



(Over)Staying (Dis)Gracefully: Dissecting Pastoral transitions in AOG BTG church in Zimbabwe

Dr. Kimion Tagwirei

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2109-1170>

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, North West University, Faculty of Theology
The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society
Email: kimion22tc@gmail.com

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Abstract

Transfers and retirement of pastors positively and negatively affect their personal, family and congregational spiritual, social and economic lives. In the Zimbabwean context of political and economic volatility, pastoral transitions have been a formidable 'elephant' in most classical Pentecostal denominations for a number of decades. Whenever anybody triggers its discussion, some parishioners hesitantly disengage in fear of provoking and hurting each other. Against her procedural stipulation that pastoral deployments should be reviewed annually, to effect exchange of ministerial gifts and balanced edification of the Church, leaders predominantly transfer junior pastors, while most seniors usually object and only move in circumstances beyond their powers, such as when ill or dead. Consequently, juniors remain gracefully while seniors overstay disgracefully. A lot has been published on leadership successions, but attention on pastoral shifts remain passive in Zimbabwe. Thus, this paper unravels some problems and panaceas of pastoral transfers and retirement. Using qualitative grounded theory and participative observations, it discerned that contradictory theological conceptualizations, unclear constitutional and procedural provisions, policy gaps, economic instability, personal and family disruptions, insecurities and other factors problematize pastoral transitions. Conclusively, concerted efforts should be redoubled to rebuild the governance and economy of the church to mitigate disruptions, sustain, secure and create a conducive environment for smooth pastoral reshufflings. This paper addresses problematic pastoral transitions, interfaces African ecclesiology and leadership with pastoral theology from the Zimbabwean context.

Keywords: Pastors, Ministry, Church, Staying, Overstaying.

Introduction

Since time immemorial, transfers and retirement of pastors tend to disrupt their personal, family and congregational spiritual, social as well as economic lives. Given the unstable political and economic Zimbabwean context, pastoral transitions have been a haunting case in the Assemblies of God Back to God church (herein referred to as the AOG BTG church) in Zimbabwe. Whenever anybody prompts its discussion, the majority of brethren diffidently disengage in fear of infuriating and hurting each other. Contrary to her procedural provision that placements should be reviewed annually for the effectuation of exchanging gifts and objective edification of the church, leaders commonly transfer juniors who cannot defend themselves, while seniors only transfer and retire when they become ill or die. Consequently, juniors stay 'gracefully' while seniors overstay 'disgracefully'. Notably, there is minimum Zimbabwean related literature in this field of study. Very few publications are focused on Church leadership transitions (i.e. Chivasa, 2018:2; Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019; Nhumburudzi & Kurebwa, 2018; Mwenje, 2016; Ruwona, 2009). Thus, pastoral transitional conundrums need greater attention. Based on a qualitative grounded theory and



participative observation, this paper unravels pastoral transitions in the AOG BTG church. Structurally, it begins by conceptualizing the grounded theory, subsequently it features the background of the study and inclusive interviewees' perspectives on the theme. The following segments unpack the problems, solutions and (dis)grace of (over)staying. At the end, it is concluded that the church should make concerted efforts to tackle problematic policy gaps and rebuild her economy, alleviate disruptive challenges, sustain, secure and create a favorable framework for progressive future pastoral transitions.

The Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999). They conceptualized grounded theory from data, systematically developed and explored through research processes. Khan, (2014:227) explains that the grounded theory encompasses data collection and analysis. According to him, it is grounded in data. As elucidated by Khan, (2014:227), the theory deals with an inductive rather than deductive approach of inquiry. Enlighteningly, Khan, (2014:227) adds that grounded theory is not just a theory, but a method, an approach, a strategy that is purposed to generate theory from data. He explicates that the theory will be grounded and generated on the basis of gathered data. As Noble and Mitchel, (2016:1) further clarify, grounded theory identifies an area of interest that has been less attended. It avoids theoretical preconceptions, uses analytical procedures and sampling strategies to accomplish a study through qualitative or quantitative data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, observation and focus groups. Additionally, Groen and Simmons, (2017:n.p) expound that the grounded theory is an open-ended and flexible exploration of a phenomenon that involves rigorous, comparative analysis of data and continuously develops an increasingly theoretical examination which begets learning and deep understanding. Accordingly, this paper employs this theory qualitatively, and applies participative observation to obtain extensive information from pastors, their wives, children, elders and congregants in different cities and congregations.

Background of the Study

Pastoral transfers and retirement have been problematic internationally (Wiredu, 2021: 26; Mager, 1981:198–201; Keehn, 2016; Bagonza, 2017:5; Matshobane & Masango, 2020: 2). The publicly predominant conceptualization of ministry as vocational include problems of economic volatility, various disruptions and insecurities which problematize transitions. Locally, as Nhumburudzi and Kurebwa, (2018: 50) observed, succession disputes from the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) and Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA), most classical Pentecostal Church leaders ordinarily do not plan to relinquish their positions due to similar problems faced. Observations on ZAOGA unearthed that, while she also does not have a pastoral transitions' policy, she efficiently transfers her pastors whenever her leaders considers it needful.

Generally, redeployments are effected earlier or later due to differing factors, for example; when one falls in sin, gets disciplined, is suspended, becomes ill, dies or is given a different local or foreign assignment and replacements are carried out respectively. Unlike ZAOGA which manages transfers better than other denominations mostly due to her strong economy, Tagwirei, (2022: 3) observes that the AOG BTG church in particular, struggle economically. Thus, the bulk of pastors who feel secure at their given assemblies resist transfers and retirement in anxiety of vulnerabilities and insecurities in new places. That way, pastoral transfers have been puzzling in the AOG BTG church in Zimbabwe. When some pastors were deployed to certain assemblies, they gracefully stayed and became heartily rooted there. The church's procedure manual (policy document) and constitution only say that her National executive (herein referred to as the NE)



shall review pastors' deployments through their regional District Council (DCC) leadership annually as envisaged in her Procedure manual n.d, section 8.4, pp. 1–7, "All current deployments must be reviewed once a year to see, which ones are effective, struggling and which ones need change. Deployments must be made on the Assembly need and the ministry required. Proposals for change are made where necessary. The proposals are submitted to the National Executive before they are communicated or effected. The National Executive will consider the proposals, make their own inquiries and assessments and communicate back to the DCC their final approval. Only after receiving a reply from the NE will the DCC write re-deployment letters to those affected. The above procedures shall not prevent the DCC from addressing urgent one-off problems in the region and advising the National Executive later. When a minister is transferred, the Pastor and the Assembly concerned are advised by the DC by letter".

As such, it does not give clear timeframes and considerations. Without binding clarifications, some pastors get transferred while others do not, for unclear reasons. As such, multiple problems tend to rock pastoral transitions. Albeit from a different context, as Mager, (1981: 92–107) sums up relative challenges of transitions, "...it must be remembered that it is not just a minister who is transferred. It is a human being with positive and negative feelings. The uncertainty of how the wife and children would cope with the necessary external and internal adjustments, the fear of not being able to cope with responsibilities in the new congregation, the pain in parting with friends and breaking off personal contacts already made; the frustration over the avoidable mistakes committed through the thoughtlessness of his predecessor, housing problems (too small or inadequate), too frequent transfers; children's school or vocational problems, personal reasons (concern about the suitability of new position); leaving the familiar home with its security, the neighborhood with its beloved paths and singular landscape have to be given up. Breaking off with meaningful interpersonal relationships, positive and negative feelings arise and disturb the emotional balance."

Generally, as indicated before, it is undebatable that manifold internal and external difficulties such as personal, family and social adjustments from usual to new places, culture shocks and transferring children to new schools befall pastors whenever they move. Nevertheless, most pastors used to accept and pay the price of such transitions. Sooner or later after encountering unsettling challenges in moving, and settling comfort in certain places, against a fluctuating economic milieu, some leading pastors began to resist transfers and retirement. Ironically, leaders continue to transfer juniors who cannot oppose their directives, while they are 'glued' to their stations. Interestingly, AOG BTG's annual placement reviews have been publicly disregarded but authorities keep the status quo unchanged. Glaringly, the policy gap allows pastors to accept or reject transfers as long as they can. On retirement, the church's procedure manual (section 8.1.3) states that "a pastor may consider retirement at the age of sixty–five". However, that is not binding as it gives room for one to stay as long as he or she feels able. To date, many of her senior and old pastors overstay at particular assemblies for decades, while a few of them are forced to retire due to illness and others leave due to death.

Perspectives on pastoral transitions in the AOG BTG church

Pastors, pastors' families, elders and congregants have mixed feelings about the subject of transfers and retirement in the AOG BTG church. Positively, they believe that pastoral transitions expose diversities of gifts and ministries to different congregations. Correspondingly, they all get mutual refreshment, growth and edification. Negatively, various disruptions, policy gaps, economic implications, as well as objectivity, selectivity, inconsistency and contradictory theological conceptualizations retrogressively complicate the issue.



Views of Pastors

The majority of pastors think that transfers should be done, while very few opine that they should not. One from Mashonaland region who said that transfers should be effected, argued that "...transfers expose pastors to new congregations and environments which can help them to grow and develop their personal lives and ministries, and equally expose congregations to different pastors and edify them with different gifts and ministries". Others perceive that transferring them brings reciprocal refreshment and healing to pastors and congregations. "Sometimes when problems arise and cause conflicts, and at worst, hostilities between a pastor and some members or leaders of particular assemblies, transfers can help as pastors move to new congregations and congregations receive new pastors, which bring needful refreshment and healing to both ends" said another pastor from AOG BTG in Bulawayo. On the same observation, another pastor from Masvingo held that transfers expose pastors to diverse social, economic, political and spiritual experiences. "Assemblies are different, one is economically poor, another is rich; one is politically unstable, another is progressive; one is socially and spiritually tense like in rural and farming communities where we face problems of traditionalism and witchcraft on daily basis and in urban areas where social life is dynamic. Transfers therefore expose pastors to varying encounters that can enrich and transform one's life and ministry".

A member of the church's national executive voiced that "...transfers are very necessary because there comes a time when ministers reach their ceiling in a certain local assembly that if transferred their ministries can be revived. There are some pastors who have overstayed at particular assemblies that their congregants know what and how they preach. Some of them have been given nicknames, like John 3:16, which is one's favorite verse; or some catch phrases that summarize what and how they preach. When such things happen, transfers will be long overdue. It will be wise to get a new assignment somewhere. Generally, change of ministries are critical so that different congregations can benefit from the same".

On retirement, most AOG BTG pastors consider it to be crucial, while few others argue that they should never retire. Those who are pro-retirement said that it is unavoidable as age, mental and physical health as well as ministry exhaustion impact everyone as they age.

"Look, we all grow old, and, as such, our physical and mental health get challenged correspondingly. Similarly, each pastor gets to a point where one is tired to do justice to the work of ministry such as preaching, doing visitations etcetera. I therefore think that a pastor should rest at a particular age from full time ministry. This does not mean that one would have retired from serving God. No. One can continue serving God in other ways such as mentoring younger pastors and giving counsel to leaders and related less labor intensive ministries" said a national executive member.

A young pastor in Harare averred that "I don't think a pastor should retire because one who calls us called us for a purpose that we should pursue as long as we live. I don't believe in retirement. I believe in serving God until God takes us home. I have never heard of a witch retiring! Why should pastors retire when agents of the devil fight to their deathbeds? Pastors should serve until they leave this world". Additionally, an old pastor contended that as the Bible says, the harvest is plenty, and laborers are few; retiring pastors can actually decrease the numbers of harvesters when we should actually pray for their increase!" He referred to Matthew 9:35-38, which says:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on



them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (NIV Online Bible Gateway).

Views of pastors' families

Interviews with some spouses and children of pastors revealed that pastoral transfers and retirement have innumerable desirable and undesirable effects. The positive bearings include exposure to many social and ecclesial environments, networking with many people for current and future personal, family and ministry developments as well as spiritual enrichment through both bad and good experiences from different places. Negative concerns include inclusive disruptions and economic changes to personal and family commitments, livelihoods and lifestyles. One of the pastors' wives from Mashonaland said; "...when my husband was transferred, it appeared fine as we moved from problems we were facing with some of our past elders. We felt refreshed, but I had established a promising market for my business. Although my husband is the pastor, his ministry is not complete without me, so I was forced to accompany him. Besides, even if I had no contribution to pastoral ministry, our marriage matters, so the transfer forced me to leave my business as we moved into a new place. As we are settling, I am yet to study what business ideas may work here. Our church cannot sustain us. Yet, as a growing family, we have growing needs to meet. I love to, and should support my husband in ministry, but these transfers are disturbing."

While transfers connected them with both good and bad people in different congregations, they also exposed them to different economies and problems, such as transportation, accommodation and settlement in new places. "At times we got small means of transport that could not carry all our property, but because that was the most affordable available, our hard earned property were forced in, and a lot broke down along the way. In the same way, some assemblies had, others could afford to rent a spacious mission house, while others got very small apartments. In all experiences, we either squeezed ourselves in and broke some of our property or felt free and inferior in a big house with limited furniture as we lost a lot in moving from this to that place" explained a pastor's wife from Manicaland.

Like what Mager, (1981:153) observed in Germany, "...families of pastors are often uprooted and homeless during transitions and that taxes pastors' wives the most, both mentally and physically". On retirement, most pastors' wives feel happy to settle at one place without further relocations when economically stable. Those who are challenged worry about their sustenance as the church seizes support, ejects them from mission houses and somewhat neglect them.

Similarly, children of pastors also expressed varied feelings about pastoral transfers and retirement. They reiterated the very same issues that were raised by their mothers, stressing that their lives are often affected by the spiritual, social, political and economic stability of their parents. When pastors and their wives submit to, and suffer in the complexities of transfers and retirement, engaged children concurred that their attention to education, work, business and ministry get negatively disturbed. "If transfers and retirement is done well and sustained, it's adventurous. When it's not sustained, it's retrogressive" concluded one pastor's son from Harare.

Views of elders

Elders concurringly voiced that transfers and retirement give pastors and the church continuous opportunities to share wide-ranging gifts, edify each other and grow together. While the church's constitution, procedure manual are not clear, and pastors are not informed about how transfers



are done when getting ordained, some elders view transfers as developmental. One elder from Gweru avowed that pastoral transitions give the church new blood. “I think when others transfer and retire, we get new blood, different and younger pastors who are still energetic and can attend to the demands of ministry effectively and progressively”. Another elder from Bulawayo said that “retirement gives our elderly pastors well deserved time to rest from their labor, and allow them to speak wisdom into the lives and ministries of their successors”.

Agreeably, they all observed that pastoral transitions have been only problematic in the AOG BTG church mostly due to selective and inconsistent ways that the leadership has been effecting them. “Transfers and retirement are very good for both the pastors and the church when done well. However, they are conflictive when selective and inconsistent, as we witness some pastors being transferred and others overstaying at one assembly. At times we see certain pastors being transferred many times while others are never moved. That is bad and it makes the whole issue inflammatory” – explained an elder from Mutare.

Views of congregants

Almost all engaged congregants viewed pastoral transitions as helpful for them to gain from their diverse ministries. However, one congregant from Kwekwe argued that the transitions are disadvantageous as well. “There is an issue of attachment and detachment on transfers and retirement of pastors. When a pastor ministers to me for some time, I get attached to, and confide with him/her. Now, when that pastor gets transferred, it means I detach myself from the transferred, and slowly begin to attach myself to the new pastor. When I get attached to the new one, if leadership transfers or retires him/her, I will have to go through the same detachment and attachment process again. The whole thing becomes disturbing”.

A congregant from Bulawayo finds the issue complicated due to how it is done. “Why are some of our pastors transferred and others are not? I have no problem with transfers, and retirement. I have problems with how the two are done. I have always heard that pastors should be transferred after one to two years, and that they should retire at the age of sixty–five. But I have never seen that being implemented. I see transfers being done here and there, and to young and weak pastors. The old, senior and powerful stay where they have been since time immemorial. The few that retire do so when very sick, or leave when dead. As long as questions about how, why and when our transfers are done remain unanswered, I am confused and I feel like I don’t belong to this church”

Problems and Solutions of Pastoral transitions in the AOG BTG church

Having delineated various inclusive views of pastors, pastors’ families, elders and congregants above, this section unwraps problems of transfers and retirement and presents possible solutions for the AOG BTG church in Zimbabwe.

Contradictory theological conceptualizations

Observations and in-depth discussions with leaders, pastors and congregants revealed grave contradictions on their theological conceptualization of transitions, especially on retirement. Some of them maintain that pastors should not retire because they are called by God for a lifelong service. Others observe that pastors should retire on sensible grounds of ministry exchanges from one assembly to another and from full time to less labor–intensive part time ministry; old age, physical and mental weariness. As alluded to by Petley, (1994:n.p); Ramunddal & Barbosa da Silva, (2021:18) and Gagliardi, (2021:n.p), the need to review traditional and developing modern



and contextually relevant theological conceptualizations which answer today's burning ecclesial and pastoral questions is critical for church development. Therefore, it is critical for leaders of the AOG BTG church to intentionally review and renew their theological conceptualization, develop a sound doctrine and policy of pastoral transitions. Successively, the leadership should educate her clergy and congregations in order to curb conflicting perspectives, and effect suave and consistent transitions.

Unclear constitutional and procedural provisions

The issue of transfers and retirement is not fully clear in the AOG BTG constitution and procedure manual. Her procedure manual (8:4) says that "the National Executive (NE) through the District Council Committee (DCC) have authority to move a minister from one assembly to another without necessarily consulting the local assembly concerned." It also states that:

All current deployments must be reviewed once a year to see which ones are effective, struggling and which ones need change. Deployments must be made on assembly need and the ministry required. Proposals for change are made where necessary. Proposals are submitted to the NE before they are communicated or effected. The NE will consider the proposals, make their own inquiries and assessments and communicate back to the DCC their final approval. Only after receiving a reply from the NE will the DCC write redeployment letters to those affected (AOG procedure manual, 8:4.1 to 8.4.6)

On retirement, the procedure manual says that "a minister shall consider retirement at the age of sixty-five. If a minister has distinguished himself, the NE may at its discretion reassign him to other duties. When a minister retires, his local assembly shall be where he has a permanent dwelling house (AOG procedure manual, 8.1.3 to 8.1.4).

Thus, her constitution and procedure manual do not clarify when a pastor is transferred and should retire. Although they say that ministry reviews for transfers should be done yearly, and retirement considerations at sixty-five, they leave a big room for selective and inconsistent implementation. This has been confirmed as mostly young pastors have been transferred while old and seniors haven't been moved. As Baloyi, (2020:238) observed the importance of reviewing constitutional and procedural provisions in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, it is recommendable for the AOG BTG church to review her constitutional, procedural provisions and accommodate appeals for sincere, unswerving and effective application on all involved parties.

Policy gaps

A number of pastors conveyed concerns that transfers and retirement are problematic in the AOG BTG church because of policy gaps. They lamented that the timing and considerations for a pastor to be transferred and retired are ambiguous in the AOG BTG church constitution and procedure manual. More-so, regional and national leadership of the church has seldom cushioned costs of redeployments. Those who have been accepting transfer directives faced multiple effects of transfers alone. That is why some leading pastors have been rejecting transfers and overstaying at certain assemblies.

More-so, the church has not yet addressed welfare and ministry challenges of retired pastors. Her procedure manual (n.d:8:11) just mentions that "the DCC shall see to the welfare of ministers by paying support, rent, light/water, medical aid, pension contribution, N SSA, transport etcetera, through its own funds or those from the assembly." Commendably, the DCCs of some of the



church's regions have been supporting pastors when they had funds. Unfortunately, they have not been able to support retired pastors. Taking the case of retirees who have been receiving zero centralized support and limited gifts from some of their former congregants as precedence, tenured pastors choose to glue where they are in fear of facing the same predicament if they retire.

Engaged pastors and elders note that there should be binding policies with regards to transfers, retirement, pastoral benefits as well as centralization of funds.

“As long as these policies are not attended to, we will keep on having problems on transfers and retirement of pastors. When each assembly sustains herself, it means that a pastor who is at a sustainable congregation cannot agree to be transferred to a poor assembly. One who is at a poor assembly cannot prepare for retirement, and one at a better, or wealthy assembly may feel secure there and resist retirement in fear of losing what his/her assembly gives. So, if we could have a centralization policy and centralize our funds, all pastors in rural, urban, poor, better or rich congregations can be catered for equally, or in accordance with an agreed salary or support scale during and after tenure” – vowed one elder in Harare.

It is considerable to reengage all stakeholders, review and fill up identified gaps to solve the issue. I agree with observations of Teddy, Lembani, Hwabamungu and Molosiwa, (2019: 700) from their study on health systems policy and implementation gaps in Africa that:

Factors such as political, social, cultural and economic context surrounding a particular policy, are usually difficult to predict and control, and therefore require constant negotiation to allow for the policy implementation process to succeed towards goals, including health care equity. Policy makers and decision-makers must be flexible and invest considerable amounts of efforts to work out, for instance, how power relations influence policy implementation, reforms and changes in service delivery, providers' roles and reallocation of resources. They need to come up with strategies for communication, negotiation and even bargaining among different actors as a way of governing the relationships that are created in the process of implementation. The roles of each actor and their related agents need to be clearly defined and managed to create shared values around a particular policy, especially where equity goals are being pursued. (Teddy, Lembani, Hwabamungu and Molosiwa, 2019: 700)

Likewise in the case of AOG BTG church, it is highly expedient for the church leaders to facilitate decisive meetings and seal the gaps towards smooth running, preparation and effectuation of pastoral transitions.

Economic instability

All interviewees concurred that an unstable economy disturbs pastoral transitions. As well observed by various scholars such as Makina, (2010:99–109); Reuters, (2022, pp. n.p); Ndiweni and Verhoeven, (2013:1–2); Munangagwa, (2009:11–127), Zimbabwe's volatile economy ruined the lives and livelihoods of most organizations and citizens. Considering that the church feeds on, and pastors are given a portion of congregational freewill offerings, tithes and related collections, which are unstable, inconsistent and unreliable, and such instabilities also problematized pastoral transitions. “In such a context, almost everyone is trying to survive wherever he is. Somehow, some of us have found strategies to survive where we are, and we can never be certain of how we can survive elsewhere, thus transfers and retirement become a serious challenge. Imagine



how a pastor who is making some money to cushion the little he gets from his assembly by farming sugar canes in Chiredzi may view being transferred to Harare where he doesn't know how to survive there? Or a Harare based pastor who survives by running a flea market project being transferred to a rural assembly where such a business cannot thrive. Being transferred or retired in an unstable environment like ours is unimaginable and very complicated" said one congregant from Bulawayo.

In order to deal with this problem, the church can contribute towards the national economy of Zimbabwe beyond prayers, through engaging with the State for political reformation of policies that have negatively impacted the economy. Understanding Christian life as of dual citizenship, primarily belonging to heaven and temporarily, to an earthly nation (Landrum, 2018; McShane, 2020:1–2; Stokes, 2021), engagement with the government for national politics contributes to the rebuilding of the broken economy. As ecclesial involvement in Zimbabwean politics has been difficult as the leading government has been victimizing and silencing many (Musvanhiri, 2020:n.p; Rasch, Niemi & Alexander, (2021:735–744), I agree with Magezi & Tagwirei, (2022) that the Church must rise as the 'salt and light', to engage in politics as prophetic and influential ambassadors of God for national transformation. Considering the unsustainability of traditional sources of income, and need for self-reliance, the need for an integration of mainstream ecclesiology with economics is long overdue. It is advisable for the AOG BTG to embrace business to generate extra income and complement congregational contributions for the sustenance of pastoral transitions. In agreement with Tagwirei, (2022:5), churches such as the RCZ and ZAOGA invested in education, agriculture, health and real estate, and have been getting extra income through levies from their investments. Although the sustainability their investments has been weakened by national economic crisis and various denominational factors, they still contribute to their monthly incomes and sustainability. Without diversified income and an unsustainable system, some pastors cling to economically better places, transfers and retirement become problematic.

Unreliable retirement schemes

Several pastors and leaders intoned that one of the problems affecting the retirement of pastors is the unreliability of retirement schemes. One of the national executive members said that "we once tried a certain retirement scheme. After paying monthly subscriptions for some time, the company shortchanged us as monetary policies changed and our pastors lost their monies and gained nothing". When the government de-dollarized overnight (Gerede, 2020:n.p; Imam, 2020:771-775), bankers found their monies automatically changed into local currency and lost valuable savings as the local currency got wiped away by inflation. While deprived of reliable retirement schemes, most pastors cannot save for their retirement. As such, they cannot just leave into worst poverty stricken retirement.

Therefore, the church should consider creating a pension plan for her pastors, whereby she arranges with pastors to contribute towards establishing a pool of funds to be set aside for their retirement. Views of Chivandire, (2021:1), Ashford and Schmidt, (2021:1) that a pool of funds can be invested on behalf of employees, and returns on the investments can yield income for retirement payouts can help much. While countless Zimbabweans lost trust in pension schemes because many of them lost their lifetime savings between 2004 and 2009 without any recourse due to the hyperinflationary economic situation that befell the nation (Chivandire, 2021:1), the church can engage insurance experts' counsel towards establishing and securing her own pastoral pension scheme.

Personal and Family disruptions



It is observable that whenever pastors get transferred, or retired, their family lives and livelihoods get disrupted. Sometimes one's spouse might have gotten employed in a certain local place, and children might be schooling there. When transferred, and retired, it means that the pastor will relocate and leave family for a while until they also secure transfers to a new place, or wait and move together when family gets ready. In cases where a company that a spouse serves does not have a branch where the family is transferring to, transfers may mean loss of employment. If children were doing particular subjects, for example, sciences, which may not be offered where they are transferring to, they will have to change and pursue whatever is available at the new place. If the pastor, or family has been doing a particular business which may not be feasible where they are moving to, it will be disturbing. These, and similar examples substantiate that transfers and retirement are usually disruptive. All in all, the church should rebuild her economic sustainability to cushion pastors and their families towards soft landing when such disruptive transitions are due.

Voluntarism

Some congregants said that pastoral transfers and retirement has been problematic because pastors are taken as volunteers. One congregant argued that "...as volunteers are not given salaries, they cannot be professionally managed. Look, if pastors were employees, they could be evaluated, transferred and retired accordingly. There could be a binding policy that determines benefits, transfers and retirement for all of them. Now nobody can really assess performance of a pastor, i.e. one's impact on spiritual and numerical growth of a congregation. When a church is not numerically and spiritually growing, its economy cannot grow. Now when we talk of transfers and retirement, we face issues of economic unpreparedness of the church and the pastor. Probably, if they could be employees, we could hire, assess, transfer, fire and retire them accordingly. Dealing with volunteers is thus highly problematic".

While volunteers help the church to run without obligations to pay, there are a number of challenges that the church should look at on volunteerism. It is observed that volunteers can be unreliable to depend on, and difficult to deal with (Kodia, 2014:13; Harris, 2010:4–5; Kabonga, 2020:18). While employing sounds good, the nature of the Church as belonging to God problematizes employment as pastors are primarily taken as workers of God. Thus, the church can seek to mitigate problems of voluntarism by diversifying her sources of income in order to sustain her pastoral transitions.

Detachments and attachments

Some pastors and congregants agree that pastoral ministry attracts some serious attachments, which are difficult to undo. Over time, they share personal issues and bond. Whenever transitions happen, they get detached, and undergo new attachments. These views concur with observations of Pilon, (2009:n.p) that "...this policy of regularly transferring priests after a very limited term destabilizes the spiritual life of the faithful in these parishes and makes the laity hesitant to really engage in any serious spiritual relationship with transient pastors. That is the ultimate harm and, since the Church itself exists for the spiritual welfare of her children, there is need for a reconsideration of such policies" With such experiences and viewpoints, increasing numbers of pastors, and some affected congregants resist transfers and retirement. Consequently, the national leadership moves some and leaves others. As observed before, such selectivity and inconsistency is conflictive. Therefore, it is considerable for the church to reconsider integrity and



review her constitutional and procedural provisions as well as to rebuild her economy to address observed problems and smoothen pastoral transitions.

Conclusion

This paper explored the gains and pains of transfers and retirement in the AOG BTG church in Zimbabwe. It unearthed mixed views of pastors, pastors' families, elders and congregants on pastoral transitions. It observed that most of them take pastoral transitions as being progressive, but question leaders' objectivity, selectivity and consistency as they struggle to negotiate their way through contextual complexities such as unavoidable personal and ministerial disruptions, national and ecclesial economic meltdown as well as constitutional and procedural problems. Conclusively, neglecting constitutional, policy, economic and related gaps is self-defeating. Thus, the church should review her theological stance, constitutional provisions, address policy gaps, diversify sources of income, rebuild her economy, establish and secure her own pastoral pension scheme. Bearing in mind that (over)staying is (dis)graceful, greater attentiveness to the suggested recommendations matters.

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