

Sustaining pastoral work and welfare in Zimbabwe: Case study of pastors in Masvingo urban



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A growing number of pastors in Zimbabwe are adversely affected by the economic crisis that has been caused by the lockdown measures imposed by the government to tackle the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Only some pastors who are financially supported by their churches and donors and others who have adopted tent-making ministry are getting through this difficult situation. There is very little study on the subject of economic sustainability of Zimbabwean pastors. The majority of the available literature is limited to a few denominations. This article applies 'theonomic reciprocity' theory, which integrates divine action and human participation for ecclesiastic sustainability. In this respect, tent-making was reviewed. In the context of economic volatility, this study examined the economic sustainability gap that needs to be bridged between pastoral ministry and welfare. The article discusses sustainability of congregational support for pastors and tent-making ministry in the Zimbabwean economic context. Very few pastors in Masvingo have embraced self-sustaining initiatives. Most of them are yet to integrate faith and business due to fear of diverting their attention from ministry. The study recommends pastors to consider contextually needful tent-making towards sustaining their work and welfare.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: Exploring the economic sustainability of congregational support and consideration of tent-making is a contextually crucial research that features Pastoral Theology, Ecclesiology and Economics.

Keywords: sustainability; pastor; church; faith; economics.

Introduction

Pastors have a great privilege to serve as word bearers of God and shepherds of mankind (Brewer 2017; Polk 2007:18; Siew 2013:49). A large number of pastors in Zimbabwe have been serving without consistent and sufficient support from their churches because of an economic crisis (Gumpo 2017; Ncube 2016). This crisis has been worsened by the lockdowns imposed by the government in an attempt to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (Chingwe 2021). Only a few pastors who are financially supported by their churches and donors and others who have adopted tent-making ministry are able to survive this difficult situation. Churches ought to provide financial assistance towards pastoral work. (Boyo 1994:70). However, tithes, offerings and donations have been insufficient in supporting pastoral work and welfare (Mwenje 2016:76). The majority of congregations have been failing to provide sufficient aid because of various factors such as economic downturns resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is observed that self-sustaining strategies such as tent-making ministry remain highly contested as some pastors perceive that it may divert their attention from the work of the ministry while others recognise it as contextually needful. Sometimes tent-makers have been viewed as less faith-driven persons or part-time gospel ministers, while those pastors who fully depend on their congregational support are regarded as giants of faith. From a biblical perspective, not doing anything for self-support reflects an irresponsible attitude during and after the tenure of a pastor, because their dependent families often suffer when churches stop looking after them. Although multiple researches have been carried out about tent-making, there is an ongoing debate about its applicability, merits and demerits in different contexts. Therefore, there is a need to assess this subject in the current Zimbabwean setting. The Pauline conception and model of tent-making (Ac 18:1-3) provides a biblical theological perspective for gospel ministers to work and support their welfare and work of ministry. This paper challenges traditional pastoral and ecclesial dependency on faith alone without reciprocal work. It recommends pastors to consider tent-making towards sustaining their pastoral work and welfare.

The article begins by defining the key terms related to this topic. Thereafter, it outlines the methodology that was used to accomplish the study. The subsequent section gives the theoretical framework upon which this article is based. Afterwards, a contextual review of the Zimbabwean economy is given. In view of that, the article then scrutinises the sustainability of congregational support for pastors. After that, conceptualisations of tent-making by pastors and scholars are discussed. Following that, the article delineates strategies to sustain pastoral work and welfare in Zimbabwe. Once this is done, the article will conclude by recommending pastors to consider tent-making as contextually very crucial. Churches will also be recommended to utilise their available resources and adopt entrepreneurship to maintain their economic sustainability and sustain pastoral work and welfare in Masvingo.

Defining key terminologies

It is befitting to define the key terms that form the foundation of this article. Definitions of terms play an important role in writing, and their primary purpose is to aid readers' understanding and to avoid confusion. Thus, Vakulenko (2014) explains that understanding their contextual meanings is very important. Concurringly, Slisko and Dykstra (1997:656) add that meanings of terms are varied and should always be clarified.

The key words of this article are 'pastor', 'church', 'faith', 'economics' and 'sustainability'. The meanings of these words will be explained first. Stitzinger (1995:147–150) defines a pastor as a shepherd assigned by God to feed and take care of people. James Stitzinger traces the history of pastoral ministry from the Old Testament and presents the attributes of a pastor from the viewpoint of God in Psalms 23:1. There the pastor is described as one who shows tender loving care, courage and displays a self-sacrificing attitude. A shepherd is also depicted in the New Testament through John 10:11–16, 14 and 1 Peter 5:4 as a humble, caring, selfless and glorious person. Similarly, Willimon (2002:11) views a pastor as a professional who professes, teaches and propels the faith of the Church. This article agrees to the above interpretations, and Polk's (2007:6) simplified description of a pastor as a shepherd who feeds and leads the Church under the leadership of Jesus Christ.

The term Church is pivotal in this article. It is usually easily confused with a building, denomination and people (Mburu 2016:46). The words of Jesus Christ to Peter, that he would build his church (Mt 16:18), and common sayings of our neighborhood fellows that 'I am going to attend church...' confuse many, hence the importance of defining the term. The Church is an assembly of people who believe in and worship God (Ac 11:26, 1 Cor 14:23). Blackwell (n.d) defines 'Church' as the universal body of believers led through and by Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 states that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. The Church is also biblically portrayed

as being married to Jesus Christ (Eph 5:24) and being submissive to Him as a wife does to her husband. Lephoko (2010:161) concurs and says that the Church is the community of those who are saved and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The term Church is used in this article based on this interpretation.

The next important word in this study is 'faith'. Generally, it refers to trust. This paper focuses on religious faith which is defined by Bishop (2016) as exclusively hoping in God, trusting in God, believing in God and committing to God. The term 'faith' is used here with respect to the belief in the existence of God and a strong conviction in his ability to care for the needs of all humans. This view is biblically depicted through Hebrews 11:1, which says, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. This indicates that faith inspires one to be sure that God will provide whatever he or she needs.

Economics is another critical term in this article. It is used with reference to Maier and Nelson (2007:37) who conceptualise it as provisioning or the organisation of societies to promote their survival and flourishing.

Another key term is 'sustainability'. There are different types of sustainability, such as ecological, economic, financial, social, political and institutional. Definitions of sustainability vary. The concept has been shifting in meaning, and consequently, it has no single definition (Fredriksson & Ytterfors 2015:7; Kuhlman & Farrington 2010:3438). The issue of sustainability is complex and far-reaching (Weber et al. 2020:26). Butzke (2007:3–4) traces its development from environmental conservation and private enterprise when it referred to productive investments and recovery through profits. In the context of non-profit making organisations, including the Church, the word sustainability means financial survival and continuity. Historically the most accepted definition of sustainability emanated from the Brundtland Report in 1987, which was entitled 'Our Common Future'. The report described sustainability as 'meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This paper takes sustainability as the development and management of available resources to meet current needs and leave some surplus for the future.

Research methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research analyses the experiences and responses of specific people to reach an inference (Merriam & Tisdell 2016:6). It is appreciated that qualitative research generates rich data, descriptions, examples and concerns of participants from their contexts (Leavy 2017:19; Yin 2016:3).

The researcher applied purposive sampling that is informative, cost-effective, least time consuming, most convenient and

generates the intended information about the research purpose with selected participants (Taherdoost 2016:23–24; Tracy 2020:82). The researcher effectively conducted in-depth interviews with 10 pastors from Masvingo Ministers Fraternal (MMF), which has 50 subscribed members. The researcher considered to select MMF because it is an inclusive fellowship group that accommodates pastors from different Pentecostal, evangelical, mainline and apostolic groupings and thus well representative. In-depth interviews were purposively preferred because they enabled selected participants to freely and fully share their lived experiences and their conceptualisations (Seidman 2006:9). According to Books (1997:6), conducting interviews helps to obtain unlimited amount of data in relatively short periods. In-depth interviews allowed the researcher to explore and discover how pastoral work and welfare could be sustained in Masvingo without restrictions as interviewees expressed themselves liberally and comprehensively in unstructured ways.

A descriptive and interpretive data analysis approach was employed because it describes and analyses the viewpoints of participants, reflects on their meaning and thereby interprets the data (Elliott & Timulak 2005:152–153).

The researcher upheld research ethics in the entire research process by obtaining informed consent, ensuring accuracy and confidentiality and avoiding deception, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of participants' responses as advised by Pruzan (2016:291), Akaranga and Makau (2016:6), Hammersley and Traianou (2012:75). The study had no ethical risk. All sources used have been referred to. Due efforts were made to articulate viewpoints of various scholars in a fair and balanced manner. No inflammatory or stereotypical language was used.

Theoretical framework

This article applied the theory of 'theonomic reciprocity', which integrates divine action and human participation towards ecclesiastic sustainability (Butzke 2007:9–10). The theory deals with the relationship between God's provision and human efforts in the same way that theology relates with philosophy. Considering the possibilities of espousing self-support strategies to sustain pastoral work and welfare amid the fear of diverting faith from God, Paulo Afonso Butzke developed 'theonomic reciprocity' from theologian Rudolf Böhren's work about preaching, which is titled 'Predigtlehre'. Böhren dealt with the connection of Spirit and method, by saying that one needs to fully trust in the Holy Spirit as the origin and the power of preaching, while the Holy Spirit gives us the responsibility for methodology. From this standpoint, it means that the Spirit, which dwells in us, wants to act with our participation. Butzke (2007:9) explicates that the Holy Spirit is a spirit of synergy that acts in reciprocity, correlation and correspondence – and that is 'theonomic reciprocity'. He refers to it as 'theonomic', arguing that God is the subject and not the result of our efforts. 'Theonomic reciprocity' embraces and activates

human efforts with the grace and enablement of God. This article submits to Butzke's emphasis that the reciprocity must be kept under theological supremacy, arguably because if human methods and techniques claim autonomy, they will become useless and helpless servants reflected through Mathew 25:30. With that perspective in mind, human initiatives should yield to God's will and depend on God's blessing. The theory signifies that human efforts should be maximised to achieve economic sustainability while correspondingly praying and trusting in God to gain positive results.

The Zimbabwean economic context

Understanding the economic context of Zimbabwe is important to explore the strategies towards sustaining pastoral work and welfare in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has been in a deepening economic crisis since the 37 years of long rule of the late Robert Gabriel Mugabe up to the military assisted rise (Cook 2017:1) of the incumbent president Emmerson Mnangagwa in November 2017. President Emmerson Mnangagwa then pledged a progressive governance and promised to bring about economic reforms when he rose into power and:

[F]or a moment, Zimbabwe's July 30, 2018 elections seemed to promise relief from a traumatic political past. An aging autocrat had been deposed and his successor intoned pledges of a 'new dispensation'. At home, and abroad, Zimbabwe's well-wishers gave themselves a cautious hope that change was finally afoot. But change was not to be. (Masunungure & Bratton 2018:1)

To date, the cost of living continues to increase, leading to a massive exodus of more than three million people, thereby depriving the economy of highly skilled workers needed for industrial growth (Chitiyo et al. 2019:4). According to Matiashe (2021), the Zimbabwean government intensively publicise the economic development of the country through state media to attract international funding, as multilateral or bilateral partners normally prefer investing money in an economy that is well managed with balancing fiscal books. However, the country's economic problems still remain unchanged. Matiashe states that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural weaknesses in the Zimbabwean economy concerning high levels of poverty and the inadequacies of social protection and public health. Kanyenze, Chitambara and Tyson (2017:6–14) observed that the Zimbabwean economy has been seriously underperforming. This has been confirmed by massive deindustrialisation and informalisation of the economy. The country has also experienced depressed investment levels because of political instability and policy inconsistencies that undermined business confidence. Kanyenze et al. also mention the weakening of public institutions characterised by fiscal and debt mismanagement and corruption accompanied by infrastructure and public service degeneration.

Moreover, the Zimbabwean economy has remained fragile as characterised by high inflation, high liquidity constraints and

high interest rates (Pasara & Garidzirai 2020:2). Chitiyo et al. (2019:25) add that Zimbabwe's economic state has been devastating households, businesses and the social fabric of the country. Consequently, the 'new' government lost public confidence as it appears performing in the same way as the former administration.

The economic haemorrhage has been worsened by COVID-19 lockdowns, which were meant to curb the spread of the deadly virus. Other causes of economic crisis include continued heavy taxation, bureaucracy, systemic corruption, command policies and flawed rule of law that suppress free market and scare away private investments (Bhoroma 2021). The majority of Zimbabweans have been subjected to abject poverty (Chingono 2021). In such an economic quagmire, pastors who established businesses like prophet Apostle Ezekiel Guti (founder and Bishop of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa), Tom Deuschle (founder and leader of Celebration church), Emmanuel Makandiwa (founder and leader of United Family International) and prophet Walter Magaya (founder and head of Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance Ministries) are flourishing, while those serving without businesses are struggling to survive. It is against this background that this study proposes tent-making for pastors to sustain their work and welfare instead of depending on congregational support.

The sustainability of congregational support for pastors in Zimbabwe

It is remarkable that pastors are called by God into ministry, and the Bible instructs the Church to support their work and welfare (Boyo 1994:78). Scriptural teachings from 1 Corinthians 9:7–14, Galatians 6:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 and 1 Timothy 5:17–18 indicate that churches should support their pastors. As complete undivided devotion is expected of the ministers, churches will be wrong if they take them for granted with a view that their service to God must be voluntary and unrewarded. One of the leaders of MMF said that 'we have needs and wants like everyone else, such as food, housing, food, clothing and finances to educate our children'. All interviewed pastors concurred that they expect their churches to support them in cash and kind. It is scripturally and humanly understandable that churches should be always in partnership with their pastors to sustain their work and welfare. Unfortunately, as Winkleblack (2017:4–5) observes, caring for the personal and professional needs of the pastor is often neglected.

Very few churches such as the United Methodist church in Zimbabwe have been supporting their pastors well (Muzerengwa 2019) by raising funds to supplement congregants' donations through trading CDs, stickers, calendars and various items for self-sustenance (Sifile et al. 2014:9–10; Taru & Settler 2015:119–120). The bulk of Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe has been struggling and failing the test of economic sustainability. Denominations

such as the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) succumbed to financial crises as some of their leaders ended up fighting for personal gains amid economic volatility (Mpofu 2018).

Another MMF member explained that:

'[I]nsufficient, and or zero support for pastors cause numerous problems that will always affect the running of churches, life of pastors and their families because without support, personal and family upkeep is disrupted, and subsequently we cannot effectively attend to the work of ministry when personally unstable. That means the congregants automatically lose clerical attention and they eventually suffer.' (Pastor 1, MMF member, interviewed 01 July 2021)

It is construed that poorly supported and unsupported pastors ultimately withdraw their devotion to ministry when they struggle for their livelihood. Thus, churches may undergo spiritual malnutrition if pastors fail to give their full attention.

A few pastors in Masvingo and other places of Zimbabwe have adopted tent-making to support their ministry work and personal and family welfare.

Previous research confirms that most Pentecostal churches depend on tithes, offerings and donations, which are not viable in the Zimbabwean context (Mwenje 2016:76–77). Tithes, freewill offerings and donations are usually fluctuating and contingent on the economic situation, capacity, conceptualization and willingness of believers. Chibango (2020:123) notes that the concept of tithing is hotly contested, leaving some congregants contending that tithes should not be fully paid to pastors but rather shared with widows, orphans and the needy people. Others are in the opinion that the clergymen have the right to receive tithes, while some others totally dismiss tithing saying that it is unfounded in the New Testament. In view of such unending problems of tithes, freewill offerings and donations, depending on them as sources of support is unsustainable.

Moreover, national economic meltdown has affected churches in the same way that it has impacted other corporate organisations in Zimbabwe. A number of churches and para-Church organisations have been growing and competing for freewill offerings and donations of the same followers. This has been constraining the traditional sources of finances. Therefore, the Church has been financially challenged and is struggling to sustain pastoral work and welfare. This research concurs with Kitawi and Irungu (2015:1026–1027) that churches acquiesced to 'dependency syndrome' partly because of the missionary history associated with donations. Having been depending on tithes, freewill offerings and donations for too long, many Pentecostal churches have not yet incorporated business strategies to generate more income for self-sustainability. When local and foreign donations decrease, or stops, churches find themselves wanting. This article therefore argues that congregational support for pastoral work and welfare in Zimbabwe is currently unsustainable and in dire need of a review.

Conceptualisation of tent-making by pastors in Masvingo

There is unanimity in Masvingo that the concept of tent-making was derived from the practice of Apostle Paul who had a job to sustain his missionary work and personal welfare. Pastors in Masvingo, however, have varying views and mixed feelings about the concept. Some of them regard it as a model to imitate, while others find it negative and retrogressive with regard to ministry as discussed below.

'It's a statement of protest'

In an in-depth interview about tent-making as a strategy to sustain pastoral work and welfare, one of the heads of MMF voiced that:

'[I]t is a statement of protest by gospel ministers on the failure of the Church to support them, although others take it as an ideal ministry model in the capricious Zimbabwean context.' (Pastor 2, MMF member, interviewed 02 July 2021)

Some interviewees agreed with the opinion and argued that if a pastor is well supported, he or she may not need to shelve ministry and look for any business or job. They elaborated that a pastor can fully dedicate themselves to the work of ministry every day when the church takes care of their welfare and work. One pastor added that:

'[I]f the church can meet the needs and wants of pastors, their spouses and children, they will always avail themselves fully and their post-retirement life can be secured through pensions and related plans.' (Pastor 3, MMF member, interviewed 03 July 2021)

The majority of churches in Zimbabwe are failing to sustain their clerical work and welfare because of the national economic volatility, which is beyond their control. As Vengeyi (2011:236–237) states, the majority of Zimbabweans live in abject poverty because of a combination of various factors beyond their control, 'such as economic sanctions that are hurting the common man, poor government policies and endemic corruption'. As tent-making can supplement what churches may give in a volatile context, the researcher argues that pastors should not engage in tent-making ministry merely as a statement of protest when their churches fail to care for their needs, but rather adopt it as a self-sustaining strategy. Thus, they will be able to support themselves during periods of economic crises.

'It can divide attention'

Some research participants voiced against the tent-making model citing the reason that 'the Church expects pastors to show undivided commitment and availability to ministry. She should therefore bear in mind that venturing in any self-sustaining quest will divide one's attention'.

According to a broad spectrum of gathered responses, a number of pastors feel that they should stick to their ministry and avoid working on any venture outside the bounds of Church. Some of them emphasised that their congregants

need their services and presence full time, hence the impracticability of tent-making. Such views render tent-making as something impractical and give an impression that pastors should always confine themselves to their pastoral work. However, their views are unrealistic. If pastors neglect tent-making out of fear of dividing their attention from ministry while their churches fail to sustain them, the economic crisis will still divert their attention when personal and family needs demand to be addressed. Those who avoid tent-making in an effort to stay focused in ministry are actually ensnaring themselves to get distracted by economic problems. It is thus advisable that pastors should consider doing tent-making while managing their time well to attend and sustain their work and welfare. A brief survey of some pastors who have adopted tent-making in Masvingo showed good examples worthy to imitate. Some pastors are running small businesses at home, such as poultry farming, while others operate large-scale enterprises in town. They generate income while setting aside time to attend ministry. Others are formally employed. They attend their jobs during working days, delegate weekly assignments to others who will be available and fully attend ministry during weekends and off-days. It is true that there are certain jobs and businesses that demand more time and can deviate the attention of pastors from ministry. Nevertheless, as Paul managed his tent-making and accomplished ministry, pastors should consider it as a practical thing to do.

'It's vulnerable to corruption'

Some of the interviewed pastors stated that tent-making can tempt them to fall into love for money, which may lead them to succumb to corruption and other evil deeds. Their views concur with the submissions of Bonga (2014:10–11) and Seet's (2000) who say that there is high corruption and pressure in doing any kind of business today. Certain pastors in Masvingo accordingly refuse the concept of tent-making and say that it is like falling into a rough place where only the fittest can survive.

Their perspective gives the idea that Christians who enter the world of business may find themselves at the mercy of market forces, facing acute competition and several temptations such as cutting corners, and some unethical means used by other competitors. They explained that such challenges can distract and divert pastors from their life-saving ministry.

According to them, 'those who consider doing business in Zimbabwe get tempted to use corrupt ways for survival in the harsh Zimbabwean economic context'. The causes behind this situation include inconsistent government policies, fluctuating exchange rates, unstable pricing system, institutional corruption and mistrusted banking system that ultimately prompt most business people to do illegal methods to survive. One of the engaged pastors alleged that:

'[A] number of business people in Masvingo adjust their operations without considering the law and the Bible.

The majority of citizens in Zimbabwe no longer transact their hard-earned forex through banks because the government restrict bank rates, and change policies overnight and sometimes declare banked forex as Zimbabwe dollar without due process.' (Pastor 4, MMF member, interviewed 04 July 2021)

The biggest problem for pastors is the temptation of using illegal black market options in attempts to stay viable in the volatile Zimbabwean environment. This has scared countless pastors away from business due to fear of losing their integrity.

However, the researcher argues that corruption has always been and remains a choice for everyone. Pastors can decide to withstand and keep free from it. We have examples of very successful Christian businessmen who prospered without compromising their Christian principles such as Strive Masiyiwa. Strive Masiyiwa is an internationally acclaimed Zimbabwean telecoms billionaire who is currently based in London. He declared a war against corruption as part of his attempts to curb corruption across the world. According to Shumba (2019), Strive Masiyiwa spoke at the annual Desmond Tutu International Peace lecture at the archbishop's 88th birthday and emphasised that corruption is stoppable 'if we individually and collectively fight it like we did against apartheid'. He stressed that corruption must be regarded as a pandemic, or an elephant in the room of Africa's progress, which must be dealt with. Strive Masiyiwa indicated that business can be done well for the advancement of the gospel, with transparency, accountability and without corruption. Thus, it is unwise for pastors to avoid tent-making because of fearing evil. Avoiding tent-making and being dependent on congregational support can actually lead to sin. It is vulnerable to frustration and desperation because tithes, offerings and donations are not sustainable. When frustrated and desperate, one may become tempted to perform dishonest acts for their survival. Tent-making can thus save pastors from sin and portray them as godly and good examples of contextually progressive ministers of the gospel. As the Bible declares that believers are the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16), pastors should not hide but lead by example in influencing what is right (by exhibiting corrupt-free business and contextualisation of pastoral ministry) in the marketplace.

It's contextually considerate

Some pastors who appreciate tent-making argued that it enables them to be empathetic, loving and caring for the needy by forbidding them from bearing costs of pastoral work and welfare in a way that was demonstrated by Paul.

Nam (2020:33–34) perceives that Paul's tent-making was to safeguard the poor from being burdened by providing him. It protected him from getting controlled by the providers of support and being misunderstood as one who serves for personal economic interests. It also helped him to display Christ-like love to believers by toiling to sustain his ministry work and welfare regardless of the capacity of his congregants.

As Sangtam (2007:41) notes, Pauline tent-making portrays contextualisation of the gospel. When ministering people who are able to support him, Paul sustained himself and embodied the suffering nature of Jesus Christ. When in poverty-stricken contexts, his self-support raising demonstrated empathetic love and care by not burdening recipients. While some gospel ministers receive congregants' support (Ac 4:34–37), Bradley (2017) says that following the example of Paul provides independence, instead of dependence from believers. It gives credibility in face of the world that suspects that those who depend on people's support may be serving their personal interests. In that view, self-reliance is vital because it helps pastors to minister freely without fears of losing followers' backing. The example set by Paul denotes that he considered working for his sustenance to withstand potentially harmful influence from those who could provide support. It is arguably difficult for a pastor to objectively oversee those who provide him most support. Dependent gospel ministers tend to compromise the gospel to secure support while independent ministers can afford to keep true to the gospel without worries of losing the support of others.

Besides that, dependent pastors may succumb to poverty, become miserable and appear as poor examples that most congregants would not want to imitate. Considering the fact that ministry work in this 21st century is subjected to numerous challenges (Onongha 2015:183), such as reflected in the case of the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, it is important to formulate innovative approaches for self-sustainability as traditional sources of income are no longer stable. As noted earlier in the review of the Zimbabwean economic context that revealed a gloomy picture of the condition of pastors, the support from most churches for conducting pastoral work is unsustainable. The precarious contextual environment demands thinking outside the box of old forms of support. While tent-making is treated with ambivalence by some pastors and churches, it is contextually needful, not only in Zimbabwe, but in Africa. In order to complement what churches may provide, demonstrate empathetic love to the economically challenged Zimbabweans and display Christ-like self-sacrificing attitude to ministry, pastors should consider tent-making ministry. They should adopt tent-making, not only for their much needed self-sustainability, but for the sustenance of the gospel beyond the pulpit to the marketplace.

Scholarly conceptualisation of tent-making

The concept of tent-making is drawn from a secular process of making of tents. A tent is a portable shelter or dwelling of canvas or cloth, supported by a pole or poles and stretched by cords attached to pegs driven into the ground (Matsaung 2006:234). In ecclesiology and missiology, the term tent-making is widely conceptualised as doing any secular job or business for self-support while one is fully committed to the work of ministry.

The concept is drawn from Paul who made tents to support his missionary work and personal welfare as reflected through Acts 18:1–4:

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (NIV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.)

Various scholars concur that tent-making refers to the activities of a person who pursues the Pauline missionary model by either working on entrepreneurship, funded service, incentivised voluntary service, as a salaried professional or as an employee (Ndelwa 2002:17–20).

Advantages of tent-making

According to White (2012:106), tent-making is a biblical strategy that offers several advantages like generating income for gospel ministers to sustain themselves and to help the needy in their neighborhoods. Similarly, some scholars believe that tent-making emancipates ministers from becoming burdens to their congregations (Matsaung 2006:239; Wessels 2016:6). This is well reflected by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:9:

And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. (NIV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.)

2 Corinthians 12:13–16:

How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! (NIV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.)

Therefore, tent-making is advantageous in that it frees a gospel minister from being a burden to the believers and enables them to demonstrate love for the recipients. It is discernible that if a pastor becomes a burden, they can be a hindrance to the spread of the gospel and to the believers' submission to God and to the minister (as reported about Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:5, 'And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us' (NIV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.).

Additionally, Paul teaches that tent-making extends love to congregants (2 Cor 12:14–15; 1 Th 2:6–9) through establishing selflessness when pastors toil hard for fulfilling his or her children's material needs. Although Paul also taught that it

is the responsibility of congregants to support gospel ministers (1 Cor 9:7–14), his tent-making approach enabled him to deliver the gospel freely without burdening believers. In agreement with this, Nam (2020:22) asserts that 1 Corinthians 9:15–18 is considered the concrete explanation of 1 Corinthians 9:12b, that Paul refused the right to support in order not to hinder the gospel of Christ (1 Cor 9:12) by offering the gospel without any fees (1 Cor 9:15–18). The position of Paul in this aspect was the most powerful distinction between him and philosophers who taught for money. The stance of Paul also highlights the gracious and sacrificial nature of the gospel.

The adoption of tent-making likewise enables a minister to become empathetic and aware of contextual challenges that necessitate to devise self-support strategies and ensure economic sustainability through engagement in some business, employment or family investments. As Paul distinguished himself from other ministers who relied on congregants' funding during his time by working hard to sustain his ministry work and welfare, pastors in Zimbabwe should consider self-sustaining activities in the context where others manipulate and exploit poverty-stricken followers who are struggling to put food on their tables.

In concurrence with Lesiba Matsaung, when a pastor becomes a tent-maker, they relieve their congregation from paying them. As a result, a tent-maker becomes mentally, physically and spiritually liberated from financial constraints and serves the congregation with joy while also allowing the meagre congregational finances to be channeled into other projects or programmes that will benefit the church and surrounding communities (Matsaung 2006:239).

By following the example of Jesus Christ, pastors should opt for a servant attitude presented in Matthew 20:28 through tent-making instead of burdening those who are already living in poverty. Pastors in Zimbabwe are free to invest wherever they can and minister the gospel in the marketplace the same way that Paul used his trade as a springboard for missionary work. Having conducted a study of the Corinthian religious and socioeconomic context, Paul partnered with Aquila and his wife, Priscilla who were also trained and experienced entrepreneurial manufacturers and traders in tents to work and sustain his missionary work (White 2012:33). It is discernible that partnership was a wise strategy that he utilised. With help of his partners, he managed his time well as confirmed by his accomplishment of tent-making and ministry.

Zimbabwe is currently undergoing disturbing economic hardships and tent-making appears to be a good strategy to open doors for the poor into churches where dependency in congregants arguably closes doors by burdening them. Paul was aware of the difficulties faced by the poor people and chose to adopt self-support strategies, thereby showing the rich that the gospel is not for money but salvation. Paul's

example of parental love and sacrifice through his manual labour is thus an example for modern-day gospel ministers to imitate.

White (2012:92) asserts that tent-makers usually have more control over how they use their time. While there may be some difficulties in the beginning to find enough time for their ministry, when the business gets running, they gain freedom to give more time to ministry.

All in all, tent-making can enable pastors to bring the gospel to all communities. Zimbabwe's underprivileged rural areas are still unreached and in serious need of the gospel because most ministers are based in town where they expect better support. When pastors embrace tent-making, they can supplement Church support or reserve Church resources for other needs.

Challenges of tent-making

It is discerned that tent-making can leave gospel ministers with an identity crisis when they begin to live in two worlds (ministry and business/employment). Matsaung (2006:239) argues that a tent-maker serves two masters. According to Van Niekerk (2018:18), working both in the secular and religious worlds presents two distinct basic attitudes to life that may cause stress and other unnecessary imbalances. Although their views are generally sound, they are not specifically binding for Zimbabwe. The local economic crisis-stricken context demands pastors to integrate the two different worlds and sustain themselves.

It is also opined that tent-making may lead ministers to be sometimes absent from the congregation. Some church members may be heavily dependent on their pastors to an extent that they become weak and may backslide when their pastors get occupied by tent-making. Without pastoral care, certain congregants may be tempted to relax and lose attention from actively participating in *missio ecclesiae* and *missio Dei*. As a result, this can weaken and ruin churches. However, the absence of pastors from church services should not always be deemed destructive. It should also be considered constructive for elders, deacons and congregants to be taught to fill pastoral gaps in the absence of their pastors. That means, when shepherds are available, they can equip their sheep for ministry and release them to serve and gradually complement them in their absence as 2 Timothy 2:2 says, 'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others' (NIV Online Bible Gateway). So, if elders and deacons learn from their pastors, they can exercise pastoral care through different capacities such as preaching, teaching, praying for and visiting each other.

Some contextualised strategies used by local pastors for self-sustenance

Drawing from different perceptions of the clergy about sustaining pastoral work and welfare in Masvingo urban,

three following strategies – rebuilding the economic sustainability of churches, empowering families of pastors and pursuing tent-making ministry – appear highly commendable because they inclusively engage all stakeholders, namely, churches, pastors and their families to make concerted efforts towards sustaining pastoral work and welfare.

Rebuilding the economic sustainability of churches

One of the local denominations in Masvingo employs an enterprising model. She has been leasing her small hall to a preschool and lets her bigger main hall on Saturdays for events like workshops, meetings, weddings and conferences. She uses the main hall for her services on Sundays from 10:00 to 13:00 and gives room for a certain church that hires it for services from 14:00 to 17:00. The church conceptualised economics and commercialised her buildings. As a result, she earns some income from rentals, complements her traditional sources (tithes, freewill offerings and donations) and sustains her pastors, employees and holistic missionary work.

Bearing in mind that the traditional sources of finances for most local churches are undependable, this article suggests that the aforementioned model is a contextually feasible strategy to generate revenue. The model proposes that utilising and commercialising available resources can help churches to generate income.

Progressively, churches can then consider establishing any other feasible business ventures. In view of the risks that doing business may divert the attention of churches from their missionary mandate, the researcher argues that they can establish business, employ or engage volunteers to run their enterprises while reserving pastors to focus on the work of ministry.

Discerning from the enterprising model, it is arguable that if a church rebuilds her economic sustainability, she will not only sustain herself, but minister beyond her walls through giving to the needy and eventually creating marketplace space to advance the gospel.

Meanwhile, it is viewed that churches should teach stewardship to grow congregational giving. As Warren J. McFate states, it is crucial for the Church to lay a solid foundation by developing a theology of Christian stewardship that enlightens, transforms and enables congregants to work for the sustenance of *missio ecclesiae* (McFate 2010:6–7).

Empowering families of clerics

Some interviewees narrated an inspiring example of a local church that is empowering families of her pastors. The church pays school fees for pastors' children up to the tertiary level. She also finances and trains their spouses to establish small business projects such as tailoring,

cosmetology and catering while resourcing pastors to exclusively attend to ministry.

Some children and spouses of pastors who benefited from this model are now cosmetologists, caterers, teachers, accountants and lawyers while others are established entrepreneurs. When educated, employed or established in business, whatever the children and spouses bring to their families, plus ecclesial support will collectively sustain pastors during and beyond their tenure.

It is thus observable that if churches could empower pastoral families in any way they can, the welfare and work of pastors could be sustained.

Considering that the majority of pastors are on voluntary contracts, they do not have pensions, and most churches will not afford to provide them any retirement package and cannot continue looking after them while supporting those who replace them. Many pastors therefore leave with nothing and die in stress without any means to eke out a living. Hence, empowering the families of pastors is an important aspect to consider.

Understanding that such empowerment is mutually beneficial, when able, pastors should strive to back the education, entrepreneurship and establishment of their families in any viable options. When their families are being empowered, pastors can give full attention to ministry without worries of poverty and thus churches gain undivided pastoral care.

Tent-making

Two of the participants who were engaged for this research run successful poultry projects. They keep broiler and roadrunner birds in cages accommodating 50–100 per batch at their homes. They sell broilers after every six weeks and roadrunners after every six months. In order to manage their time, they feed their birds every morning between 06:00 to 08:00 and subsequently free themselves to attend to their work of ministry.

Although their sales fluctuate because of the national economic crisis disturbing Zimbabwe, they said that their projects have been giving them some helpful extra incomes to complement what they get from their churches.

One interviewed pastor is formally employed. He works Mondays to Fridays from 08:00 to 17:00. He facilitates two midweek church services on Tuesdays and Fridays from 18:00 to 19:00 after work. He attends home visitations and events like weddings on Saturdays and main church service on Sundays from 10:00 to 13:00. Being well aware that some pastoral work may need attention during working days (like funerals, ailments, etc.), he assigns elders, deacons and mature congregants to represent him when he is absent.

The aforementioned examples confirm that tent-making is a feasible option. They concur with preceding discussions and

analysis under pastoral and scholarly conceptualisations of tent-making that pastors should strategically consider either securing some form of employment or business to earn some extra income while cautiously making deliberate efforts to avoid getting distracted from ministry. If doing a job or conducting a business venture demand more time, the examples given above highlight the fact that pastors can equip and send their subordinates and congregants to fill their gaps while they work towards availing themselves to accomplish the work of ministry.

Conclusion

This article addressed an economic sustainability gap that must be bridged between pastoral work and ministry. It found that very few pastors are adopting self-sustaining initiatives and the majority are depending on the unstable support of their churches. It is observed that many pastors are undecided and wondering in a dilemma of absolute faith in divine provision without their participation because of fear of diverting their attention from ministry by tent-making. The study revealed that the volatile Zimbabwean economic situation has been exacerbated by government policy inconsistencies, systemic corruption, defective rule of law and COVID-19 lockdowns. The predicament subjected countless Zimbabweans to abject poverty, constrained their life and necessitated to adopt self-support strategies. The study found that few churches are still managing to support their pastors while the rest are struggling and failing. It also noted that the number of churches and para-church organisations are increasing in Zimbabwe, causing intense competition for believers' support. Financial constrictions have thus adversely affected churches and their support for pastoral work and welfare. It is exposed that dependency in tithes, freewill offerings and donations is unsustainable, inconsistent and unreliable because congregational giving keeps changing as circumstances change. The article discussed and analysed conceptualisations of tent-making ministry by pastors and scholars. The study found that tent-making is derived from the missionary practice of Apostle Paul. Although its applicability is debated, the examples of Paul and some local pastors who efficiently adopted it prove that it is feasible, especially in the poverty-stricken Zimbabwean context. Tent-making must therefore be approached from an informed position for takers-in to withstand its challenges and utilise it for self-sustenance and advancement of missionary work in its holistic form beyond the walls of churches into the marketplace. The study also recommends churches to utilise their available resources towards economic development and sustaining pastoral work and welfare in Masvingo.

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