

The Effectiveness of Intervention Strategies Implemented by Church Leadership during COVID-19 lockdown Period in Harare: A case of two churches in Glenview community from March to October 2020

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Abstract

Coronavirus is a unique wicked problem that has caused unprecedented changes across the globe. Worldwide, it has caused enormous trauma, disrupted economies, social life and academic programmes. Religious communities have not been spared; they have been severely transformed by the pandemic. This research seeks to establish the effectiveness of intervention strategies used by church leaders during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period from March to October 2020 using the case of two churches in Glenview community of Harare. This shall be measured in line with the overall liturgical role of the church in supporting communities during pandemics. Five independent variables namely Internet ministry, zoom meetings, pastoral counselling, Google meetings and resource mobilisation were reviewed. Accessibility, convenience, affordability and viewership were the moderating variables which were used as standard measurements of the effectiveness and impact of the strategies used by church leaders. The study population was 20 church pastors and 30 congregants from the two churches ZAOGA and Covenant Faith Church. The research employs the convergent parallel mixed methodology as the research had both qualitative and quantitative features. Snowballing sampling was utilised for the selection of the church congregants and convenience method was used to locate church leaders. In undertaking the research, telephone, questionnaire, interview guide, social media shall be used. Data collected was captured in the IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 data entry template designed by the researcher. The study found that the social media platforms used by church leaders during the lockdown period were effective.

Keywords: Covid-19, Online services, Resource mobilisation, Pastoral counselling and church leadership

Introduction

The advent of Coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) has created a worldwide health catastrophe that also deeply impacted the political and socio-economic way of life of the Zimbabweans. COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the coronavirus which began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and it became a pandemic that affected many countries globally (Snowden, 2020). The disease exists on the level of virus, cell, immune system, individual, economy and culture at large. In response to the novel Coronavirus pandemic, President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared it

a national disaster on 27 March 2020 and introduced lockdown on 30 March which banned public gatherings and set up quarantine centres for people who were migrating from hot spot countries (Masuka, 2020).

Within this context of lockdown, church leadership came with interventions strategies to guide the thinking and actions of the church and its members. Church leadership can be defined as the means of persuading/helping church members out of Christ's interests in their lives, for them to realize God's assignments on earth (Lawrence, 2018). The church leadership was presented with the options of virtual theology through sharing of sermons via electronic media, live streaming of services, collection of offerings via mobile money services, zoom meetings and charity works to help their vulnerable members as homes became centres of worship due to lockdown. Thus, this work seeks to assess the effectiveness of church leadership intervention strategies in Harare churches using the case of two churches in Glenview community.

Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent measures introduced to reduce its spread greatly affected the operations of Zimbabwean churches. Individual families would now gather in their respective homes for worship as churches moved out of buildings (Ndangana, 2020). The introduction of lockdown in Zimbabwe came with severe socio-economic consequences such as loss of employment, upsurge in gender-based violence, collapse of businesses, and general loss of livelihood. Against this backdrop of lockdown measures, various strategic interventions were adopted by church leaders to help and reach out their church members. Among other things, the church leadership came up with online church services, zoom meetings, mobile money collections, and charity and resource mobilisation programmes. Considering these fundamental changes, this research seeks to establish the effectiveness of these intervention programmes in helping church communities.

Research Objectives

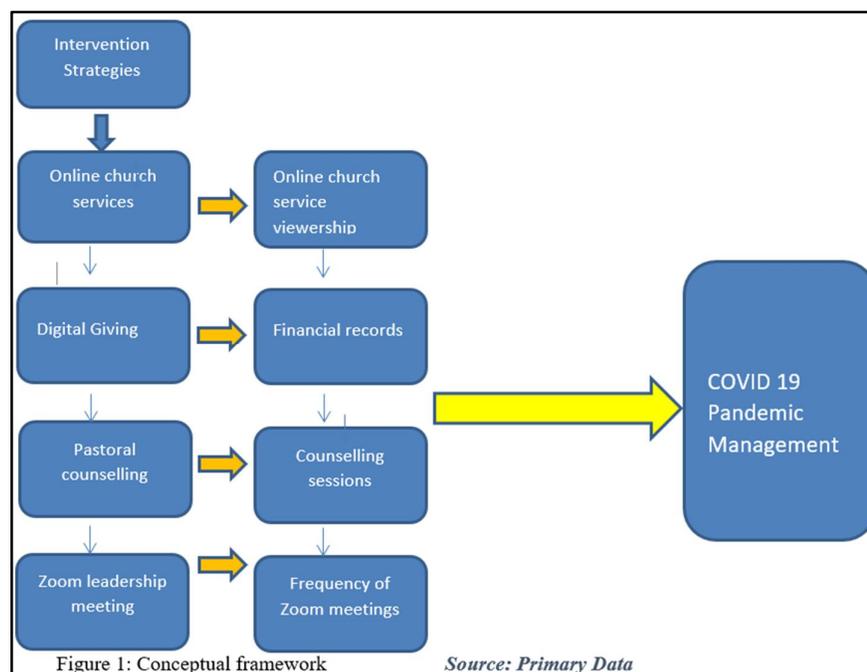
The general objective of this study is to find the effectiveness of church leadership intervention strategies during COVID-19 lockdown period in Harare, but the specific purposes are as follows:

- To establish the different intervention approaches taken by Christian denominations towards the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To establish the problems encountered by church leaders in the implementation of their respective intervention strategies.
- To find out the measures taken by church leaders to deal with problems encountered in the implementation of the strategies.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Church leadership intervention strategies involve online church services, zoom leadership meetings, Google meet, pastoral counselling and digital giving. The moderating panel of instruments that can be used to gauge whether church leadership reached their mitigation goals are online church service viewership, frequency of successful zoom meetings, church records, counselling sessions, church records on mobile giving and resource mobilisation. The mentioned mitigation strategies and the stated measuring instruments promoted the researcher to develop the following theoretical framework in figure 1 below



Online church services

In the wake of the Covid-19 plague there has been an affluence of online services as thousands of churches around the globe are turning to digital answers to proceed their systematic worship. Most churches in Harare also involuntarily close their accesses due to the need for social distancing. The consequence was that the traditional cathedrals had to make an unexpected and swift conversion towards technologically-driven forms of assembly. Numerous church leaders were driven out of their comfort zone as they explored the online church services to remain relevant to the church. At the same time, scholars and theologians began studying this new trend in how churches perform worship online.

Even though Internet offers eccentric replacements in times such as these, digital technologies have unbolted new options and closed others. It has been argued that there is a social religious influencing of expertise within religious communities as they debate whether to adopt, acclimatize or discard the use of explicit technologies in the light of their own practice and dogma (Taylor, 2020). For these reasons, online streaming of adoration services upstretched numerous questions that demand careful dogmatic consideration.

A mutual protestation to online services is that they do not facilitate dependable community in a way that direct gatherings of followers do. Most scholars tend to assign superior intimacy to offline meetings than to online communication. However, one may argue that just because people meet face-to-face does not mechanically mean that they form tougher bonds than those who watch virtually. Thus, this investigation seeks to establish the effectiveness of possibilities such as posting questions and comments about the sermons being offered by digital community through online services.

Zoom Meetings Concept

With an increasing number of church employees working remotely due to the COVID-19, there was an increase in the use of online collaboration tools such as Zoom. Zoom is a collective, cloud-based videoconferencing facility offering features as well as online meetings, group messaging services, and secure recording of sessions with the goal of making online communication easy (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). As opposed to other comparable daises like Skype, Zoom offers the ability to communicate in real time with geographically dispersed individuals via computer, tablet, or mobile device. Nevertheless, like many other virtual technologies, Zoom entails internet connection which may be a challenge to most church associates in the high-density areas of Harare hence the need to assess the effectiveness of using Zoom meetings by church leadership.

An important benefit of Zoom is its aptitude to steadily record and stock sessions without option to third-party software. Furthermore, vital haven of its features includes user-specific verification, real-time encryption of meetings, and the capability to holdup recordings to online remote server systems and local drives which can then be shared tightly for partnership (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). The Zoom platform is also said to be relatively easy to use for all people with minimum computer skills and it also offers high-quality audio and video which gives the impression of a real meeting. Participants can instant message during the presentations like questions to the presenter or making a comment.

Another interesting feature is that meetings are easily recordable for future reference. Users can create reoccurring meetings and use the same link for future meetings for signing into the zoom meeting, the links can also be sent to new members to join the meeting from anywhere in the world.

However, inadequate material is available on Zoom's usability in zones where there is poor network connectivity and low level of computer literacy.

Other studies have found that Zoom participants were characteristically more receptive, and built relationship more quickly, than frontal participants (Deakin, 2015). Thus, it is imperative to resolve such disagreement among scholars by conducting this practical research through assessment of members' understandings and discernments of Zoom using separate meetings.

Google Meet Concept

One of the alternatives that were presented to churches during the lockdown period was the Google meet. Google meet can be defined as a video-chatting facility intended chiefly for commercial and place of work use, which leases contemporaries to talk over video and script (Keeley, 2020). It has always been a crucial element in the technique to accomplishment for enterprises and other commercial sectors eager to connect with clientele and distant employees (Beauford, 2020). In relation to previous studies on the use of video conferencing in organisations, Google meet platforms have advantages and disadvantages.

Google meetings are more secure as audio and video streams are specially encrypted for the users only. The platform can also accommodate large viewers at once and for long hours. Members of the organisation can also join pre-scheduled meetings with ease using either calendar invites, via a link or phone access. The Google meet system also integrates well into Gmail and Google Calendar (Bradford, 2015). It is also easy to use on both mobile and desktop devices. It was observed that it also offers services like polls, recording meetings, and live streaming on the highest-level plans (Armfield, 2015). For certain packages, participants can join by phone which is helpful if Wi-Fi is unreliable.

Thus, it is imperative to find out whether the church leaders and their members enjoyed these benefits during the COVID-19 lockdown period in Harare. However, Google meet has its own notable demerits such as the system can also crash if too many people join the video meeting at one time (Boatin, 2015). It also requires internet connection which can be costly to the users. Thus, it is imperative to talk to churches and find out what their experiences have been.

Digital Giving Concept

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of lockdown measures led to increase in mobile giving and online engagement. It should be observed that digital giving and mobile charity was already underway in the faith community but COVID-19 accelerated it. Much literature dwells on traditional face to face giving in the church but not much is written on digital giving in the

church thus this investigation pursues to discover the state of online and mobile giving in the faith-based community using the case Glenview Community Harare.

Research on new digital institutional forms is still in its infancy compared to the rest of organizational and institutional studies. However, given the rapid growth in recent decades of some new digital institutional forms, there has also been growing interest in understanding these forms. Getting online contributions can yield fewer possessions than other approaches, so it is a good possibility for non-profits like churches with restricted resources. Extensive past research has been done investigative work on charity, but research probing the precise behaviour of online contributors is inadequate.

Thus, it is imperative to evaluate whether church leaders quickly adjusted to COVID-19 lockdown measures and conducted effectively mobile collections and giving. It is within this context that this research seeks to evaluate if giving in churches increased or remained steady during COVID-19.

Pastoral Counselling

Pastoral therapy is a unique form of psychoanalysis which uses unworldly resources as well as mental understanding for healing and growth (Taylor, 2015). It is given by specialized pastoral therapists, who are not only psychological health specialists but who have also a comprehensive religious and theological training. Pastors play a critical role in preparing their communities from the onset of the pandemic threat to its conclusion. They are there to promote healthy behaviour to reduce the spread of the pandemic, tackle stigma and fear and provide practical care for the most vulnerable (Benner, 2016).

A lot has been written about the vital roles that pastors played in a health crisis like Ebola and Influenza but very little has been documented about the role of Pastors during COVID-19 pandemic. Pastors had an alternative for online counselling. Online counselling has been branded as the transportation of counselling services via the Internet, where the pastoral/spiritual counsellor or psychologist and counselee are not within the same physical zone and they connect utilizing computer-mediated communication novelties (Vigano, 2020).

Indeed, the question may be asked as to how well pastors were equipped to deal with the real-life problems and traumas of COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is within this context that this research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of pastoral counselling during COVID-19 lockdown period in Harare.

Methodology

Mixed method was used since the research has some features which are usually more connected with quantifiable methods and other features which are usually more linked to qualitative methods. Mixed method refers to an embryonic methodology of research that advances the organized integration, or fraternization of quantitative and qualitative data inside a solitary investigation or sustained program of inquiry (Creswell, 2011). The uncomplicated premise of this methodology is that such integration permits a more comprehensive and synergistic application of information than detached quantitative and qualitative information collection and examination. This enhances a better understanding of the objectives of the research.

The convergent parallel method where data shall simultaneously be collected and merged shall be used. The researcher adopted both the positivism and constructivism research philosophies given the fact that the exploration is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Mixed method design points out that arguments, pictures, and descriptions can be used to enhance meaning to numbers while figures can add exactness to words, photographs, and accounts. It can also handle an extensive variety of research interrogations because the researcher is not restricted to one research design.

Target Population

The target population in this study involved all ordained pastors who in the age group of between 25 and 60 years. The church leaders are from both Covenant Faith Church and ZAOGA in Glenview community. For church congregants, the target population was full time members of the two churches. The respondents chosen were all adult church members who were in the Glenview community during COVID-19 lockdown period who may well speak Shona, Ndebele or English, the languages the researcher is well acquainted with. The Pastors were selected on the basis that they are ordained pastors who had operated in the Glenview community for more than three years.

Data Collection Tools

In undertaking the research, telephone, social media and particularly WhatsApp, email and text messages, twitter, zoom and Skype were used. This was classified under primary data. The use of the above-mentioned methods has been necessitated by the fact that the outbreak of the Coronavirus made it impossible to go to the field. It has been cautioned that this virus will be there for a long time and the world cannot go back to the way things were. For this reason, the research was undertaken without much contact with people.

Social media. The researcher utilised WhatsApp and Twitter in conducting this research. These helped the researcher to reach massive audience since the researcher was already in one of the groups of the Pastors fraternal in Harare of which some of the members of the group are pastors of the member churches in Glenview.

Telephone and email correspondence. Block and Erskine (2012) assert that telephones are increasingly popular for collection of data for academic research and accessing population that might be difficult to reach in person or by other means. The telephone was used it was a clear cost-effective alternative. For official communications with institutions, the researcher made use of emails since they were faster and convenient.

Questionnaire. The questionnaire instrument was considered useful in this study given the fact that most information collected required to be quantified. In addition, the questionnaire instrument made it possible for easy quantification and analysis of the collected data. A research questionnaire containing carefully framed questions as reviewed in literature was administered to selected church leaders for data collection. The questionnaire had both unrestricted and close-ended interrogations. Unrestricted questions were intended to get the views and sentiments of leaders on what they think about intervention strategies.

Data analysis procedure. Data collected was captured in the IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 data entry template designed by the researcher. SPSS version 21 was opted because of its comprehensiveness in data analysis. It can take data from virtually any kind of folder and use it to produce tabulated reports, diagrams, plots of distributions and trends, descriptive statistics and composite statistical breakdown.

Data Presentation and Research Findings

It is essential that data collected is shown with the sources where it has been collected, presented in a way that can be easily interpreted and clearly illustrate the results of the analysis and findings.

Demographic Information of Participants

The study collected information on demographic characteristics of respondents to validate characteristics of respondents. Detailed results on the demographic characteristics are presented below:

Sex of respondents. The analysis indicated that most of the respondents were male. Specifically, 28 males constituted the survey giving 56% whereas female respondents totalled 22 yielding 44% of the survey. Table 1 below presents the results:

Table 1: *Respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	28	56	56	56
	Female	22	44	44	100
	Total	50	100	100	

Source: Primary Data

Age of respondents. The examined age variable under demographic characteristics showed that respondents in the bracket of 25-32 years were 5 giving 10% of the survey. The next age group was 33-40 years with a total frequency of 20 constituting 40% of the survey. For the stage of development group of 41-48 years, 15 respondents participated in the survey making 30% of the respondents. Lastly, 10 respondents were 49 years and above and these constituted 20% of the respondents. While it appears that age does not have a significant impact on church engagement levels, it can be noted that respondents over 33 years have the highest levels of engagement. This could be due to the impact of length of tenure in the church and its consequent effects on continuance commitment among church members.

The available literature also commented on the upsurge in church commitment of this age group. Berger (2016) observed that this is a stage when many people make decisions about the rest of their lives, classically asking such questions as "Who am I?" "How should I spend my life?", "What is really worth doing?" and so on. Thus, this period is characterised very powerfully by an exploration for authentic standards and distinctiveness. Table 2 presents the respondents according to their age groups.

Table 2: *Age of respondents*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	25-32years	5	10	10	10
	33-40years	20	40	40	60
	41-48years	15	30	30	80
	49years & above	10	20	20	100
	Total	50	100	100	

Source: Primary Data

Education level of participants. The survey constituted of respondents with different categories of educational levels. Ten (10) participants were form 6 and below and these made 20% of the respondents. The Diploma level yielded 21 respondents making 42% of the survey. The next level of respondents was the Degree level, which polled 14 participants to give 28% of the total participants. The Master’s Degree level gave 4 respondents who were 8% of the participants. One (1) respondent was not in the categorised educational levels and this was 2% of the population under study.

Most participants in this study were at least at the Diploma level and this helped a lot in dealing with the participants who had an intellectual understanding of the studied phenomenon. The findings also show that there are numerous respondents who either have university degrees or are still studying. The general population could be said to be well educated, and while it may be the well-educated people who are highly mobile, this may yield a congregation with a higher percentage of skilled people in a few years (Campbell, 2020). This would suggest that the church's revenue towards internet ministry will rise as individuals' proceeds rise, if they are tithing their money to the church. Table 3 presents the educational levels data of the participants.

Table 3: *Education level*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Form 6 & below	10	20	20	20
Diploma	21	42	42	62
Degree	14	28	28	90
Masters	4	8	8	98
Other	1	2	2	100
Total	50	100	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Period in church. Twenty-six (26) participants in the study specified that they had been in their churches for a period of 5 years and below, these made 52% of the respondents. Those who had been in their churches for 6-10 years were 11 respondents, making 22% of the total participants in the study. Additionally, 13 clients who had been with their churches for 11 years and above in this study contributed 26% of the survey. Therefore, most of the respondents portrayed that they are still five (5) years and below with their respective churches. The results indicated that most congregates are still new in their respective churches. Table 4 presents period of believers with their respective churches.

Table 4: Period in church

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5years & below	26	52	52	52
	6-10years	11	22	22	74
	11 years & above	13	26	26	100
	Total	50	100	100	

Source: Primary Data

Years of experience in pastoral ministry.

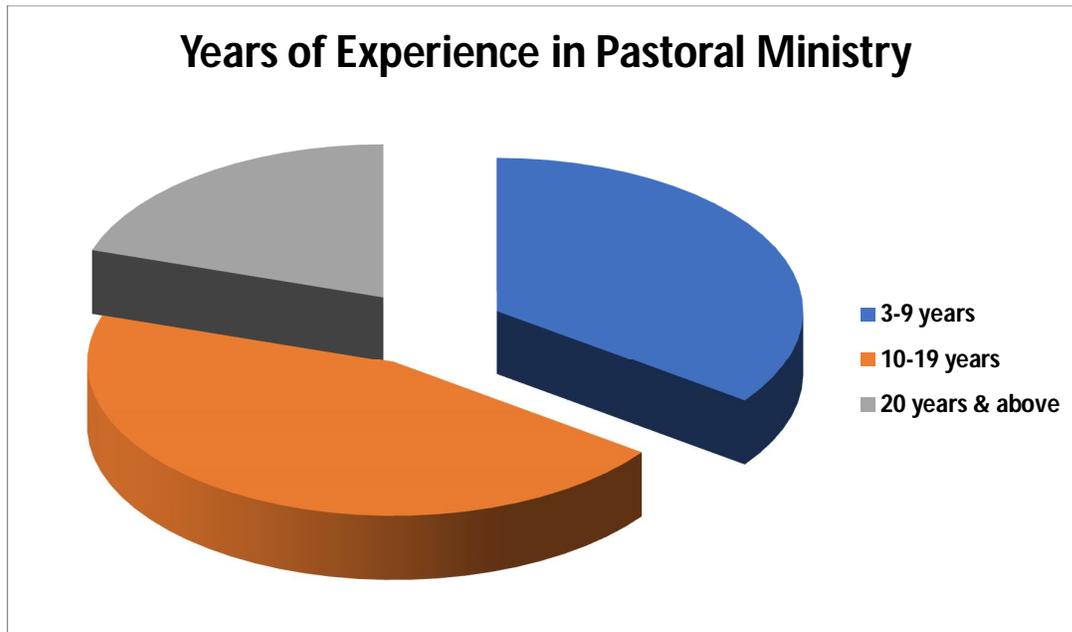


Figure 1: Years of experience in pastoral ministry

Source: Primary Data

From the number of pastors that replied as shown in Figure 2, Seven (7) respondents that represent thirty-five per cent (35%) have had pastoral ministry experiences for less than 9 years, nine (9) respondents that represent forty-five per cent (45%) have had pastoral ministry experiences between 10 and 19 years, four (4) respondents that represent twenty per cent (20%) have had pastoral ministry experiences for at least 20 years. This result shows that most of the respondents are veteran pastors in their pastoral ministry. This could be because experienced pastors know what is expected of them and may have good rapport with church members after many years working together.

In this vein, Schaller (2013) argues that the most critical solitary factor in defining the effectiveness, vitality, self-esteem, attractiveness, numerical growth or deterioration, public image, and outreach of both the small and great worshipers is the experienced pastor. Thus, the findings of this research agree with the available literature that the experienced pastor is indispensable for impetus, course, assessment and achievement. It is the one component crucial for the triumph of any organization.

Presentation and discussion of findings

Findings under objective 1. The first objective was to establish the different intervention strategies taken by Christian denominations towards the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was made to first find out chief traditional conducts of pastoral ministry before COVID-19 pandemic period. The respondents acknowledged some of these customs as represented below.

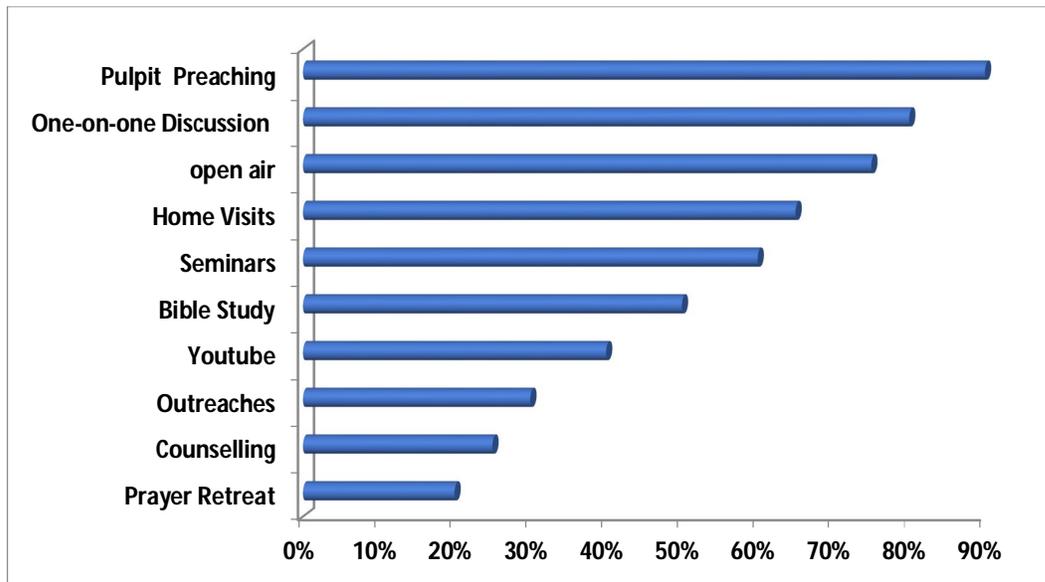


Figure 2: Traditional ways

Source: Primary Data

These answers do not mean a respondent picked only single response. The respondents had the chance of identifying as numerous ways as conceivable. The responses specify that each of them has been using various ways to accomplish his pastoral ministry before the occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic. A rapid glimpse at the Figure 4.3 shows that attending and presiding over systematic church activities is most noticeable means of pastoral ministry among the respondents. These activities comprise the conventional gatherings frequently on Sundays and some other days during the week. Preaching from the podium is the most recognisable way many of the respondents (18

respondents representing 90%) showed as the traditional way of engaging in pastoral ministry before the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Two other more recognisable ways are one on one discussions (16 respondents representing 80%) and open-air services (15 respondents representing 75%). Additional ways that have respondents between 4 and 10 (representing 20% and 50%) are home visits, Bible study, counselling, outreaches YouTube and prayer retreats. The findings of this research are consistent with available literature. It was observed in line with this research that the most noticeable methodology of reaching the flock before COVID-19 pandemic was pulpit preaching in the church (MacArthur, 2014).

Most church leaders concentrated on bringing many people to church buildings as ministry was based on face to face. Thus, with the introduction of lockdown measures and social distancing there was need to adjust for church leaders to remain relevant to their congregants. Burnet (2015) detected that the most theatrical result in religion has been the exceptionally rapid shift of spiritual services from in-person to online reverence. However, the research found out that internet ministry was already there before the pandemic though it was operating to a limited degree.

Ways of Pastoral Ministry during COVID-19 Pandemic.

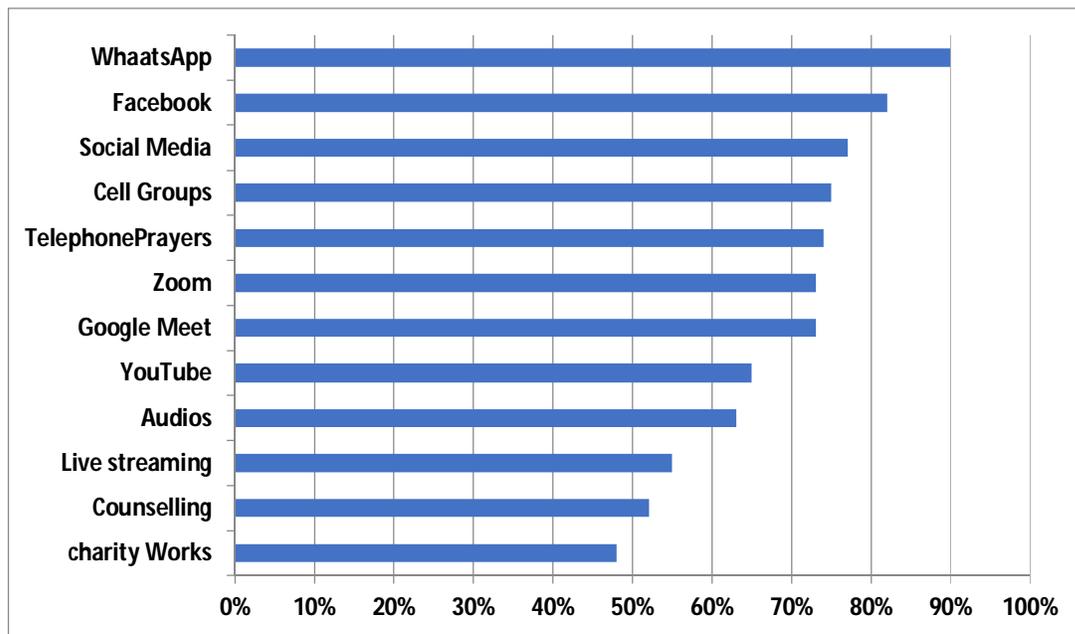


Figure 3: Ways of pastoral ministry during COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Primary Data

An interrogation was done to the respondents on how they are undertaking pastoral ministry during the COVID19 pandemic period. This was a subjective question that permitted the respondents to give as many reactions as conceivable. As shown in Figure 4, there are still some traditional ways

of pastoral ministry like house fellowship/cell church (15 respondents representing 75%), telephone calls for counselling and prayers (14 respondents representing 74%), weekly audios (12 respondents representing 63%), personal counselling for few emergencies (10 respondents representing 50%), distribution of relief packages (8 respondents representing 48%).

Most of the ways indicated as shown in Figure 4 as the conducts of pastoral ministry during the plague are Internet inclined. The survey indicated that the WhatsApp platform was the most adopted platform by the respondents with 18 participants representing 90% of the pastors agreeing that they were using the platform due to its cost effectiveness and convenience in reaching members at once in the group.

It allowed smartphone users to quickly exchange texts and audio and video messages for free and make calls during the lockdown period. In the COVID-19 pandemic situation WhatsApp was found to be cost-effective and easy to use, giving it competitive advantage over the other social network platforms. WhatsApp was also considered a safe application due to the inclusion of end-to-end encryption.

Furthermore, WhatsApp users were able to check if messages have been received properly and read by the receiver when two blue marks appear next to the sent information. On the downside, however, the research found out that WhatsApp groups limit the number of users, which may prevent the formation of groups of church members exceeding 256 and this was a setback to churches with larger memberships.

The survey found out that 82% of the respondents happened to be using Facebook platform during the lockdown period under study. The outcome of the survey reveals that apart from the previous recognized traditional means of pastoral ministry, numerous features of the Internet ministry take a most important role in the pastoral ministry of respondents to their church members throughout the pandemic. The findings of this research concur with studies in digital theology that have emphasized an enlarged interest in watching and participating in online church services under lockdown (Ryan, 2020). The interconnectivity encouraged by digital technologies has helped to promote the capacity for individuals to participate in church activities despite physical distance and this comprises those who previously may have never stepped foot in a church.

Similar research on the virtual church reveals that churches commenced to appear more online during COVID-19 through transfer, decode and transform stratagems (Campbell, 2020). The approaches change from merely recording worship as it was done in the building with a mobile phone or camera running to moving worship services into a dissimilar environment with leaders speaking from their homes by means of more collaborative technology. The following figures show a surge in terms of membership on Facebook and YouTube in Covenant Faith church. The church experienced a

43% increase in membership on Facebook during lockdown from March to October 2020. This is illustrated below in Figure 5

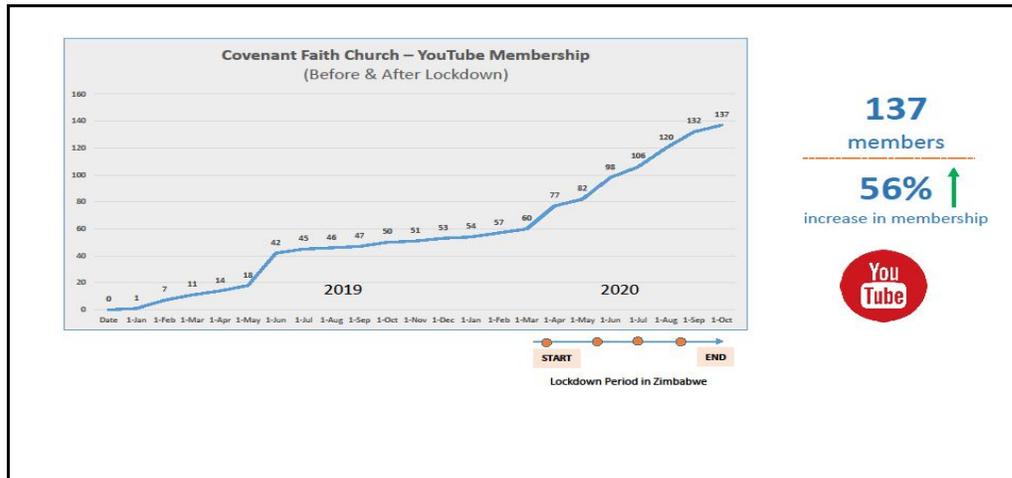


Figure 4: Increase in membership on facebook

Source: Primary Data

This finding is consistent with studies evaluating YouTube posts during COVID-19 lockdown period (D'Souza et al. 2020; Li et al. 2020). The proactive measures adopted to combat the spread of misinformation by international organizations, such as the WHO COVID-19 myth busters and efforts from the management of Facebook, may justify the operative use of the Facebook by church leaders and their members. Many churches are now accustomed to streaming and recording services and events through Facebook. Churches have a range of options available to share content on Facebook either by live streaming or by recording and sharing afterwards.

The research found out that the Facebook platform can support both live and recorded services. It also allows multiple users to converse and contribute to an event from different locations. It also aids as an inordinate display place for the church leaders to show their programmes to both members and non-members of their churches. Most Facebook users admitted that they have the extravagance of viewing their favourite ministers on their smart phones.

This further encourages the users to attend the services and be part of what is happening. The audiences who missed the daily services have an occasion to watch them on Facebook. Users also acknowledged that they can view the video several times as long as they have data on their cell phones. Operators can also share videos with diverse people, including intercontinental viewers. Moreover, operators have a choice to leave remarks as to why they like or do not like a specific video.

Against this backdrop, this study infers that even though Facebook is a widely utilized social network site with the potential of reaching and providing educational information to a wide array of

church audiences towards flattening the COVID-19 curve, Facebook users also face challenges. The first shortcoming found by this study was the genuineness of Facebook users. Consequently, countless Facebook users do not use their actual designations but fictitious names. As a result, it cannot be verified that the likes that one pastor has on Facebook are actual likes from his genuine supporters.

The limitation found by this research was the publication of false information on Facebook. This is in line with the available literature. The charismatic churches in southern Africa, according to Mochechane (2016), has been criticised for theatrical miracles and fake prophecies. Hameno (2014) augments that the prophetic actions that are testified on Facebook range from the strange to shocking and occasionally wicked or even criminal. Disgraceful and perhaps careless claims thrive on most social platforms of the charismatic churches.

Covenant Faith Church also experienced 56% increase in YouTube membership from March to October 2020 during COVID-19 lockdown period as demonstrated in Figure 6 below.

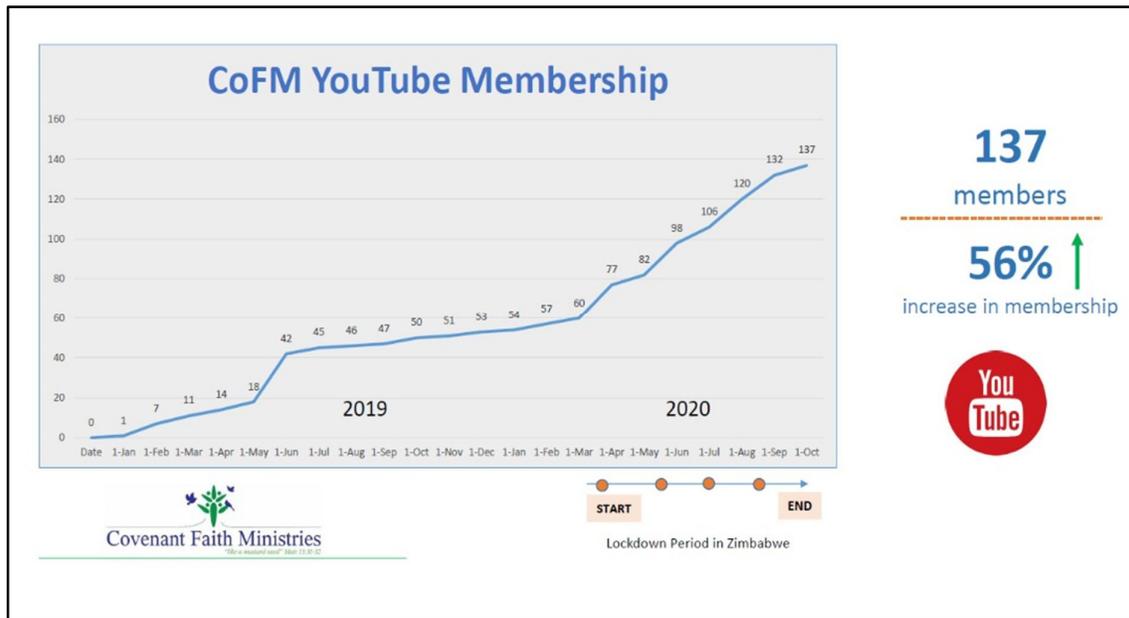


Figure 5: Increase in membership on Youtube

Source: Primary Data

The advantage of YouTube, as compared with other social media platforms, lies in its sensible use of audio and visual communication, making it readily reachable to individuals from all demographic upbringings. Though YouTube is an influential informative tool that church leaders can mobilise to broadcast information and influence behaviour of their members, if used improperly, it

can instantaneously be a source of misleading information that can work expressively against these efforts.

Previous studies have shown that YouTube has been a source of valuable and ambiguous information during public health crises, including the H1N1 pandemic, Ebola outbreak and Zika outbreak (Bora, 2015). These studies found that approximately 23%–26.3% of YouTube videos informing viewers about these diseases were misleading and that these videos largely originated from independent users (Pathak, 2015). Though these studies provide initial understandings into the use of YouTube during public health disasters, the generalizability and applicability of their findings to the current COVID-19 plague are limited.

The research found out that public media has emerged as a commanding tool in directing the spread of information and in determining public understanding and behaviour. YouTube is an influential, unexploited educational instrument that should be better mobilised by church leaders to regulate information and influence public behaviour.

Findings under Objective 2. The second objective was to establish the problems encountered by church leaders in the implementation of their respective intervention strategies.

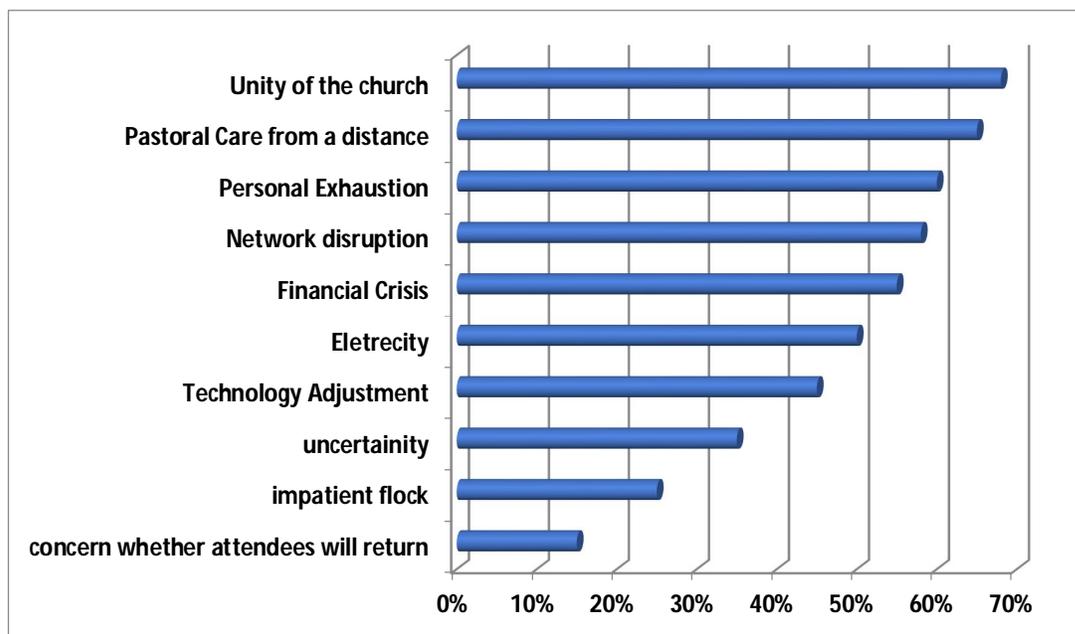


Figure 6: Top challenges mentioned by pastors
Source: Primary Data

Although most of the respondents agreed that online ministry, as a substitute means, is effective in their pastoral ministry throughout the pandemic, they indicated that there are some limitations to that agreement. The survey found that 68% of the pastors cited maintaining unity of the church as one of the top challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. The

second most cited challenge was pastoring at a distance, with 65% mentioning it. Personal exhaustion due to fatigue and stress was also another major challenge with about 60% of the respondents expressing it.

Burnout among church leaders during lockdown period from March to October 2020 was higher than previously reported and was mainly linked to high workload, job tension, heaviness, and inadequate organizational support. The research also collected responses from pastors in relation to the struggle of linking with their congregation and keeping up with requirements in a practicable way. The survey found that 58% of the pastors experienced network disruption. The issue of Internet network failure and interruption is seen by these respondents as worrisome as they at times felt frustrated with the failure or interruption of the Internet service when they are using it especially when it has to do with live streaming and video-related features of the Internet in their ministry.

From the data given in Figure 7, electricity supply was a challenge by some of the respondents with 50% citing it as a challenge of their online services. This is indeed a major problem generally in Harare as there has been erratic power supply in the country for years (Mutsaka, 2019). The respondents argued that in as much as they would like to make usage of the online services and other technical tools in their organizations, this erratic power supply was a major hindrance to them and their church members. Fifty five percent of pastors reported worry over finances.

The research found out that churches experienced a double income shock from the impact of COVID-19 that exacerbated cash flow problems. This was mainly caused by severe disruption of Sunday and midweek offerings whilst churches remain closed for public worship. For most churches, congregants failed to quickly adjust to digital giving. Loss of trading/rental income from groups using church properties for an uncertain period, with the risk that some may not return was also another major hurdle in financial collections. Fundraising events was also curtailed for a season, and there was also a loss of income from weddings and funerals whilst the churches remain closed.

The survey also found out that 45% of the pastors felt pressure over technological challenges mainly due to low living standard of their members. The low living standard in the High density of Glenview community is affecting many people to the extent that they find it difficult to have a personal computer or Internet-enabled devices not to talk of buying Internet data to access the Internet as their church pastors were trying to reach them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the respondents confessed that the low standard of living in the country is affecting them as well in making good use of the Internet in their ministry. Pressure from the impatient flock was cited by 25% of the respondents as some church members were losing patience and wanted to get on with normal life with little regard for the potential consequences.

The research found out that 15% of the pastors cited concern of whether all church members would return to church after lockdown. This catastrophe has unsurprisingly resulted in a substantial increase in workload for pastors and church leaders.

Findings under Objective 3. The third objective was to establish measures taken by church leaders to deal with the problems encountered during the implementation of their respective intervention strategies. The survey noted that church leaders responded differently depending on their background, social backing from family or friends, financial situation, health, sensitive background and the community around them. The survey noted that 57% of the church leaders turned to resource mobilisation appealing for help from both local and international donors. Most cited donors were UNICEF, Free Grace International, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Oxfam and Econet.

These were targeted because of their venerable operational involvement in answering to public health tragedies and previous epidemics like cholera, typhoid and Ebola. They were already responding to COVID-19 outbreak with support to the most susceptible people, particularly those in higher-risk surroundings such as refugee sites or packed urban areas. For instance, on 30 October 2020 UNICEF Zimbabwe and the World Health Organisation in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Child Care (MOHCC) jointly commemorated key days around Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH), in Budiriro Glenview, Harare (Kambarami, 2020).

To cope up with the challenge of network disruption, 46% of the pastors opted for pre-recorded messages than live streaming. Pre-recording gave them many more options for production, including flexibility with how the video is presented with the audience seeing the speaker and additional images simultaneously in some instances. It also increased quality to produced videos and audios as it allows more time for editing with sound design, music and animation.

The survey also noted that 33% of the church leaders turned to prayer as a therapy to stress and personal exhaustion. It was also noted that 15% of the church leaders used the lockdown period as an ideal opportunity to take vacation leave as they were not directly involved in the administration work of the church. The respondents argued that, period off work was central in preserving good spiritual and physical wellbeing. The above information can be presented in the graph in Figure 8 below.

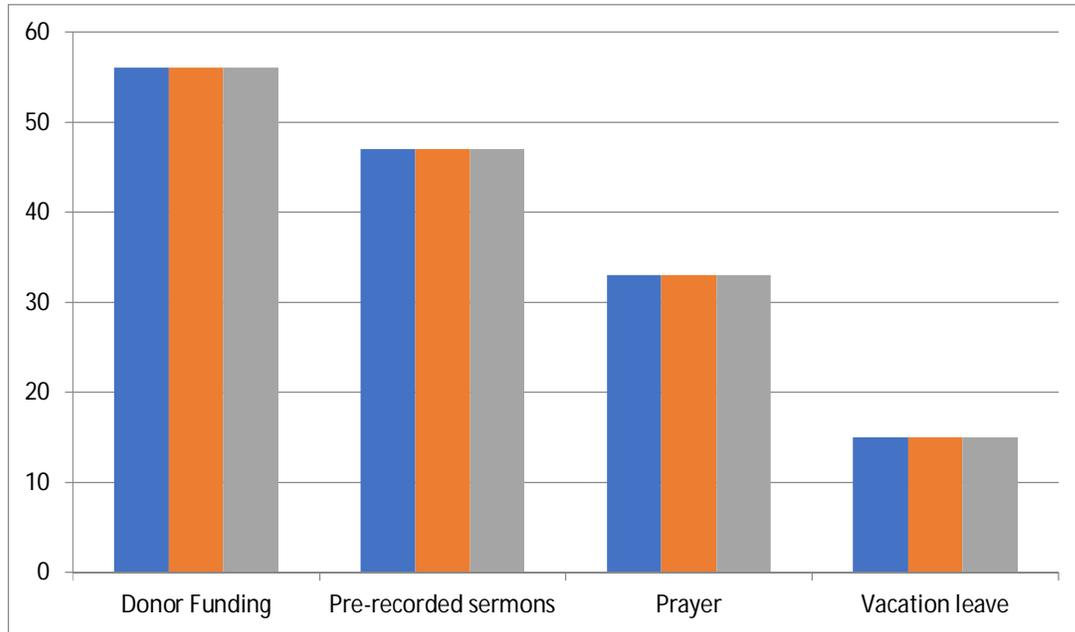


Figure 7: Coping during COVID-19 pandemic *Source: Primary Data*

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

According to the opinions of the respondents and the findings of this research church leadership intervention strategies implemented in Glenview community Harare during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period was effective as most of the objectives have been met. The success of the strategy could be attributed to the hard work and dedication of the pastors, support staff and church members who switched to social platforms and house churches. Churches have multiplied several offline and online initiatives to overcome the disturbance caused by the coronavirus.

It should be noted that internet ministry can never totally replace other aspects of the church ministry that are done physically. It can only be a supplementary means of ministry. Despite the many limitations that Internet ministry has in the Zimbabwean setting as identified in this research, the alternative ministry opportunity should be encouraged especially in this contemporary technology-driven world. Education of the church members and church leaders in information Technology is of the utmost importance and should be kept up and even increased to circumvent the challenges brought by the online church.

Recommendations

In the progression of finalizing this study, several apprehensions and ideas emerged. This might help denominations in disaster management, leadership training, sustainable church growth and lead to further research

Recommendation to church pastors.

- Each pastor should study the distinctiveness of his/her congregation and vicinity and fashion out how to answer to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in the framework of the uniqueness of his congregation and locality.
- Pastors should embrace the use of the Internet and other technical tools in their pastoral ministry.
- Churches should devote more in their multimedia ministry by drilling pastors on how to use numerous tools to improve the hypermedia ministry, and by training some church members to support the pastors and the church in the use of technological tools for ministry.
- Less weight should be placed on mega congregational gatherings while more importance should be placed on small groups in arrangements of cell churches, house fellowships and home fellowships.
- Less prominence should also be laid on erecting large auditoriums while more emphasis should be put on activities that builds the physical and spiritual lives of congregants.

Recommendations to Zimbabwean government.

- The government and Internet service providers should make Internet access available and cheaper for people. This will encourage more people to have access to the Internet.
- The government should improve the standard of living of people in both urban and rural settings. If this is done, people will be motivated to have Internet-enabled devices, buy Internet data to access the Internet, and be involved joyfully in Internet ministry.
- Internet service providers like Econet and Netone should upgrade their services and make Internet work more seamlessly.
- The problem of erratic power supply can be solved by replacement of aged equipment with new tested and of high-quality ones; proper and adequate maintenance of electrical power equipment, taking of strict and immediate action by anticorruption agencies to curb the problem of corruption and looting of funds meant for ZESA sector reform.

Recommendations to church members.

- To control distraction, one must determine to be focused during online worship services or any online church/spiritual programme by not allowing anything (including personal

technological tools) to distract one from the main purpose of being in that service/programme. It means one should be purposeful in the first instance.

- Internet literacy should be promoted especially among the older generation in the church. Capacitation of the unexperienced elderly is the most indispensable step to become conversant with new technologies. This can be accomplished through planned education curricula that teach elderly the way new technologies work.

Recommendations to Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ).

- The fellowship should raise awareness to the communities and mobilize churches to follow government announcements such as putting face masks, maintaining social distance, hand washing and temperature checks. Awareness workshops that target Pastors and churches in Harare should be regularly conducted.
- Virtual training should be facilitated for church leaders on COVID-19. Discussions on what churches can do to mitigate their members from the negative impact of the pandemic should be highly encouraged through EFZ platforms.
- EFZ should also develop communication materials that should be distributed via social media platforms.
- To come up with effective strategies and action plans, it is essential to meet people in positions of authority in government. There should be constant interface between EFZ and Minister July Moyo of the Local Government and Public Works to harmonise the working of churches in Glenview community. The government should be persuaded to consider pastoral service as an essential service to empower churches to help actively in the fight against COVID-19.

Recommendations for the review of leadership training curriculum.

- As the study found out that most churches are using shallow methods of training their lay leaders which mainly captures spiritual growth, the Zimbabwean churches are encouraged to review their leadership curriculum. The curriculum should involve in-depth study of administration, stewardship, leadership development and missions and disaster management.
- As the study found out that disaster management is a team effort, the researcher encourages the Zimbabwean churches to concentrate not just on training leaders but also on developing their capacity to train others. Frequently, pastors are trained well to do things themselves, but they are less equipped to train others.



Suggestions for further study

Based on the result of this study, the following are suggested for additional study:

- Managing the challenges of post-COVID-19 pandemic.
- Revisiting the cell church/house fellowship arrangement.
- Usefulness of multi-staff ministry in the contemporary world.
- There is need to study to what extent Internet ministry can be used to perform some ordinances of the church
- To what extent pastors can follow up on the people they are ministering to through the Internet compared to the people they are ministering to physically.
- The level which pandemics like COVID-19 intensify or diminish religious beliefs?

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