great deeds of God to motivate them to keep the statutes and decrees. The opposite of “remember” is to “forget”. The danger for God’s people is to forget who they are, who God is and what He has done for them. Therefore the word “don’t forget” is also prominent in the first eleven chapters (Deut. 4:9; 6:12; 8:11, 14-15; 9:7 etc.). How do adults help children to remember and not forget? In the context of Deuteronomy it is by telling and sharing the stories behind the faith community’s activities and reading the law at regular intervals¹⁷¹. The community is urged in Deuteronomy 4:9-10 to tell (literally, make known) the story to the children, who were not there, about the appearance of the Lord on the mountain. In another passage Deuteronomy 6:20-25 tells the people to expect to be asked questions by their children: “When in future your child asks you...” The practices of the faith community and the family raise “why” questions in the minds of the children. In this instance the question arises from the character of the book itself: “What is the

¹⁶⁹ The call to “remember” strikes a vital chord in Deuteronomy. It is embedded in the concept of a deliverance of slavery which then becomes the ground of covenant faithfulness (McConville, 2002:169)

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Deut. 5:15; 7:18; 8:2; 12:15; 24:18; 24:22;

Olson (1994:65) notes that the remembrance of Israel’s past as slaves in Egypt and the Lord’s gracious deliverance from slavery forms a primary motivation and basis of obedient actions throughout the laws (Deut. 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:1, 3, 6, 12; 17:16; 20:1; 23:4; 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 26:5-9).

¹⁷¹ see Deut. 31:12-13; Millar (2008:49-50) states that in Deut. 31:12-13 the children listening to the law “come to know the whole polity that governs their life and that they are to follow”.

meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?” (NIV)¹⁷².

The passage presumes that the child has been exposed to the various aspects of the polity, the teaching for life in the land, celebrating the festivals and wants to know why it is that we are doing all these things. What is it all about? (Miller, 2008:56). The answer to the child’s question is not giving him information or trying to interpret the law. It is telling the story of God’s deliverance of them from slavery (Deut. 6:21-23) to motivate them to do what God expects. Festivals, where children were included, are used to help them to remember and to motivate them to do and to keep the Torah (Deut. 16:12).

Although children are not specifically mentioned in the Deuteronomy Passover-Leavened festival, it can be assumed when comparing Deut. 16:1-8 and Exod.12 and 13. Exodus emphasises that the Passover feast and rituals will evoke similar questions from the children who participate. It is significant that two of the five¹⁷³ question-and-answer texts in the Old Testament are in Exodus 12 and 13. Exodus 12:26 and 27 says: “*When your children ask you: ‘What does this ritual mean?’ you will answer, ‘It is the sacrifice of Passover to honour the Lord, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt’*”¹⁷⁴ (GNB). The phrase “*When your children ask you ... you will answer*” reflects a primary storytelling occasion in the life of Israel¹⁷⁵. The Passover feast creates an opportunity for the adults (parents) to tell the Exodus story, as a story to children.

¹⁷² This sentence can also be translated in other ways, for example: “What are all these statutes and ordinances the Lord our God has commanded you?” or “What about the decrees and statutes...?” Millar (2008:56) states that “The ambiguity of the Hebrew should be acknowledging, that is, the character of the question as being both a content question and a why question. The common judgement that it is more the latter because of the context does not rule out the possibility that the child may ask “What are the rules?” as well as “What do the rules mean?”

¹⁷³ The other three Old Testament texts are *Deut 6:20-25; Joshua 4:6-7 and 21-24.*

¹⁷⁴ The Hebrew Text can literally be translated: “*And it shall be, when **your sons** say to you. What is this act/service to you?*”

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Boomershine, *Biblical Storytelling*. 2007.

<http://www.tomboomershine.org/writings/Part3BiblicalStorytellingBook.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2011), 3.

5.5.8.3 Do and keep these statutes *שְׁמַרְתָּ וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה*

The directives concerning the Festival of Weeks in Deuteronomy 16:9-12 ends with two directives in verse 12b and 12c:

וְשָׁמַרְתָּ וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַחֻקִּים “Keep and do these statutes (decrees)”

In the analysis of the overall thought structure of Deut. 16:9-17 (see 5.5.6.2.4) it is indicated that these two¹⁷⁶ directives form part of the centre of the literary structure. The centre of the literary structure of the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Booths is: “Keep and do these statutes (decrees)”. In other words, “Keep and do the Torah and its implications”. In the total structure of the Book of Deuteronomy (see 5.5.2.1.4), especially Deut. 1-11, obedience to the Torah is to show total loyalty and commitment to Yahweh (Deut. 5, 6). Therefore it is not strange that these two directives occur very often¹⁷⁷ throughout the book.

It is significant that the outer frame of the literature structure of the festival calendar (Deut. 16: 11 and 14) emphasizes the fact that the celebrations of the great deeds of God must not exclude those marginalised in society, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows. Deuteronomy reminds Israel frequently not to neglect the marginalised in society (Deut. 14:28-29, 24:17-22; 26:12-13; 27:19). This relates to the fact that Deuteronomy, as God’s constitution for Israel, reflects something of God’s character¹⁷⁸ (Deut. 10:18-19).

Both the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of the Booths were celebrated as agricultural feasts to thank God for His blessings during the Harvest. The blessings that Israel received must be passed on to others, especially to those most vulnerable in the society. Through the feast celebrations adults and children reach out to the marginalized and do what God expects of them. In the larger context of Deuteronomy it is not only learning the Decalogue but also doing the Decalogue. Over and over, it is emphasized that the people have to learn to fear the Lord by keeping the law that is taught to them (Deut. 5:1, 31; 6:2-3, 31:10-13 etc.). Miller

¹⁷⁶ The First directive that is part of three directive central structure is: *זָכַרְתָּ כִּי־עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ*

בְּמִצְרַיִם “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt”

¹⁷⁷ Deut. 4:5,6,14,40; 5:1,31; 6:1,17,24; 7:11; 11:32; 12:1; 17:19; 26:16,17; 27:10

¹⁷⁸ See also Grobbelaar (2008:268-270).

(2008:53) states that “Obedience is the goal of the Torah but also the means by which the proper relation to the Lord is developed. Precisely in the nurturing of the child, faith and obedience are so intricately tied together that it is not possible to set them in chronological order”. During the festival celebrations, adults modelled to children how God’s covenant people should treat outsiders and the needy (see Deut. 31:10-12). The festival occasions also provide opportunities to practice children’s faith and enhance their walking with God.

5.5.9 Revelation-historical place

De Klerk and Van Rensburg (2005:80) argue that the determination of the place of a pericope in the revelation history is necessary. The reason: it is evident from the Bible that God’s revelation regarding a specific matter often is not fully given on a specific point in time but over a period of time. God’s revelation through Scripture does not only take place in history, but runs through history. It is also clear that Scripture itself witnesses a progress of revelation. Kaiser et al. (2007:85) state that Moses was alerted to the fact that the legislation he was given (concerning the tabernacle, its services of offerings, the priestly ministries, and the festivals) was merely according to the “pattern” (*tabnit*) of the real, which was shown to him on the mount (Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). When the real finally came, that which was only a “model” and a “copy” of the real would need to give way to the actual and the real. That is the argument of the book of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament. The Old Testament’s ceremonies and rituals were ‘shadows’ until Christ came and made them obsolete. We can conclude that the directives of the festivals’ rituals in Deuteronomy 16 were only shadows until Christ came and fulfilled the purpose of it. However, the principals behind the different festivals, namely to celebrate the Great deeds of God, are still valid for our present practices.

5.5.10 The Communication goal of the pericope.

What was the communication goal of the pericope to the first hearers? To be able to answer this question, the three possible periods from which the book originates, as discussed in 5.5.7.1, have to be taken into consideration to determine the communication goal of the book.

From the perspective of the *first period readers*, the purpose of the speeches was to prepare Israel to enter the Promised Land and to fight against their enemies (Van Rooy, 1999:192).

For the *second period's readers*, in the one to two hundred years before the Babylonian destruction, the purpose was to express a systematic organized world view that revitalized Israel's own traditions and so presented the Yahweh option as a persuasive alternative within an uncertain and pluralistic framework of the late pre-exilic Judah (Brueggemann, 2002:167).

For the *third period's readers*, during and after the exile, Van Rooy (1999:192) argues that the purpose was to see the reasons for Israel's misery and suffering in exile and 'why' they lost their freedom. Fretheim (1996:42) states that it "seems likely that the implied readers of the Pentateuch had experienced the apostasy, the devastation of Jerusalem and its attendant losses, and sufferings, and the deportation to Babylon. The readers were now the remnant that had survived and had to tussle with the realities of exile, including apostasy, fear, distress, repentance, and wondering about the return to the land and continuing validity of the divine promises"

We can summarize by saying that Deuteronomy is a God-given strategy through which a faithful community at risk can be sustained and have new hope for the future (Brueggemann, 2003:25). It serves to sustain and legitimate a distinct community of gratitude and obedience – the distinct community, whether in the Canaanite, Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian period, living among cultural pressures and political powers that have no appreciation for this distinctiveness. Or it can be at best an inconvenience and, if possible, would have abrogated the distinctiveness (Brueggemann, 2003:24). If the requirements of the exile were costly and demanding for adults who went deep into memory and so sustained hope (see Lam 3:21-24), Brueggemann (2003:25) notes that we may imagine that this radical, buoyant distinctiveness to the next generation of the young was urgent and deeply problematic. He continues by saying:, 'The young, who did not after a while remember the ancient glories of Israel, were surely candidates for membership in the dominant culture of the empire at the expense of this distinctiveness. It is likely that the Torah is peculiarly aimed at the young in order to invite them into the distinct identity of wonder, gratitude and obedience".

In conclusion, the communication purpose of Deuteronomy is to build the real identity of the people of God. The book helps to discover who we are, where we come from and how we face the future.

5.6 Norms for the faith formation of children in festival practices

The question in the beginning of this chapter was, 'What are the norms to reflect on and guide the festival practices? What are the perspectives of Deuteronomy about the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?' From the perspective of the New Testament, as already stated, the directives of the festival practices in Deuteronomy 16 are no more valid because of the coming and the work of Jesus Christ. However, although the directives are no longer valid, the principles behind the practices are still there to guide faith communities in their festival practices concerning children. Kaiser et al. (2007:82) uses the method of "principlization", where Scripture alone is still the authoritative basis for all decisions. In this method, scriptural principles are abstracted from the biblical text that supplies the proper foundation for meeting modern questions that do not have a direct biblical answer.

Deuteronomy 16:1-17 has been analysed through the method of discourse analysis. The grammatical, literary and historical aspects of the texts have been interpreted. After the liturgical festival calendar of Deuteronomy 16:1-17 had been related to the overall thought of the book, the following principles regarding festivals and the faith formation of children can be deduced:

- Festivals enhance the faith formation of children if the overall focus of the festival practice is on God and on his great deeds, done in the past. The motivation for celebrating is always grounded in the undeserved grace of God.
- The festival practices and atmosphere should be a testimony of gratitude for what God has done and still does. The accent of the celebrations is on God's gracious provision.
- In the celebration of the great deeds of God no-one, especially not children and the marginalised in society, must be excluded from the faith community.

- Faith formation through celebrating the great deeds of God, takes place in the faith community as a whole (Deut 31:12-13). Explicitly or implicitly all the festival occasions prescribe a family gathering across generations. Children are not to be excluded from the ritual acts of the faith community; they must be actively involved.
- The festival celebration of the great deeds of God carries a strong symbolic message. In tough times God will sustain the faith community's (children included) identity in him and invites them to stay loyal only to him and to always depend on his undeserved grace.
- A festival liturgical calendar provides a sense of belonging (socialization) for children into a distinctive faith community.
- The festival character of the celebrations should be particularly characterized by experiencing joy, eating and drinking in the presence of God.
- The festival celebration should motivate and encourage children to live an obedient life out of gratitude, according to the principles of the 'torah'.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has explored the perspectives on the role of festivals in children's faith formation in Deuteronomy 16:1-17. The built-up structure of Deuteronomy 16 was also analysed by means of discourse analysis. Important structure- and meaning-carriers were theologically investigated in the context of Deuteronomy and the New Testament. To conclude, principles were formulated to guide the festival practices of a faith community. The next chapter will explore possible strategies on how child inclusive festivals may enhance the faith formation of children.

CHAPTER 6

CHILDREN AND CHURCH FESTIVALS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FESTIVAL STRATEGIES

6.1 Introduction

In a practical theology manner, this study investigates the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children. The previous chapter discussed perspectives on festival practices in the context of the Book of Deuteronomy and the theological implications for the future.

Osmer (2008:4) argues that the fourth and last task of practical theology is pragmatic. The pragmatic task asks, 'How might we respond?' The fourth question relates to the role of church festivals in the children's faith formation: How may inclusive church festivals enhance the faith formation of the children? Osmer (2008:176) refers to this task as that of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable. Practical theology often provides help by offering models of practices and rules of art. Models of practice offers leaders a general picture of the field in which they are acting and ways they might shape this field towards desired goals. Rules of art are more specific guidelines for carrying out particular actions or practices. The focus in the pragmatic task is on how to lead change. Osmer (2008:183) describes the spirituality of leaders that influences change as a spirituality of servant leadership¹⁷⁹.

This chapter will describe possible strategies to apply with a view to assist the four congregations in influencing their festival practices towards the desired goal of enhancing the faith formation of children. The chapter will compare the descriptive data of the empirical research (Chapter 3) and the explanation of the results (Chapter 4) with the theological perspectives of Deuteronomy (Chapter 5). First, the three previously mentioned chapter's key discoveries will be listed as a starting point for developing specific strategies. Specific descriptive data concerning the inclusion of children in the festival practices will then be evaluated in the light of

¹⁷⁹ Osmer (2008:192) describes servant leadership as leadership that influences a congregation to change in ways that more fully embody the servant hood of Christ. It is leading a congregation to change in ways that more nearly approximate its mission, since a contrast society and social catalyst, will take courage, decide, and have the ability to empower others.

Deuteronomy's perspective. Possible strategies with a view to influence the present practices in the different congregations will then be recommended.

6.2 Key aspects to consider in the formation of festival strategies

For the formulation of possible strategies to influence festival practices the key aspects on the answers of Osmer's three questions in the previous chapters (3-5) must be taken into consideration:

What is going on in the festival practices? (Chapter 3)

Why are the phenomena, revealed in the festival practices, going on? (Chapter 4)

What are the norms to reflect on in order to guide the festival practices? (Chapter 5)

The present festival practices (What is going on?)

The qualitative data in Chapter three revealed the following key aspects in the festival practices:

- The majority of the congregations allow children only to be observers during the celebration events where all the generations are gathered together.
- Most of the children perceived Baptism to be one of the most important church festivals. Although most of the children in the sample rated this festival as important, they portray a lack of proper understanding of the festival.
- None of the children perceive Pentecost as a church year festival.
- Christmas and Easter are the most enjoyable for children.
- The source of the joy during Easter is mainly found in the playful interaction and activities.
- Most of the children perceived enjoyable festivals to be occasions where a loving playful interaction exists between adults and children accompanied by special food and atmosphere.
- Children experienced enjoyable festivals mainly in the context of the family and very rarely in the context of the faith community.
- Children have a need for a friendly, loving and caring adult community to celebrate together the faith community's festivals.
- Children have a need to feel special during the festival practices through their interactive involvement with the adults.
- Indications that festivals may enhance children's spiritual growth.

The reasons for present festival practices. (Why is it going on?)

The reasons for the above-mentioned phenomena were explained in Chapter four and can be summarized by referring to the four social theories exploited in this study, namely:

- The *social cognitive learning theory*, which explains why children view baptism, through observational learning and modelling, as the most important festival, although they couldn't explain the reasons behind their answers.
- The *enculturation faith theory* explains why children experience through their interaction with loving, caring and friendly adults that they are special and that a lack of experiential participation in the Pentecost festival contributes to the fact that they couldn't identify Pentecost as a church year festival.
- The *ecological system theory* explains what the impact can be on the child's spiritual growth if there are more interconnections between the systems in which they function.
- The *socio-cultural theory* explains the reason why children's faith is enhanced when they participate interactively in the presence of others who have progressed further in their faith journey.

Norms and guidelines for the festival practices. (What ought to be going on?)

The liturgical festival calendar of Deuteronomy 16:1-17 indicates the following norms to guide festival practices with a view to enhance the faith formation of children:

- Festivals enhance the faith formation of children if the overall focus of the festival practice is on God and on his great deeds, done in the past.
- In the celebration of the great deeds of God no-one, especially not children and the marginalised in society, must be excluded from the faith community.
- Faith formation through celebrating the great deeds of God is taking place in the faith community as a whole.
- The festival celebration of the great deeds of God carries a strong symbolic message. In tough times God will sustain the faith community's (children included) identity in him and invites them to stay loyal only to him and to always depend on his undeserved grace.
- A festival liturgical calendar provides a sense of belonging (socialization) for children to a distinctive faith community.

- The festival character of the celebrations should be particularly characterized by experiencing joy through eating and drinking in the presence of God.
- The festival celebration should motivate and encourage children to live an obedient life, out of gratitude.

6.3 Reflection and possible strategies with a view to influence the festival practices:

6.3.1 Intergenerational festival practices

The empirical results indicate, with a few exceptions, that the festival practices of the majority of the four congregations *allow children only to be observers* during the celebration events where all the generations are gathered together. However, from the perspective of Deuteronomy, faith formation through celebrating the great deeds of God, takes place in the faith community as a whole. Explicitly or implicitly all the festival occasions prescribe a family gathering across generations. Children are not to be excluded from the ritual acts of the faith community; they must be actively involved.

It is recommended that congregation leadership put in place processes to develop an intergenerational interactive festival culture in which all the generations celebrate the festivals together.

Possible strategies for starting this culture is by:

- Creating a family welcoming environment that makes all ages feel welcome and comfortable.
- Exploit the opportunities, where all the generations are already together, to influence intentional processes for a connecting climate – interactive and participatory involvement – between adults and children.
- Develop processes that enhance interaction between the different generations.
 - ❖ Involve all five senses of touch, sight, smell, taste and hearing.
 - ❖ Allowing adults and children to engage in the biblical stories interactively and visually helps to connect people’s lives to God’s Word (Amidei et al., 2014:loc. 2464).
 - ❖ Develop aids that reflect the multiple ages of the faith community.

- ❖ Allow artists of all ages in the faith community to create art for the church environment for the church year feasts and seasons.

6.3.2 GOD-FOCUSED enjoyable festival practices

A core principle in the prescription of the festival practices in the book of Deuteronomy is to put the *main focus on the great deeds of Yahweh* and what was done in the past. The danger during festival celebrations is that the focus is shifted only to a horizontal enjoyable celebration. The empirical results indicate that the festival experiences of children in the context of the home, especially during Easter, are mainly on a human horizontal level. Easter has become a wonderful human experience without opportunities to strengthen children's relationship with God. On the other hand, there are very few festival, enjoyable experiences in the context of the faith community. The desired outcome is to find a balance between the vertical and horizontal aspects of the festival practices.

Possible strategies to apply with a view to influence faith community and home festival practices:

- Involve all generations, including children, in liturgical roles: reading the scriptures, leading a prayer, conducting a drama or dramatic reading, enactment of the Scripture stories etc.
- Create, during the festivals, opportunities for adults and children to interactively share what the great deeds of God mean to them personally. Also allow them to show their gratitude through prayer and singing, and invite the marginalized to be part of the festival celebrations.

6.3.3 ENJOYABLE God-focused festivals

The empirical results indicate that most of the children perceived enjoyable festivals to be occasions where a loving, playful interaction exists between adults and children accompanied by special food and a celebrative atmosphere. This aspect of the festival practice is emphasised during the Christmas and Easter season. It is also the reason why the children in the research sample perceived these two festivals to be the most enjoyable for children. However, children experienced enjoyable festivals mainly in the context of the family and very rarely in the context of the faith community. It is also significant to notice that the book of Deuteronomy underlined that the festival character of the celebrations *should be particularly characterized by*

experiencing joy, eating and drinking in the presence of God. The vertical aspect in a faith community's festival practice can be so over-accentuated that there is little or no room for the horizontal aspect of enjoyment. We can be so God-focussed that there is no place for real human enjoyment, especially during the Pentecost and Baptism festivals.

Possible strategies to influence faith community and home festival practices:

- Expand the Pentecost and Baptism festivals to a total experiential experience through symbols, colour, food, atmosphere, participation, songs and storytelling to relive and re-experience the past great deeds of God, in the present.
- Stimulate opportunities during Pentecost and Baptism festivals to celebrate, with food and drink, the great deeds of God interactively between children and adults.
- Develop baptism celebration practices to celebrate children's baptism annually in the family and faith community to build their faith identity.

6.3.4 Festivals with a missional focus.

Deuteronomy motivates faith communities not to exclude the marginalised in the *celebration of the great deeds of God*. Festival celebrations are an opportunity to reflect God's love by involving the strangers and the poor. It is also an opportunity for those, who are further on their faith journey, to model and guide the next generation to practice doing God's will. The early Christian tradition is marked by involving the poor in their Lent and Christian traditions. The challenge for faith communities is to think creatively of new ways to use festival celebrations to reach out to those outside the church, especially the marginalised in society.

6.1 Conclusion

This chapter compared the descriptive data of the empirical research and the explanation of the results with the theological perspectives of Deuteronomy and reflected critically on it. Possible strategies for influencing the present festival practices with a view to enhance the faith formation of children are recommended by using the norms deduced from Deuteronomy's perspective.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 Introduction

This study investigated the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children. The research question for this research was, “*What role should Biblical and Church festivals play in the faith formation of children in the Dutch Reformed church of eastern Mpumalanga?*”

The research was divided into seven chapters. The purpose of Chapter one was to present a background to the research question and the purpose, objectives and, methodology of the research. Osmer’s approach to practical theological interpretation is used to formulate the questions related to the research problem, namely:

- *To what extent do children in rural eastern Mpumalanga form an inclusive part of Dutch Reformed faith community festival celebrations?*
- *What are the reasons for theories behind the present festival celebration practices of Dutch Reformed congregations in eastern Mpumalanga?*
- *What perspectives does the book Deuteronomy give on the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?*
- *How can inclusive church festival celebrations enhance the faith formation of children in the Dutch Reformed congregations in eastern Mpumalanga?*

Chapter’s two to six followed the sequence of Osmer’s four questions in practical theological interpretation:

- What is going on? (Chapters 2 and 3 - Descriptive empirical)
- Why is it going on? (Chapter 4 – Interpretive)
- What ought to be going on? (Chapter 5 – Normative)
- How might we respond? (Chapter 6 – Pragmatic)

7.2 Research Design and Results (Descriptive Empirical)

Chapters two and three are descriptive empirical and focus on *what is going on in the festival practices of the congregations?* To determine to what extent children

form an inclusive part of faith communities' festival celebrations, different focus groups were used as a principal method for collecting data from leaders, parents and children.

Chapter two describes the empirical research design and procedures which were implemented in collecting and interpreting the data with regard to the question as to what extent children are included in the congregation's festivals.

Chapter three examines and analyses the focus group and interview data for insight into the children and adults' perceptions. Key issues revealed from the data were:

- ❖ the majority of the congregations allow children only to be observers during the celebration events,
- ❖ Pentecost is not perceived by children as a festival, while Easter and Christmas are the most enjoyable,
- ❖ children perceived enjoyable festivals to be occasions where a loving playful interaction exists between adults and children accompanied by special food and atmosphere,
- ❖ Children experienced enjoyable festivals mainly in the context of the family and very rarely in the context of the faith community, and
- ❖ indications that festivals may enhance children's spiritual growth.

7.3 Explanation theories (Interpretive)

Chapter four is interpretive and focuses on the question, *what are the reasons for / theories behind the present festival celebration practices?* Four theories are described to explain the results in chapter three, namely the social cognitive learning-, enculturation-, ecological system- and socio-cultural theory

7.4 Deuteronomy's faith formation perspective (Normative)

Chapter five is normative and explored the question, *what perspectives are given by the book Deuteronomy on the role of festivals in the faith formation of children?*

Deuteronomy's festival calendar built-up structure in Chapter 16 was analysed by means of discourse analysis. Important structure- and meaning carriers were investigated theologically in the context of the rest of the book. Some of the key perspectives revealed by the analysis are:

- ❖ Festivals enhance the faith formation of children if the overall focus of the festival practice is on God and on his great deeds.
- ❖ Faith formation, through celebrating the great deeds of God, takes place in the faith community as a whole.
- ❖ The festival character of the celebrations should be particularly characterized by experiencing joy through eating and drinking in the presence of God.
- ❖ The festival celebration should motivate and encourage children to live an obedient life, out of gratitude.

7.5 Strategies to apply with a view to bring about new festival practices (Pragmatic)

Finally, **Chapter six** is pragmatic and addressed the question: *How can inclusive church festival celebrations enhance the faith formation of children?*

The implications of Chapter five were discussed in the light of the results of chapters three and four. Possible strategies are recommended to influence festival practices in order to enhance children's faith formation. Key strategies are:

- ❖ Create a family welcoming environment that makes all ages feel welcome and comfortable.
- ❖ Develop processes that enhance interaction between the different generations
- ❖ Involve all generations, including children, in liturgical roles
- ❖ Stimulate opportunities during Pentecost and Baptism festivals to celebrate, with food and drink, the great deeds of God interactively between children and adults.

7.6 Final conclusion

This study originated from an interest in what role church year festivals play in the faith formation of children. It focussed on four rural congregations in eastern Mpumalanga. The study indicates that children's faith may enhance if a loving, friendly and caring environment is created to nurture their faith – an environment in which different generations share and live their faith. I discovered that church year festivals and seasons provide a natural way of becoming intentionally intergenerational. Many congregations conduct church year festivals in conjunction with or preparation for the liturgical seasons such as Advent, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost. Each festival is an integration of experiential learning,

praying, ritual, and community life. Nurturing children's faith is a multifaceted, complex process. However, Church festivals are wonderful opportunities for nurturing children's faith in the family and in the faith community. Kathie Amidei (2014:loc.1202) notes that "... there is a nurturing presence within the home and within the faith community, the experience of faith is reinforced and strengthened."

The celebration of the great deeds of God was shaping adults' and children's faith in the past. In the fast-moving 21st century, where our children are mostly shaped by modern culture, faith communities are increasingly challenged to become spaces where the great deeds of God will be celebrated, together with children, in a welcoming experiential manner.

The research study accomplished most of its goals and will hopefully be used by faith communities' leaders to develop different strategies to actively include children in congregations' festival practices to nurture adults as well as children's faith formation.

7.7 Recommendations for further research

The qualitative research in this study was only a small size, which may hinder generalizable findings. The small sample size provided an opportunity to look in-depth, at each of the congregation's festival practices, yet it also means there was less information for comparison. The sample was only from one language group, one denomination, and one region of one province in South Africa.

Further research can be done to determine:

- ❖ the influence of different denominations' festival practices on children's faith formation, especially in the African context.
- ❖ the role of church year festivals in the faith formation of children in an urban context.
- ❖ the role symbols and rituals play in the festival practices in expanding children's faith formation.
- ❖ the role baptism celebration experiences, in the family and faith community, plays in children's faith formation.
- ❖ how baptism celebration practices in the family and faith community can be utilised to build the faith identity of children.

- ❖ which intergenerational festival models can be implemented to maximize the faith formation of children.

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ADDENDUM A

A. Parents and leadership focus group discussion guide

A. INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank you all for coming today. My name is Johan and my helper is my wife Lenda.

Over the next few weeks we will be conducting group discussions with children, parents, church leaders, as well interviews with pastors. It will be about the role that church feasts play in the faith formation of children.

The research focuses on rural faith communities in Eastern Mpumalanga.

The **objectives** of the research are to:

- determine the extent to which children in faith communities feel themselves part of the congregation's celebration of the church year.
- investigate the reasons for congregational festival practices.
- explore new opportunities on how church festivals, which include children and adults, can enhance the faith formation of children.

I realize that there are several reasons why faith communities celebrate festivals in a certain way in the home and in the church. Therefore, your perspectives and experiences of congregational festivals celebrations are of particular interest. I really want to encourage you to freely air your opinions.

Let me tell you a little about how the group discussion will be conducted today. Your participation in this group is voluntary, so if you prefer not to be part of the discussion you are completely free to leave. However, I value all of your opinions and hope that you will stay and share your views. Whatever we discuss today will be confidential. The results of the research will be announced later.

I would like to put you at ease, so there are no right or wrong answers. You are simply being asked for your opinions and experiences, so please feel comfortable to share what is in your heart and what you really think. I would like to hear as many different points of view as possible. Please feel free to disagree with someone else and to share your own view, while still respecting the views of others. We will not be going around the room. Please just join in when you have something to say or you want to respond to someone else's point. It will also be important that only one person talks at a time to make sure that we don't miss anything.

During our discussion Lenda will be taking notes and reminding me if I forget to ask something. However, to help my wife not to stress too much in trying to write down everything, it would help if we could make a voice recording of the whole discussion. The reason for the recording it, is to make sure that we don't miss anything that is going to be said. Please don't be concerned about this. Our discussion will remain completely confidential so I will only use first names during the discussions. This recording will only be used for this research project and it will be securely stored so that it is not accessible to anyone outside this group. Is it OK with everyone to record this discussion? Are there any questions before we begin?

B. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

1. Just to kick off. Let's just hear something about yourself.

- Who are you? and
- How are you involved with children?

2. Write the following words on a flip chart - Festivals.

What comes to your mind when you see the word 'Festivals'?

C. TRANSITION QUESTIONS:

1. Think back to your childhood. Imagine you're 10 years old again.

- What Festival celebrations come to your mind?
- How did you experience those festivals?

Probing:

- What was your experience as a child about church festivals?
- What was the value of the festivals for you?

D. FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. What are your views on Church festivals?

Probing:

- How do you feel about celebrating it?
- What role should Church festivals play in a congregation?

2. What kind of festivals are celebrated in your congregation?

Probing:

- In families?
- In the faith community?
- How is it done?

3. How are children involved?

Probing:

- Are they active participants?
- Observers?
- Ignored?
- Do they take the lead?

4. Discuss one of the following two statements:

- "With children, it is better to first teach the great deeds of God to them than to celebrate it together through festivals."
- "Celebration with adults, especially where children feel welcome and special, enhances their faith"
 - How do you feel about this statement?

Probing:

- ✓ Do you agree?
- ✓ Why or why not?

5. I would like to read a nine year old girl's experience of Easter in the adult church.

Odette: "Yes, you see... Easter in the adult church is a little bit boring. You don't have fun, chocolates and Easter eggs and that stuff. There is a little bit of fun and a lot of talking... they

only talk about the Bible and how Jesus died. There is not even paper and crayons that you can use it to say how you feel, but adults are actually fun ... Ah! I think the big people must love the children and they must not use the big peoples Bible with big words. And also we have to have communion together and doing other things together like when it was Christmas and the children and adults were acting together in a play... It was so much fun. Some of the mummies were the angels.”

What do you hear when you listen to Odette?

Probing

a. How do you feel about this? Do you agree / disagree?

6. **How do the kids in your congregation feel about church festivals together with adults?**

E. CLOSING QUESTIONS:

1. **Let us summarize** what has been said...

2. **What are the implications for your church in the light of our discussions?**

F. CONCLUSION:

We are now almost at the end of this session. Does anyone want to add anything or comment before we conclude?

I want to thank you all for your participation in the discussion. Thank you for your opinions and experiences shared. It was very valuable and I believe it will ignite further discussion on this matter.

ADDENDUM B:

B. Children Focus group discussion guide

INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank you all for coming today. My name is Johan and with me is my wife Lenda. It is such a privilege to be here with you. We were so excited when we heard that you will be willing to help us with our problem.

Over the next few weeks Lenda and me are going to listen to children in different congregations. Before we are going to talk about that, is it okay to play a few games to know you better?

Ice Breakers

- **Different ways to greet:** Children show first how they greet one another. Lenda ask them if they know how the high English people greet, show them and then greet one another in that way. Do the same with the Suma wrestler's and carpenter's greeting.
- **I'm special game:** Passing on stones while saying it
- **Recording Voices on the cell phone:** 'I wonder how your voice will sound on a cell phone? May I make a recording of you voice on the cell phone? What are we going to say? What do you think? Add if it's necessary suggest the following: What about our names, ages and what we like"

Whatever we discuss today will be confidential, that means we are not going to tell anyone who said what. Another thing is, it is not like a test so guess what...? There is no right or wrong answers. You can freely say what you think and feel and it can be totally different from what someone else said. Can we just agree to respect one another? How will we do that? Listen to what the other say, not interrupt and it is also important that only one person talks at a time so that we don't miss anything.

Will it be ok with you if we make a recording to help us to remember everything you said? Please don't worry about this. What is shared here will not be shared as coming from someone specific and the information will only be used for helping adults in the church. The recording will be surely stored so that it cannot be used use by anyone else. Is it okay with everyone to record this discussion? There is a surprise for everyone at the end of our session. Are there any questions before we start?

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

Outcome: To help the children to be at ease and share freely

Method: Projective technique using 16 picture associations of five church festivals (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Baptism, Holy Communion) and a birthday celebration.

Process:

- Display the 11 pictures and let the children look at it. 'I wonder which picture is very special to you'.
- Let every child randomly share their special pictures. Prompt questions: 'What in the picture make it special to you?'; 'Tell me more about the picture'.

MAIN QUESTIONS 1

Outcome: To listen to the children's views on:

- Christian festivals in general and
- Which festival is for them the most important

Method: Continue to use the previous pictures (Introductory questions), except the birthday celebration. Add 5 pictures of Jesus life on earth (Birth, baptism, crucifixion, resurrection and Ascension).

Process:

- Ask: *Do you think that we can put these pictures in different groups? Help me and see if you can put some of the pictures together.*
- Children discuss how will they combine the pictures and motivate the reasons.
- Ask: *Which group of pictures is for children the most important? Tell me why you say that.*

MAIN QUESTIONS 2:

Outcome: To help the children so share their positive and negative feelings about church festivals

Method: Emotion Pictures combine with a Doll on a chair.

Process:

- Put a doll on a chair and introduce her to the children: "This is Simone and she loves God very much"
- Choose one of the festivals that the group indicated as the most important, for example Christmas.
- Start first with the positive emotion. "Simone goes during Christmas time to the church". Show the positive emotion (Happy/Glad/excited). *"How does Simone feels now? What about Christmas at the church makes her feel like this?"*
- Choose then one of the festivals that the group indicated as not so important for example Holy Communion.
- Use next a negative emotion face: "Simone goes to communion in the church". Show the negative emotion (sad). *"How does Simone feels now? What about Communion makes her feel like this?"*

MAIN QUESTION 3:

Outcome: To help the children to share how adults should ideally be to make the festivals for children special.

Method: Drawing a picture or Play and mould clay

Process

- Let the children to choose to draw or mould something with clay
- Question: *How should the adults (Pastor, elder, deacon) at the church be, that children will feel very special during feasts?*

CLOSING QUESTION:

Outcome: To help the children to identify their feelings about own congregation in the context of festivals

Method: 4 emotion pictures – glad, sad, mad and frightened

Process:

Display the four emotion pictures

Question: *If Simone will be together with the BIG people in your church next Sunday, how will she feel?*

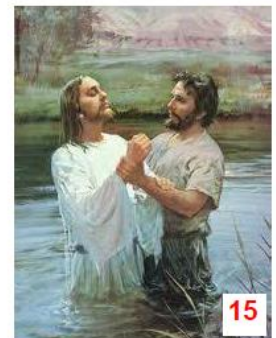
CONCLUSION:

We are now nearly finished. Is there anyone of you who still want to add something? Thank you very much for helping us, we are so grateful that you were willing to do so. This is going to help adults to make church festivals special for children. Now for the surprise... This is to say thank you that you were willing to use your playtime to spend time with us and helping us by sharing your feelings and how you think about festivals. Thank you very much.

ADDENDUM C:

C. Projective pictures for children's focus group

Pictures used during introductory Questions:



ADDENDUM D

D. In-depth-interview guide for Ministers

1. INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

If you would use a metaphor or a sketch to picture your children's ministry, how would you do it?

2. TRANSITIONAL QUESTIONS:

2.1 Church festivals - What is your view on Church festivals?

Probing:

How do you feel about celebrating it?

What role should Church festivals play in a congregation?

3. FOCUS QUESTIONS:

3.1 How important is the liturgical church year for you?

Probing:

Where is your focus?

3.2 What types of church festivals is celebrated in the congregation?

Probing:

In families?

In the faith community?

How are the festivals mentioned celebrated?

3.3 How are children involved?

Probing:

Are they active participants?

- Observers?
- Ignored?
- Participate?
- Take lead?

3.4 How do you feel about the following statements?

- "Churches should organise separate church festivals for kids."
- "With children, it is better to first teach the great deeds of God to them than to celebrate it together through festivals."

3.5 How do the kids in your congregation feel about church festivals together with adults?

4. CLOSING QUESTIONS:

4.1 How will a child of 9 years described the pastor of your church?

Probing:

What would he say?

4.2 I would like to read a nine year old girl's experience of Easter in the adult church.

Odette: "Yes, you see... Easter in the adult church is a little bit boring. You don't have fun, chocolates and Easter eggs and that stuff. There is a little bit of fun and a lot of

talking.... they only talk about the Bible and how Jesus died. There is not even paper and crayons that you can use it to say how you feel, but adults are actually fun ... Ah! I think the big people must love the children and they must not use the big peoples Bible with big words. And also we have to have communion together and doing other things together like when it was Christmas and the children and adults were acting together in a play... It was so much fun. Some of the mummies were the angels.”

What is your comments on this story.

Probing

How do you feel about this?

ADDENDUM E:

E. Focus Group and In-depth interview guide

Month	Dat	Congregation	Who? Children	Time	Who? Parents/ Leader	Time	Who? Pastors	Time	Notes
Feb	26	Pilot Testing Congregation	Children Focus Group	15h30					Pilot Interview Guide Testing for children focus group.
March	2	Ephesus	Children Focus Group	09h30					Intergeneratio nal Service 08h30
	9	Colosse	Children Focus Group	10h00					Children's Service 09h00
	14	Pilot Testing Congregation			Parents/ Leader Focus Group	16h00			Pilot Interview Guide Testing for parents/leaders Focus G
	16	Galatia	Children Focus Group	08h45	Parents/Adult Focus Group	10h15	Pastor Interview	11h45	
	18	Pilot Testing Congregation					Pastor Interview	08h00	Pilot Personal interview Guide for ministers
	19	Philippi	Children Focus Group	15h30	Parents/Adult Focus Group	17h00	Pastor Interview	09h00	The minister's personal interview was the next day
	30	Ephesus	Children Focus Group No. 2	09h30	Parents/Adult Focus Group	09h30			
April	13	Colosse			Parents/Adult Focus Group	10h30	Pastor Interview		
								11h00	
	20	Easter weekend							
	27								
May	5	Ephesus				09h30	Pastor Interview	13h15	Skype interview with previous minister

Addendum F:

F. Algemene Brief aan Kerkrade

Ek is besig met navorsing vir my M-studies oor die rol wat kerklike feesviering in die geloofvorming van kinders speel.

Die **doel** van die navorsing is om vas te stel watter rol kerklike feeste (bv. Paasfees, Pinkster ens), wat kinders insluit, in die geloofvorming van kinders speel.

Die navorsing **fokus** op plattelandse gemeentes in Oostelike Mpumalanga.

Die **oogmerke** van die navorsing is om:

- Vas te stel tot watter mate kinders in Ned Geref Gemeentes hulleself deel voel van die gemeentelike viering van die kerklike jaar.
- Die redes vir die gemeentelike feespraktyke te ondersoek.
- Nuwe moontlikhede te verken oor hoe kerklike feeste, wat kinders en volwassenes insluit, die geloofvorming van kinders kan bevorder

Om die navorsing te kan doen benodig ek een gesprekbyeenkoms (fokusgroep) van 'n groepie kinders en een byeenkoms van 'n paar volwassenes uit die gemeente. Die groepsbyeenkoms sal nie langer as 'n uur en 'n half duur nie. Die groep grootte moet verkieslik so tussen 4-8 lede wees.

Die ouderdom van die 4-8 kinders moet verkieslik so tussen 6-12 jaar wees en uit gesinne kom waar die ouers gereeld die eredienste bywoon. Die 6-8 volwassenes moet uit leierskap en ouers, wat aktief betrokke by die gemeente is, bestaan.

Die navorsing kan die volgende **voordele vir die gemeente** inhou:

- Kan die gemeente help om insig in die kinders se persepsies en belewenis oor kerklike feeste te kry.
- Toekomstige gesprekke en aksies stimuleer hoe om kinders aktief in die gemeente se feesvierings te betrek.

Ek sou graag die navorsing gedurende Maart en begin April (enige tyd gedurende die week of Sondag na die erediens) wou doen. Die rede hiervoor is dat dit ook die tyd vir die voorbereiding en viering van die Paasfees is. Die kinder- en leierskapsgroep kan ook op afsonderlike tye gereel word soos bv. Kindergroep op Sondag na die erediens en die leierskapsgroep op 'n weeksaand.

Groete,

Johan Muller

Petra Instituut vir Kinderbediening

Addendum G:

G. Letter to parent or leaders participants

Dear

Church festivals like Communion, Easter and Christmas play a very important role in the lives of Christians. In the last decade several churches in South Africa put a big effort into celebrate these festivals as a memorable experience.

Rev. Johan Muller of Institute for Children's Ministry, near White River, does at the moment research on the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children.

The research focuses on rural faith communities in Eastern Mpumalanga.

The **objectives of the research** are to:

- Determine to what extent children in faith communities feel part of the congregation's celebration of the church liturgical year.
- Investigate the reasons for congregational festival practices.
- Explore new opportunities how church festivals, which include children and adults, may enhance the faith formation of children,

The research will provide the following **benefits** for a congregation:

- It will help the congregation to gain better understanding of children's views and experiences on church festivals.
- Stimulate future discussions and actions on how to involve children to be more active in church festival celebrations

I would very much like to invite you to join in group discussion with other members of your congregation on the above matter. I believe that your contribution to the discussion group will be very valuable and might ignite further discussions in the future.

The duration of the discussion will be about an hour and a half. The discussion will be confidential and the names of the participants will remain anonymous.

The discussion group will be meeting at..... (Date, time and place)

I look forward to meet you.

Blessings!

Johan Muller
Petra Institute for Children's Ministry

Addendum H:

H. Research - The role of church festivals in the faith formation of children

I'm doing research on the role of church festivals in the faith formation of children. The **purpose** of the research is to determine what role Church festivals (eg Christmas, Easter, etc.), which include children and adults, play in the faith formation of children.

The research focuses on rural faith communities in Eastern Mpumalanga.

The **objectives** of the research are to:

- Determine to what extent children in faith communities feel part of the congregation's celebration of the church liturgical year.
- Investigate the reasons for congregational festival practices.
- Explore new opportunities how church festivals, which include children and adults, may enhance the faith formation of children,

The research will provide the following **benefits** for a congregation:

- It will help the congregation to gain better understanding of children's views and experiences on church festivals.
- Stimulate future discussions and actions on how to involve children to be more active in church festival celebrations

To do research I needed a gathering of a few adults from the congregation as well as a personal interview with the local minister . The group meeting will not last longer than an hour and a half. The group size should preferably somewhere between 6-8 members.

It will be preferable that the 6-8 people consists of leadership and parents who are actively involved in the congregation.

The duration of the interview with the pastor will not exceed one hour .

I would like to do the research during March. March is also the time for the preparation and celebration of Easter.

I will appreciate it if you consider the possibility to join the research project. I believe that the research will also be beneficial for the congregation and the children.

Regards ,

Johan Muller

Petra Institute for Children's Ministry

Addendum I:

I. Letter to the child

Dear..... ,

I have not met you yet, but would really like to do. My name is Johan. I love children and know that children are very, very special to the Lord.

I have a problem and want to ask you if you can help me with that. Let me tell you about this problem. The adults want to organise more festivals, like Christmas at the church. They would like the festivals also to be nice and enjoyable for children. My problem is that the adults have never asked you or other children how you feel about it and how would you like it to be.

My wife, Lenda, and I would like to visit you on

..... (Date, time and place). Then we want to hear from you how to help adults to make church feasts an awesome experience for children.

Will you PLEASE help me with that? We will definitely not just talk. We are also going to play as well and do other interesting fun things.

If you want to help me, please ask Mom and Dad if you can do so. Thank you for your willingness to listen to me.

Hope to meet you soon.

Kindly regards until we meet again.

Johan and Lenda



Addendum J:

J. Letter to the parents of the child participant

Dear Parents,

Church festivals like Communion, Easter and Christmas play a very important role in the lives of Christians. In the last decade several churches in South Africa put a big effort into celebrate these festivals as a memorable experience. The question is: How do the children feel about it?

Rev. Johan Muller of Institute for Children's ministry, near White River, does at the moment research on children's perceptions and experiences of church festivals.

The **purpose** of the research is to help congregations to:

- Gain better understanding of children's views and experience on church festivals.
- Stimulate future discussions and actions on how to involve children to be more active in church festival celebrations.

Your child has been identified to participate in a children's discussion group on

.....

(Date, time and place), with Rev. Johan and his wife on the above matter. The duration of this event will be about an hour and a half. The session promises to be an interesting and enjoyable experience for the children.

The discussion will be confidential and the names of the children will remain anonymous

We would like to get your permission so that your child can participate in this event.

I,

(Parent's name)

give my consent that

(Child's name)

will be allowed to participate in the discussion group on church festivals .

ADDENDUM K :

K. Blake Poland's guidelines to transcribe Interview Data -

Pauses	Specify short pauses during talking by a series of dots (...), the length of which depends on the amount of time elapsed. For example. Indicate longer pauses with the word pause in parentheses.	(..)two dots (...) three dots (....) four dots '(pause)' '(long pause)'	for less than 0.5 sec for 1 sec, for 1.5 sec 2-3 sec breaks 4 sec and more breaks
Laughing, coughing, and so on for example:	Signify in parentheses; Use '(laughing)' to indicate 1 person '(laughter)' to mean several laughing	'(coughs)', '(sign)', '(sneeze)'. '(laughing)' '(laughter)'	1 person Several people
Interruptions:	Denote when someone's talk is broken off midsentence by including a hyphen (-) at the point where the interruption takes place,	(-)	'How did you-'
Overlapping speech:	Employ a hyphen (-) to signify when one speaker intersperses into the conversation of another, include the speech of the other with '(overlapping)'. Then return to where the original speaker was interrupted (if he or she continues)	P1: (-) P2: '(overlapping)'	R: She said that was impos- I: (overlapping) Who, Mary? R: No, Sonja.
Garbled speech:	If guessing what was said, signal words that are not clear with square brackets and question mark, for example Use x's to indicate passage which cannot be elucidated at all. Number of x's should symbolise approximate number of words which cannot be clarified. For example	[?] XXXXX	'At that, Emma just [doubled? Glossed?] over') 'Zoe went xxxxx xxxxx, and then [came? Went?] home.'
Emphasis:	Strong emphasis can be represented with capital letters, for instance	WAW	'You did WHAT?'
Held sounds:	Repeat the sounds which are held, separated by hyphens. If they are emphasised, capitalise them too	N-o-o VER-r-r-y-y	'No-o-o-o, not really' or 'I was VER-r-r-y-y-y excited.'
Paraphrasing others:	When a participant employs a voice which indicates that he or she is imitating someone else's speech or is expressing his or inner voice, use quotation marks and/ or indicate with '(mimicking voice)'. For example:	'(mimicking voice)'	R: Then you know what he came out with? He said (mimicking voice) 'I'll be damned if I'm going to let YOU push ME around.' And I thought to myself: 'I'll show you!' But then a little voice inside said 'Better watch out for Susan.' Sure enough, in she came with that 'I'm in control now' air of hers.
