

Missio Dei In The Context Of Covid-19 and poverty

Towards a missional-pastoral approach using the informal settlement of Zandspruit as a case study

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Abstract

As the Church, its members, and functionaries continue with mission work; it must do that with the self-understanding of what the Church is and its nature as a missional church, which also has pastoral responsibilities, among its many dimensions. The Mission is not that of the Church, its members and functionaries, but the Mission of God (*Missio Dei*), the author of Mission, who has mandated the Church to be missional. As the Church lives out its God-given mandate, the Church does that in specific contexts. In the case of this article, it is the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and poverty, and associated suffering, using Zandspruit informal settlement as a case study.

Key concepts: *Missio Dei*, missional-pastoral approach, multidimensional, informal settlement, Zandspruit, context, poverty, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The article deals with the pastoral responsibility of the Church, which should be missionary in character in the context of the crises of poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pastoral responsibility of the Church, particularly pastoral care, is usually thought of and done as if it is in isolation from the Mission of God. On the other hand, mission work is also often erroneously divorced from pastoral ministry, particularly pastoral care. Pastoral care is correctly linked with psychology and other social sciences in the spirit of interdisciplinary co-operation. No discipline should be like an island. It is correct that pastoral care shares a lot with psychology, but it is not psychology with a twist. It remains one of the areas of the Mission of the Church. Pastoral care is more than its relationship and interfaces with psychology and other social sciences. Pastoral care, as a discipline that deals with the pastoral ministry of the Church, is part of the mission work of the Church; it is part of the *Missio Dei*. The Mission of God, which is shared with the Church is multidimensional and can only be lived out provided the Church has an under-

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standing of itself as a missional church that has been mandated by God to carry out many of its mission activities. The article proposes a missional-pastoral approach in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and poverty in impoverished communities such as Zandspruit.

2. The multidimensional Mission of God and the various missional-pastoral activities

The main argument of this article is that pastors, other functionaries, church caregivers, and members involved in mutual care engage in pastoral care as part of and on behalf of the Church. It is the Church that extends pastoral services to both its members and members of the community. As the Church extends its pastoral responsibilities, it does so as a missional church attempting to be faithful to its nature as a missional church. It is part of the Church's involvement in the *Missio Dei*. The *Missio Dei* has many dimensions, and it is lived out in various areas of the ministry of the Church. However, it is mainly only the actions of preaching, praying, (liturgics) singing, teaching, and reaching out to others outside, that is, in crossing the frontiers, that are correctly regarded as part of the Mission of the Church. It is interesting to note that in David Bosch's list of what the Church is doing, pastoral ministry (pastoral care) is not included. Bosch states: "She (the Church) is also to be a worshipping presence, providing for the building-up of her members (*oikodome*) through liturgy (*leitourgia*), fellowship (*koinonia*) and teaching (*didaskalia*)" (1980:17). In the book *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (1980), Bosch states as he articulates the total Mission of the Church: "The most adequate formulation subsumes the total mission of the Church under the biblical concept *marturia* (*witness*), which can be sub-divided into *kerygma* (proclamation), *koinonia* (fellowship), and *diakonia* (service)" (1980:227). Later, the concept *leitourgia* (liturgy) was added by the Willingen conference (1952), stating:

This witness is given by proclamation, fellowship and service. We should in fact add a fifth aspect, that of *leitourgia* (liturgy), that is, the encounter of the Church with her Lord (Bosch, 1980:227).

Kritzinger (2011:43) adds other dimensions of the macro-structure to the equation as he dialogues with Bevans and Schoeder, namely; reconciliation, evangelism, healing, justice, and earth-keeping. Referring to earth-keeping as a form of theological environmentalism, Bevans and Schroeder (2004:268) state: "Another example is the emergence of a new Christian theology and practice called earth-keeping, which is a unique form of theological environmentalism. All these happen

to be areas of ministry that Practical Theology also deals with, including pastoral care (*which includes healing*), which should also be included in the equation.

Missiologists often avoid including other areas such as the pastoral dimension (*poimenics* or shepherding)² of the Church's ministry in the Mission of the Church, as it may sound as if they are implying that everything is Mission. They are sensitive or rather allergic to the claim that everything is Mission and therefore tantamount to proposing a dictum that "*if everything is Mission, then nothing is*" (Bosch, 1991:511). Even Bosch states: "We may therefore not call everything the church does 'mission' or 'evangelism'" (1980:17). I am not attempting to cross swords with Bosch, an intellectual and theological giant the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. However, I suggest that pastoral ministry is one of the important dimensions of the *Missio Dei*, without necessarily implying that everything is Mission and therefore turning Mission into 'nothingness.'

Pastoral ministry (*poimenics*/shepherding)³ is part of a multidimensional prism, which Bosch refers to as "missionary activities" (1980:228; cf. Hiltner, 1958:15). It is often linked to healing, which is included in the list of missionary activities referred to by Kritzinger (2011:43). Some of these were at one stage regarded as classical fields of Practical Theology, and sometimes referred to as actions or operational fields (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:16). Furthermore, it is important to note that pastoral ministry, together with evangelism, diakonia (related to development theology), proclamation (preaching), liturgics etc. are part of the sub-disciplines of Practical Theology,⁴ which according to Hiltner grapples with operations, not only of the pastor, but the whole Church, which included healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling (Hiltner, 1958:24, 28). These are inevitably part of the *Missio Dei* in which there is human participation, not in the agent's Mission but God's Mission.

According to Bosch, all these missionary activities are like a single prism consisting of various colours (1980:228). None of the various dimensions is more important than the others or has a priority over them. They are, according to Bosch, indissolubly bound together (1980:228). The context indicates where the emphasis must be placed, and the circumstances (contexts) dictate how our witness must be communicated, based on solidarity with people for whom it is intended (Bosch, 1980:229).

² It is interesting that Prof J.N.J. Kritzinger includes healing, though pastoral care (*poimenics*/shepherding) is avoided.

³ According to Seward Hiltner "poimenics" (shepherding) or the study of Shepherding is a term that was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in relation to Pastoral Theology. (cf. Hiltner, 1958:15).

⁴ At that time Hiltner was referring to Practical Theology as Pastoral Theology, which he regarded as an operation-focused branch of theology (Hiltner, 1958:24). Hiltner also referred to this as Practical Theology or Operational theology (Hiltner, 1958:24).

In this article, it is argued that even pastoral care is part of the Mission of the Church. This does not suggest that the author subscribes to the view that everything is Mission, but to a view in which we see a church that correctly understands its identity and nature as a missionary/missional church with pastoral ministry as part of its responsibility. It is part of what Bosch refers to as:

The total task which God has set the Church for the salvation of the world. It is the task of the Church in movement, the Church that lives for others, the Church that is not only concerned with herself, that turns herself 'inside out' towards the world (1980:17).

It is a missionary church that gets involved in all the above. When the missionary church, through its functionaries or representatives, extends pastoral care, it does so in particular contexts. It is for this reason that the article makes a case for a holistic missional-pastoral approach in the context of poverty and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse consequences. There will be millions of people who the pandemic will impoverish. However, the pandemic in South Africa is not the cause of poverty, although there will be people who will be introduced to poverty by COVID-19, which is only exacerbating the pre-existing poverty. When the first case of the pandemic was reported on 5 March 2020, there were already millions of people living in poverty and associated unemployment and inequality. The pandemic, its consequences, and the response to the pandemic are not causing, but merely exacerbating the poverty that was already affecting millions of the people of South Africa, the majority of whom are black. As the article argues for a holistic missional-pastoral approach in the contexts of both poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic, an impoverished community of Zandspruit is used as a case study. The article outlines *Missio Dei*, which is multidimensional. One of those dimensions is the pastoral presence and responsibility of a missional church in the context of poverty and COVID-19. It also attempts to trace the pandemic's beginning, its spread to other countries, and its arrival in South Africa, a nation struggling with its economy and poverty and its rampant consequences.

3. Problem Statement

The article deals with the pastoral responsibilities of a missional church in the context in which millions of people are impoverished and are now facing a global health emergency that inevitably causes massive suffering for all people, particularly the poor. While the concerns of the double burden of poverty and COVID-19 relate to the whole of South Africa, an impoverished community of Zandspruit is used as a case study. The article proposes an approach referred to as a holistic missional-pastoral approach in the contexts of poverty and COVID-19.

The case study reflects on the real-life situation related to the socio-economic and political conditions at Zandspruit. Although Zandspruit is a unique community, it is also sharing a lot with other informal settlements, townships, and villages, which are forgotten in terms of services, infrastructure, and exclusion from the economic life of South Africa. As Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014:178) state: “A case study is a thick and detailed description of a social phenomenon that exists in a real-world context.” It is in that common scenario of Zandspruit in which the Church must live out the *Missio Dei* in all its dimensions, and the proposed holistic missional-pastoral approach must be lived out in the context of poverty and COVID-19.

4. Zandspruit informal settlement as a case study of an area that requires a missional-pastoral approach

Zandspruit is an informal settlement northwest of Johannesburg, along Beyers Naude Drive in Honeydew (Johannesburg). Some even refer to it as Honeydew, although Honeydew is the formal, relatively more affluent suburb, which was formally a Whites-only area and well-serviced in contrast to Zandspruit. It is popularly referred to as Kwa-Jack (Dlamini, 2020:9). It is a relatively unknown place, yet there are service delivery protests from time-to-time (SAPA, 2014). When there are service delivery protests in Zandspruit, in other informal settlements and other established townships, the Church is often conspicuous by its absence or apathy towards the poor. Zandspruit was established as far back as 1994, and yet it remains a poorly serviced informal settlement with no infrastructure. Like informal settlements in South Africa, Zandspruit is densely populated and inhabited by the poor members of the South African society, who stay in overcrowded shacks. In such circumstances, it is almost impossible to adhere to the lockdown regulations and health and safety protocols that were imposed under the National Disaster Management, which was declared by President Ramaphosa, and which started on 26 March 2020, following reports of several cases of COVID-19 infections, the first of which was reported on 5 March 2020. The first death case was reported on 27 March 2020 (SAPA, 2020). The main purpose of the lockdown was to bring the spread of the COVID-19 under control, that is, to flatten the curve (as it is normally expressed).

A visit to Zandspruit during the initial alert level 5 gives one the impression that, according to a report in the City Press of 19 April 2020: “the lockdown does not seem to have taken effect in Kwa-Jack, as residents of the area fondly refer to it” (Dlamini, 2020:9). Palesa Dlamini reports that every day during the lockdown period:

It is a busy day. From a distance, it looks like it is life as usual in the community in the midst of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and nationwide lockdown.

But a closer look reveals the fundamental impossibilities and struggles of some communities, including this one, owing to the socio-economic realities they face (Dlamini, 2020:9).

Members of this large informal settlement (which came into being in the 1990s) live under harsh socio-economic conditions that are characterised by poverty, a fate they share with all inhabitants of informal settlements that have become a permanent feature of South Africa.

During the lockdown period, residents found it difficult to adhere to lockdown regulations. They found it difficult to stay “at home and safe.” They found it difficult to put on masks and to sanitise as these are expensive for poor communities, many of whom are either employed or only had poorly paying jobs, mainly piece jobs, before the lockdown. Many of the inhabitants live on government grants. Those who are not documented and are without identity documents have no income at all; hence, the masks and sanitisers are a luxury they cannot afford. They cannot even practice regular handwashing as water is also a scarce basic commodity. Most importantly, they cannot even practice social distancing due to the small, overcrowded shacks they are staying in.

In an interview with Palesa Dlamini, one of the residents, Dallas Zulu, a 36-year-old father of three, said:

We are told to social distance and stay 2 metres away from each other, but our shacks are right on top of each other... A person in this area is more isolated when on the street than when indoors because we are crammed in one shack. With more than five of us in a shack, how is 1 metre or 2 metres apart possible? Even if we want to isolate... how can we do so? (Dlamini, 2020:9).

Due to the lockdown regulations, Mr Zulu was not able to put food on the table as he could not continue with the piece jobs such as painting or gardening that he usually performed. As a result, he had lost his income, and due to lockdown and its regulations, he was unable to make any plans to feed his family of five.

Another resident of Zandspruit, Ms Carol Selepe, a mother of four who was six months pregnant, says:

I tried this lockdown thing; it is impossible to avoid people... I am doing laundry right now. For me to get water, I must walk a bit of distance in these tiny congested passages, where I will definitely bump into different people... I will then get to the tap that we all share... all of us, more than 100 of us on this side. So please tell me how this is supposed to work for us? (Dlamini, 2020:9).

Carol Selepe is mother who shares a shack with four children, the eldest of whom is a 13 year old boy, and when she takes a bath, she faces the uncomfortable issue of having to:

Ask my children to go outside when I need a bath... What else can I do? I can't take a bath in front of him (13-year-old boy). And obviously, children will not just sit at the doorstep and wait; they will walk around and will more likely find their friends and end up roaming the streets. That is our life. People look at us and think we are idiots who are living life as usual. We live this way because the struggles we are facing do not disappear just because of corona. We still live in shacks that are adjoined and that we share with more people; we still have one tap that we all have to share as a community, and we cannot run away from that (Dlamini, 2020:9).

Other complications in Zandspruit and other similar informal settlements are the use of communal taps shared by hundreds of people and communal toilets that many people also share. In such residential areas, you see, smell and touch poverty and hunger. Zandspruit is just one of the many densely populated informal settlements where the COVID-19 pandemic hit the hardest due to the pre-existing conditions of poverty (*epidemic of poverty*), that the pandemic itself exacerbates.

These are communities that are not only forgotten by politicians but by churches as well. Whenever there are service delivery protests, you hardly see the churches supporting them. The churches, which are supposed to have a self-understanding of their missional nature and its pastoral responsibilities, do not seem to care about the plight of impoverished communities, especially with regards to transforming the socio-economic and political structures in which poverty is embedded. At best, they offer charity, which includes soup kitchens and donations of old, unwanted clothes, welcome as these may be to those who have nothing.

5. The broader context of poverty and in South Africa

Zandspruit, and other impoverished communities in informal settlements, townships, and rural villages are part of the broader context of poverty rife in South Africa and other parts of the world. Poverty is a global reality. It is global epidemic, according to Crais (cf. 2011:1). In that global context, Crais could as well have been writing about poverty in South Africa and communities such as Zandspruit when he says, in very dramatic terms:

To witness kith and kin dying of poverty is the worst humiliation. We are at our weakest, at our most powerless and vulnerable, when we cannot help those for whom we care to attain food, water, and shelter necessary for survival. There is a sense of injustice and of abject failure when children perish from malnutrition and

disease, or when the old, the sick, and the innocent are left behind on roads and paths leading away from epochal violence and crisis (Crais, 2011:1).

Indeed, poverty is violence, institutionalised violence, that the missional Church must deal with and confront. Crais writes in the global context that we live in a planet of extraordinary poverty and inequality: “Where there is a wide gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots...’. More and more people currently live lives of poverty and destitution than at any other point in human history” (2011:1). This is no exaggeration: in both the global and South African contexts, the rich have been becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. The consequences are too ghastly to contemplate with the double blow of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the global epidemic of poverty.

Michael Smith refers to a recent World Bank Report, which paints a desperate picture of poverty and inequality in South Africa (Smith, 2018:ix). Turok cites a World Bank Report that underlines poverty and inequality in South Africa: “South Africa is not only the most unequal country in the world, but inequality has increased since the end of apartheid in 1994” (2018:4). According to Turok, poverty, together with inequality and unemployment, are the critical social problems of South Africa that South Africans must stop being polite about (2018:3). Smith says that poverty levels are unsustainably high in South Africa. This poverty is associated with unemployment. In the World Bank Report, it is identified as a key challenge for the South African economy, which at one stage was at a whopping 27.7% (in 2017). According to the Statistics South Africa Media release of 1 June 2021, the official unemployment rate stood at 32.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). As for the second quarter, the unemployment rate has risen to 34.4% (Maluleke, 2021). By the end of the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be far worse. In 2018, Smith said that it is estimated that 76% of South Africans could face an imminent threat of falling below the poverty line (2018:ix; Turok, 2018:4). As a result of this poverty, millions of people do not have food, healthcare, decent sanitation, and other essentials of a dignified life (Smith, 2018:ix). These are commodities, amenities, facilities and services that are basic, but very scarce in Zandspruit and other informal settlements and townships. This was the case before the COVID-19 pandemic, and things are like to worsen in the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of poverty did not end with the end of apartheid and the dawn of a new South Africa. In fact, in many cases, poverty and inequality became worse over the years. Smith says that the democratic era has witnessed widening inequality, with South Africa turning out to be one of the most unequal countries globally (Smith, 2018:ix). The Gini coefficient, the measure by which poverty is gauged, hovers between 0.63 and 0.68 since 2010 (Smith, 2018:ix). Citing the World Bank Report of 2018, Turok also provides the shocking, sobering statistics:

The top percentile of households had 70.9% of the wealth, and the bottom 60% with 7.0% richer households are almost ten times wealthier than poor households. What is striking is that ownership of financial assets features prominently among the factors that influence wealth inequality (Turok, 2018:4; cf. Smith, 2018:ix).

Behind these statistics, there are poor people and massive suffering due to the poverty entrenched in the country's socio-economic structures. Smith points out that a recent report confirmed that the economy's structure has largely remained intact since the apartheid era (2018:x; Turok, 2018:3). According to Smith, the poor continue to suffer and become poorer while the rich are becoming more prosperous and richer (2018:ix). It is, therefore, not surprising that South Africa has over the years seen the frustration of the poor masses whose dreams of a better South Africa are being shattered daily. The extension of economic justice remains elusive for the poor masses of South Africa. According to Ngcukaitobi, many of the promises that are contained in the Constitution remain "a hollow hope" in the context in which the climate of economic exclusion and political marginalisation continues (Ngcukaitobi, 2018:1). Ngcukaitobi argues in the context of a world-acclaimed Constitution, which stands as a monument and a model in the world and mandates the state to facilitate economic justice (2018:1). To millions of South Africans who remain poor, the promises of a new South Africa as entrenched in the Constitution and which are made before all elections have not delivered a "better life for all" as promised. Communities such as Zandspruit and many others remain on the margins of economic justice. When a pandemic like COVID-19 hits, it exacerbates a situation that is already dire and desperate.

Currently, the excuse is that the whole South African economy and other world economies are not doing well. This is an excuse that is difficult to accept as billions of Rands have been wasted and, in many cases, stolen from government Departments and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). In an open letter to Members of Parliament, the late Prof Ben Turok, a former member of Parliament, wrote:

The reports of the Auditor-General, the Zondo Commission, and many other reliable sources have revealed the scale of wrongdoing throughout the public sector. There has been outright theft, inflated tenders, wrongful expenditure and many other distortions. Let the Treasury and other relevant branches of government seriously initiate action to recover these billions, and that will be a good start (Turok, 2019:19).

Had that voice been listened to and the billions recovered, those billions would have been used to stimulate the economy, particularly parts of the economy that create jobs and reduce inequality. That voice and many others have not been lis-

tened to, and poverty persists, with serious consequences for the poor communities such as Zandspruit. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the worsening levels of poverty and inequality in South Africa. It is that context where we need the missional-pastoral approach on the part of the Church.

6. The beginning and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic

According to an article in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, authored by Chen, Zhou, Dong, Qu, Gong, and Han (2020), since 8 December 2019, there were several cases of pneumonia of unknown aetiology that were reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, People's Republic of China (Chen *et al.*, 2020:507; cf. Velavan & Meyer, 2020:278). Cases continued to increase rapidly to levels of a pandemic. This pandemic, which is now a global crisis, started in Wuhan City, China. On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was made aware of several cases of respiratory illnesses of unknown aetiology that emerged from Wuhan (Chung *et al.*, 2020:202; Guan *et al.*, 2020:2; Guarner, 2020:420). The illness was pneumonia, referred to as novel coronavirus (2019-nCov)-infected pneumonia (NCIP) (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1061; Holshue *et al.*, 2020:929; Chen *et al.*, 2020:507).

The associated clinical presentations resembled viral pneumonia and manifested fever, cough and dyspnoea (*difficulty in breathing*) (Chung *et al.*, 2020:202; Guan *et al.*, 2020:3). As of 30 January 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak a global health emergency, that is, Public Health Emergency of International Concern (Chung *et al.*, 2020:202; Gilbert *et al.*, 2020:871). On 11 February 2020, the virus, which was initially referred to as the novel coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV), was given the official name COVID-19 by the WHO (Guarner, 2020:421).

The preliminary epidemiological investigation revealed that most patients were frequent visitors to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market (Chung *et al.*, 2020:203; Holshue, 2020:929). According to Chen *et al.*, most of the patients worked at or lived around the local Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, where live animals were also on sale (Chen *et al.*, 2020:507). The cause of the illness was attributed to coronavirus, which was temporarily named 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV). The outbreak that started in Wuhan became a global crisis. It rapidly spread to other areas within Wuhan and China and later other countries to the extent that it was declared a global health emergency by WHO (Chung *et al.*, 2020:202; Wang *et al.*, 2020:1062). The 2019-nCoV has close similarities with bat coronaviruses, and it was postulated that bats are the primary sources (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1062). The source was initially thought to be transmitted from wild animals to human beings, particularly those who had a history of exposure to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. However, epidemiologic evidence was soon discovered that indicated person-person transmissions (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1062; Holshue *et al.*, 2020).

The presented clinical symptoms included fever, non-productive cough, dyspnea, myalgia, fatigue, shortness of breath, headache, and chest pains (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1062; Guan *et al.*, 2020:3; Chen *et al.*, 2020:509; Guarner, 2020:420).

There is no specific treatment for the coronavirus infection except for meticulous supportive care (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1068). The current approach focuses on the following (Wang *et al.*, 2020:1068; Guan *et al.*, 2020:11):

- Controlling the spread and the source of the infection;
- Use of personal protection equipment (PPE) to reduce the risk of transmission;
- Early diagnosis;
- Early isolation and quarantine;
- Supportive treatments for affected patients.

Patients who became severely ill had underlying diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes (Chen *et al.*, 2020:512). As for old age (60 and older), obesity, and those associated with comorbidities led to increased fatalities (Chen *et al.*, 2020:512).

Having started in China, and rapidly spreading to other countries, the first case in the United States was reported on 20 January 2020 (Holshue, 2020:929). This was the case of a man who returned from Wuhan, China, to Washington on 15 January 2020 (Holshue, 2020:929). From there, the pandemic rapidly spread to other continents and ultimately landed in Africa, with the first case reported in Egypt on 14 February 2020 (Gilbert *et al.*, 2020:871; cf. Nkengasong & Mankoula, 2020:871). The first case in South Africa was reported on 5 March 2020, and the first case of death was reported on 27 March 2020. It is important to remember that China is an important commercial partner of many African countries, resulting in large travel volumes through which COVID-19 could reach the continent, particularly Egypt, Algeria, and South Africa, with the highest importation risks (Gilbert, 2020:871; Nkengasong & Mankoula, 2020:841). African countries remain particularly vulnerable and South Africa, with densely-populated black townships, informal settlements and rural villages, is extremely vulnerable. This situation is made worse by fragile healthcare systems in Africa, including South Africa. Although it has world-class health facilities for the middle class and the rich, it has weak health systems for impoverished communities. This is the fate that South Africa shares with many other sub-Saharan countries with a fragile health system (cf. Velaven & Meyer, 2020:279). These are communities where the missional Church must be present and where the Church must be prophetically and pastorally active in caring and pastoral ways.

7. Missio Dei and Pastoral responsibility

Mission is what the Church is all about. Mission is what Christian life is all about. I agree with Saayman, who postulates that Mission is, broadly speaking, “the overarching di-

mension of Christian life in the world, what is widely known as *Missio Dei*" (2013:134). Mission does not only have to do with what the Church does in mission fields or as it reaches beyond the frontiers. It has to do with its identity and its engagement in and with the world in specific contexts. Most importantly, Mission must start with the understanding that Mission is God's Mission, it is *Missio Dei*. It is not the Mission of witnesses or agents who are involved in mission work. They are merely agents or instruments that God uses in His work in the Church and society. Acknowledging the centrality of God in the Church and Mission and the importance of the self-understanding of the Church, Roxburgh and Boren point out that the Church is God's missionary (2009:45). They proceed to say: "There is no participation in Christ without participation in God's mission" (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:45). Without engaging in semantics, my view is that the Church by its nature is missional, as it shares in and participates in the *Missio Dei*, not just in the context of North America and Europe, but also (and especially) in the context of the developing world (South Africa). Dames raises an extremely valid point when he says that the Church's calling must be missional in its 'calling and response' (2008:55). This is a response to realities in which God's people live, including socio-economic and political realities. In agreement with Saayman, there is not much difference between missional and missionary (2010:9). The two words relate to the *Missio Dei* and to the nature of the Church as a mission-oriented church. One agrees with Saayman that both terms are meant to refer fundamentally to the *Mission-Dei*, even though they are not necessarily synonyms (2010:13). The concern of Saayman is that the term missional, which was first used in the North Atlantic context in the 1990s, should not be transplanted lock, stock and barrel as it is (Saayman, 2010:14). Due consideration must be given to context. I would argue that even the term missionary was transplanted from the West, North America, and Europe from where missionaries were sent. In fact, the whole Christian theology came from the West, and all we must do is pay serious attention to contextualisation.

The ancient, outdated, one-dimensional understanding of Mission is that the Mission of the Church is only about "sending the church to do mission to all nations." It was as if Mission was confined to work among the 'not-yet-Christians' (Bosch, 1980:14). Once a church has been established, it is no longer involved in Mission. However, that need not be the case. Bosch correctly points out this erroneous and mainly geographic understanding of Mission: "Mission was something we did in far-off, pagan countries" (1980:12).⁵ I concur with Bosch that this is not the only feature of the existence of the Church (1980:17).

⁵ Prof David Bosch was making this point in the context of making a distinction between Mission (far and abroad) and Evangelism, with the latter having to do with something for our environment. There were others like Hendrik Kraemer and Johannes Hoekendijk, who according to Bosch, pleaded for an interpretation of mission and evangelism as synonymous or interchangeable (see. Bosch, 1980:13, 14).

Many churches, including the Lutheran Church and its various formations, use the word Mission only when they refer to the efforts of the Church to reach out to others who are outside the Church. Mission focuses only on efforts of the Church to increase its membership, or some occasions to do charity work. From time to time, mission festivals are held with the focus on the following:

1. Remembering those who did mission work amongst indigenous people who were “heathens” and are now members of an established church. Remembering the good old days of missionaries and mission work in far off countries.
2. Encouraging members of established churches to go out and do mission work by reaching out to others to make them Christians. This is always in terms of the Church growing in numbers. However, spiritual growth is usually not seen as part of the Mission of the Church. Neither is the pastoral presence and ministry of the Church regarded as part of the Mission of the Church.

At such mission festivals, guest speakers are invited to preach, and most of them remind members of the work of the Mission Societies and encourage members to reach out to others who are out there and to strive towards church growth in terms of statistics. The favourite biblical texts are Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 7:13-16, and Acts 1:7-8.⁶ The application of these texts is often directed towards others out there who must be brought into the Church. Nothing is wrong with this, but the missional nature of the Church is far deeper and extends way beyond this. Efforts are seldom made to re-examine its understanding of what the Church is, that is, its own ecclesiological self-understanding and the implications thereof. According to Kirk, the Church’s self-understanding and its sense of identity (its ecclesiology) are inherently bound up with its call to share and live out the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth and end of time (Kirk, 1999:30).

In one of the Lutheran churches, this being the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA), within the Central Diocese, there are four established circuits that are regarded and treated as such. However, there is a fifth circuit, which is referred to as the Mission Circuit (Southern Circuit in the Vaal area) because it is relatively new due to the re-demarcation of borders and the limited numbers. It is also regarded as a Mission circuit because it cannot yet meet its financial obligations to the Diocese. The Mission Circuit is treated differently from other Circuits and is led by an Interim Circuit Leader instead of a Dean like other Circuits. This is a structural misunderstanding or, at best, a one-sided understanding of what Mission is and presents a severely limited focus on the Mission of the Church. As Roxburgh and Boren (2009:10) point out: “Churches had lost touch with the way biblical

⁶ These classical mission texts are included in the lectionary, ELCSA ALMANAC in pages of readings for special occasions (see ELCSA ALMANAC, 2020).

texts spoke of God's mission in and for the world."⁷ The above are indeed part of the Mission of the Church, but the concept of Mission that we see here is quite limited. There is more to the Mission of the Church than increasing the number of church-goers. There is more to Mission than "crossing the frontiers towards the world" (cf. Bosch, 1980:17). Except to argue that Mission has to do with what the Church is, its nature and character, thus making it missional, it is not the intention of this article to fully engage at this stage with the theology and history of Mission, which is fully explored in other publications, particularly the work of David Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (1980) and a 'truly magisterial'⁸ book, *Transforming Mission* (1991), which according to Niemandt (2011) has not yet reached its sell-by-date. The relevance of Bosch's book, in my opinion, cuts across all disciplines of theology and not only missiology, and is relevant for the contemporary Church.⁹ The main argument of this article is that the Church is a missional institution that is involved in manifold ministries, including pastoral ministry. This pastoral engagement happens in various contexts, and in the context of this article, the missional-pastoral engagement occurs in the context of poverty and the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. What is *Missio Dei*?

Willem Saayman defines Mission as the *Missio Dei*, the great Mission of the triune God in the world (1997:5). He regards Luke 4:18-21, the Messianic vocation of Jesus of Nazareth, as fundamental to his understanding of Mission and the most comprehensive and satisfying paradigm for *Missio Dei* (Saayman, 1997:5; cf. Saayman, 2013:134). Some even say that this text is a manifesto outlining the *Missio Dei* as embodied in Jesus Christ. One agrees with Saayman that the comprehensiveness and the all-encompassing Mission is illustrated by the range of activities of the Spirit-filled Servant of God, which includes the following: preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed (Saayman, 1997:5; cf. Bosch, 1980:17). These range of activities of the Spirit-filled activities of Jesus explicitly imply the pastoral presence and actions of Jesus, who, throughout his ministry and particularly towards the cross, in the farewell discourse, shared his Mission with his disciples (followers). Jesus

⁷ The two authors were writing in the context of churches in North Africa and the formation of the Gospel and Our Culture Network that was inspired by the work of Leslie Newbegin in the late 1980s. The conversations arising from that Network focused on the sending of the church to North America.

⁸ It is Hans Kung who referred to the book as a 'truly magisterial' book in his brief cover review of the book.

⁹ Bosch, who passed away in a road accident on 15 April 1992, was way ahead of his time, hence the continued relevance of his outstanding work, especially his magnum opus, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991).

said: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). One can even say he shared his Mission, pastoral presence, and responsibility with his followers. He also endowed the followers (disciples) with the Holy Spirit and transferred his vocation to them (Saayman, 2013:134). One could even refer to this transferred or shared vocation as a missional-pastoral vocation. This is a multidimensional calling and Mission that, according to Saayman, included inter alia the following: evangelising, healing and working for social justice (*theology and development*), and announcing the Year of the Jubilee (Saayman, 2013:134).

According to Andrew Kirk, *Missio Dei* (God’s Mission) was first used at the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952, with reference to the purposes and activities of God and for the whole universe (Kirk, 1999:25; cf. Bosch, 1980:227). This acknowledgement of the fact that Mission is God’s Mission, in contrast to a witness’ Mission, is also appreciated by Bosch, who refers to it as “a decisive shift towards understanding mission as God’s mission (*Missio Dei*)” (1991:389). Mission is not merely an aspect of the existence of the Church, but it is “at the heart of the Church’s life” (Kirk, 1999:30). The centrality of Mission to the being of the Church is also appreciated by Saayman and Newbegin who correctly affirm that mission “is central to the life and being of the church, that is; mission belongs to the very being of the church” (Saayman, 1997:6; cf. Newbegin, 1995:1).

Missio Dei is God’s Mission. Godself is the subject, the initiator of Mission, and not the witness. God is the author of Mission (Bosch, 1980:75). It is not the Mission of the witness or agents of Mission, but God’s Mission. It is an attribute of God who is a missionary God (Bosch, 1991:390). Bosch concurs with Moltmann, who said: “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church” (Bosch, 1991:390). As cited by Roxburgh and Boren (2009:20), Rowan Williams, former archbishop of Canterbury, opines that “it is not the church of God that has a mission. It is the God of mission that has a church.” Hans Kung is also of the view that “God is at work in the church among *men* (sic) and through *men* (sic)” (Kung, 1967:265).¹⁰ Though, it is important to note that Kung was arguing not necessarily in the context of Mission but the ecclesiology and the oneness (unity) of the Church.

The Church is by its very nature a missionary institution to the extent that if it ceases to be missionary, it ceases to be a church (Kirk, 1999:30). A church that is not missionary, in my view, is not different from a social club. Equally, a church that is not pastoral or not caring like a shepherd is not a church. Lesslie Newbegin also acknowledges that more and more Christians have come to “recognise that a church that is

¹⁰ We will have to pardon the theologians of the past who are products of their time and lived when there was still no sensitivity to the use of inclusive language.

not ‘the mission church’ is not a church at all” (Newbegin, 1995:2). I would add that a church that is not a caring community is not a church at all. According to Bosch, it is the Church and the Christian faith¹¹ that is intrinsically missionary (Bosch, 2008:8). Gerkin sees the Church as “a Community of mission”, a community that seeks to be faithful to the Lord (1997:127). According to Gerkin, the Church is called out of itself into the world around it, who cites H. Richard Niebuhr who said: “The church loses its character when it concentrates on itself and seeks to make the love of the Church the first commandment” (1997:127). Therefore, the missional nature of the Church cannot be divorced from its pastoral responsibility, not only to its members but to all members of society. It is for that reason that the proposed direction is that of a missional-pastoral approach in the context of poverty and COVID-19.

9. Missio Dei, missionary or missional? That is the question.

The question may be posed as to why this paper is proposed in a missional-pastoral approach? Firstly, why the word missional? In the article *Missionary or Missional? A Study in Terminology* (2010), Saayman grapples with the two terms and attempts to obtain clarity. Saayman correctly argues that there are no clear etymological differences in the two terms, missionary and missional, as both derive from the word mission (2010:5). According to Saayman, the difference between the two lies in contextual factors, as the term missional had its origin in work done by the Gospel and Our Culture Network in the North Atlantic (Saayman, 2010:5; Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:9). That was the work inspired by Leslie Newbegin, who was concerned with the radical need to re-missionise the modern West (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:9). That was after Newbegin had spent decades in India and returned to Britain to a world and a very strange country that needed refocussing and re-missionising (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:9; cf. Dames, 2008:56). Those involved were grappling with the question of churches that seemed to have lost touch with the biblical texts that spoke of God’s Mission in and for the world (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:9-10). It was in that context that the term missional was used in relation to the Church. They understood missional as “an invitation for people to consider a new way of being the church” (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009:31). Self-understanding and identity of the Church are critical. In my view, this new way must start with the Church’s self-understanding of herself. What is the Church, and what is the nature of the Church? The Church should be very conscious of its missional nature, precisely because God of the Church is missional. God is active in the world, and God is the originator of Mission. The Church of the missional God must therefore be

¹¹ Bosch also says that Christianity is Missionary by nature, otherwise it denies its *raison d’être* (Bosch, 1991:9).

obedient to God's command to be missionary in various contexts. This is also the command to be a caring (*shepherding/pastoring*) church. The Church, therefore, must be both missional and pastoral as it becomes obedient to God's command.

What Bosch wrote decades ago remains valid today, regarding the issue of the Mission that was in crisis: "The danger then, however, is not merely of becoming irrelevant to the situations in which we live but also of being disobedient to the Lord who has called us to mission" (1980:3). That is the danger if we cling to the one dimension of Mission at the expense of other responsibilities, particularly at the expense of the nature and character of the Church, which should be missionary in nature and character, and which should among other things include the Church's pastoral ministry.

10. The pastoral responsibility of the Church as an important part of Missio Dei

As pointed above, many of the "missionary activities" or dimensions in the image of a prism referred to by Bosch and supported by Kritzingler are also part of the dimensions that are very present in Practical Theology, particularly in pastoral care (see Bosch, 1980:228; Kritzingler, 2008:33). These dimensions relate to theology as a witness to the Christian Community in worship, proclamation, service (*diakonia/theology and development*), and daily living. These various dimensions do not focus only on the pastor, but on the "whole people of God in the variety of its witness and service, as it lives in, with and for the world" (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006:29). To this, both Missiology and pastoral care have a role to play as theological disciplines. They have a role to play in ministry, that is, the interconnectedness of Ministry that Osmer refers to as the "Web of Life" (2008:15). As Osmer correctly argues, "Ministry in its various forms is interconnected" (2008:15). It is in the spirit of interconnectedness that I propose a missional-pastoral approach in the context of poverty. Osmer borrows this interconnectedness from the perspective of Bonnie Miller-McLemore's metaphor that describes Practical Theological interpretation as the "living human web" drawing attention to various forms of interconnection according to this image of a "living human web" which is a correction of the individualistic, therapeutic focus of pastoral care in the past century (Osmer, 2008:15, 16).

What has been said about God being at work in the world can also be said about God being at work in pastoral ministry, be it by pastors, caregivers, representative Christian persons or Christians as they engage in mutual care. Pastoral ministry is the responsibility of all Christians and not only the clergy, in line with the emphasis of Luther and other reformers on the priesthood of all believers (Gerkin, 1997: 42). It is also no longer the care of only individuals, but according to Gerkin, "the care of the entire community of faith" (1997:51). It is the Mission of God that mandates the caring of all, by all. *Missio Dei* can also be understood to be about God

being at work in the world through the pastoral interventions of the Church and its functionaries and members as they do pastoral care, including mutual care, in specific contexts. In the case of this article, the context is marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and poverty, and all associated socio-economic and political evils.

In my view, this *Missio Dei* includes activities or engagements of the Church which do not exclude the pastoral work, particularly pastoral care, which Clebsch and Jaeckle define as follows:

Pastoral care consists of helping acts by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons, whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns (Clebsch & Jaekle, 1967:4; Lartey, 2003:21;).

It is important to note that already in the early 1960s, Clebsch and Jaeckle recognised the importance of context. Lartey points out that this explanation has become standard and classical, and on which other definitions are based. In the spirit of the multidimensional nature of Mission, Bosch includes a much more comprehensive list of acts, as missionary activities in Mission when he says: “Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualisation, and much more” (1991:512). The pastoral acts referred to above are part of God’s Mission, through which God facilitates various ways and areas of ministry. Here, I do not necessarily challenge the independence of the two disciplines: Missiology¹² and Practical Theology,¹³ which includes pastoral care as one of its sub-disciplines. The two share a lot, more than any other discipline. Therefore, it is puzzling that when a merger of former Departments of Practical Theology with other Departments was considered at Unisa, the natural choice became Philosophy, Practical Theology, and Systematic Theology¹⁴ (including Theological Ethics). The motivation could not have been theological or academic, but rather political (nasty politics of the academia).¹⁵

¹² At Unisa Missiology is a discipline in the Department of Missiology, Church History and Christian Spirituality, and Practical Theology is a discipline in the Department of Philosophy, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology (which includes Theological Ethics).

¹³ Practical Theology is a discipline in the Department of Philosophy, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology (which includes Theological Ethics).

¹⁴ The historical jury will one day judge (leniently or harshly) the merits or otherwise of the merger that did not merge Practical Theology with Missiology, Church History and Christian Spirituality but rather Philosophy, Practical Theology and Systematic Theology.

¹⁵ If one day research was to be undertaken, I suspect the motivation is likely to border on personal interests, egos, and possibly unfounded fears that related to positions and power. This is notwithstanding that as a member of the merged Department I have experienced some enriching collegiality and friendship from members of the disciplines that under normal circumstances do not belong together,

11. Missional-Pastoral approach in the context of poverty and COVID-19

The starting point of the missional-pastoral approach in an impoverished community like Zandspruit informal settlement is the Church's self-understanding of herself as one body of Christ that has been called and mandated to live, not only for itself, but to equally live for others. It is a body that belongs not to its members or leaders, but to God who is a missionary God. God is the originator of the *Missio Dei*, and the Church has to be faithful and obedient to God of the Church and to Christ, who is head of the Church, whose ultimate objective is to increase the love of God and neighbour (Gerkin, 1997:127). The Church must be pastorally present in struggling communities such as Zandspruit. If that were the case, we would have seen the Church pastorally present in the struggles of the community of Zandspruit, including the presence during service delivery protests. The missional Church must articulate and live out the call of the Gospel to be concerned for and actively involved in social ministries that provide more than just soup kitchens and distribution of old, unwanted clothes. As Gerkin points out, the Church must: "Be concerned for and be actively involved in social ministries that care for the dispossessed, the homeless, and victims of political and economic injustice everywhere" (1997:128).

Gerkin cites Dieter Hessel who said:

Since God is radically social, all modes or dimensions of ministry are social in ways that encompass both personal growth and political responsibility. Congregations must develop the modes of ministry with intentionality and competence, so that ministry contributes to social transformation as well as human fulfilment, to the health of community and country as well as congregational renewal, to local/global action as well as to church growth (Gerkin, 1997:128).

As the Church gets involved in social ministries, the purpose of which is to transform society, due consideration must be given to the agency of the impoverished communities. Therefore, the Church must be involved in an empowering ministry and must be prophetically and pastorally present in the struggles of the poor.

12. Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to make a case for the Church to be both missional and pastoral in its character, and proposed a missional-pastoral approach. The starting point for such an approach is a self-examination of the Church, bringing the realisation that the Church is a missional body that has been mandated by Jesus

particularly from the discipline of Philosophy, which is not a theological discipline.

Christ, the head of the Church, to live out its missionary and pastoral responsibilities. The Church is not the author of the Mission, but the author of Mission of the Church is God, to whom the Church must be obedient; hence, the Mission is referred as the *Missio Dei*. This Mission of God must be lived out in specific contexts. In the case of the article, the context of living out its *Missio Dei* is the context of COVID-19 and poverty in impoverished communities such as Zandspruit.

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