




Contemporary Pastoral Praxis: Addressing Structural Injustice in Nomzamo Park Informal Settlement, Soweto

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Abstract

This article examines contemporary pastoral praxis in addressing structural injustice within the Nomzamo Park informal settlement in Soweto, South Africa, contributing to the contextualization of practical theology and pastoral care in the African context. Nomzamo Park, which is characterized by its socio-economic challenges and systemic inequalities, serves as a focal point for exploring how pastoral care can effectively respond to the needs of marginalized communities. The study highlights the intersection of faith and social justice, emphasizing the role of the church in advocating for structural change and providing holistic support to residents. Utilizing a practical theological framework, the research draws on qualitative data from interviews and participant observations, revealing the lived experiences of community members and their interactions with pastoral initiatives.

The findings suggest that effective pastoral praxis in Nomzamo Park involves a critical engagement with social issues, fostering community resilience, and promoting advocacy for justice. Pastoral care is re-envisioned not merely as spiritual support but as an active, transformative presence addressing poverty, housing insecurity, and other systemic injustices. This approach aligns with the broader objectives of Practical Theology, which seeks to integrate theological reflection with practical action in real-world contexts. Moreover, this article underscores the importance of culturally sensitive pastoral strategies that resonate with the unique experiences and needs of African communities. It argues for a praxis that is both contextually relevant and theologically sound, advocating for the church's role in spearheading initiatives that challenge oppressive structures while nurturing the spiritual and material well-being of individuals. In conclusion, this article calls for an expanded understanding of pastoral care that embraces social justice as a core component, thereby enriching the discourse on Practical Theology in the African context and offering insights for similar settings globally.

Keywords: Pastoral praxis, socio-political theology, structural injustice, informal settlements.

Introduction

Informal settlements are spontaneous, popular and complex neighbourhoods offering an immediate response to housing needs (Mndzebele & Gumbo, 2024: 242). They are characterized by being unplanned, densely populated, and having complex structures. The location of these settlements is crucial, as it greatly influences the socio-economic activities and interactions within the community. In essence, informal settlements play a significant role in shaping the overall social and economic landscape of the areas they exist in.



In the South African context, informal settlements are a direct consequence of apartheid policies, which displaced millions of individuals and entrenched socio-economic disparities (Terreblanche, 2002). These settlements stand as stark reminders of the enduring struggle for dignity and equality. Thus, addressing structural injustice in South Africa necessitates a thorough examination of its historical and systemic origins. The convergence of socio-political theology and pastoral praxis offers a transformative framework for confronting and transcending these injustices. Over the last three decades, the South African government has made efforts to improve living conditions in informal settlements, focusing on upgrading, housing provision, infrastructure development, and legal rights. However, the challenges of rapid urbanization, resource constraints, and implementation delays continue to complicate these efforts.

Socio-political theology, with its emphasis on justice and liberation, explores the theological underpinnings of societal structures, scrutinizing power dynamics and advocating for systemic change (Maluleke, 2018). This field provides a critical lens for understanding how theological principles can inform and challenge societal structures to promote justice. Meanwhile, pastoral praxis represents the compassionate response of faith communities, offering solace, solidarity, and empowerment to individuals navigating the complexities of injustice (Vellem, 2016). By integrating these two perspectives, a holistic approach emerges, one that not only addresses immediate needs but also engages in the broader struggle for social transformation.

The insights of other esteemed African scholars, such as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2003), Mamphela Ramphele (2008), and Kwame Bediako (1992), further enrich this discourse. Their scholarship delves into justice, reconciliation, and social change within the African context, providing valuable perspectives on the multifaceted challenges faced by communities in informal settlements. Gobodo-Madikizela's work on trauma and reconciliation, Ramphele's focus on health and social justice, and Bediako's exploration of African Christianity's role in social transformation collectively enhance our understanding of these issues. Engaging with the rich insights of these scholars allows us to deepen our comprehension of the complex realities within South African informal settlements. It also encourages the exploration of innovative theological and pastoral approaches aimed at addressing systemic injustices. By integrating socio-political theology with compassionate pastoral praxis, we can foster pathways towards liberation and healing, effectively responding to both the immediate and systemic needs of these communities (Ramphele, 2008:112). This integrated approach not only amplifies the impact of each discipline but also provides a more comprehensive framework for achieving justice and transformative change.

Contextual Analysis: Nomzamo Informal Settlement

Nomzamo Park, the densely populated informal settlement in Orlando East, Soweto, was established in 1990 and named in honour of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, born Nomzamo Winifred (Gilili, 2023). It was established by people who left Johannesburg hostels after being displaced by political violence between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the early 1990s. In 1994, the South African Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was initiated to provide subsidised housing for low-income families (Wilcox *et al*, 2024). This programme aimed to redress the imbalances of the apartheid legacy by providing decent housing to poor people who were victims of the land segregation policies of the apartheid government. Notwithstanding the government interventions of building RDP houses in Nomzamo, this area is still relatively informal. Nomzamo is still plagued by several prevalent structural injustices such as alcohol abuse, poverty, lack of basic services, housing issues, marginalization, crime, etc. imputable to the systematic legacy of apartheid. As a result of these challenges many residents of Nomzamo live in a perpetual state of despair with alcohol and drugs being the preferred anaesthetics to numb the sickening hopelessness. The challenge of alcohol and drugs abuse in Nomzamo in



the main affects young people between the ages of 13–24, substance abuse among this group has reached pandemic proportions. Many young people have given up hope of ever having a better life.

In Nomzamo and its adjacent areas, few churches, such as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal denominations, a play a role in providing support to the community during times of hardship and adversity. However, an essential inquiry arises: to what extent do these churches engage in contemporary pastoral care practices to confront and address the structural injustices prevalent within the Nomzamo informal settlement? The case study below of the deadly tavern mass shooting in Nomzamo that took place in July 2022, accentuate the dire systematic challenges that are pervasive on the ground. Nomzamo Park is not a unique community in South Africa, since it shares a lot of similarities with other informal settlements, townships, and villages whose youth are affected by alcohol and drug abuse.

Case Study – The Nomzamo Shebeen Shooting

Nomzamo Park, a community grappling with severe poverty and despair, is characterized by its bustling streets, especially on weekdays when young people are the most visible. Many of these youths seek refuge in local taverns, using alcohol to numb their pain. Tragically, on July 11, 2022, Nomzamo Park was struck by a devastating incident: a violent attack at Mdlalose’s Tavern left 15 people dead. This horrific event not only caused physical injuries but also left emotional scars on many residents, with ongoing claims that insufficient action has been taken to address the aftermath (Gili, 2023).

This case study explores the aftermath of the attack, focusing on the application of pastoral care, and counselling within the Nomzamo Park informal settlement. According to Buffel (2021:179), citing Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout, a case study is “a thick and detailed description of a social phenomenon that exists in a real-world context.” The residents of Nomzamo Park experienced profound trauma, compounded by the fact that minors witnessed the attack. Some victims’ families are either non-South African or reside in other parts of the country, leading to additional challenges, such as children losing their parents.

As highlighted by Nanthambwe (2024:1), pastoral care has been central to the mission of the church since its inception. Given its importance, it is crucial to examine what specific actions the church in Nomzamo is taking to provide pastoral care in this context. In particular, how is pastoral care being utilized to address grief, post-traumatic stress, and the loss of parents, spouses, and other significant family members? The incident in Nomzamo has raised questions about the effectiveness of local church interventions in such crises. It serves as a critical case for evaluating the role and impact of pastoral care in addressing community trauma.

The situation in Nomzamo Park highlights a broader issue: the apparent neglect of impoverished communities by both politicians and churches. Despite their missional nature and pastoral responsibilities, churches often seem indifferent to the plight of these communities, especially regarding the eradication of embedded social injustices (Buffel, 2021:181). This case study underscores the need for a more engaged and effective pastoral response to address both immediate needs and long-term healing within such communities.

Structural Injustice and Pastoral Care: A Theoretical Exposition

Structural injustice in the African context presents a multi-faceted challenge that calls for a theological reflection and action. This section of the article explores how theological perspectives can illuminate and address systematic injustices prevalent in African



communities. Structural injustice refers to systematic inequalities embedded within socio-economic, and political structures.

To understand the relevance of these experiences to theology, we can draw on the insights of the influential theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. He powerfully articulates the complexities of poverty, stating:

“But the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. His or her existence is not politically neutral and is not ethically innocent. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalised by our social and cultural world. They are oppressed, exploited proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labour and despoiled of their humanity. Hence the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order” (Gutiérrez, 1971:15)

Understanding structural injustice through a theological lens compels us to recognize the interconnectedness of faith and social responsibility. Gutiérrez’s assertion that poverty is not an isolated issue but rather a consequence of systemic inequities challenges us to reflect on our roles within these structures. It prompts a critical examination of how our beliefs inform our actions and responsibilities toward marginalized communities. The call to build a different social order is not merely theoretical; it requires active engagement and a commitment to dismantling the systems that perpetuate injustice. This understanding paves the way for deeper theological inquiry and action, urging us to consider how our faith can be a catalyst for change in addressing the root causes of inequality.

Heitink (1999) offers a framework for understanding pastoral praxis through historical and theoretical perspectives. He advocates for a practical theology that integrates insights from historical injustices with contemporary issues, emphasizing the need for pastoral actions that are both theoretically grounded and responsive to the evolving needs of communities like Nomzamo. In the African context, structural injustices are often rooted in the legacies of colonization, exploitation, and marginalization, manifesting as poverty, corruption, ethnic conflicts, and unequal access to resources. A robust pastoral praxis must therefore draw on historical and theoretical insights into justice and inequality. By grounding pastoral care in these perspectives, it can more effectively address both historical grievances and current challenges, ensuring that actions are both informed and impactful.

From a theological standpoint, the concept of justice lies at the heart of many religious traditions, including Christianity and indigenous African religions. However, complexities arise when interpreting what "justice" entails, especially when it intersects with interfaith dynamics, cultural differences, and historical contexts. The Bible and oral traditions often emphasize the importance of justice, fairness and compassion for the marginalised and oppressed (Micah 6:8, Isaiah 1:17). It upholds the inherent worth of every individual as created in God's image. Indigenous African religions frequently emphasize communal harmony and justice as a restorative, rather than punitive, concept, aiming to repair broken relationships and societal balance. Establishing a conceptual framework for pastoral care becomes pivotal in framing the discourse on contemporary pastoral praxis aimed at tackling social injustices within the African context. To establish a contemporary pastoral praxis that will address various social injustices alluded to above, it is important for that intervention to conform to the theological tenets of *Imago Dei*, *Prophetic Tradition*, and *Ubuntu*. These tenets are core values or axioms that serve as the foundation for any pastoral care intervention. These tenets are often used to describe the essential convictions in religious, philosophical, or ideological contexts. In exploring these theological tenets as a basis for pastoral care in Africa, we uncover a profound interconnectedness that speaks to the heart of practical ministry.



Theological Tenets and Practical Action in Pastoral Care

a) *Imago Dei*:

The concept of *Imago Dei*, or the image of God, encompasses profound implications for understanding human dignity, suffering, and resilience. Theological insights from Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Karl Barth, and Desmond Tutu offer a comprehensive view of *Imago Dei* and its relevance to pastoral care.

Thomas Aquinas posits that being made in the image of God involves rationality, free will, and moral reasoning. These qualities reflect God's nature and underscore the inherent dignity of humanity, even in the face of suffering. Aquinas's perspective highlights that human dignity persists through our rational and moral capacities, providing a foundation for pastoral care that values human worth regardless of external afflictions (Schoot, 2020).

St. Augustine builds on this by emphasizing the relational aspect of *Imago Dei*. Augustine views the divine image as reflected in humanity's capacity to connect with God and embody moral virtues. This relational dimension suggests that human dignity is both individual and communal, shaped by our interactions with others and with God. Pastoral care, therefore, should foster solidarity and compassion, affirming human dignity through acts of love and empathy, especially in contexts of suffering (Sullivan, 2021).

Karl Barth offers a Christocentric perspective, presenting Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God. Barth asserts that humanity's true reflection of the divine image is found in Christ's redemptive work, which restores and transforms our broken image. In the midst of suffering, Barth's theology encourages seeing suffering as an opportunity for God's transformative grace, reaffirming human dignity through faith and redemption (Robinson, 2011).

Desmond Tutu, drawing from his experiences with apartheid, expands the discussion to include social justice and liberation theology. Tutu argues that *Imago Dei* affirms the dignity and rights of all individuals, especially the marginalized and oppressed. His perspective highlights the prophetic role of *Imago Dei* in challenging systemic injustices and advocating for human rights, emphasizing that the image of God calls for justice and solidarity in the face of adversity (Tutu, 2006).

These perspectives collectively offer a nuanced understanding of *Imago Dei* that integrates theological, philosophical, and practical dimensions of human dignity and resilience. Theological reflections from Aquinas and Augustine emphasize intrinsic and relational aspects of *Imago Dei*, grounding human dignity in rationality, virtue, and communal solidarity. Barth's approach presents *Imago Dei* as continuously redeemed through Christ, while Tutu's advocacy underscores the active role of *Imago Dei* in promoting justice.

This theological principle aligns with the biblical mandate to seek justice and defend the oppressed. Proverbs 14:13 (NIV) reinforces this connection, stating: "*Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*" This verse emphasizes the link between mistreatment of the oppressed and disrespect towards God, urging compassion and justice for those in need.

In pastoral care, *Imago Dei* calls for practical actions that embody compassion, justice, and solidarity. By integrating these theological insights, pastoral care can more effectively address systemic injustices and support the dignity and well-being of individuals and communities.

b) *Prophetic Tradition*

The prophetic tradition has historically been a powerful force for shaping societal values, challenging authority, and advocating for justice. Biblical prophets like Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, as well as contemporary figures such as Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, have been



instrumental in calling their communities to account and envisioning a more just and equitable future. Their role was not only to deliver messages of divine will but also to engage actively in addressing social injustices and advocating for transformation.

Jeremiah Cataldo highlights that the teachings of biblical prophets extend beyond mere predictions of future events. They primarily addressed the societal and political issues of their own time, urging their communities to confront injustice and advocate for the marginalized. Cataldo argues that these prophetic messages serve as urgent reminders to engage actively with the plight of the oppressed, promoting meaningful dialogue and action (Cataldo, 2022).

In contemporary contexts, the prophetic tradition remains highly relevant. It involves a dual approach: the prophetic voice and the call to action. The prophetic voice, as defined by Walter Brueggemann, is a public address that critiques prevailing power structures and encourages communities to envision alternative futures (Brueggemann, 2001). This voice challenges settled assumptions and energizes people to seek justice and change.

Several African scholars have expanded our understanding of this tradition, particularly in relation to social justice and liberation theology. Allan Boesak, a noted South African theologian and anti-apartheid activist, argues that the prophetic call involves not only speaking truth to power but also engaging in practical efforts to dismantle oppressive systems (Boesak, 1984). Similarly, Desmond Tutu's concept of '*ubuntu*', which emphasizes human interconnectedness and solidarity, reinforces the importance of collective action in addressing societal injustices (Tutu, 1999). In South Africa, the prophetic tradition manifested through nonviolent resistance, grassroots organizing, and advocacy for political change, with figures like Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, and Albertina Sisulu exemplifying the fusion of prophetic voice and practical action in the struggle against apartheid.

Today, South African scholars and activists, such as Allan Boesak, Desmond Tutu, Tinyiko Maluleke, continue to draw on the prophetic tradition to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and racial discrimination. By combining rigorous social analysis with a commitment to transformative action, they embody the prophetic call to justice and liberation, inspiring ongoing efforts to confront systemic injustices.

The prophetic tradition encompasses both the critique of injustice and the mobilization of communities to effect change. The integration of the prophetic voice with practical action provides a comprehensive approach to addressing systemic injustices and promoting human dignity. By aligning theological insights with concrete efforts, pastoral care and activism can more effectively challenge oppression and foster social transformation.

c) *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu, an African philosophical concept, often translated as "*I am because we are*", emphasises the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of communal solidarity (Ramose, 2017). This concept underlines the theological imperative to work towards the common good and promote justice and reconciliation within society.

In essence then

"A community is realised through individual people who collect together. In this arrangement, people are communal entities and have social interactions with others with whom they are linked culturally and share common interests, values and even objectives. In such a community, the individuals share a range of emotive attachments and are willing to stand together to defend the common interest. (Nicolaidis, 2022: 7)



Ubuntu reflects a theology of solidarity, compassion, and mutual responsibility, emulating the teachings of Jesus Christ. The principles of ubuntu resonate with values of human worth and dignity that are universally acknowledged (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021:10; Mangena, 2016; Nicolaidis, 2022). According to Magezi and Khlopa (2021: 22), pastoral care ministry entails being metaphorically God to people through embodying the characteristics of God, i.e., being under shepherds and representatives of God in the world. Magezi and Khlopa (2021: 23) posit, ubuntu is the ministry of presence and supporting others, drawing insights from African ubuntu traditions. Thus, the ubuntu approach can help meet pastoral care needs by drawing on the wisdom and resources of African indigenous philosophies. Ubuntu is a highly plausible African moral theory and is compatible with many ethical theories including the common good approach, the utilitarian approach, the rights ethical or deontological approach, the justice or fairness approach and the virtue approach (Nicolaidis, 2022: 3; Gyekye, 2010).

Ubuntu-inspired pastoral care advocates for pastors to actively address systemic injustices and for social change (Ngewa, 2017). Collaboration with local organizations, participation in community initiatives, and empowering congregants to become agents of transformation are integral aspects of this approach. Furthermore, Ubuntu informs pastoral care practices related to restorative justice, emphasizing processes of healing and reconciliation both within congregations and in wider society (Tutu, 1999). Pastors facilitate spaces for dialogue, forgiveness, and restitution, guiding individuals and communities towards wholeness and reconciliation. In addition, Ubuntu-inspired pastoral praxis embraces holistic care, recognizing the interconnectedness of spiritual, physical, emotional, and social dimensions of well-being (Mosala, 1989). Pastors provide comprehensive support to individuals facing challenges such as poverty, illness, or trauma, addressing their needs in a holistic manner. Finally, Ubuntu encourages pastors to engage in dialogue with practitioners of other faith traditions, fostering mutual understanding, solidarity, and cooperation (Hlongwane, 2014). By recognizing the shared humanity and spiritual values that unite diverse communities, pastors contribute to the promotion of peace, justice, and reconciliation in society.

By embracing Ubuntu as a theological tenet, pastoral caregivers enrich their praxis with principles of solidarity, compassion, and communal responsibility, contributing to the flourishing of individuals and communities and embodying the transformative power of Ubuntu in their ministries and beyond.

In conclusion, the importance of a well-defined pastoral care framework becomes increasingly clear when considering theological principles. Understanding and defining pastoral care within the African context is essential for addressing contemporary societal challenges and fostering transformative actions that offer hope and healing to those affected by structural injustices. Ricoeur (1992) emphasizes that addressing structural injustice requires a deep understanding of the narratives and identities of those impacted. He advocates for a pastoral praxis which promotes reflection and action that is concerned with the dire human condition and the search for, justice that respects and incorporates these personal and communal narratives, informing practices that tackle both immediate and systemic issues. By engaging with these narratives, pastoral praxis in Nomzamo can develop interventions that are sensitive and responsive to the community's needs, leading to more meaningful and transformative outcomes.

Although some view definitions of pastoral care as redundant, assuming an inherent understanding of the concept (Pattison, 2000: 5), Buffel (2004: 38) argues that articulating its meaning remains crucial despite the challenges. Berinyuu (1988: 4) notes that the concept of pastoral care existed in Africa before the introduction of Western Christianity. Despite this historical foundation, the development of pastoral care in Africa has progressed more slowly compared to Western contexts, which may contribute to its limited practical application. The assumption that pastoral care in Africa has progressed more slowly than in Western contexts stems from the unique historical, cultural, and institutional factors shaping its development. Historically, Western pastoral care evolved through centuries of structured theological



education influenced by movements such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment (Lartey, 2006). In contrast, Africa's pastoral care has been shaped by colonialism, missionary efforts, and indigenous care systems, which were often undervalued or marginalized (Mugambi, 2003). African pastoral care, rooted in communal and holistic traditions, frequently differs from Western models and may not align with formalized theological frameworks, leading to perceptions of underdevelopment (Waruta & Kinoti, 2000). Additionally, the reliance on Western paradigms in African theological education has sometimes constrained the contextualization of pastoral care to address Africa's distinct challenges, such as communal trauma, socio-political instability, and post-colonial struggles (Magesa, 1997). The limited documentation of informal and indigenous caregiving practices has further contributed to the belief that pastoral care in Africa lacks practical application (Lartey, 2006). However, these perceptions overlook the rich and resilient traditions of care in Africa, including the integration of faith-based approaches with concepts like reconciliation, *ubuntu*, and communal healing. By recognizing these contributions and addressing structural barriers, the distinct and transformative potential of African pastoral care can be fully appreciated (Mugambi, 2003).

A Biblical Exploration of Pastoral Care

In the ancient text of the Bible, narratives vividly illustrate the interplay between structural injustice and the divine call for pastoral care. These stories not only portray the harsh realities of oppression but also offer profound insights into the compassionate response required from individuals and communities. Let us embark on a theoretical exposition, drawing from biblical narratives that resonate with the complexities of contemporary structural injustices.

a) The Exodus Narrative: Liberation from Bondage

The Exodus narrative unfolds against the backdrop of systemic oppression inflicted upon the Israelites in Egypt. Pharaoh's regime embodies structural injustice, as the Israelites endure forced labour and brutality. In this context, Moses emerges as a pastoral figure, called by God to confront Pharaoh and lead the oppressed people to freedom (Exodus 3:7-10). Through divine intervention and human agency, the Israelites experience liberation from bondage. This narrative underscores the importance of solidarity in the face of systemic oppression. Pastoral care, in this context, involves standing with the marginalized, advocating for their rights, and facilitating their journey toward liberation.

b) The Prophetic Call: Speaking Truth to Power

The prophetic tradition in the Bible exemplifies courageous voices that challenge structural injustice. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos confront rulers and institutions perpetuating inequality and exploitation. Their message is one of divine judgment upon unjust systems and a call for repentance and societal transformation (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Amos 5:24). Pastoral care in the prophetic tradition involves speaking truth to power, denouncing injustice, and offering hope for a renewed future. Prophets serve as instruments of divine compassion, guiding communities toward justice and righteousness.

c) The Parable of the Good Samaritan: Compassion Across Boundaries

In the New Testament, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan embodies the essence of pastoral care in the face of structural injustice. Set against the backdrop of ethnic and religious tensions, the Samaritan defies societal norms to care for a wounded stranger, transcending boundaries of prejudice and discrimination (Luke 10:25-37). This parable challenges individuals and communities to cultivate compassion and solidarity across societal divides. Pastoral care, in this context, involves recognizing the humanity of the marginalized, extending practical assistance, and advocating for systemic change to address root causes of injustice.

In conclusion, biblical narratives offer profound insights into the dynamics of structural injustice and pastoral care. They call upon individuals and communities to embody divine compassion, confront oppressive systems, and work towards a world characterized by justice, equity, and



solidarity (Bosch, 2010; Brueggemann, 2014). As communities like Nomzamo Park navigate the complexities of contemporary society, may these narratives inspire pastoral praxis to be agents of transformation, bringing hope and healing to those affected by structural injustice.

Methodology

This article employs a comprehensive literature search methodology, grounded in the analysis of previous relevant articles. The literature review serves as the foundational framework for the research, providing context and depth to the investigation. As Zed (2004) articulates, a literature review is essential for establishing a research framework, enabling the identification of key themes, gaps, and perspectives within existing scholarship. The review draws from a wide array of reference materials, ensuring that the research is built on a robust and diverse base of academic and empirical sources.

The literature search involved systematic identification and evaluation of scholarly articles, books, and other pertinent documents related to the topic. This approach facilitated the extraction of relevant data and insights, forming the cornerstone of the research activities. By synthesizing information from these reference materials, the article aims to present a well-rounded and informed analysis, contributing to the ongoing discourse in the field and addressing structural injustices with a solid theoretical and empirical foundation (Zed, 2004).

Relational and Contextual Approaches in Pastoral Praxis

According to Gerkin (1997), effective pastoral praxis hinges on establishing deep, empathetic connections with individuals and communities. He emphasizes the significance of relational and practical dimensions in pastoral care, especially within informal settlements. This relational approach is crucial for understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by community members. Pastoral care in such contexts must go beyond mere provision of immediate support to also advocate for systemic social change. By building strong, trusting relationships, pastoral caregivers can more accurately assess and address both urgent needs and broader social inequities. This approach ensures that pastoral care is both responsive and transformative, providing immediate relief while also challenging and seeking to remedy structural injustices.

Browning (1991) complements this view by highlighting the necessity of integrating theological reflection with practical action. Browning argues that practical theology must address not only the immediate pastoral needs of individuals but also engage with the broader socio-political landscape. In the case of Nomzamo, Browning's approach would advocate for a pastoral praxis that not only meets individual needs but also actively confronts and seeks to rectify systemic injustices. This integration of theological insights with practical strategies ensures that pastoral care is both spiritually grounded and socially impactful. Browning's framework underscores the importance of a holistic approach that combines immediate support with long-term efforts to address and transform the structural issues affecting the community.

Gadamer (1975) introduces a hermeneutic perspective, emphasizing that understanding and addressing structural injustices require a nuanced interpretation of the community's socio-political and cultural context. Gadamer argues that effective pastoral praxis involves dialogical engagement with community members to uncover and address underlying structural issues. This interpretative approach ensures that pastoral interventions are not only contextually relevant but also sensitive to the lived experiences of the community. By engaging in a hermeneutic process, pastoral caregivers can develop more precise and effective strategies for addressing systemic problems, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of their interventions.



The integration of relational, theological, and hermeneutic approaches in pastoral praxis offers a holistic framework for addressing the complex needs of individuals and communities. Relationally, it emphasizes empathy and connection, supported by theological concepts like *imago Dei* and psychological insights into healing (Browning, 1991; Lartey, 2003). Theologically, it draws on doctrinal foundations to guide ethical action, as argued by Browning (1991). Hermeneutically, it stresses the importance of contextualized interpretation, informed by the work of Lartey (2003) and Ricoeur (1981). Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive way to navigate the complexities of pastoral care, ensuring that it is both spiritually grounded and contextually relevant. The relational aspect ensures that care is grounded in trust and empathy, enabling caregivers to address immediate needs effectively. The theological integration provides a foundation for confronting systemic injustices and promoting transformative change. The hermeneutic approach ensures that interventions are contextually informed and responsive to the community's unique circumstances. Together, these dimensions create a multifaceted pastoral praxis that not only supports individuals in their immediate struggles but also actively engages in challenging and changing the structural conditions that perpetuate injustice.

In my argument, the combination of these approaches offers a robust model for pastoral care that is both compassionate and impactful. By integrating strong relational connections, theological reflection, and hermeneutic interpretation, pastoral caregivers can deliver care that is empathetic, contextually relevant, and socially transformative. This comprehensive approach is essential for effectively addressing the complex realities of informal settlements and working towards long-term social justice.

Pastoral Response to Structural Injustice

Pastoral care and ministry are pivotal in addressing structural injustices, especially within marginalized communities in African informal settlements. These roles encompass advocacy, empowerment, and the provision of holistic support, fostering social justice and community well-being. Hendriks (2004) argues that for pastoral praxis to be genuinely effective in African contexts, it must address structural injustices through community-based approaches and highlight the role of local religious leaders in driving social change. In African informal settlements, such as those in Nomzamo, pastoral care must be deeply attuned to local realities. This requires understanding the specific challenges faced by these communities and developing culturally and contextually appropriate strategies. Local religious leaders are pivotal in advocating for social justice and mobilizing community action. They raise awareness about the root causes of structural injustices—such as poverty, discrimination, and inadequate access to essential services—by leveraging religious teachings and moral principles to emphasize justice and equity (Magesa, 2014). Additionally, pastoral leaders engage in policy advocacy, collaborating with policymakers to promote legislation that addresses the needs of marginalized communities, including improvements in housing, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities (Taylor, 2018).

Empowerment and capacity building are also crucial aspects of pastoral care. This involves providing educational programs and vocational training to enhance skills and increase employment opportunities, helping individuals break the cycle of poverty and improve their socio-economic status (Awuah & Hammond, 2014). Pastoral care includes leadership development, identifying and nurturing local leaders who can advocate for their communities and drive sustainable development from within. This includes offering training in leadership, community organizing, and advocacy (Ochola, 2013).

Heyns and Pieterse (1990) underscore the importance of integrating theory and practice in pastoral care. They assert that pastoral praxis in communities like Nomzamo should merge theological reflection with practical strategies to address social injustices, advocating for a holistic approach that encompasses advocacy, community engagement, and comprehensive



support. This approach is essential for meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals while enhancing overall community well-being. By combining theological insights with practical interventions, pastoral care can effectively address both immediate and systemic issues, ensuring that support is both empathetic and impactful. Pastoral care provides spiritual guidance and counselling, helping individuals navigate the challenges of marginalized conditions and fostering resilience and hope (Gathogo, 2007). Additionally, pastoral leaders play a crucial role in facilitating access to health and social services, either directly or through partnerships with other organizations, to ensure that community members receive the necessary care and support (Kessler, 2016).

Pastoral care also fosters a sense of community and solidarity, essential for collective action against structural injustices. Engaging community members in dialogue and decision-making processes ensures that interventions are community-driven and address the real needs of the population (Smit & Hancock, 2019). Promoting a culture of solidarity and mutual support within the community helps build strong social networks that can mobilize resources and support collective efforts to address structural issues (Hope, 2017).

The role of pastoral care and ministry in addressing structural injustices is multifaceted, involving advocacy, empowerment, holistic support, and community building. By leveraging their unique position and resources, pastoral leaders can significantly contribute to the fight against structural inequalities and the promotion of social justice in marginalized communities.

In the face of pervasive structural injustices within African informal settlements such as Nomzamo Park, pastoral praxis offers a robust framework for holistic intervention and empowerment. One such strategic framework is the '*INA Three-Pronged Approach*' — Identification, Nurturing, and Assimilation (Mahlangu, 2022). This approach can be instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by communities in these settlements. Here is how the INA framework can be applied in this context:

1. *Identification*: The first step in addressing structural injustices is to identify the root causes and the individuals most affected. In the context of pastoral praxis, this involves:
 - *Community Engagement*: Actively engaging with community members to understand their lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations. This can be achieved through participatory meetings, focus groups, and surveys (Magesa, 2014).
 - *Needs Assessment*: Conducting comprehensive assessments to identify the specific needs of the community, such as access to clean water, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Kessler, 2016).
 - *Mapping Resources and Gaps*: Identifying existing resources within the community and gaps that need to be addressed. This includes physical resources, such as infrastructure, and human resources, such as local leaders and skilled individuals (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2020).
 - *Vulnerability Analysis*: Focusing on the most vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, to ensure that interventions are inclusive and equitable (Smit & Hancock, 2019).
2. *Nurturing*: Once the needs and resources have been identified, the next step is to nurture the community's potential through capacity building and empowerment. Pastoral praxis can facilitate this through:



- *Education and Skill Development:* Providing educational programs and vocational training to enhance the skills and knowledge of community members. This empowers them to pursue better employment opportunities and improve their livelihoods (Awuah & Hammond, 2014).
 - *Leadership Development:* Identifying and nurturing local leaders who can advocate for their communities and drive change from within. This includes training in leadership, advocacy, and community organizing (Ochola, 2013).
 - *Spiritual and Moral Support:* Offering spiritual guidance and moral support to strengthen the community's resilience and sense of solidarity. Faith-based initiatives can play a crucial role in fostering hope and unity (Gathogo, 2007).
 - *Economic Empowerment:* Supporting small-scale enterprises and cooperative initiatives to promote economic self-reliance. This can involve microfinance programs, entrepreneurship training, and market access support (Collins & Fakim, 2015).
3. *Assimilation:* The final step is to integrate the nurtured talents and resources into the broader societal framework to ensure sustainable development and systemic change. In the context of informal settlements, this involves:
- *Policy Advocacy:* Working with local and national governments to advocate for policies that address structural injustices and promote equitable development. This includes advocating for land rights, improved infrastructure, and social services (Taylor, 2018).
 - *Community Integration:* Facilitating the integration of informal settlements into the formal urban framework. This can involve upgrading housing, improving infrastructure, and ensuring access to basic services (UN-Habitat, 2020).
 - *Sustainable Practices:* Promoting sustainable practices that ensure long-term community development. This includes environmental stewardship, sustainable livelihoods, and community-led planning (Baffoe, 2020).
 - *Monitoring and Evaluation:* Continuously monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions to ensure they are meeting the community's needs and addressing structural injustices effectively. This involves feedback loops with community members to adapt and improve strategies (Hope, 2017).

The INA Three-Pronged Approach—Identification, Nurturing, and Assimilation—provides a comprehensive framework for addressing structural injustices within African informal settlements through pastoral praxis. By actively engaging with communities, building their capacity, and integrating them into the broader societal framework, this approach fosters sustainable development and social justice. Pastoral leaders and practitioners can play a pivotal role in this transformative process, ensuring that marginalized communities are empowered, and their voices are heard in the pursuit of equitable and just societies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the transformative potential of contemporary pastoral praxis in Nomzamo Park, Soweto, where systemic issues such as poverty and housing insecurity profoundly impact the community. The research demonstrates that integrating theological reflection with practical action allows pastoral care to extend beyond traditional spiritual



support, actively engaging with and addressing these structural injustices. Utilizing qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observations, the study underscores the effectiveness of culturally sensitive pastoral strategies in building community resilience and advocating for justice.

Addressing structural injustice in Nomzamo through contemporary pastoral praxis requires a multifaceted approach. This approach should integrate theological insights with practical actions, engage meaningfully with the community, build relational trust, and consider historical and theoretical perspectives. By aligning pastoral care with these principles, it is possible to achieve both immediate relief and long-term social transformation. The findings reveal the crucial role of the church in advocating for systemic change and providing holistic support to marginalized communities. This approach not only adheres to the principles of Practical Theology but also emphasizes the need for contextually relevant strategies that align with the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of African communities. By expanding pastoral praxis to include both spiritual nurture and social action, the research enhances our understanding of how churches can effectively address complex issues of injustice. Moreover, the study suggests that successful pastoral praxis requires continuous collaboration with community members, local organizations, and policymakers to foster sustainable change. By amplifying marginalized voices and promoting inclusive dialogue, pastoral caregivers can play a key role in advocating for policies that tackle the root causes of inequality.

Overall, this research enriches the discourse on Practical Theology within the African context and provides valuable insights for global pastoral practices. It advocates for a renewed commitment to social justice in pastoral care, encouraging practitioners to explore innovative approaches that empower communities and challenge oppressive structures. Embracing a holistic and inclusive approach will enable pastoral caregivers to make a significant impact on the well-being and resilience of marginalized populations in Soweto and beyond.

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