



# The pastoral presence in absence: Challenges and opportunities of pastoral care in the context of the global Coronavirus pandemic

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## Abstract

The role of the pastor is shepherding. With his/her presence the pastor becomes a companion and leader of the Christian church. The advent of the coronavirus has provided a myriad of challenges for pastoral care and presence. These challenges have come because of the closure of chapels and church meetings due to the introduction of lockdown that include the banning of religious gatherings. Lack of pastoral encounters has left families and congregations with many questions about their life as a church. This paper discusses these challenges including pastoral care in the form of contact church services, and pastoral presence in times of crises COVID 19 pandemic. It also argues that despite the challenges, the pandemic has provided opportunities for the transformation of the church and pastoral care approaches. It will conclude by suggesting turning some of the challenges into opportunities and maintaining some of the avenues of pastoral presence used during the pandemic to promote pastoral ministry in future. The paper advocates for the adoption and use of a variety of media platforms for pastoral care as a way of promoting pastoral presence in pastoral absence.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus, COVID 19, church, Pastoral presence, lockdown, challenges, opportunities.

## Introduction

The Coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan in China where it affected many and killed others. It is believed to have started late 2019 hence named the COVID 19. By February 2020 the disease spread across the world and affected Europe and USA where it ended up killing over a thousand people per day. It became more threatening that majority of the countries like South Africa banned international travels, and then local travels and the introduction of strict national lockdown regulations. In South Africa the first COVID 19 case was in the Hilton suburbs in Pietermaritzburg. It was a man who had travelled from Italy on 1 March 2019 and other cases became the members who had travelled with him in the same plane. The South African government introduced national lockdown on 26 March to 16 April 2020, when the number of infected cases was 62. All industries, schools and shops that do not sell groceries were shut down. Places of worship including chapels were not spared and this left the pastors in difficult situations thinking about ways of being a church and pastoral presence for adherents. Only those in essential services such as the Health Department and pharmacy and those involved in the production and distribution of food were severely impacted. It also included the prevention of aircraft landing at South African airports, docking of vessels at harbours and the closure of most borders with neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Despite the lockdown the number of new cases and deaths



increased leading to the extension of the lockdown with two weeks to 30 April 2020. However, the South African lockdown was staggered in stage five down to stage one with the easing of regulations at each stage. COVID 19 posed not only a crisis of illness but of being church and pastoral presence. The traditional forms of gathering at church were brought to a halt and the pastoral roles of contact services and visitations became a thing of the past. Lockdown regulations became strict so that even families experienced long times of separation even during the times they needed each other the most. The general experiences of being family, being church and being a pastor were turned inverted. Events moved in another direction which became popularly known as “the new normal”. The paper discusses the challenges posed by the COVID 19 on the church and how the church transformed its operations and pastoral presence during this era. It ends by exploring the opportunities that COVID 19 presented for the development of the church and pastoral presence.

## Method

The paper utilized the descriptive and exploratory method, textual analysis, and information from informal discussions around COVID 19. This was through examining the question on pastoral presence and its relevance in the context of COVID 19 where pastoral physical contact has been made impossible. A holistic understanding of pastoral presence may shape the church’s responses to COVID 19 and also be an eye-opener to the challenges and opportunities presented to the church by the current pandemic, which while waning, still remains a threat to all.

## Pastoral presence

A pastor is one who is called by God and ordained by the church for the ministry of the word and sacraments (Moyo, 2015:4). Therefore, God calls and the examination and validation of the call to ministry are done by the church (Willimon, 2002:38). We are all in the *Ekklesia* (Church) to serve the Lord as His nation and ordination plays a vital role (Nicolaidis, 2010). Nurnberger (2005:166) avers that “In ordination, the community recognizes the competence and authority of the ordained person to preach the word of God and serve a parish”. Where there is no church there is no pastor because his/her roles are done in, for and within the church boundaries. The church ordains and appoints pastors to exercise their ministry. Ordination of the pastors is an acknowledgement of the calling and investment of the trust of the church upon the person ordained (Nurnberger, 2005:166). The pastor is not a title but an office of trust with a duty to nurture and care for the flock. Thus, the pastor is called to be a shepherd to take care of God’s people. Jesus said to Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these? ... Feed my lambs” (John 21:15). However, there is need to note that ordination depends on the denomination’s tradition, most of the contemporary churches and ministries do not ordain pastors but acknowledge their gifts and appoint them for pastoral ministry (Moyo, 2015). Furthermore, the priesthood of all the baptized emphasize that the ministry of the word is for the whole congregation (Nurnberger, 2005). Members of the congregation assume pastoral roles of preaching the word, pastoral care and counseling. This is most common in instances when the pastor is away or is managing more than one congregation that he/she cannot minister to them every time.

In general, pastoral presence is used in pastoral counseling where the physical presence of the pastor is experienced. Pastoral presence brings comfort in times of despair as his/her presence represents one who comes to the other, as well as the presence of the church and God to the persons under his/her care. The pastor plays a role of being with others and paying attention to their needs (Holm, 2009). A pastor’s presence means the availability of the significant other in a times of crisis. It enables us to listen to the stories of others (Mullally, 2020:13). From her findings, Mullally (2020:14) further notes that:



‘Being “fully present” the giving of time, genuine attention, thought, prayer etc. – in a word, love.’ ‘Being present in a physical sense, aware of where I am.’ ‘Being intentional in laying aside of all other distractions and applying concentration.’ ‘Being engaged – your body can be there but mind absent – and fully “there”. Being present . . . means listening, being willing to participate and share.’ ‘Being present means giving oneself wholly (as wholly as is possible.)’ ‘Being aware of the importance of this particular moment in time . . . heightened alertness to this context.’

Thus, being present is a ministry of sacrifice of giving one’s time and life for the sake of the other. With such attention the member or client feels the strength and comfort of being accompanied by the other person whose absence would otherwise create a vacuum.

The pastor does not only represent him/herself but the community of faith (Patton, 2005). His or her presence marks the presence of the local congregation, denomination and the church family at large. It is the church that has validated the ministry of the pastor hence when he/she goes out to meet the people in their situations he/she goes out on behalf of the church. Since pastoral presence is the presence of the church he/she provides hospitality and unconditional love, prayers, the word and sacraments outside the church buildings as a way of bringing the church to those who cannot fellowship with others. This form of pastoral presence of the faith gives the sense of belonging, and comforts and encourages those who are suffering.

The pastor’s work and presence signify the sacred presence of God in human lives. Patton (2005) avers that the pastor represents an encounter with God and always affirms the possibility of divine presence in every place and in diverse situations. Pastoral presence intensifies the sense of God’s presence and acknowledges the presence of the other as God’s gift (Holm, 2009:17). It affirms the assurance that God gave to his loved ones like Jacob when God said “I will be with you wherever you go” (Genesis 28:15). Christ also said to his disciples “I will be with you until the end of the age (Matthew 28:20b). God comes and does his work through the presence of the pastors. Paget and McCormack (2006:28) argue that: “The presence of God in the person and ministry of the chaplain empowers the client to healing and wholeness. In partnership with the presence of God, chaplains bring calm to chaos, victory over despair, comfort in loss, and sufficiency in need. Chaplains practice the presence of God through prayer, rites, ritual, listening, the spoken word, the holy scriptures, and acts of service.”

Human beings experience the sense of God’s presence in the presence of the other, hence pastoral presence becomes a significant vehicle of God’s presence in their experiences. Pastoral presence provides the comfort and confidence of Divine accompaniment in one’s problems. This kindles hope in the midst of despair and gives courage to handle difficult situations as one moves into the future in faith.

The COVID 19 pandemic helped us to rethink what it means to be church together and what pastoral presence suggests. Mullally’s (2020) argument that pastoral presence has different meanings has become true in this context. It may mean different things according to peoples’ perceptions and a wide range of contexts. While pastoral presence means physical presence and accompaniment in the context of COVID 19 we begin to re-read and think about the message of Jesus manifesto. Jesus declared: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18–19).



Christ's mission of compassion may not require new programs, although it may require us to care for one another and those in our community with a renewed intentionality. But it needs us to formulate new approaches that are contextually relevant and meet the needs of the church and community at large. The church has the mandate to provide pastoral presence to proclaim the gospel and provided care and healing to those who are suffering due to the effects of COVID 19.

## **The challenges posed by COVID 19**

### **Misinformation compromised preventative positive responses**

COVID 19 is most dangerous to health and in many cases leads to loss of life. This is perpetuated by myths and misinformation through social media. Some political leaders like Zimbabwean minister Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri argued that Coronavirus was God's punishment. She was quoted addressing a political meeting saying: "Coronavirus is the work of God punishing countries that imposed sanctions on us. They are now keeping indoors. Their economies are screaming just like they did to ours. Trump should know that he is not God<sup>1</sup>".

This is some kind of myth that relegated the virus and COVID 19 to certain nations and races. The sentiment was shared among other Africans who thought that the pandemic was only dangerous to the whites. One pastor and colleague argued that there was no need to close churches because COVID 19 is a disease for the whites while HIV and AIDS is a disease for the Blacks<sup>2</sup>. Such misinformation could put people at risk as it leads to resistance preventative measures such as physical distancing, masking and hand washing. It took time for people to adapt to these practices due to the amount of myth around COVID 19.

Others view it as a biological weapon for the powerful nations. Coronavirus is thought to be a biological weapon used between USA and China. Their desire for economic supremacy and control of the world markets is thought to be the reason for them to want to employ biological weapons in their 'cold' war. Imhoff and Lamberty (2020:5) advance that:

While many people played down the danger of COVID-19, calling it no worse than a flu, and suspected others to purposefully claim otherwise for their own advantage (e.g., hurting national economies, passing unpopular/restricting laws), others painted an even more drastic picture by claiming that the new coronavirus had not evolved by mutation but had been intentionally manufactured and purposefully spread as a bioweapon for political or economic gains.

For the nations like China, USA and other western countries the conspiracy theories reflect a deep seated mistrust which dates back to the period of the two world wars. The animosities and power dynamics lead to negativity and propaganda campaigns. However, for the generality of the population the theories lead to the hatred of other nations and the failure to take the pandemic seriously. This causes people to undermine the lockdown regulations regarding the government efforts as hoax and political gimmicks. Such misinformation continually misleads people. Myths, misinformation on COVID 19 are like the superstitious beliefs which became a hindrance to the efforts of the government, church

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<sup>1</sup> Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri is Zimbabwe's Defence Minister and the Chairperson of Zimbabwe's ruling party ZANU PF

<sup>2</sup> Informal discussion with a friend at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg. 28 March 2020.



and other agencies in preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS in Africa. Also, misinformation and rumours regarding COVID-19 cause risk to healthy behaviors by promoting erroneous practices that increase the spread of the virus and ultimately result in poor physical and mental health outcomes among individuals (Tasnim, Hossain & Mazumder, 2020:2). People are caught unaware due to their complacency. The results lead to physical and psychological pain that is exacerbated by a lack of access to quality and affordable medical care.

### **Pastoral care challenges**

Besides challenges posed by theories and misinformation COVID 19 caused health problems and death that affected the communities, and members of the church are not spared. Some were hospitalized and recovered while others lost their lives. The biggest challenge is loss of physical pastoral presence in the context of illness, hospitalization and death. No one is allowed in the hospital except making phone calls which in some instances, the one who is hospitalized cannot accept because he or she is under strict medical care. The challenge of lockdown which banned travelling across provinces and crossing borders has left many overburdened. Those who lost their loved one could not attend funerals and burial services and rituals. Those who have their homes outside South Africa, like Zimbabweans, could not accompany the remains of their loved ones across the border for the burial but only 'parcelled' the body and send it home for burial in their absence. This would happen after a long period of bereavement alone or as a family without the presence of other family members or church members around. This leads to highly unusual scenes at funerals. The common funeral would be characterized with gathering of family and friends and night vigils and big send-off to the loved one. As 'people of God', having God's covenant with his chosen people, and with how Christians generally come to internalise the notion that they are the 'new Israel' we need to live by the golden rule and do what is best for our neighbour and ourselves and this includes living through a pandemic (Nicolaidis, 2010),

### **Loss of colourful formal worship gatherings**

The church was deeply affected because it was used to everyday gatherings where believers expressed their passionate worship "highly formal, with robes, acolytes, stained glass, organ music, orchestral accompaniment, and hardwood pews with hymnals on the rack in front" (Schnase, 2007:39). Besides loss of meeting time and experience of such beautiful services other church members could not receive Holy Communion which they used to get on a weekly or monthly basis. This is as a result of the absence of the pastor and closure of the places of worship. Closure of chapels and other places of worship and banning of large gatherings left the church without options but to seek pastoral presence and worship online using Whatsapp video sermons, audio sermons, songs and prayers. Those who could afford this had to do Zoom services and live Facebook online services. All these forms of worship helped to promote worship and pastoral presence but excluded those who could not afford to have cell phones, computers, Wi-Fi and data. They remained out of touch for many months due to the strict regulations of lockdown due to COVID 19.

### **Mission principles compromised**

The church lost its footing on mission and hospitality. One of the key practices of local congregations is hospitality whereby both the pastor and the laity frequently invite, welcome include and support new-comers who come for the services (Schnase, 2007:11). The active care of strangers who come for fellowship with the local congregation stopped. There is no



longer invitation and no welcome for each one worshipped with his/ her household with the aid of online services. Instead of being a gathering the church becomes a connection of believers who either meet in their homes or fellowship with one another online. The church is known for preaching the unconditional love of God and the healing power of Christ (Nurnberger, 2005). The challenge of the current pandemic calls for the church to walk the talk in every sense. But how can this be done when the virus is so contagious and dangerous? COVID 19 does not allow physical contact due the introduction of physical distancing, popularly known as “social distancing” protocol. Despite all the challenges the church remained the messenger of love and peace, and a healing and caring community (Thesnaar, 2010). It embraced the challenges and found ways of reaching out, giving pastoral care and presence through online services and encouraging sharing of goods through the provision of cash and hampers for basic goods to those affected by lockdown.

### **Opportunities for church provided by COVID 19**

COVID 19 did not only come with challenges and threats to lives and church life but it provided opportunity for the church to fulfill its mission and mandate. COVID 19 led to transformation in pastoral presence. Lockdown regulations could not allow pastors to move around and reach out to their members in their chapels, homes and hospitals for pastoral care and counseling. Members of the church could not visit one another even in the event that one is sick or bereaved. The pastors remained restricted in their homes or parsonages waiting for such times to return to their daily routine of providing the physical pastoral presence. New strategies of pastoral presence were introduced as discussed above in this paper. Pastors adopted new methods of weekly online fellowships and online Sunday services.

### **Living testimony**

As a pastor I am running a diaspora congregation for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ) in Kempton Park, South Africa as a pilot programme for the ELCZ to establish congregations outside Zimbabwe. The ELCZ Kempton Park congregation is a one-year old vibrant congregation with more than 70 members. I used to visit and do pastoral care once every month. But due to COVID 19 and lockdown, physical contact was prohibited and services were banned. Some of the members of our congregation were heavily affected such that they had no income and ran out of food. We decided and established a new account for fundraising programs so that it can help those in need. With the funds that were raised it supported those members who were affected. On average a family is allocated R300 while the individual who stays alone gets R200 to buy basic commodities until the end of lockdown. The fund also assisted as a bereavement fund which helped three members who lost their loved ones.

For bereavement the fund was boosted by individual contributors who were encouraged to help as a way of showing Christian love despite being unable to be physically present. Members marked their presence through their contributions and messages of support sent through WhatsApp messages, calls and phone calls. The pastor encouraged the members especially leaders, to frequently call and check on the bereaved families to make sure the affected persons remained in touch with others and felt their presence. I would call or send a message to check on the affected persons and share a word of encouragement through the church’s WhatsApp group or directly to the bereaved.

By helping and journeying with those in need and the bereaved, we helped members of the congregation “to understand the suffering of others, but also must allow themselves to suffer



with those suffering, and stand alongside them” (Thesnaar, 2010:270). Although those who lacked food and the bereaved remained isolated due to COVID 19 regulations, they still experienced compassion through the support from the pastor and the congregation. Despite loss of physical contact, there was moral and material support that comforted them. Each one exercised the role of pastoral presence not only in the family but for those who are out of reach due to COVID 19 regulations.

### **Opportunities for the church**

The advent of Coronavirus has awakened the church to develop further self-understanding and ways of doing ministry particularly being church and new ways of pastoral presence. Although some of these ways and means were used, COVID 19 opened new opportunities for the church to offer pastoral presence to its members. Coming out of this pandemic the church will be transformed and different.

### **Use of social media platforms**

The use of social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom was limited to the professionals for meetings and church groups for announcements. It was never thought to be an ideal way for church services and fellowship as well as a means for pastoral care and counselling. For some, social media was regarded as something for fun and sharing jokes and information or church announcements. According to McKinney (2014) social media can be an influential way to announce upcoming events within the church. Church groups on social media platforms were only meant for sharing and receiving church announcements. However, these 10 social media platforms became useful means of passing information on COVID 19. Although it can be abused for passing hoax and misinformation, social media remained key in our communities including the church. Tasnim, Hossain and Mazumder (2020:4) have this to say:

Secondly, mass media, community organizations, support groups, and civil society may play critical roles in disseminating authentic information. To achieve this, it is necessary to build strategic partnerships at local and global levels, connecting offline and online resources in a coordinated manner so that validated information is communicated across platforms.

Social media platforms became the most important channels of communication, pastoral contact and disseminating information for the church and COVID 19. WhatsApp has become the most popular mode of communication for pastors and congregants. Facebook and Zoom are still for a few but WhatsApp can be accessed by the young, the middle-aged working class and the elderly. It is done in the form of messages, audio and voice calls. For that reason, pastoral presence was done by organizing and having fellowships and services through audio recordings and MP3 audios that carry every part of the service.

Church members could enjoy fellowship and service in the comfort of their homes. They could share and forward the services and pastoral messages with their friends and relatives. This improved members' spirituality and interpersonal relationships and even mediation (Collins, 2001). Through WhatsApp text messages, audio voice recordings and voice calls, pastors could do pastoral care and counselling to the ill and the bereaved as well as shepherding church members in their homes.

Social media allows the church to reach a wide variety of people (McKinney, 2014). It enables the church to reach out to those who are not regularly at church and those who are permanently absent due to social challenges, work commitments, age or ill-health. The COVID 19 has



awakened the church to develop love and creativity in its use of social media not only to share information but for online services and increased pastoral presence.

### **Broader collaboration and collegiality**

Despite pastors having to shepherd their own congregations they deliberately or unintentionally served the Christian community beyond their local congregations. Their virtual sermons went viral on social media. Sermons were shared across the congregations, denominations as well as across the national borders. At one moment I heard my sermon coming from a friend in the United Kingdom. COVID 19 provided opportunity for pastors to cooperate in the propagation of the gospel. Pastors would easily invite one another to prepare and share Bible study lessons and sermons for the benefit of their congregations. This was made possible by the use of Zoom and Facebook for the privileged congregations in the cities as well as using the WhatsApp text messages and audio recordings in rural and urban areas. This kind of collegiality is not possible when doing contact sessions due to distances and financial constraints. One would need to travel from one place to another to deliver a sermon or Bible study.

The pastors became more collegial than before due to the COVID 19 pandemic. They could easily share information and help one another not only in preaching but pastoral care and counselling, thereby improving pastoral presence among the church members. This has transformed the pastoral ministry. There was improved collegiality inviting other pastors from Zimbabwe, Canada and other parts of the world to prepare sermons used in the ELCZ diaspora congregation in Kempton Park. This resulted in the members in diaspora congregation being connected to their former pastors, marriage officers and pastors in their home parishes. This improved the relationships and connections between the pastors and members of the ELCZ in diaspora. The cooperation enabled pastors to share their gifts across the congregations without being limited by geographical boundaries and locations. However, the sermons missed the common features of eye contact, gestures, humor, laughter, proverbs, songs and dance which some pastors and congregants enjoy the most in our African context (Nhiwatiwa, 2012).

### **Improved caring and generosity**

The question of lockdown separated people from their loved ones, families and church members for a long time. It also affected their jobs and businesses hence their incomes were heavily impacted. It was within this context that the church was provoked to exercise generosity and care for the members, particularly those in need. The church lived its ideals “characterized by care, sensitivity, sharing, and oneness” (Collins, 2001:170). The pastor who contributed both material and spiritual goods is never outside these ideals. When the members ran out foodstuff they would call the pastor and the pastor would always check if the members were well. In the process the pastors would learn about the dire needs of the members and encourage members to mobilize resources for general support. In the process members showed their care and generosity by sharing their goods with their fellow members. They fulfilled the law of loving one’s neighbour by engaging in ‘extravagant generosity’. “Extravagant Generosity describes practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures. It describes 12 lavish sharing, sacrifice, and giving in service to God and neighbour” (Schnase, 2007:112).

Due to the challenges of COVID 19 and lockdown regulations the church was left with no option except to call those who had resources to engage in extravagant generosity. The generosity improved the spirit of willingness to share, joyous giving expressing God’s love and love for one’s neighbour (Luke 10:27). This gives challenge to local congregations to generate income through fundraising and income generating projects so that they will always have income to care for their members in times of social and economic distress such as this. The congregations should not



only rely on cash offerings but use bank accounts and E-Wallet services so that people can transfer monies to the church account which can also easily be distributed to the need.

### **Sharing information and awareness**

Information sharing is critical when a crisis such as COVID 19 arises. Lack of information leads to ignorance and complacency that results in making uninformed decisions and in risky behaviour that leads to the spread of COVID 19. But this comes with responsible behaviour and vigilance on the side of church leadership because hoaxes and misleading information are also spreading through social media. There is a general need for “good information governance, and leadership across communities and institutions should be promoted to remove any misleading information related to COVID-19 (Tasnim, Hossain & Mazumder, 2020:5). In this case the church and the community in general needed information on the spread, symptoms and prevention of the spread COVID 19 from one person to another.

Information such as that by the World Health Organization (WHO) disseminated on the spread of COVID 19 needs to be put on flyers and spread among church members and the community. According to WHO, COVID 19 can be spread when people come into contact with the infected persons or indirectly through touching surfaces and objects where the virus is. It is passed through the person’s nose or mouth secretions such as saliva and respiratory secretions. Therefore, people are advised to sanitize and wash their hands regularly, keep physical distance, use their elbow to cover their mouth when coughing and no longer need to shake hands or kiss when greeting and they should use face masks.

### **Personal information on critical actions against COVID-19**

There are four key points of action or approaches that need to be mastered.

1. Washing hands and sanitizing. Hand washing should be done for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol often after meeting other people or visiting the bathroom and touching common surfaces.
2. Social distancing. Social or physical distancing involves avoiding large crowds, and crowded public places. Hand shaking should be avoided when greeting. One should avoid close contact with people who are sick because people who are in close contact (within 1 metre) with an infected person can catch COVID 19 when those infectious droplets get into their mouth, nose or eyes.
3. Coughing and sneezing. When coughing or sneezing one has to cover one’s mouth with the elbow or use tissues that are immediately disposed to avoid passing on the virus to the next person close by.
4. Masking and face care. COVID 19 led the government and Health Department to make face mask wearing mandatory. This will not only prevent one from spreading the virus but also prevents him/her from getting infected by the next person. This should be accompanied by avoiding touching one’s eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands, because contaminated hands can transfer a virus to these areas and make one ill.

COVID 19 has encouraged general cleanliness in homes, workplaces and churches. The virus requires regular cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched objects and surfaces every day. The surfaces include counters, table-tops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, computer keyboards and tablets. COVID 19 crisis can be mitigated with a pastoral care role or for your own self-care and care for others. All actions are done for personal reasons and also in view of loving the neighbours, because they seek the common good by mitigating the spread of the



Coronavirus. From a Christian Ethics point of view we always need to consider others (Nicolaides, 2020).

## Conclusion

Church leaders should exercise their pastoral presence and leadership in the context of the pandemic such as the COVID 19. They need to encourage the church members to listen to the government seeking to give life. The church also should condemn the myths and unhelpful beliefs among the members and community in general. The myths and harmful beliefs include the belief that the diseases are racially based, or attacks only the ill and the elderly. Although the ill and the elderly are more vulnerable all people are not immune to the virus. It should also discourage belief in the end of the world, curses of oppressive nations and races and also the belief that COVID 19 can be fought with other medicines not approved by medical professionals. Churches ought to embrace social media as a way of providing pastoral care and counselling thereby improving pastoral presence even after the COVID 19. Whatever the church may have learnt and adopted as a way of fulfilling its mission and pastoral presence, should be used in addition to the traditional approaches of contact services and pastoral presence..

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