Mission as *'being with'* in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa

by

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the impact measures (such as lockdowns) used to combat pandemics like the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) on the church's mission. When people in communities face travel and assemble restrictions, the church as a community of witness testifying and participating in Christ's work, as Hooker (2009) puts it, risks being neutralised and its presence weakened. What then does mission as 'being with' look like in these situations? Is faithful presence something one can turn on and off at will depending on the situation? If faithful presence is no more, what then is the impact of such absence on the church's mission? What is the impact of such absence, perceived or real, on the beneficiaries of the church's mission? These questions underscore the relevance of this research which seeks to ascertain the impact the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has on the church's mission; in other words, what does mission as *being with* mean during a deadly pandemic that is accompanied by a government-mandated lockdown? The crucial area this research seeks to explore are the lessons from the COVID-19 lockdown that will prepare the church for future pandemics which scientists say are inevitable. What then happens when communal life is disrupted by a deadly pandemic; when freedom of movement is taken away and people can no longer move around as they wish; when there is a shortage of willing and capable people to deal with issues other than 'medical' that affect communal life; when faith communities cannot assembly and churches can only stream their worship services directly to people's digital devices and homes? What does mission as *being with* look like in these situations?

The results revealed six attributes, or capacity building blocks, of a missional church, namely, it:

- creates a culture of collaboration – with government, business, and non-governmental organisations;
- continuously builds strong relationships with groups of similar interests;
- builds long-term partnerships;
- embraces diversity, unity and inclusion in decision-making;
- regularly communicates its vision, policy and plans;

- encourages community participation in its programmes whilst also participating in community led initiatives.

Based on these themes/attributes, the research recommends a 7-step process to prepare the church for the next pandemic:

- ecumenical relationships
- useful partnerships
- striving for church unity – speaking with one voice
- pew skills audit
- indigent households audit
- (re)training of pastors and laity
- Disaster Management Framework (DMF) for the church

Contribution: This research has provided the church with a perfect opportunity to shift from being 'inward-looking' to a church that is community focused, a church that prepares, trains, and equips its adherents for the work of ministry in their own communities, organisations and encounters, such that the work of ministry continues with or without gatherings. The lesson learnt is that the church needs to be proactive, to be a kind of place where you have everything ready so that if there is a pandemic or a major disaster, the response is immediate. To this end, the DMF is recommended as an emergency response plan for the church.

Keywords: COVID-19, mission, being with, lockdown, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1IR	First Industrial Revolution
2IR	Second Industrial Revolution
3D	Three-Dimensional
3IR	Third Industrial Revolution
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APA	American Psychiatric Association
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CEO	Chief Executive Officers
COVID-19	Coronavirus
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CV	Curricula Vitae
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
EFT	Electronic Funds Transfer
FBO	Faith-Based Organisations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	General Practitioner
GPS	Global Positioning System
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOL	Independent Online
IT	Information Technology
LEAN	Local Ecumenical Action Network
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
NICD	National Institute for Communicable Diseases
NPO	Not for Profit Organisations
PPE	Personnel Protective Equipment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RQ	Research Question
SAB	South African Breweries
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SARSA-Cov-2	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus
TEASA	The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TB	Tuberculosis
TERS	Temporal Employer-Employee Relief Scheme
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UJ	University of Johannesburg

UN	United Nations
US	United States
USA	United States of America
WEF	World Economic Forum
WHO	World Health Organisation
WWW	World Wide Web

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

This research investigates the impact measures, such as lockdowns, used to combat pandemics like the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), on the church's mission. Investigating the impact of a pandemic that is accompanied by a government-mandated lockdown which restricts the movement of people and goods, except for essential services such as those related to health, safety and security, and the provision of basic foods, while also enforcing the social distancing policy that prohibits large-scale gatherings like conferences, classroom learning, religious gatherings, and social-cultural functions like weddings, funerals, concerts, etc., is important because of the impact it has on society and the church. Pandemics can shape and alter the history of humanity and the church, or any other social institution for that matter, as neither are immune or passive participants. Those on the receiving end of the church's mission, that is, mission beneficiaries, may also change the way they understand church based on its presence or absence during lockdowns; thus, in the process, signaling a need for the church to redefine and repurpose itself in order to stay relevant and meaningful. The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic did not only affect the well-being of individuals and groups. It also meant that, on the one hand, people needed to change the way they behave and engage with one another, and, on the other hand, the church's mission of equipping its members for the work of ministry and of caring for one another needed more emphasis. Thus, if the church is to continue to save and serve people in communities, it has no option but to adapt and change.

When people in communities face travel and assembly restrictions, the church as a community of witness, testifying and participating in Christ's work, as Hooker (2009:1) puts it, risks being neutralised and its presence weakened. What then does mission as '*being with'* look like in these situations? Is faithful presence something one can turn on and off at will depending on the situation? If faithful presence is no more, what then is the impact of such absence on the church's mission? What is the impact of such absence, perceived or real, on the beneficiaries of the church's mission? These questions underscore the relevance of this research which seeks to ascertain the

impact the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown had on the church's mission, in other words, what does mission as *being with* mean during a virulent pandemic that is accompanied by a government-mandated lockdown? This research seeks to explore the lessons from the COVID-19 lockdown that will prepare the church for future pandemics that scientists say are inevitable

This research needs to be seen in the context of the basic obligations said to be inherent in the Christian tradition "to visit the sick, to console the mourners, to attend to the dead, to dower the bride, to escort one's guests to afford them support in all their necessities" (Maimonides, cited in Loewenthal 1997:173). Caring for the ill, poor or any in need is given priority in Scripture. Specifically, with regard to illness, James 5:14*,* Matthew 10:8*,* Galatians 6:2 and Romans 12:13 are the main Scriptures that speak specifically to the Christian obligation to attend to the unwell and take care of those who are not able to fend for themselves. However, the Bible places some boundaries on these injunctions. Leviticus 13 in the Old Testament stipulates that persons affected by contagious diseases were to be removed from the public space and placed in isolation for a certain period of time until they are healed. Such persons were considered unclean until pronounced by a priest to be clean (cf. Conti & Gensini 2007:174). Leviticus 22:4 specifically refers to a leper (a derogatory term that whenever used is meant to hurt those suffering from disease) as someone unclean and not worthy to partake in sacred functions. In the New Testament, Luke 17:12 recalls the ten lepers who kept a distance from where Jesus and the crowds were because they were forbidden by law to be amongst the people for fear of infecting others (cf. Gensini, Yacoub & Conti 2004:258). How far then should the church stretch itself in serving and saving lives, not only as law-abiding people and institutions respectful of government lockdown regulations, but also as a movement of sent and sending disciples whose moral obligation is to act against injustice, inequality, greed, corruption, xenophobia, and all kinds of suffering, including illness and near-death situations?

As an approach to mission, faithful presence places strong emphasis on face-to-face engagements and communal life (James 2016:20). It emphasises '*being with'* and '*working with'* instead of '*being for'* and '*working for'* (Wells 2017:10-12). It means

creating time and space to be actively and directly involved in communal life, living in the place, not above it, and loving neighbours from within, instead of from a distance. It is about knowing what it means to be rooted in a particular place and context at a particular time (James 2016:20). Genuine love and care cannot be practiced from a distance; it happens up close and personal. God's love as a model of how to love, is not love from a distance, but love in a person-to-person way (Billings 2004:188). Old age homes, as an example, exist for the aged and their families who are no longer able to provide adequate personal care – Old age homes fill this void. Hospices too take care of those whose families neither have the know-how, nor time or resources, to provide the required personal care. What then happens when communal life is disrupted by a deadly pandemic; when freedom of movement is taken away and people can no longer move around as they wish; when there is a shortage of willing and capable people to deal with issues other than 'medical' that affect communal life; when faith communities cannot assembly and churches can only stream their worship services directly to people's digital devices and homes? What does mission as *being with* look like in these situations?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO Constitution n.d., para 1). *Physical health* refers to the ability of the human body to use any part of the body without limitations as a result of either injuries, sickness, or diseases. It also reflects the feeling of freedom from any disease in body parts or organs. *Mental health* reflects the functioning of our brains, how we think and act from what we see and hear. It also reflects our ability to face and withstand difficult moments in life. *Social health* refers to the feeling of contentedness with our life situation, how we feel, think, and relate with others, the quality of conversations and engagements we have with the world around us and the level of respect we give and receive back from others. It is the overall quality of life in our neighbourhoods, where we congregate for worship, social clubs, associations, and places we frequent.

This then brings us to the core focus of this research which, in a sense, is two-fold in that on the one hand it investigates the church's missional presence with regard to the physical aspects of the lockdown and, on the other hand, it investigates the church's

presence with regard to the psychological effects of isolation and confinement households and societies experienced during lockdowns. *Physical* aspects in this sense include health in general and the way people take care of their bodies, what they consume and how they exercise, to mention a few examples. This in turn is determined by the extent to which the supply chain is disrupted by the lockdown, rendering people unable to buy what they need for their bodies or access gyms and other facilities for their physical well-being. *Psychological* aspects are those that refer to a person's mental and emotional state of health as a result of isolation and confinement. Included in this category is the psychological impact of job loss, hunger, and poverty due to the devastating effect of the COVID-19 lockdown which affected a wide variety of industries such as tobacco, liquor, and food services.

Posel, Oyenubi and Kollamparambil (2021:6) studied how job loss and job furlough affected the mental health of South Africans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings revealed massive economic fallout from the pandemic – 30% of the workforce lost their jobs and a further 12% furloughed in the first month following the lockdown. This would have a severe mental and emotional impact on those affected and their families, including their standing in society. Thus, responses to the pandemic needed to address not only the physical aspects (provision of food, medication, and shelter) but also mental health (emotional support and counselling).

A limited number of similar studies describing the prevalence of mental health sequelae associated with COVID-19 are cited below:

Regarding healthcare workers:

- Conti, Fontanesi, Lanzara, Rosa and Porcelli (2020) in a study conducted during the COVID-19 outbreak between March and May 2020 found a high incidence of somatisation and distress among Italian health care workers.
- Lai and colleagues (2020) found symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress in health care workers treating patients with COVID-19 in China.
- Mira and colleagues (2020) in a study conducted in Spain found that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the mental health of health professionals with the likelihood of reducing their resilience in future waves.

- Şahin, Aker, Şahin and Karabekiroğlu (2020) found that Turkish health care workers serving during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced high levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress symptoms.

Regarding patients with COVID-19:

- Rogers and colleagues (2020) found that during acute infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or Middle East respiratory syndrome, patients manifested neuropsychiatric symptoms consistent with delirium (insomnia, impaired attention or concentration, anxiety, memory impairment, depressed mood, confusion, and altered consciousness).
- In a United States of America (USA) study by Taquet, Luciano, Geddes and Harrison (2020), a diagnosis of COVID-19 was found to be associated with increased incidence of a first psychiatric diagnosis in patients with no previous psychiatric history.

Regarding the general population:

- Wang and colleagues (2020), in an online survey conducted in January and February 2020, found moderate to severe anxiety in 29% of Chinese adults and moderate to severe depression in 9 to 17% of the same population.
- Tian, Li, Tian, Yang, Shao and Tian (2020), in a survey conducted in January and February 2020, found the presence of psychological distress in 8 and 12% of adult Chinese individuals.
- In February 2020, Liu *et al.* (2020) found symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (intrusion symptoms, avoidance, negative alterations in mood and cognition, and hyperarousal) in the Chinese adult population.
- In March 2020, in a survey by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), 36% of Americans felt that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a serious impact on their mental health (APA 2020).
- In April 2020, McGinty, Presskreischer, Han and Barry (2020) found the prevalence of psychological distress in 14% of the American adult population.
- In a survey conducted jointly by the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Orkin, Roberts, Bohler-Muller and

> Alexander (2020) found that 33% of South African adults were depressed, 45% were fearful, and 29% were lonely during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Further studies found that older individuals, for example those above 70 years, and people with reduced immunity due to various illnesses, may also experience increased anxiety, depression, and worry (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). In addition, the United Nations (UN) suggested that refugees and people displaced by wars and humanitarian issues are more at risk for psychiatric disorders related to COVID-19 (UN 2020:2). However, it should be noted that whilst useful, these studies are compromised by the convenience sampling methods applied in most of them (Pierce *et al.* 2020:567).

As alluded to by Pfefferbaum and North (2020:510), the psychological effects of the lockdown was one of the main concerns at the onset of the pandemic. These included issues related to the disruption of citizens' normal life following restrictions on their freedom of movement, financial losses suffered by businesses forced to cease their operations and the job loses that followed, and individuals being unable to meet their financial obligations to lenders. Additionally, shortages of essential goods at retailer shops as people 'panic' bought fearing severe shortages when the supply food supply chain was disrupted, as well as the uncertain prognosis of the pandemic whose future activity and impact could not be predicted with any certainty, exacerbated issues.

There was concern also for those who contracted the coronavirus and were subsequently placed in isolation at home, or in hospitals and other venues, with no visitation allowed, even by their close family members. Further concern was for bereaved families who endured difficult moments without friends, co-workers, neighbours and faith communities who weren't able to extend the usual support they often provide during deaths and funerals. Even on the eve of a funeral, which traditionally is an important event in South Africa, night vigils were not allowed under lockdown rules, and no more than 50 people could attend funerals. If faithful presence requires a direct and active involvement in communal life, in a particular place and context, at a particular time, then the church's mission can never be complete until it encompasses this social dimension of mission, no matter how difficult and challenging contexts turn out to be. In times of difficulty, when faced with a crisis, we rely on others

to provide support, whether material (money, food, or clothing) or emotional (someone there just to listen and show compassion). Stone, Cross, Purvis and Young (2004:407) express that, in these moments, all we may need is the feeling of safety and the knowledge that we are loved and cared for. Those who have experienced such beautiful moments of love and care have a first-hand experience and knowledge of what the church is and can essentially be, adds Marynovych (2015:55). This is precisely what the Gospel says in Matthew 11:28, calling on all those who are weary and burdened for genuine relief. Thus, the presence of the church during a major incident is a living testimony of Christ's ministry of *being with* those in need who are crying out for genuine love.

Mission as *being with* requires the church to be present and to be felt by the people in neighbourhoods beyond the walls of the church building. Disseminating useful information about the pandemic and how society can protect itself and prevent further spread; making church buildings available for public health services such as temporal hospitals, quarantine centres, and the provision of counselling services and advice to those in need, are just some examples of how a missional church can remain relevant, meaningful, and with society during difficult lockdown periods. But '*being with'* means more than the mere provision of facilities and services. It means being with the people in their moments, feeling the pain together, working together toward a common purpose, celebrating successes together, and taking collective accountability for failures and omissions in a particular context. Accordingly, McManus (2005:10) noted:

> The presence of the Church provides an important testimony to the ongoing work of the Spirit through all aspects of human life, points to the fact that even through disasters we are upheld by God.

Echoing this sentiment in an opinion piece regarding the role of the church during the time of the COVID-19 crisis, Rev Mzukisi Faleni expressed:

> South African citizens, without any theological training, may find themselves in a situation of providing pastoral and theological care to the sick and dying. What one has in one's heart is all what the dying person needs at this time. This is the practice of love for thy neighbour and the needy. In the same breath, we do not inspire our nation

> or professional staff to expose themselves irresponsibly to danger. God has given humans the inclination towards self-protection and trusts that they will care for their bodies. The virus teaches us to care for each other using our caring hearts to communicate with the needy hearts. The sooner the church comprehends that the mission is different, the better (Faleni 2020:n.p.).

In the same way, when Jesus commanded the 70 disciples in Luke 10 to go out to the neighbouring towns as his forerunners, to carry no baggage but depend on God, pronounce a blessing on the house that welcomes you, accept what they give you to eat and drink, heal the sick and declare the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus was instructing them to be the vehicle of God's love when they enter the house of misery, the house of pain and suffering, the house of hunger and starvation, the house of isolated and dying patients, the pavement of a homeless person, the street corner of a sex worker, and the victim of gender based and sexual violence. In summary, the church has a duty to be present to minister to all people in all types of situations and catastrophes.

Darrell Guder (2000:66) summed it up this way:

> It is essential for mission as witness that the reality of the kingdom become tangible in the church – not that the church is the kingdom, but that the church demonstrates the nearness of the kingdom, the first fruits of its coming.

The COVID-19 situation provided the church with an opportunity to change from being inward-focused to being community focused; a chance to be a church that prepares, trains, and equip its disciples for the work of ministry in their communities, in all encounters. According to Rodney Stark in *The Rise of Christianity* (1996), Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage writing in 251 claimed that "only non-Christians had anything to fear from the plague", referring to the Plague of Cyprian which ravaged Rome from around 250–270 CE. The bishop noted:

> The just are dying with the unjust, it is not for you to think that the destruction is a common one for both the evil and the good. The just are called to refreshment, the unjust are carried off to torture; protection is more quickly given to the faithful;

> punishment to the faithless. How suitable, how necessary it is that this plague and pestilence, which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the justice of each and every one and examines the minds of the human race; whether the well care for the sick, whether relatives dutifully love their kinsmen as they should, whether masters show compassion for their ailing slaves, whether physicians do not desert the afflicted. Although this mortality has contributed nothing else, it has especially accomplished this for Christians and servants of God, that we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death. These are trying exercises for us, not deaths; they give to the mind the glory of fortitude; by contempt of death, they prepare for the crown. Our brethren who have been freed from the world by the summons of the Lord should not be mourned, since we know that they are not lost but sent before; that in departing they lead the way; that as travellers, as voyagers are wont to be, they should be longed for, not lamented ... and that no occasion should be given to pagans to censure us deservedly and justly, on the ground that we grieve for those who we say are living (Stark 2011:116).

When another plague hit the Roman world in the middle of the third century, the bishop of Alexandria, Bishop Dionysius, wrote:

> Most of our brothers showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing upon themselves the sickness of their neighbours, and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in caring and nursing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead… The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that in death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal to martyrdom (Stark 2011:117).

The missional role of the church is to change the world, i.e., from a world characterised by wars and the displacement of people, to a world where there is peace and unity amongst the people and the nations. From a world where wealth is a privilege for a minority to a world whose resources benefit all its citizens. From a world characterised by greed, corruption, and bribery by those put in positions of power and influence, to

a world where those elected officially care more about communities and less about lining their own pockets with large sums of money. The church's missional role is no longer about bringing people into the church building so they may congregate for a Sunday worship event. It is now more about outward focusing, transforming societies and ensuring that a better life for all citizens is realised here and now. Pillay (2015:1) says this is tantamount to portraying God's sovereign rule on earth. In agreement, Niemandt (2019b:4) states, "[T]he church needs to establish a faithful presence in the commons". The church, through Christian men and women, needs to establish a faithful presence in the communities. Faithful presence is not occasional help provided to strangers. It is not an outreach initiative that is planned at set intervals or occasions. Faithful presence means seeing, feeling, and experiencing God's presence in every moment of encounter with a situation crying out for love and care. It means presenting our bodies and our mind the way of Jesus in every encounter to be the living testimony to the ongoing work of the Spirit. COVID-19 has provided the church with a chance to turn a crisis into an opportunity – an opportunity to be agile, to be a going and faithful church; an opportunity to transform the world to reflect the glory of God. If the church fails to reflect God's kingdom in the world, COVID or no COVID, then the church is not true to its calling.

For a missional church, a crisis in society is not to be a crisis for the church. Instead, it is an opportunity to live out the gospel to be with those battling the impact of the crisis. Dreyer (2015:2) says, should the crisis in society become a crisis for the church, then the church is not doing what it is called for – to be missional. The missional church's daily focus is on people's well-being – spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. When a humanitarian crisis erupts, a missional church should not scramble for resources – human and material – because it already has these; they were procured and stored long before the crisis in anticipation of uncertain times ahead. Similarly, when a health disaster strikes, a missional church already has psychologists and psychological programmes at its disposal. It already has a database of all civilians in its neighbourhood regardless of faith or denomination affiliation. This corresponds with Dreyer's (2015:2) assertion that the church's primary focus should not be on empty pews, and thus diminishing finances, but rather, it should always be on people's physical, mental, emotional, and social health.

Even if the position of the church changes from predictable to unpredictable in terms of income flow and membership base, and other indicators that the church considers crucial for a good and healthy operation, the church should still remain the church by following the example of Jesus's ministry – of remaining true to oneself, regardless of the situation one faces (Marynovych 2015:55).

1.2 BASIS FOR THE CHOICE OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO on 11 March 2020. By then, more than 118,000 cases and 4,291 deaths had been reported in 114 countries. By mid-March 2020, Europe had become the epicentre of the pandemic, with over 40% of cases confirmed globally. By 28 April 2020, 63% of global deaths from the virus were in the European region (WHO 2020). The realisation that countries of the Global North with much more sophisticated health systems, strong economies, and world class financial systems were hardest hit at the onset of the outbreak presented serious concerns for Africa. Governance structures in Africa are known to be relatively weak compared to the developed world. Exacerbating issues is the shortage of basic services such as clean running water, transportation, and adequate health facilities. Fighting the spread of the coronavirus in these situations would be a monumental task. However, contrary to all predictions, the spread of the virus in African countries was significantly lower than in the Western world, puzzling everyone including international scientists. At the conclusion of this research, most countries around the globe had experienced a series of waves of infection of variable strengths, with human behaviour being a major contributor to the second and subsequent waves. National governments' responses, such as the reopening of boarders, restaurants, shops, public recreation facilities like parks and beaches, as well as individual people's responses to physical distancing, handwashing, and mask-wearing, all contributed to the surge of infection in the subsequent waves. At the conclusion of this research, Africa had reported 11,2 million cases and 249,000 deaths (The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2022). South Africa was the most affected in the region with 3,9 million cases and 100,000 deaths (Republic of South Africa [RSA], Department of Health [DoH] 2022). Globally, there have been more

than 600 million confirmed cases resulting in 6,5 million deaths (Johns Hopkins University of Medicine 2022).

In a meta-analysis of COVID-19 patients, the prevalence of comorbidities was examined. The presence of underlying diseases, such as high blood pressure and heart and blood vessels related disease, were found to be risk factors for severe cases when compared to non-severe cases (Yang *et al.* 2020). Similarly, the US CDC reported that older people (65 years and older) and people of any age whose immunity was compromised due to a variety of comorbidities, poor management of these comorbidities, and poor health behaviours, were more at risk of severe illness (CDC 2020). But Africa, with its vast limitations, was in a different state altogether. Having the world's youngest population, and almost 26 million of its people living with HIV/AIDS and 58 million children having stunted growth due to malnutrition (WHO Africa 2020), the expectation was that younger people in Africa would perish at a much faster rate than people of any age anywhere in the world. That this did not happen after the first wave of the pandemic confounded many, including scientists across the globe.

For South Africa, with approximately 55,5% (30,3 million people) of the population living in poverty at the national upper poverty line (~ZAR 992), and a total of 13,8 million people (25%) experiencing food poverty (World Bank Group 2020), the situation was equally disturbing. About 4,3 million of the workforce is unemployed, and 17,6 million people are recipients of social grants (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] 2020). Of the total population, only 9,4 million are covered by a medical aid scheme, meaning that about 47,2 million people rely on public health facilities (Medical Brief 2018). With a population of over 58 million and a total nursing manpower of 284,837, equating to 206 people per qualified nurse (South African Nursing Council [SANC] 2020); and about 27,432 doctors (17,802 general practitioners and 9,630 specialists), translating to 2,861 people per general practitioner (GP) in the public sector and 2,723 people per GP in the private sector (Econex 2010), South Africa's health system is severely stretched and under-resourced. This means that national, provincial, and local government structures and institutions on their own could not cope with the crisis without active participation by business, civil society, and the church.

South Africa reported its first positive case of COVID-19 on 5 March 2020, and by 15 March the number had risen to 61, prompting the country's president, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, to declare a national state of disaster and several measures to contain the spread of the virus. Still by 23 March, positive cases had risen to 402, further prompting the president to declare a 21-day national lockdown from midnight March 26, 2020. Under the Disaster Management Act, No. 57 of 2002 (RSA 2002), a series of regulations to contain the spread of the disease were promulgated. These include restricting the movement of people and goods; practicing social distancing; dissemination of information; closing the country's borders; shutting down non-essential social and economic activities; restricting gatherings to 50 individuals; prohibiting the sale of alcohol, tobacco, and other non-essentials; and tracing all those who had been in contact with an infected person. Although successful to a certain extent, the lockdown strategy came at a huge cost to some communities and the country at large. There were unparalleled levels of hunger as people who relied on casual jobs, like vehicle guarding in parking areas, or garden maintenance in residential homes, could no longer generate the much-needed daily income for their survival. Those who depend on selling fruit, vegetables, and cooked food on street corners and pavements also suffered. School-going children who depend on government's feeding schemes in schools suffered as classroom schooling was not allowed during the lockdown period. The disruption of the supply chain meant that some of the people's daily needs could not be met. Additionally, their confinement to their homes meant a surge in gender-based violence (GBV) and mental challenges as a result of being denied freedom to participate in social activities, e.g., gyms that were forced close.

In the face of these adversities, Preuss and Seabright (2020:7) wrote:

> The use of interventions [non-pharmaceutical] is hotly debated and calls for an end to restrictions have recently become louder. The discussion is often illustrated as one weighing up between money and lives …Imposing a lockdown may reduce the death toll from the epidemic but can also have an opposing effect by increasing the risk of suicides and domestic violence.

Under the aforementioned Disaster Management Act, financial, human and other resources directed towards the resolution of the disaster (Labuschaigne & Stanton 2020a; Labuschaigne 2020:24) may be released to support the national campaign. Thus, during his address to the nation on 23 March 2020, the president announced the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to support the South African Police Service (SAPS) in enforcing the lockdown regulations (Labuschaigne & Staunton 2020a). But with only about 143,000 police officers (South African Police [SAPS] Annual Report 2020/2021), giving South Africa a police to population ratio of 1:413, and about 37,000 army personnel (Department of Defence Annual Report 2020/2021), enforcing compliance in a country of 60 million people, 46,3% of which live in rural areas, spread across 9 provinces over an area of 1,2 million km², is a monumental task. This situation was exacerbated by the poor living conditions most South Africans, especially those in informal settlements and rural areas, found themselves in. In these areas, social distancing is a near impossibility due to uncontrollable overcrowding and lack of effective law enforcement. Regular handwashing is a difficult task due to the economic impact of joblessness (cf. Labuschaigne & Staunton 2020b). These situations have brought to the fore those aspects of social life which government can influence but cannot control, which then call for civil society and the church in particular to begin to play active roles in aiding the sick and suffering, serving the common good, something governments cannot achieve on their own. The purpose of the church is not to attract people to a congregation so they can worship together at set times, the main purpose is to serve and save lives by preparing and supporting its people for the work of ministry in their communities.

With regard to the role of the church during a pandemic flu that was expected to hit the world in 2006, Donnelly and McManus (2006:657) wrote:

> There is a consensus among public health officials that public services, businesses and especially voluntary organizations are not prepared for the effect pandemic flu may have on them. There is also a consensus that these agencies will need the resources of the [c]hurch to provide for a pandemic, such as clergy, in their roles as community leaders, reinforcing government health guidance, reassuring a frightened public, and clergy and volunteer laity visiting the sick.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO and governments around the word, in collaboration with business and civil society, provided adequate information regarding prevention measures households and communities should follow to protect themselves thus preventing further spread. During the first wave of infections, the health sector had ample time to prepare for the influx of infections from the second and subsequent waves. The only area that appeared to receive less attention is guidance on how people can address anxiety, fear, and depression that may result from the pandemic, especially during lockdowns. It is in this area where the church can play a positive role by connecting people to their souls and maintaining a positive sense of meaning and purpose to help them cope with the crisis.
In a pastoral letter by the moderator of the WCC central committee, Dr Agnes Abuom, and the general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, they wrote:

> Faith communities can in times like these do a lot to promote solidarity and accountability, wisdom and care. We as churches can and should raise the voice of the communities who are made vulnerable by their marginalisation, who do not have sufficient water to drink let alone for washing their hands. We have to consider the displaced communities due to war, famines, economic and ecological collapse, living in precarious conditions, many of them not even recognised by the authorities of the countries in which they find themselves. They cannot be left completely defenceless against the pandemic. We have to be in solidarity with those for whom self-isolating means a loss of livelihood and even the risk of starvation, and with those whose precarious daily life leaves very few options for social distancing (WCC 2021a:n.p.).

In a comparable manner, a Joint Statement from the WCC and Regional Ecumenical Organisations (WCC 2021b), affirmed the urgency of unity and collaboration within the religious community in order to protect lives in the midst of a pandemic. They wrote:

> As religious leaders, we raise our collective voices to highlight the necessity for greater attention to the needs of the homeless, the incarcerated, the elderly and those already suffering from social isolation. We remember, too, those people, especially women and children, who face abuse and violence, who are not safe at home and may suffer additional abuse and violence as stress increases.

Clearly, the challenge lies ahead long after 'herd immunity', or 'population immunity' is achieved through mass vaccination or mass immunity developed through previous infections. The church as a community of witness in Christ's work cannot be 'relegated' to an observer status whilst state monopoly enjoys exclusive rights and responsibility for public welfare policies and programmes. The church has an obligation to participate proactively and constructively in political debates and policy making in a manner that prepares the church for the ministerial and pastoral needs of the community, both physical and spiritual, thereby creating confidence in communities that the church is prepared and ready for the challenge whenever and wherever it occurs. When preparing itself for such a challenge, the church needs to accept that some of its own (clergy and laity) will be exposed and infected, become ill or die, temporarily weakening the church as an institution; but the church as a movement cannot turn a blind eye on this responsibility. Proper planning encompassing everyone in the church is important so that ministering to the needy is not left to individuals but becomes a collective effort involving the clergy, laity, and all structures and levels of the church.

To summarise, the COVID-19 pandemic has had major effects on (a) health care workers who risk their lives to save people who have COVID-19; (b) church leaders and devout Christians who have a moral obligation to visit and care for the sick, suffering and dying; and (c) the general population living in fear and uncertainty about the what the future holds for them and the world. However, as God reminds us through the prophet Jeremiah 29:11, he has a plan for us; that even in the midst of uncertainty, though shaken, all shall pass, and we shall conquer. God is working in and through everything in our lives, even when it seems he has forsaken us.

1.3 SOUTH AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The South African Government acted swiftly to contain the spread of the virus by shutting down certain sectors of the economy such as restaurants, gyms, and pubs, and by confining people to their homes to prevent unnecessary travel and physical contact. The government introduce what is now known as the five-level risk adjusted alert system (Alert). The system specifies a variety of measures to be put in place and

observed at each alert level of lockdown, depending on the severity of cases at that point. The system considers the infection rate, the capacity of the health system nationally and provincially, as well as the economic and social impact of restrictions. Depending on the combination of these criteria, lockdown levels could be adjusted up or down. The purpose of the lockdown was three-dimensional:

- First, to reduce the number of people each infected person comes into contact with and infects – this helps reduce mortality rates
- Second, to build capacity of the health system to prevent it from being overwhelmed
- Last, to manage the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions with a view to returning to full normality

South Africa went into lockdown from midnight 26 March 2020 in a managed process which, over the lockdown period, progressed as follows:

Alert level 5 from 27 March to 30 April 2020.
Alert level 4 from 1 to 31 May 2020.
Alert level 3 from 1 June to 17 August 2020.
Alert level 2 from 18 August 2020 to 20 September 2020.
Alert level 1 from 21 September to 28 December 2020.

As the cases began to surge during the second wave of infections, the country went back to Alert level 3 from 29 December 2020 to 28 February 2021.

Alert level 1 from 1 March to 30 May 2021.
Alert level 2 from 31 May to 15 June 2021.

South Africa entered a third wave of COVID-19 infections in June 2021.

Alert level 3 from 16 June to 27 June 2021.
Alert level 4 from 28 June to 25 July 2021.
Alert level 3 from 26 July to 12 September 2021.
Alert level 2 from 13 September 2021 to 30 September 2021.

Adjusted Alert level from 1 October 2021.

South Africa entered a mild fourth wave in December 2021.

The National State of disaster, which had been in place for some 25 months, ended at midnight on 5 April 2022.

This approach by South Africa is in agreement with the two strategies of *suppression* and *mitigation*, proposed by Ferguson and colleagues (2020:3). In terms of the first strategy, suppression, the focus is on limiting human-human infections through lockdowns and social distancing enforcement. This helps reduce the virus reproduction rate. In terms of the second strategy, mitigation, the focus is on isolating and quarantining suspected cases to reduce the health impact of the pandemic. It also includes prioritising elderly people and those with comorbidities with early vaccinations. This, together with the fully recovered from infections, helps build population immunity. The South African scenario is depicted graphically below in Figure 1-1:

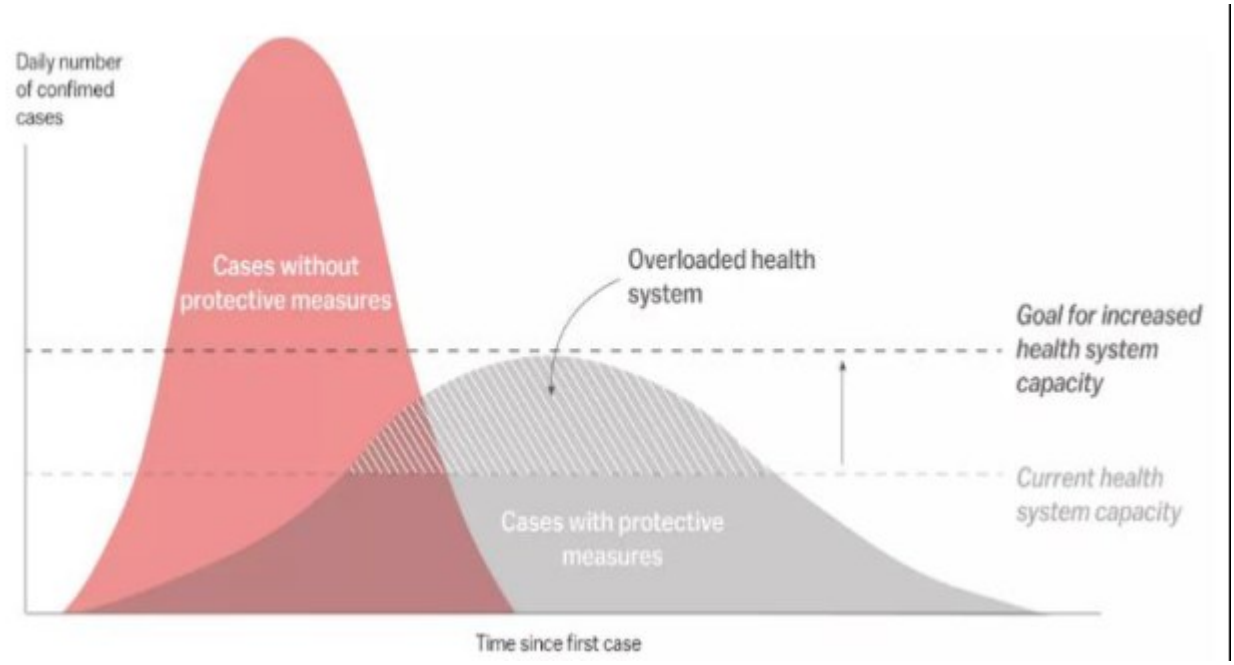

Figure 1-1: Comparative illustration of COVID-19 cases with and without protective measures

(Source: RSA, DoH 2020)

Without the lockdown, the number of cases would have increased rapidly and exponentially, and the spike would have happened before the health system was adequately prepared to respond, thus causing more deaths. Although there were no expectations for a 100% success rate, some concerns from certain sectors of the population were justifiable depending on the position one views the situation. The period following the onset of the pandemic and the institution of lockdown rules raised serious questions regarding the impact of these regulations. The sharp increase in the number of daily cases in waves two, three, and four (see Figure 1-3 below) raised doubts about the effectiveness of the lockdown. The behaviour of people and the conditions of their environments, especially in overcrowded townships and informal settlements where policing is not effective, rendered guidelines such as social distancing practically non-achievable. The failure of government's contact tracing system, coupled with inadequate availability of personnel protective equipment (PPE) and the availability of misleading information from unknown sources through social media, all contributed to the less-than-ideal success rates of the lockdown.

A comparison of COVID-19 cases in South Africa versus the rest of the world (see Figure 1-2) confirms the gains South Africa enjoyed by acting promptly.

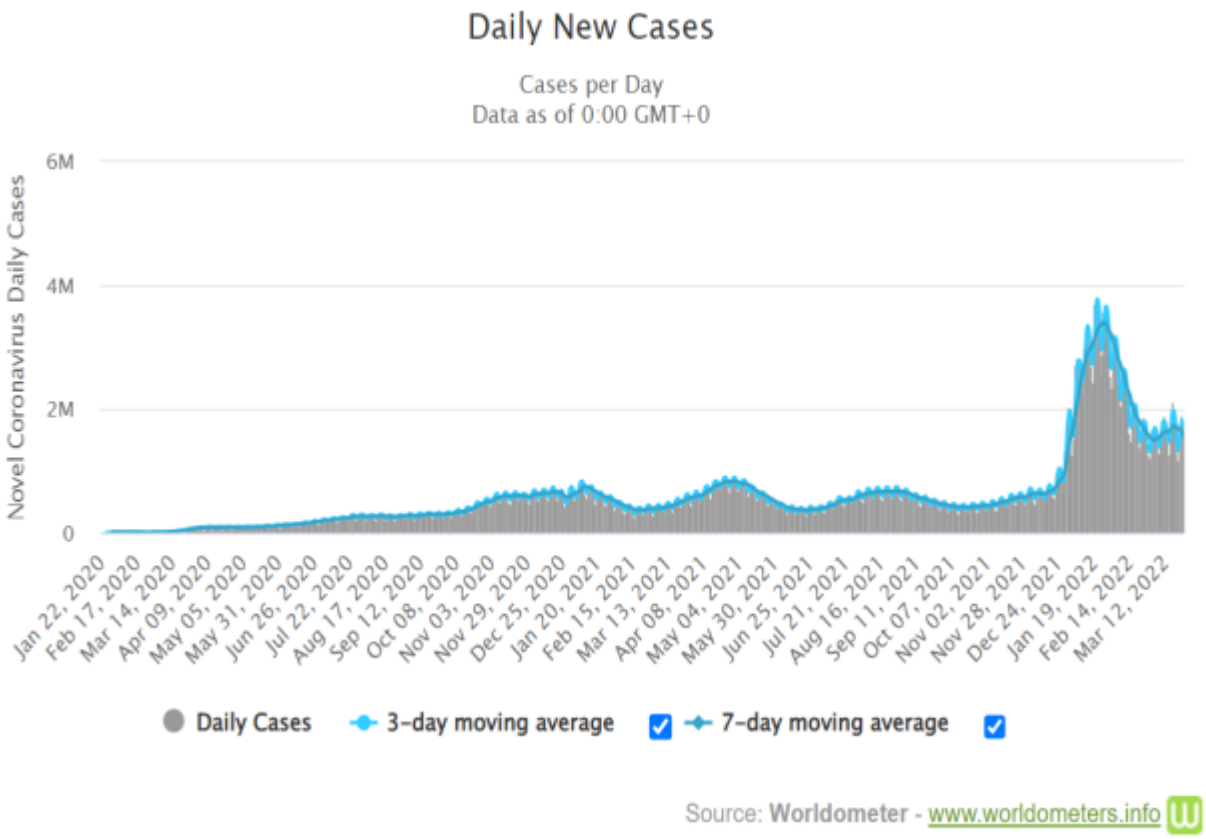

Figure 1-2: Worldwide – new daily cases

(Source: Worldometer 2022:n.p.)

Globally, during the first wave, the COVID-19 cases grew exponentially even with strict government interventions (Figure 1-2); yet in South Africa, the curve flattened quite quickly, with a significant decline in new cases up to the beginning of the much steeper second and subsequent waves (Figure 1-3).

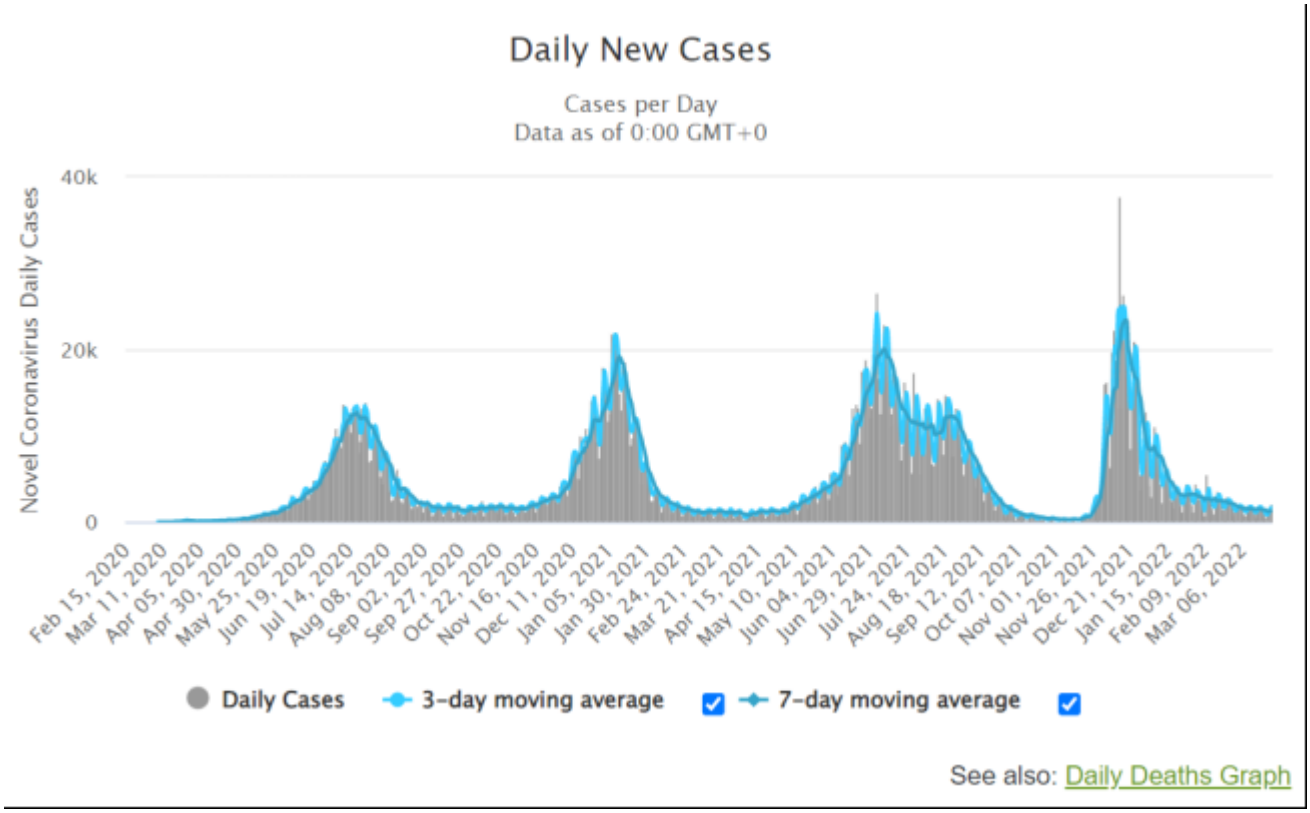

Figure 1-3: South Africa – new daily cases

(Source: Worldometer 2022:n.p.)

In anticipation of the third and subsequent waves, South Africa, following in the footsteps of the developed world, started a vaccination programme in March 2021, thus assuring the nation that the physical and medical response to the coronavirus was taken care of. However, the spiritual effect was not prioritised. With the closure of churches during the lockdowns and heavily restricted worship gathering and practices during the extended 'state of disaster' periods in subsequent months, millions of South Africans might have experienced 'sick souls' without any external help, and this is precisely the role of the church – to anticipate and react, sometimes proactively, to situations that threaten human lives.

1.4 RELIGION AND EPIDEMICS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Human beings are by nature meaning-seeking creatures because God gave us the brain power to make sense of what we see, hear, touch, taste, and experience. This capability to make sense of things gives us the ability to understand sensory information from the environments and conceptualise ideas about the good and the

bad, sin and obedience, as well as truth and falsehood. As a consequence, human suffering triggers an immediate attempt to attribute meaning and to make sense of the situation in order to determine the best course, often spontaneous and immediate. Thus, when exposed to a danger or a threat that is beyond our understanding, we use various survival strategies – one of them being faith, giving us hope and a sense of security in the midst of uncertainty. Our faith-based hope is not wishful thinking, rather it is based on our belief that God is with us in good and bad times, that God will not forsake us. Korner (1970:134-136) defines hope as "a positive phenomenon necessary for healthy coping". Thus, we do all we can for ourselves and those around us in the hope of a better future for all. When we cross rivers and valleys to care for those who cannot fend for themselves, we fear nothing, neither death nor pain, for we know that the Lord has a plan and purpose for us, as indicated in Psalm 57:2. This is our faith giving us hope and a sense of security amid uncertainty. Through faith, we feel empowered and hopeful, as well as loved and cared for. We feel Christ's presence instead of loneliness and we see the opportunity to improve our lives, build our faith, and grow closer to God. Meaning is also gained through formal education, and there is no doubt that education has changed the way we see and understand the world and the meaning we attach to what is happening around us. What we know today as a result of formal education and engagement with the global community, including people of other faiths and cultures, may conflict with what we learned and understood from our parents, peers, and encounters, including the Bible, when we were growing up.

According to Bousso, Serafim and Misko (2010:157):

> Meanings are historically transmitted, determining the culture of a people, through which individuals develop their knowledge and activities with regard to life; as a social construction, culture permits a way of seeing the world, of experiencing it in the cognitive and emotional sense, influencing people's attitudes related to health and disease. Hence … religion is described as a strategy to deal with disease and its treatments.

Explaining the role religion played in relation to epidemics in ancient history, Byrne (2008:594) wrote:

> Epidemics were usually understood as having been let loose upon the world by supernatural forces: one or many gods, demons, or spirits of the dead. These heavenly beings were not seen as acting randomly, but as responding to particular human actions that offended them. Religion aims to identify the causes, redress the problem, and restore good relations between heaven and earth.

In *Responses to Plague*, Slack (1988:436) explained:

> Plague was a divine scourge, a retribution for the sins of mankind … It was God's punishment for [sins of a people] … Repentance and prayer were therefore universally recognized as the proper and first recourse against an epidemic of plague.

The Christian tradition therefore viewed pandemics and epidemics as punishment for sins that should not have been committed in the first place. The prescribed response would most often involve a search for reasons, most certainly moral decay amongst the people, and the elimination of conditions which threatened their health. In Scriptures, a range of sources outline specific human transgressions which should be avoided or eliminated. Specifically, with regard to moral transgressions, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Jude 1:7, Mark 7:21, Galatians 5:21, and Romans 13:13 are the main sources dealing with bad behaviour. The Christian view therefore prescribed the elimination of these conditions (Dols 2019:285-298).

Goodman (2020:n.p.) warns that religious beliefs can potentially undermine the healing process during stressful times. Goodman identified three religious attitudes that have the potential of derailing healing in stressful situations, namely:

a) *Putting it all in God's hands* – especially those who have committed their lives to God, believing that God has the right plan for them. When disasters strike, they may feel they can do whatever it takes to prevent being harmed, believing that God will never let them down. Such people may even travel in and through the most dangerous places totally convinced that God will never allow harm to befall them. These are the people who disregard the call for social distancing and the closure of churches, as

they believe that their life and that of their congregation is in God's hands, and that who are they to play God?

b) *Feeling punished by God* – when dealing with tragedy that is too severe or imaginable and not your own making, this may challenge one's perception of God as loving and caring. How can such a God allow such things to happen to those who have committed all their lives to him? Such people may even feel anger towards God for he has forsaken them.

c) The third one is what Goodman (2020) calls *falling into moral struggles*. This happens when a health worker, for example, must decide on the allocation of limited resources like oxygen supply in a case of COVID-19 when there are hundreds of people with breathing difficulties. Who do you save and who do you allow to die? When a good Samaritan walks into a refugee camp with only 10 loaves of bread in his or her hand amongst thousands of hungry individuals – who do you feed and who do you allow to go hungry? These decisions may put individuals in an uncomfortable role of playing God.

According to Stone *et al.* (2004:408):

> Religion serves as a crisis buffer on two levels. First, religious beliefs and values offer people a framework for understanding and evaluating the stressful events they encounter and can sustain them in difficult times. Second, participation in some form of religious community provides a sense of belonging as well as additional social support resources.

Byrne (2008:599) agrees:

> By providing an explanation of events that was judged meaningful and satisfactory by a particular society, and by offering concrete solutions that were believed to avert or change events, religion has offered believers a way of making sense of the world and thereby, perhaps, gaining some measure of control over it. In times of epidemics, religion often functions as a significant coping strategy … [and] cannot be ignored in any attempt to understand past, present, and future encounters with epidemic disease.

Thus, when people join religious groups or communities and attend church or other religious gatherings on a regular basis, very often they look beyond individual salvation or gratification and more towards belonging – in this sense, religion gives comfort and hope during difficult times. However, Christianity is full of charlatans and false prophets, leaders who use Christianity for their own personal enrichment. These are people who continued to open their church doors during the lockdowns, claiming that their congregations are protected by God. Below are examples of some of these charlatans:

- Cosgrove (2020) reported that Pastor John MacArthur of the Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, claimed that “there is no pandemic” and that COVID-19 virus is “Satan’s deception”.

- Sherwood (2020) reported an unnamed Protestant pastor admitting that in their church they continue to have secret services in defiance of the lockdown rules.

- Pauls (2021) reported that the Church of God Restoration in Manitoba, Canada, and its pastor were fined for breaking public health orders, including in December 2020 when more than 100 people attended a service while the area was in Code Red for having a COVID-19 test-positivity rate of 40%.

- Mlangeni (2021) reported that pastors against church closure were leading a mass protest to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa, calling for the president to allow churches to operate fully and for cases of arrested pastors for flouting lockdown regulations to be withdrawn. They are also against the presence of the police during church service as they accuse them of brutality.

- Nene (2020) quoted Bishop Bheki Ngcobo of Nkanyezi Church of Christ, vowing to forge ahead with plans to hold a massive church prayer session arguing that the president is not God and that as Christians they believe COVID-19 will be expelled through prayer.

But what about non-believers? How do they cope in these situations? Van Mulukom (n.d.) found that non-believers' beliefs and worldviews are based on science, natural laws, human ability, critical thinking, as well as being kind and caring toward one another. Illness is considered from a scientific point of view, and death is a natural occurrence. Anything that is not based on evidence is rejected. They learn to accept the situation and cope with it, believing it will pass. Thus, for both the secular and religious worlds, their respective worldviews and beliefs can provide comfort and meaning even in the toughest situations such as the coronavirus pandemic.

1.5 A SHORT RECOLLECTION OF SOME OF THE WORST EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS IN HISTORY

COVID-19 is not the first pandemic in history and certainly not the last. Diseases and illnesses have been part of the history of humanity since the earliest days. Below is a summary of some of the major epidemics that have occurred over time:

430 BC Athens Plague – Broke out in 430 BC, subsided, and then broke out again in 427 BC, wiping out about one third of the population of the city (Longrigg 1980:210).

AD 165 Antonine Plague – Broke out in AD 165 and lasted till AD 180. It is also called the Plague of Galen, named after the physician who described it. The number of deaths from this plague are estimated to have been around 5 to 10 million (Littman & Littman 1973:243).

AD 250 Plague of Cyprian – Broke out around AD 250 and lasted till AD 262. At its height it is reported to have killed about five thousand people a day in the city of Rome. The plague is named after Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, as his description of the outbreak is what the world would come to know about the plague (Horgan 2016).

AD 541 Plague of Justinian – Broke in AD 541 and continued in waves till around AD 549. Although the number of deaths from this plague is uncertain, some scholars have estimated the number to have peaked around 500 deaths per day in Constantinople. The plague is named after the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, who is reported to have contracted the disease but managed to recover (Horgan 2014).

11th Century Leprosy – This leprosy was believed by some to be punishment from God for sins committed. Seen as symbols of sin and carriers of deadly contagion, lepers were condemned to quarantine centres and hospitals. Others equated the suffering of lepers to that of Jesus Christ, believing that when lepers die they will walk through the doors of heaven to be with God – their sorrows on earth will be turned into happiness in heaven. Those who held this belief understood the caring of lepers to be their own ticket to heaven when they die (History.com Editors 2020).

1350 Black Death – Occurring around 1347 to 1354, the Black Death is estimated to have caused 75 to 200 million deaths, although the estimates vary widely. The Black Death is recognised as one of the most deadly pandemics in human history (Buchillet 2007:518).

1492 Columbian Exchange – The name 'Columbian Exchange' originates from the exchange of basically everything, from slaves, textiles, food, tobacco, and eventually diseases between the New World (Americas) and the Old World (Eastern Hemisphere) following the voyage to the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Europeans brought with them deadly diseases such as smallpox, measles, and cholera, and on their return home they brought syphilis to Europe. It is estimated that the death toll was around 20 million (Sherman 2007).

1665 Great Plague of London – Broke out in 1665 lasting roughly a year till 1666. It is estimated to have caused between 75,000 and 100,000 deaths, roughly 15% of the population of London. Those who could flee the city wasted no time, and the majority of those who stayed behind were poor or remained to enforce the quarantine laws (Rodgers, n.d.).

1817 First Cholera pandemic – the world was hit by at least seven cholera pandemics between the years 1817 and the current period, namely: The first pandemic started in 1817 and ended in 1824; the second pandemic was from 1826 to 1837; the third pandemic was from 1846 to 1860; the fourth pandemic was from 1863 to 1875; the fifth pandemic was from 1881 to 1896; the sixth pandemic was from 1899 to 1923;

and finally, the seventh pandemic was from the year 1961 to the present (as it is still officially a pandemic according to the WHO factsheet of 30 May 2022) (Buchillet 2007:522).

1855 Third Plague pandemic – Broke out around the mid-eighteenth century in central Asia from where it spread to China, India, and the rest of the world. It is estimated to have taken 12 million lives in India alone and about 200 million worldwide (Glatter & Finkelman 2021:117).

1875 Fiji Measles – Breaking out in 1875 in Fiji, the disease is estimated to have caused between one fifth and one fourth of the Fiji populations, taking with it almost all, if not all, of the islands chiefs, thereby creating a massive leadership vacuum at the time (Shanks 2016:71).

1889 Russian Flu – Broke out in 1889 and lasted till 1894. The Russian flu is considered the first flu pandemic of the industrial era. Although its case fatality was quite low (estimated at between 0,1 – 0,28%), it is said to have caused more than a million deaths worldwide (Berche 2022).

1918 Spanish Flu – Broke out in 1918 and lasted till 1919. At its peak it wreaked havoc throughout the world, taking with it more than 20 million lives, although some believe that this number might be the deaths in India alone (Laver & Garman 2002:1309).

1957 Asian Flu – Originating in China in 1056 and lasting until 1958, the Asian Flu is one of the deadly pandemics to have ravaged the world, with an estimated 1 million deaths worldwide. It started in Hong Kong and quickly spread to mainland China, the United States (US) as well as England (CDC n.d.)

2003 HIV/AIDS – First identified in 1981, HIV continues to rock havoc around the world with a particular concentration in less developed countries, especially African regions. Since it started, it is estimated that over 36 million lives have been lost to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and still no cure has been found (Healthline n.d.).

2019 COVID-19 – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2), what is now known as COVID-19, was first reported on 31 December 2019 in Wuhan City of China. The rate at which the infection spread from China to many countries of the world, particularly Europe and America, prompted the WHO to declare it a pandemic on 11 March 2020. At the conclusion of this research, more than 6 million people worldwide had died of COVID-19 (Johns Hopkins University of Medicine 2022).

In spite of the fact that some responses to the outbreaks were quite controversial in that they promoted social exclusion and derogatory treatment of the sufferers, these outbreaks elicited positive social responses that have helped shape the concepts and practices of public health ever since. Regarding the Fiji Measles outbreak of 1875, Morens (1998:121) recalled:

> Virtually every public building was converted to an emergency hospital. The British printed, widely distributed, and published in the newspaper and on broadsheets instructions in the Fijian language for sanitation and nursing care, and they quickly organised civil teams to set up hygienic measures. Public lectures were given on prevention; the Methodist Mission distributed food and medicine, and hastily built out-houses near dwellings to prevent enteric diseases.

Regarding the destructive nature of the Justinian plague, Byrne (2004:4) wrote:

> People dealt with the disease as best they could: they tried to purify the ‘corrupted air’ with fire and aromatic smoke; they prayed and held processions; they used religious and magical amulets and incantations; Christians signed crosses on their houses and other objects; and they fled to avoid the bad air. But nothing they did could stop further outbreaks.

Slack (2020:409) added:

> Plague victims were isolated, and their contacts traced and incarcerated. There were restrictions on movement, bills of health, quarantine regulations for travellers and shipping. Bedding and houses were fumigated. All this necessitated the growth of local administrative machines and an expansion of state power, the invention of ‘medical

police' in fact. This implied serious restrictions on individual liberty and provoked opposition for that reason, among others.

Devastating as they were, the above summary supports the notion that both the secular and religious worlds, bolstered by active participation by civil society and the church, did not fold their arms. With the help of limited medical advances at the time, the response has always been visible action meant to protect and save lives. Clearly, any responses to the pandemic require the collective efforts of all citizens including governments, civil society, and the church to address or end the crisis.

1.6 HOW THE EARLY CHURCH DEALT WITH DEVASTATING EPIDEMICS IN HISTORY

When disasters struck, early Christians shared their resources to care for the sick and dying, and by doing so they put their own lives at risk. They did this because Jesus had commanded that they do so in Matthew 25:40: *"*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me", and Mark 12:31: "Love your neighbour as yourself*"*. In so doing, the early Christians made caring for the sick and the dignified disposal of dead bodies a religious duty they could not ignore. In *The Rise of Christianity,* Stark (1996:74) posits that whilst Christian lives were lost, the overall Christian community grew as more and more people converted to Christianity in appreciation of the manner in which Christian men and women conducted themselves during pandemics. Stark suggests three main reasons for this growth, namely:

First, Christian men and women put their own lives at risk when tending to the sick, comforting the mourners, and giving the dead decent burials. Whilst pagans struggled to provide comfort and explanation, Christianity provided credible explanations of why these disastrous times had fallen upon humanity. In so doing, Christian men and women won the approval of those who might have seen them in a negative manner either as a cult or heresy, and in the process, more and more converted to Christianity (Stark 1996:74).

Second, Christians seemed to endure hardship better than others and this boosted their survival rates. This meant that as epidemics subsided, more Christians (men and women) survived compared to pagans. The better survival rate for Christians would have prompted many others to convert to Christianity (Stark 1996:74).

Third, as mortality mounted, large numbers of people, especially pagans, would have "lost the bonds" that once might have restrained them from becoming Christians (Stark 1996:75). Pagans would have seriously questioned their belief system, and without any credible explanation, coupled with a miraculous survival rate of Christians, many pagans would have found it easy to loosen their ties to the bonds of the past, replacing these with Christianity.

Christians put their own health at risk, eager to help those in need and taking care of the sick and dying neighbours. In so doing, Christians earned praise and respect in many quarters, and this would have encouraged conversion to Christianity (cf. Stiller 2020). Thus, even the most distrusters and doubters of Christianity had seen hard evidence of the hospitality and the amazing survival rate of Christians. Even non-believers had no reason to doubt the authenticity and saving grace of the Christian religion. This is understood to have encouraged substantial conversions.

As an example, the Plague of Cyprian, according to Horgan (2016:para 6),

> [C]laimed the lives of emperors and pagans who could offer no explanation for the cause of the plague or suggestions for how to prevent further illness much less actions for curing the sick and dying. Christians played an active role in caring for the ill as well as actively providing care in the burial of the dead. Those Christians who themselves perished from the illness claimed martyrdom while offering non-believers who would convert the possibility of rewards in the Christian afterlife. Ultimately this episode not only strengthened but helped to spread Christianity throughout the furthest reaches of the empire and Mediterranean world.

In a pastoral letter written during the Plague of Cyprian in AD 250, Bishop Dionysius, according to Stark (1996:66), described the events in Alexandria as follows:

> At the first onset of the disease, they [pagans] pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease, but do what they might, they found it difficult to escape.

Paying tribute to those Christians who laid down their lives to serve and save others, the bishop wrote:

> Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead ... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom (Stark 2011:117).

Christians believed in an obligation to care for one another as neighbours, feeding the hungry and destitute, clothing the naked, and attending to the needs of sick and isolated patients. The families of those who contracted the disease and died whilst caring for others, were comforted by the knowledge that their loved ones died as heroes honoured in heaven. This way Christians gave meaning to life in the midst of hopelessness and uncertainty. It is this behaviour of Christians, of tending to the sick and dying with less concern for their own safety, that led to the massive growth of Christianity in ancient history. Stark (1996:74) suggests that “had classical society not been disrupted and demoralized by these catastrophes, Christianity might never have become so dominant a faith”. Thus, for the church, COVID-19 is not a crisis but a mission and evangelism opportunity. The church needed to find new ways of reaching out to the world with the Word and good deeds, thus bringing to life here and now the kingdom of God. Mission is not only about serving and saving others, but also about personal sacrifice, the willingness to forego one’s pleasure and comfort for the betterment of the neighbour and the stranger (Mk 10:28-30; Heb 11:24-27). First John

3:16 which reads: “Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”, commands Christians to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. History is littered with stories of great civil and political rights activists who laid down their lives for the liberation of their nations. For South Africa, the list is endless and includes high profile names like Steve Biko – leader of the Black Consciousness Movement; Victoria and Griffiths Mxenge – civil rights lawyers who took up cases of political freedom fighters; David Webster – academic and freedom fighter; Neil Aggett – medical doctor and trade unionist; Solomon Mahlangu – uMkhonto we Sizwe soldier, the military wing of the African National Congress; Ahmed Timol – educator and freedom fighter; Ruth First – pan-African revolutionary; and Desmond Tutu – Archbishop of Cape Town, and many more. Mission is exactly that, to change and save the world, not for ourselves but for others. Christians are meant to emulate Christ and be living testimonies of what a Christ-like life is, even long after they themselves have departed from this world.

When the bubonic plague of the fourteenth century ravaged Europe, many priests fled their cities leaving behind the sick and dying. Historians believed that the plague and responses by the clergy only served to weaken the church (Kyiv Theological Seminary n.d.). When the same plague struck the city of Wittenberg in August of 1527, Luther refused to flee when many others were fleeing in droves. Rather, he stayed behind, tendering to the sick and dying, a decision that eventually cost his daughter her life. In a pamphlet entitled *Whether One May Flee from A Deadly Plague,* Luther provides an explanation of the Christian epidemic response. In it he said:

> I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus per chance inflict and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbour needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God … no one should dare leave his neighbour unless there are others who will take care of the sick in their stead and nurse them. In such

> cases we must respect the word of Christ, 'I was sick and you did not visit me …' [Mt 25:41–46]. According to this passage we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped (Luther 1989:n.p).

In the same way Jesus told his disciples about how he will separate the good from the bad during his second coming as King and Judge, Luther recognised that if his neighbour was hungry, he must offer food; if he/she was thirsty, he must offer something to drink; and if he/she was naked, he must clothe him/her even if it meant putting his own life at risk. Regarding the COVID-19 crisis and, in a sense, echoing Luther's words, Stone (2020:n.p) said: "[F]or Christians, it is better that we should die serving our neighbour than surrounded in a pile of masks we never got a chance to use". Christians in history nursed the sick, not only their own, but many pagans as well, and the result was greatly reduced mortality.

Stark (2011:114-119) pointed out:

> Under the circumstances that prevailed back then, even quite elementary nursing will greatly reduce mortality ... Simple provision of food and water will allow persons who are temporarily too weak to cope for themselves to recover instead of perishing miserably.

Although at the time of this research the final outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was impossible to predict, the church can learn so much from this pandemic, especially as we enter the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) on how to build capacity to be a better prepared church for future pandemics certain to hit the world anytime in the unknown future.

1.7 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown had on the church's mission. The impact was investigated and revealed in two stages:

a) First, through an analysis of the language and meaning church leaders as mission practitioners used to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa.

b) Second, through an analysis of the language and meaning civil society groups such as faith-based organisations (FBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as mission beneficiaries, used to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa.

The investigation of the church's presence in this research was two-fold. First, the investigation focused on the presence of the church with regard to the physical aspects of the lockdown; and second, it is focused on the presence of the church with regard to the psychological effects of isolation and confinement households and societies experienced during the lockdowns. The aim was to investigate the church's missional presence to uncover the meaning of '*being with'* during the lockdown periods. In other words, the aim was to reveal what mission as '*being with*' looks like when stay-at-home orders, social distancing, and nationwide lockdowns are enforced in law, and both mission practitioners and mission beneficiaries risk spreading the disease and criminal charges if lockdown rules are disrespected.

At this point it is necessary to explain what is meant by civil society. Civil society comprises organisations that are not associated with government, organisations such as NGOs, labour unions, FBOs, professional associations, churches, cultural groups, and foundations. These organisations play a crucial role in the development of society and hold governments to account whilst also taking care of citizens' needs. They fill the gap left by government in society.

The role of civil society is summarised in the World Economic Forum (WEF) report entitled 'The Future Role of Civil Society', as follows: "Holding institutions to account and promoting transparency and accountability; raising awareness of societal issues and advocating for change" (WEF 2013:9). In holding government to account, civil society's main focus is on improving the lives of ordinary citizens by being the voice

of the voiceless, demanding transparency and accountability, and if government expenditure is prioritised according to the needs of the people. In its engagement with government and the business sector, civil society remains firmly focused on the protection of human rights, advocating for social justice, and the safety and security of all citizens, thus helping shape government policy and strategy. Within the realm of civil society, a myriad of functions are performed every day in communities, including holding elected officials accountable; empowering individuals with skills and knowledge to self-sustain; being a caring neighbour; and promoting the interests of women and children and those displaced by wars, to name a few. Thus, NGOs and FBOs constitute civil society groups of interest for the purpose of this research.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research was to investigate what mission as 'being with' looks like when both mission practitioners and mission beneficiaries face travel and assembly bans, as well as social distancing enforcement, and are themselves at risk of spreading the disease if these measures are not observed.

The following questions helped to focus the study:

1) "If being with is 'the heart of mission' and the telos of all our action, as Wells (2015:25) asserts, what does it look like for the church to be with – to embody faithful presence – in its locality, when being with as a form of social presence is prohibited?"
    - The aim was to understand the church's incarnational presence in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown, that is, what presence means when all forms of social contact and assembly are prohibited and the Christians risk spreading the disease if social distancing is not observed.

2) "What does it mean to 'be with' when almost all forms of social contact are reduced to remote, digital, and online platforms?"
    - The aim was to investigate the presence of the church during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa and whether the internet and 'new media' can, or are in effect, alternative ways of being there and being with.

3) "Is faithful presence in absentia a possibility? If so, what shape and form does it take? If not, what are the implications for the church's mission?"
    - The aim was to understand mission in mediated environments where practitioners and beneficiaries do not meet face-to-face. Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? If they are not present in the flesh, will they be perceived as absent by the communities they are trying to reach and be part of? Can the mission of being with be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other? These and similar questions were explored in this research.

4) “Since COVID-19 has changed the way we engage with one another and the world around us, whilst the church’s mission of making disciples and caring for one another remains unchanged, what resources does the church need for the mission of *being with* to be authentic?”

- The primary aim was to investigate and identify key elements/dimensions that build the capacity of the church to effectively deliver its mission. The secondary aim was to flush out capacity building opportunities arising from the COVID-19 experience in order to empower the church to respond quicker and better to future pandemics as they manifest.

1.9 RESEARCH GAP

From the review of available resources, it is clear that there is adequate literature on the theology of mission as ‘being with’, that is, the theologies of incarnation and faithful presence. However, there is not enough research conducted on what it means to be with – to embody faithful presence – when social contact and other forms of public assembly are prohibited because of a pandemic and associated lockdown. This research therefore endeavoured to ascertain the impact the COVID-19 has on the church’s mission, in other words, what mission as ‘being with’ mean during a pandemic that is accompanied by a government-mandated lockdown.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The WHO Constitution n.d. states: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Thus, health is not a static condition; it is continually subjected to internal and external challenges such that every human being is constantly moving between staying healthy (physically, mentally, and spiritually) and struggling with infections and diseases. Such a holistic view has implications for the church’s mission (Isaak 2011:327), hence the positioning of this research in mission studies.

This research made use of a qualitative method to discover new information on mission as ‘being with’ in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South

Africa. Bricki and Green (2007:3) explain that if the aim is to understand how people, groups, or individuals perceive a particular issue; what they do or think in response to the issue; their reasons or explanation for responding in that way, then qualitative methods are often appropriate. Researchers utilising qualitative methods strive to understand the whole of human experience and the meaning people ascribe to their experiences (Mason 2006:9-25; Merriam & Grenier 2019:5). Greenhalgh and Taylor (1997:740-743) contend that researchers who employ qualitative methods look for deeper meanings people living the experience express, i.e., their understanding and meaning of the phenomenon in their natural settings (1997:740). In qualitative research, both the researcher and participants walk away with a better understanding and knowledge about the phenomenon through the sharing of questions and answers and follow up questions (MacDonald 2012:34-35). Further, Merriam and Grenier (2019:5) contend that in

> all forms of qualitative research design the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis thus allowing flexibility to spontaneously adapt and follow up on questions, something that would be difficult in a survey or an experiment. Additionally, in qualitative studies questions that don't work in an interview can be altered, researchers can gain a deeper understanding or responses by observing non-verbal communication, fieldwork sites can be changed, accuracy of interpretation of responses can be checked instantly, data can be processed immediately and online interviews can be rescheduled without much difficulty. Further, because the human instrument can simultaneously analyse data as the data are being collected, adjustments in data collection can be made that may yield a more robust analysis and understanding of the phenomenon.

1.10.1 Defining a sample universe and a sampling strategy

Bricki and Green (2007:9) emphasise the importance of selecting the sample in a systematic way in order to ensure credibility and representativeness of the sample. To ensure trustworthiness of the sample, Robinson (2014:2) proposes that a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria must be clearly delineated upfront. Inclusion criteria comprise those attributes that each case or study unit must possess for it to be

included in the sample. Exclusion criteria specify those attributes that render the case or study unit unsuitable for inclusion in the sample.

Thus, this research utilised *criterion sampling*, a purposive sampling strategy that requires the researcher to predetermine the criteria each participant must possess to be included in the sample. Such an approach enables the researcher to narrow his or her focus on those participants from whom the information extracted is both in-depth and generalisable to a wider population (Creswell 1998:118).

Criterion sampling occurs when all study participants meet this predetermined criterion. For the current study, the criterion was that the research participants had to be participating in mission either as mission practitioners (belonging to a church) or as mission beneficiaries (belonging to an NGO). To set the boundaries for the sample universe, church leaders from across the South African Christian spectrum were selected for interviews. The fact that there are so many churches in South Africa not speaking with one and a united voice, and not driving a united 'church' agenda and not belonging to one mother body, is acknowledged as potentially problematic. The mission beneficiaries interviewed in this research were leaders and/or managers of NGOs.

1.10.2 Deciding on a sample size

Samples in qualitative research are usually purposive in that respondents are chosen based on their likelihood of providing useful data for the study. In qualitative research interviews, the useful way of conducting a study is to keep interviewing until nothing new comes to the fore. This point is known as *data saturation* (Bricki & Green 2007:9).

To delineate a representative sample, Robinson (2014:4) recommends a provisional sample size with a minimum and maximum number be determined at the beginning of the research project to help not only with planning, budget, and the allocation of resources but also to allow for flexibility. For this research, the approximate sample range was a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 16, as shown in the sampling grid in Table 1-1 below. The grid has 8 cells. Interviewing 1–2 people in each cell gives a total sample of around 8–16 respondents.

Table 1-1: Sampling grid

Mission Practitioners (Church leaders)	**Mission Beneficiaries (NGOs/FBOs)**
X	X
X	X
X	X
X	X

1.10.3 Gaining access to the research subjects

Bricki and Green (2007:5) explain that participants in a study must do so freely without any pressure being put on them; in other words, participation must be voluntary. Creswell (1998) further explains that agreeing to participate in a research study should be accompanied with freedom to withdraw at any point without having to give reasons for withdrawing and that a disclosure of the purpose of the study and respondents' rights regarding withdrawal and anonymity must be clarified upfront. Whenever a withdrawal decision is made, any data collected from the participant must be destroyed and not included in the analysis and interpretation (Robinson 2014:11).

1.10.4 Developing an interview strategy (Interviews)

Bricki and Green (2007:11) mention that interviews must be conducted in the most rigorous way in order to ensure reliability and validity (i.e., trustworthiness). This means that interview techniques are reproducible, systematic, credible and transparent, hence this research utilised in-depth unstructured interviews. Bricki and Green (2007:11) explain that this type of interview is used to explore in detail the respondent's own perceptions and accounts. This method is used on topics for which little is known and where it is important to gain an in-depth understanding. With this explanation in mind, the starting interview questions were as follows:

For church leaders as mission practitioners:

- The church's mission of making disciples and caring for one another has not changed, but COVID-19 has changed the way we engage with one another and with the world around us. Faced with this situation,

- How did the church practice presence, connection, and participation in a world characterised by lockdowns, social distancing, and quarantines amongst other measures aimed at controlling the spread of COVID-19?
- What mission programmes (or ways of doing mission) was the church unable to perform during the COVID-19 lockdown period and what was the impact of this on the church's mission?
- What new mission initiatives (or ways of doing mission) did the church introduce during the COVID-19 lockdown period and how were these executed?
- What lesson could be learnt from the COVID-19 lockdown that will prepare the church for future outbreaks?

For civil society (NGOs) as mission beneficiaries:

- The church's mission of making disciples and caring for one another has not changed, but COVID-19 has changed the way we engage with one another and with the world around us. Faced with this situation,
  - What is/was your experience of the church's presence, connection, and participation during the COVID-19 lockdown?
  - What did the church do well during the lockdown periods?
  - What could have been done better?
  - Are there any lessons we could learn from the COVID-19 lockdown that can assist the church to fulfil its mission better in future lockdowns?

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. The Zoom platform was chosen for its ease of compliance with COVID-19 safety guidelines, as it does not require travel or face-to-face meetings. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed immediately after each interview.

1.10.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics is an important factor to consider, especially when conducting research with human participants. The researcher kept this at the forefront of his agenda throughout the interviews and data collection process. Permission was obtained to conduct this

study from the University's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies Research Committee (T012/21) (see Appendix A).

All the participants were given an information letter which explained the purpose of the research and their role in the research process (Appendix B). The researcher explained that data would be collected via interviews and their informed consent to participate was first obtained before these were conducted. It was made clear to the participants that their participation was purely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and the participants' identities were protected through the use of coded names instead of their real names, e.g., Respondent 1, and so on. No names or personal identifying information was made known during the research process, and will also not be disclosed in any publications arising from this research in the future.

Furthermore, the collected data were also safely stored on the researcher's password protected computer accessible only to the researcher. The data will be safely stored for 15 years and then disposed of in an appropriate manner. The findings and recommendations, as well as the completed thesis, will be made available to the participants upon request after the completion of the study.

1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This study consisted of the following six chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the study and provides the researcher's motivation for conducting the research. In addition to summarising the history of epidemics and how the Early Church dealt with them, the chapter also describes South Africa's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The purpose of the study, research questions, and research gap are also presented, along with a description of the methodology employed to conduct the research.

Chapter 2 explores the church's incarnational presence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The basis of the discussion is Adam's (2006:2) assertion that "if

incarnation was fundamental to God's mission in the world, so it is fundamental to the church's mission in the world". The argument is that if the church is not incarnate in communities, in their contexts and places, in hardships and catastrophes, epidemics and pandemics, the church's mission could be severely compromised. Such a church may not be present nor with the people when most needed. The relevance of such a discussion is in the context of a pandemic lockdown, that is, how to incarnate or be incarnated when all forms of social contact and assembly are prohibited.

Chapter 3 investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on the church's mission. This impact is investigated in two stages:

> First, through an analysis of the language and meaning church leaders (as mission practitioners) use to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa.
>
> Second, through an analysis of the language and meaning civil society (as mission recipients) uses to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa.

The aim is to investigate the presence of the church during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and whether the Internet and 'new media' were, or are in effect, alternative ways of *being there* and *being with*.

Chapter 4 investigates the capacity of the church to deliver its mission. The chapter argues that church capacity building is about the church's ability to deliver its mission effectively. Key elements or dimensions that build the capacity of a church for its mission are investigated and new opportunities and challenges brought to the fore for the church to consider. The hypothesis is that the church's inability to deliver during lockdown periods should not be blamed on COVID-19 but solely on its lack of capacity. It is the researcher's hope that this investigation reveals the missional stance of the church prior to and during COVID-19 in order to accurately determine the impact the pandemic has had on the church's mission. Such an analysis will be deduced from the

interviews conducted with church leaders as well as the beneficiaries of the church's mission.

Chapter 5 takes the capacity building conversation of Chapter 4 a step further, bringing to the fore the 4IR as an integral component of missional conversations. Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? Can the church's presence be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other? To answer these questions, three critical areas of recent developments are considered:

- The 4IR and the future of the church
- The impact of COVID-19 on how we 'do' church
- Digital religion and the future of the church online and offline

Chapter 6 concludes the research with an overview of the challenges and opportunities for a 'being with' during lockdown, the research findings, as well as the recommendations and practical guidelines to assist the church to deal with future encounters with the phenomenon.

1.12 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 introduced the topic under investigation which focused on 'Mission as "being with" in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa'. The main elements of the research process were also presented. Attention now shifts in the following chapter to a discussion on the theology of incarnation as a basic principle of God's mission and the church's mission.

CHAPTER 2
INCARNATIONAL PRESENCE AS (THE ONLY WAY OF) *BEING WITH*

2.1 INTRODUCTION: THE NOTION OF BEING

This chapter discusses the theology of incarnation as a basic principle of God's mission and the church's mission. The argument advanced herein is that if incarnation was fundamental to God's mission, it is equally fundamental to the church's mission. Thus, based on this premise, if the church is not incarnate in communities in their contexts and places, as well as hardships and catastrophes, then the church's missional orientation is curtailed. Such a church may not be present with the people in their situations and contexts. The relevance of this discussion is in the context of a pandemic lockdown, raising the question of how to incarnate or be incarnated when social contact and all forms of assembly, including those of a religious nature, are prohibited by the government legislation. This chapter will attempt to address these kinds of questions whilst exploring the principles and practices of *being with* in the era of lockdowns.

Before delving into the meaning of the expression '*mission as being with'* and by implication '*incarnational mission'*, we first need to consider the notion of being and what it means to be *in, for*, and *with* from philosophical and theological perspectives. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger considers the meaning of being by asking the question "what is common to all entities that makes them entities"? (Heidegger, Macquarrie & Robinson 1962:25-26). It is in this sense that Heidegger introduces the notion of *Dasein*, a phrase he uses to describe what he calls 'being there' or 'presence', which in a way describes the fact that human beings inhabit the world. *Dasein*, meaning life or existence (Korab-Karpowicz 2001:3), is a fundamental concept in the existential philosophy of Heidegger and can be viewed as a way of being in the world, but not simply being there in physical presence, but being actively involved in and caring for the immediate world one is inhabiting whilst also being aware of the dynamic nature of that involvement and the priorities of the world to the self. According to Heidegger, this mode of being is realised only by human beings (Childers

& Hentzi 1995:70). Whilst not to be understood as 'the biological human being', nor 'the person', *Dasein* is "a living way of life shared by the members of some community" (Haugeland 2005:423), a "living way of life [that] includes the world in which it is lived". For Heidegger then, what is so special about human beings is that it is human beings alone who operate in their everyday activities with an understanding of *Being* and are able to reflect upon what it means *to be* and *be with* (2005:32). It is a God given gift to human beings that is narrated in the story of creation in the Book of Genesis. God created humans to have dominion over all the earth (Gn 1:26). None of God's other creation, be it plants or animals on earth or the skies above, have this gift. It is human beings alone who are able to reflect upon what it means to be in the world with other human beings and all of God's creation in the cosmos. For Heidegger, being is 'being-possible', being is only being insofar as it has possibilities in front of it.

> Being-towards-possibilities … is itself a potentiality-for-Being. [It] has its own possibility – that of developing itself (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:188).

Being then is an open-ended, philosophical idea, with options and responsibilities. A human being is full of possibilities. The church too, as an entity – a being of its own, in its own right – is full of possibilities, whether attainable or not is not the issue; but that infinite possibilities exist is not in doubt. These philosophical reflections point to a complex web of underlying relationships that affect the way human beings (and the church) are in the world (cf. Barnett 2010:60).

Heidegger addresses the meaning of 'being in the world' by considering the question, "what is meant by being-in"? (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:79). To address this question Heidegger uses the word 'dwell' to capture the distinctive way *Dasein* is in the world. To dwell in a house, for example, means more than just occupying a space in it. Rather, it means to belong there, to influence and be influenced by the confines of the house; in other words, being aware of the immediate world within the house. To dwell in a city means to live there for a time as a resident, to have knowledge of the city and be pretty familiar with limitations and opportunities of the city and its immediate world. In Psalm 27:4, David wished he could dwell in the house of the Lord, surrounded by the beauty of the Lord's presence. For his safety and prosperity, David longed to dwell

in this house. It is in this sense that *Dasei*n is in the world. For Heidegger, 'Being-in' can be understood as 'Being in something', designating the kind of Being which an entity has when it is 'in' another one (1962:79), like water is in the glass. A similar example is that of Jesus being in the lives of his disciples, in and with them every day to the end of the age (Mt 28:20). Jesus' disciples are (in) his church, the church in the neighbourhood, the neighbourhood in the city, and so on. Without a clear appreciation of the intricate array of linkages such as of person-person, person-entity, entity-entity, and entity-community relationships, the complex nature of incarnational presence cannot be fully apprehended. In Heidegger's existential philosophy, human beings are 'thrown' into the world which they must 'continually act and continually interpret' (Zahorik & Jenison 1998:83). Just as the church is thrown into the community, the church needs to be part of the community (*the church must be attached*), collaborate with the community (*the church must participate*), and be present with the community (*the church must be connected*) (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:85). Heidegger contends that as human beings we exist in the world in this thrown state, not in any detached manner but continually engaged with the world around us (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:83). This nature of our thrown existence, according to Heidegger, is what defines our being-in-the-world; our primary and everyday mode of existence (Zahorik & Jenison 1998:83). Thus, being in the world is explained in terms of actions human beings undertake within a worldly context (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:83).

Turning to the question of who it is that *Dasein* is in its everydayness (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:149), Heidegger argues that to be *Dasein* at all means to Be-with; thus being in the world with one another is a fundamental mode of existence for human beings in the Heideggerian sense (1962:162). Wheeler (2011) explains that *Dasein's* everyday world is thus a shared world. Being-with and being-in-the-world should therefore not be considered separately. Theologically, *being with* means being with others in Christ. When Jesus commanded his followers to go make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19), Jesus was instructing them to bring others unto him and to be with them in him. In Scripture, 'Body of Christ' is a phrase that captures the uniqueness and functioning of the church of Christ. Christ is the head (Rm 12:5) and the church is the body. Different parts of the body perform different functions all geared toward the survival of the body, which is its main function. The church too, as an agent of Christ in the world, is

composed of different parts, each with its own capability, performing different function for the church, as the body of all believers, whose main function is to witness to the kingdom of God in words and deeds; proclaiming the gospel to all nations and caring for each other in love and prayer. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, wrote: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). What this means is that Christian people need to work together, with their many gifts, talents, and skills, to accomplish the mission Jesus gave us. The Heidelberg Catechism (Sunday 21, Question 55) gives a wonderful description of how Christian people work together:

> First, that believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members (Ursinus 2012).

Thus, as Christians we are duty bound by our faith in Christ to bring the love of Jesus to those with whom we share our lives in our immediate world.

With these philosophical reflections in mind, this research argues that the church is, in reality, an entity; it exists and is of being. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d. - b) defines an *entity* “as of being or existence; an organization that has an identity separate from those of its members”. Thus, the church, whether including all Christians or those assembled in one place, is an entity, it has existence. According to Welch (1967), “[N]ot only does the church, have entity or existence; it has collective or unit function as well as distributive function of each Christian”. The church functions as a system of many different parts complementing and supporting each other. The distributive function is in the working of each individual part, and the unit function in the building up of the church as each part does its work (Eph 4:16). Thus, we have two entities that collectively assembly to form one entity. On the one hand, we have the human being, an entity which is *I myself*, to borrow Heidegger’s terminology; a follower of Christ, his disciple in the world. On the other hand, we have the entity ‘church’ made up of a collection of individuals, tangible and intangible resources, a being on its own as church. The human being and the church are not isolated beings

or entities, both live in relation to each other and with others in their immediate environments while being ultimately alone with oneself as separate entities. Thus, if *Dasein*, as Heidegger asserts, is a way of being actively involved and caring for the immediate world one is inhabiting whilst also being aware of the dynamic nature of that involvement and the priorities of the world to the self, then for us, in the sense of this discussion at least, church is a way of worshiping God by actively participating and being involved in changing the lives of people in communities. Active participation and involvement indicate that the church does not only attract people to congregate for worship services once or twice a week in chapels or synagogues; church is the priesthood of all believers actively involved in the lives of all those around them, in schools, hospitals, prison cells, social gatherings, workplaces, etc. This requires an awareness of, first and foremost, God's and thus the church's priorities in the world, the priorities of the world to the church, and equally important, the self of individual members that make up the collective unit 'church'. Heidegger's argument is that to be *Dasein* means to Be-with: "So far as *Dasein* is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being" (Heidegger *et al.* 1962:163). As Christians we are disciples of Christ, it is our identity, our being. Our mission is to bring the love of Jesus to those with whom we share our lives in our immediate world. Thus, being a disciple means more than a 'church' attendee every Sunday.

Sri (2018) recognises two fundamental truths about a disciple, namely:

- The truth about him/herself: his/her many weaknesses, failures, and areas where he/she falls short of living like Christ (A).
- The truth about what he's/she's made for: being conformed to the image of Christ, living like him, thinking like him, and loving like him (B).

In Sri's view, discipleship is all about moving from A to B. As Christians we have priorities which vary from person to person; we were born with and have acquired skills and qualities, varied as they are, from person to person. As members of the entity church, we come together to form a unit church, a unit which is both a movement and an institution. By church, in this instance, is meant all levels of the church, namely: the local church or congregation in a specific geographical area; the national church or denomination such as the Methodist Church, Lutheran Church, etc.; and the universal

church which refers to the worldwide church – those constituting the church, not necessarily the assembly. Thus, church is the church even when it is not holding an official assembly. It is the collective effort of this unit (local, national, universal) that makes church what it is, a force in its community, something individuals cannot achieve working alone in silos. Echoing this sentiment in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, in an address to the National Assembly of the RSA said:

> We are in this together. Today we are on one side grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic that is on the other side. We will still need each other tomorrow when we might be faced with another yet-to-be-known mutual threat. The Covid-19 pandemic must help us to hold together and ready ourselves for tomorrow's challenge (South African Government 2020c:n.p.).

Being with then is being with purpose. The following section expands on this further and looks at self and collective awareness as 'being with'.

2.2 SELF AND COLLECTIVE AWARENESS AS 'BEING WITH'

The term 'being with' refers to an ontological characteristic of the human being, that it is always already with others of its kind (Heidegger *et al*. 1962:156). This statement must not be understood as meaning that human beings are in spatial proximity to one another. Rather, it should be understood as a statement about the being of every human, that in its being-in-the-world, reference to other humans is implied. All of us are born dependent on others; whether we recognise it or not, we rely on relationships throughout our lives (Sparks, Sorens & Friesen 2014:23). Heidegger calls this feature of human life 'being-with', and says it is essential to being human (Heidegger 1962:156). Such a state of living is reciprocal in that as much as we could not live without others, they too cannot live without us. The Bible in Hebrews 3:16 says: *"*do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased*"*. This is what it means to be with; feeling and sharing the pains of people in our communities and doing all we can to help them flourish, instead of believing that our roles end the moment we pay taxes to governments. Governments play their role in providing the basic infrastructure such as roads, water, sanitation, and safety and security services.

The fundamental role of business is a reliable provision of goods and services people want for their well-being, ensuring that in the process, the environment is preserved and those employed are rewarded fairly. Civil society, including the church, then fills the gap left by government and business by being advocates for the excluded and marginalised, ensuring that no one is deprived the right to basic life necessities.

According to Darwall (2011:n.p.):

> To be genuinely with each other, persons must be jointly aware of their mutual openness to mutual relating … People who are with each other are in one another's presence … to be with someone is … to enter into a relation of mutual accountability.

Such relating, which Darwall (2011) calls 'second-personal', requires that we place ourselves into the 'shoes' of others and see the world and life in and around it from others' perspective, in other words, projective empathy. It is in this sense and from a missional perspective, that to be with others involves the 'doing' together in an open and relational way that shows full awareness and appreciation of the collective responsibility and connection between practitioners of mission (those who witness) and beneficiaries of mission (those who are witnessed). This means that beneficiaries become a part of the solution; they are empowered to contribute to decisions on matters that affect them so that they do not feel that decisions are simply made for them. The missional conversation must include the transfer of knowledge (theory) and skills (practice) for the benefit of both the practitioner and beneficiary. Being with is not about doing things for people but doing things together, with the people. This is described in more detail in Chapter 4 which deals with capacity building.

According to Rogers (1975:3):

> To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice.

Darwall (2011:7) further argues that for genuine mutual relating, frankness and openness to others' suggestions and views is important – it is difficult to *be with* deceptive and secretive individuals. Jesus too acknowledged the existence of those

who would not want to be saved or be part of a struggle for the saving of others when he told his disciples to shake the dust off their feet should anyone not welcome them or listen to their words (Mt 10:14). Jesus was telling his disciples that they could walk away from those people and households without any guilt, knowing that they had done all they could do. Mission as *being with* is like that. Being with is not imposing upon an unwilling and uncooperative audience; being with is about mutual relating between two willing and cooperating individuals or entities.

2.3 BEING WITH AS PRESENCE

Flowing from the preceding explanation, 'being with' and 'presence' are, if not equivalent, deeply intertwined. To be present to someone is to be aware of that person's status and personage and relate to him or her in ways similar to what a movie or drama actor would portray the character he/she plays. Mission is about presence – the presence of God among us and our presence among God's people (Martin-Achard 1962:79). Such presence requires entering into the life of others, understanding the complexities of their life, not from a distance but genuinely up close and personal, and working together with others, vertical and horizontal, to remove obstacles and create opportunities for a better life. In the book, *The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement*, Frost (2014:155) writes:

> I believe Christians should be the most rooted people in their community; their loyalty and devotion to a particular geographical area and everyone who lives there should be legendary. I live in the neighbourhood where I grew up. I have deep, long-term connections with the place and with the community. I share in the history of our village, knowing what problems it has overcome … and what vexing struggles it avoids addressing … And I drastically limit the amount of travel I do to ensure that my primary energy goes into the local.

So, what is the relation between incarnation and mission? God entered our world, lived with and amongst us, through the person of Jesus. John 1:14 explains that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Knowing Jesus is not reserved for personal salvation only but is for the purpose of making him known to the world (Jn 17:23). The language of incarnational presence represents the rooting of our lives in

words and deeds, inspiring hope and confidence in those we already share our life with. Brisco (n.d.:18) adds: "[I]f the essence of missional living is sending, then the heart of incarnational presence is staying". Wright (2010:125) summed it up this way: "Jesus dispenses the knowledge of God, first to his immediate disciples and then through them to the world". What this means is that in Jesus Christ God Himself, in his own Being, has come into our world and is actively present amongst ourselves. Thus, mission is presence; there is no mission without incarnation.

Being with means presence, and presence, as Wells (2017:125) asserts, means to be fully available, not just in voice or text only but in all communication which includes the non-verbal, what Wells calls unmediated interaction. Thus, being with is deeply rooted in the life of the Trinity – God came to be with us and amongst us in the person of Jesus, and when Jesus ascended to heaven, God and Jesus continue to be with and among us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as Wells asserts, Jesus restores the *with* between God and us. *Being with* is the telos of all God's action, and thus should be ours.

From a humanistic perspective, Moustakas (1986) mentions three intertwined processes of being and relating – *being in*, *being for*, and *being with* – and says although *being with* may include *being in* another and *being for* another, it emphasises presence as a foundation for being with. The slight difference, in Moustakas view, is that *being in* involves intentionally entering into another person's world with a view to exploring and understanding their life as if you were actually in that person's space (1986:101); *being for* involves doing what one believes is good for others quite often from a distance, not necessarily from others' perspective. It is equated to the saying 'we are in this together' or 'I am with you', when advocating for the person's frustrations and problems (1986:102). In *being with,* two people are fully involved, sharing thoughts and ideas, and actively searching for solutions and opportunities together. The pain of setbacks is felt equally whilst gains and successes are celebrated together.

2.4 WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE CHURCH?

The first question to ask is: “what is the church”? At its very core, the church is a community of Christ followers whose purpose and function is described in the Scriptures in many ways: to observe the Sabbath and keep it Holy (Ex 20:8-11); to shepherd the church of God (Ac 20:28); to equip all the people for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12); to pray (Mt 24:20); to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16); to be a holy priesthood (1 Pt 2:5); to love one another (Jn 13:34-35); to stir up one another to love and good deeds and to always meet together (Heb 10:24-25); to be friendly and generous to one another without grumbling (1 Pt 4:9); to have fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7); to bear one another's burdens (Gl 6:2); to live in harmony with one another (Rm 12:16); to do good to everyone (Gl 6:10); to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness to God (Col 3:16). From a missional perspective, the purpose of the church is accurately articulated in Matthew 28:19: “to make disciples of all nations”, and 1 Peter 3:15: “to give hope in the midst of despair”. Thus, the church’s orientation is three-dimensional:

- The church is orientated to the glory of God – ‘being with God as God’s agent’
- The church is orientated to one another as members and followers of Christ ‘to have fellowship with one another’
- The church is orientated to the world ‘to give hope in the midst of despair’

A simple illustration (Figure 2-1) of these linkages helps clarify this point:

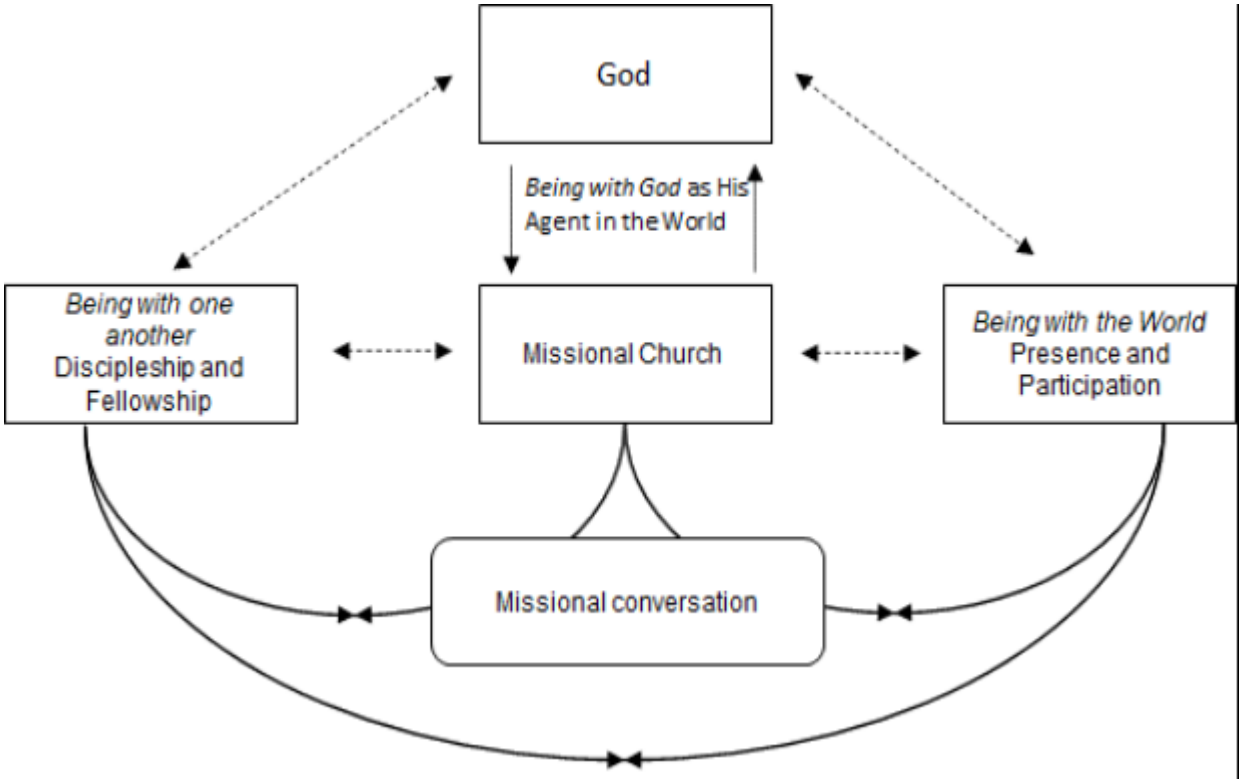

Figure 2-1: Missional church framework

What this diagram tells us is that the flow of God's love is not always through the church and church alone. Rather, it is multidimensional in that God's love, while flowing through the church to the world, simultaneously flows directly to the world without the church, sometimes back to the church and to the world. A simple illustration of this suffices:

God's love→church→world
God's love→world→church→world

Either way, the destination is not the church, but rather it is the kingdom now and in the future that is the ultimate goal of God's ever-flowing love for the world. We see this whenever all types of people, Christians and non-Christians alike, bring their spiritual and material gifts forward to help strengthen the church. In this way, God's blessings flow through the world to the church and back to the world. At times it may even bypass a 'sleeping' church altogether. God's love is felt with or without the church. The

missional conversation therefore should cover all areas of the church's engagement, firstly with God, and then with the world in its immediate environment.

The purpose of the church is to preach the Word of God and prepare adherents, listeners and converts for their work of ministry, sending them into the world to be living testimonies of God's kingdom, giving them support and encouragement as they navigate valleys and mountains. It is not the purpose of the church to congregate adherents within church buildings, bounded by organisational structures, doctrine, and visual identities. It is not the purpose of the church to clothe its members in uniforms and regalia so they may appear different form non-members or non-followers. COVID-19 has reminded us how to be a church in-between gatherings yet fully present to those around us in all spheres of life. The pandemic has taught us how to be a church faithfully present to neighbours across the fence or street, outside of an institutional or gathered church. Nürnberger (2005:132) provides a valuable insight into the understanding of the invisible church as a church that is everywhere but has no street address and GPS (Global Positioning System) coordinates. It is a church of all those whose lives belong to Christ wherever they may be. In this church, the head is Christ; there is no other. There is neither a bishop nor a president – Christ is the head. The love of God flows into the members and through them into the world through the power of the Spirit. What results is a wonderful presentation of a life in Christ that is enjoyed by all as promised in Scripture (Jn 13:35), that if we love each other, the world will know that we are the Lords disciples. Therefore, we do not have to wear Christian nameplates for the world to know that we are God's disciples.

The invisible church becomes visible when Christian lay people called by God to be servants to those in need, play their part in the secular world in the faith that God is at work making things happen. The debate or distinction between *visible* and *invisible church* will be covered in more detail in Chapter 5 where mission challenges and opportunities presented by the 4IR are discussed.

2.4.1 The church's orientation to the glory of God

Saucy (1974:n.p.) gives a beautiful summary of the church's relationship with God:

> The church is a people called forth by God, incorporated into Christ, and indwell by the Spirit. As such, the members of the church are 'God's elect' (Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12). Being chosen and elected by God, the church belongs to God. It is 'the people of God' (1 Peter 2:10), 'a people of God's own possession' (1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14) or simply 'my people' (Romans 9:25; 2 Colossians 6:14-16; Acts 15:14; 18:10) ... those sanctified or set apart from the masses by the action of God in Christ (Ephesians 1:4).

Thus, regarding the squabbles we have seen in our churches about power, property, finances, etc., let us not forget that we do not own the Church. Christ owns His Church. The church does not belong to us but Christ.

2.4.2 The church's orientation to one another

Regarding the church's role of disciple making, Saucy (1974:n.p.) explains:

> In 1 John 4 we are told that God is love and that it is this love of God that was the motive for the incarnation: the sending of Jesus Christ. The activity of God's love for us demands a reciprocal activity by us not only in loving God but also in loving our neighbours.

Saucy (1974) explains that as members of the family called church, a family that belongs to God, we are related in a 'spiritual community of lie'. Saucy maintains that there is no life where there is no love. If it is this love of God that led to the sending of Christ, then it is the same love that is the motive for the church's mission (Sparks *et al.* 2014:81) and this love demands for us to be present for each other in all life situations.

2.4.3 The church's orientation to the world

The church's role as salt and light is expressed clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus told His audience: "you are the salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14). The light not only shines in the witness of word; it equally shines in the witness of good deeds; in the same way, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). Jesus commands for us to love God first and foremost, but equally important is the love for

neighbours and all those we share our spaces with. In its orientation to the world, the church creates an intricate array of relationships with the state (government), private sector (business community), civil society (NGOs, neighbourhood communities, rights and advocacy groups, etc.), and last but not least, the most vulnerable of society – the poverty-stricken households and communities; people with disabilities; the unemployed and unemployable; the aged and infirm; those who live in poorly serviced townships, overcrowded informal settlements, and remote rural areas without running water and proper sanitation.

As can be seen from the illustration below (Figure 2-2), community structures are generally organised around three realms: the government, business, and non-profit sectors, and all three sectors must be present and working together to achieve balance and stability (De Vita, Fleming & Twombly 2001:5).

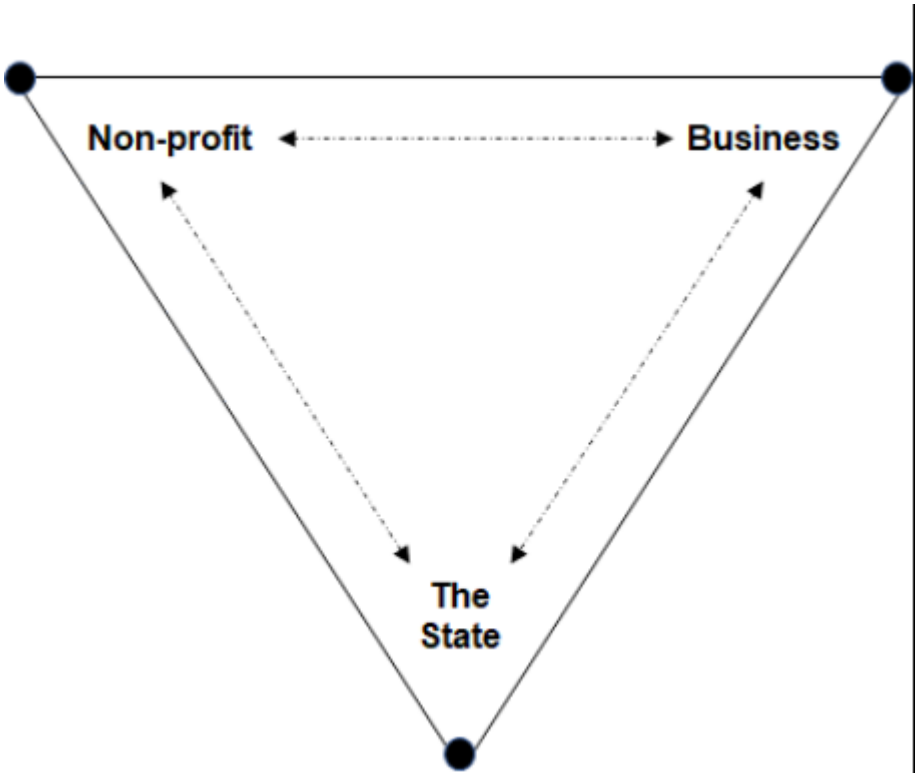

Figure 2-2: Mutually beneficial relationship between government, business and non-profit sectors

In the section that follows, a review of the responses of each realm on the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa is considered. At the onset of the

COVID-19 outbreak, the world almost came to a standstill, and given the already weak state of the economy at the time, coupled with high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality, the end could easily have been catastrophic. To prevent the total collapse of both the economy and society, genuine involvement by all stakeholders was a necessary intervention to save and preserve lives.

2.5 SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

When the president of South Africa addressed the nation on COVID-19 on 15 March 2020 to announce the national lockdown, which was initially for 21 days but then extended month-to-month thereafter, included in the announcement was government's economic response to the pandemic, which can be divided into three phases, as follows:

The **first phase** began with the announcement of the national lockdown on March 12, 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national disaster. Included in the announcement was a broad range of intervention measures including a tax relief scheme for businesses, the release of disaster management funds, emergency procurement, Unemployment Insurance Funds (UIF), and Temporal Employer-Employee Relief Scheme (TERS) funding to businesses whose operations had to shut down in line with the rules of the lockdown and were thus unable to pay employee salaries in full.

The **second phase** was aimed at stabilising the economy and protecting jobs, mitigating the sharp decline in supply and demand due to closure of businesses and home confinement of people. This phase saw the establishment of a social and economic support of R500 billion, an equivalent of 10% of South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP). The second phase focused on the following programmes (Hartzenberg 2020):

- Redirecting national resources to fund the health response to the pandemic
- Providing support to households and individuals for the relief of hunger and social distress

- Aiding small business and companies forced to scale down operations or shut down completely during the lockdown period. The support package included the payment of TERS to protect jobs.

The primary focus of the **third phase** was the recovery of the economy as the country emerged from the pandemic. Included in this phase was the *infrastructure build programme*, fast track implementation of economic reforms, and many other initiatives designed to ignite economic growth (Hartzenberg 2020).

Whether these measures were successful or not, is neither here nor there as they do not constitute the subject of this study; needless to say, some of these great initiatives were hampered by corrupt procurement practices by state employees, which is a daily occurrence in South Africa. In October 2020, Dr Mbongiseni Buthelezi, of the Public Affairs Research Institute, wrote:

> Government action and inaction was met with scepticism and downright cynicism by a population that has become highly disillusioned with politics, politicians and state institutions since the heyday of state and social reconstruction in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The scandal that broke out in June – large contracts were issued to companies linked to politicians belonging to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and bureaucrats to supply personal protective equipment (PPE), sometimes at vastly inflated prices (Public Affairs Research Institute 2020:n.p.).

This sentiment was echoed by Ndebele and Mdlalose (2021:549):

> South Africa is battling the scourge of corruption and other self-serving behaviours, often among the upper echelons of governing power. It is clear from the literature that the government took a gamble in introducing an emergency public procurement approach in the fight against Covid-19 that is now having a severe and negative impact on the economy. The new emergency Covid-19 procurement approach essentially enabled government officials to rake in millions through dubious deals with opportunistic companies that suddenly diversified into the PPE market and have done more harm than good

These initiatives are presented here to demonstrate the intricacies amongst all structures of society, including government, business, and civil society, and that if one of these sectors is not fully engaged and participative, overall successes may be limited.

2.6 SOUTH AFRICA'S PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As a way of responding to the outbreak but also to contain further outbreaks while assisting affected communities and employees, and also trying to limit the impact on their own operations, the private sector responded as follows (these are excerpts from their media/press statements):[1]

- On 20 March 2020, MTN SA announced zero-rated channels; free peer-to-peer payments; access to the e-learning platform (zero-rated for MTN customers); learning materials for Grade 10 to 12 learners in Mathematics, Information Technology (IT), and Physical Sciences.
- On 22 March 2020, Standard Bank announced temporal debt repayment relief measures aimed at those customers who found it difficult to navigate their financial commitments to the bank. Student customers were also afforded a payment holiday at zero percent interest and zero fees for the duration of the relief period.

- On 25 March 2020, Distell announced that it was to begin production of hygiene products (hand sanitisers and disinfectants) for distribution to vulnerable communities to help improve good hygiene practices across South Africa.

- On 25 March 2020, Old Mutual Limited announced a R50-million pledge for educational initiatives such as the provision of hygiene awareness in schools, and e-learning materials addressing immediate needs brought about by the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Included in the pledge was

[1] Global Compact Network South Africa, 2020, South African Private Sector Response to Covid-19, viewed 22 August, from https://globalcompactsa.org.za/special-initiatives/how-south-african-companies-are-responding-to-covid-19/.

the provision of nutrition to thousands of children who would not be able to access school feeding schemes during the lockdown period.

- On 27 March, MultiChoice announced the implementation of several measures to protect the incomes of freelance broadcasters who were unable to work due the suspension of sport during the lockdown, as well as the salaries of cast, crew, and creatives to also help safeguard the sustainability of production houses. Multichoice set aside R80 million to ensure that existing productions were able to pay full salaries during the hard lockdown period of March and April 2020. Furthermore, the company announced the launch of an online learning portal to support over 40,000 members of the industry by providing access to courses and online master classes when face-to-face classes and large gathering[s] were prohibited under lockdown regulations.

- On 30 March 2020, Transnet SOC Ltd announced that it had designated its properties in three provinces for use as quarantine centres and shelters for the homeless during the lockdown period.

- On 30 March 2020, First National Bank announced a three-month instalment cashflow relief to individual and business customers whose financial stability was impacted by COVID-19. Further, the bank announced the prioritisation of early invoice settlements for suppliers to help improve their financial stability.

- On 30 March 2020, Absa Bank announced the launch of a comprehensive customer, business, and corporate relief plan, incorporating a three-month payment relief.

- On 31 March 2020, FirstRand announced the establishment of a R100 million South African Pandemic Intervention and Relief Effort (Spire) to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic alongside government. The immediate objective was to accelerate the scaling of the country's COVID-19 critical care capacity such as the provision of ventilators, hospital bed capacity, and the provision of protective equipment for front line health care professionals.

- On or around 1 April, Woolworths announced a R500,000 donation to the Gift of the Givers Foundation to support frontline medical workers through the provision of protective wear and equipment.

- On 2 April 2020, AngloGold Ashanti announced that they were to make available two hospitals, one in the Gauteng province and another in the North West province for the treatment and isolation of COVID-19 patients. Other AngloGold Ashanti support initiatives announced were:
    - The provision of water tanks at selected high-traffic areas in the Gauteng province to improve hand hygiene.
    - The distribution of groceries, handwash, multipurpose cleaner and a COVID-19 information booklet to social-grant beneficiaries.
    - The provision of electronic intensive-care beds for Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto for its COVID-19 isolation units.
    - R20 million pledged to the Solidarity Response Fund.

- On 2 April 2020, Nedbank announced a R12 million donation for hunger relief efforts to individuals and households as well as the training of volunteers whose work in communities is to drive awareness and the promotion of hygiene measures across the country, prioritising provinces with highest infection rates.
- On 02 April 2020 the Sasol Foundation announced the opening of its online education resources and textbooks platform to all learners and parents free of charge during the lockdown period.

- On 2 April 2020, Telkom announced a partnership with the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to develop a novel track and trace solution to identify people who may have contracted COVID-19.

- On or around 17 April, Pick ‘n Pay supermarkets announced the ‘Feed the Nation’ COVID-19 relief fund to provide food and hygiene products to vulnerable communities during the lockdown. The ‘Feed the Nation’ provided

meal donations to the hungry, homeless, orphanages and those schoolgoing children dependent on school feeding schemes.

- On 20 April 2020, Sappi Southern Africa announced the donations of PPE – hand sanitiser and face masks – to complement national government efforts aimed at arresting the spread of the virus. Furthermore, Sappi announced a partnership with the Southern Lodestar Foundation and the Spar Group, for the provision of nutritional porridge to vulnerable rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga provinces.

- On 20 April, the South African Breweries (SAB) announced a donation of face shields mask visors made from recycled beer crates for frontline health workers who are in the forefront of the fight against the spread of the coronavirus. The company also announced a donation of food vouchers to 17,000 taverns across South Africa to support the owners who had not had an income for months due to the hard lockdown in place.

- On 22 April 2020, Tiger Brands announced that they were to provide assistance to the national government's School Nutrition Programme by sustaining the provision of meals to school going children who would ordinarily have relied on meals served in schools. Most of these kids come from poor families – most of them with no income at all who now had no access to school supplied meals as all schools were closed during the lockdown. The Tiger Brands Foundation supplied 6 000 food hampers so that children could be fed. A second wave of food hampers, customised to include a high-energy porridge, milk powder, oil and soap were due to be delivered to communities within a week thereafter. The company also committed to sustaining the University Food Programme by providing meals to around 4,500 university students at five universities across eight campuses in South Africa. These students would ordinarily have been fed through their institutions directly had they not been shut for the lockdown period.

- On 23 April 2020, Vodacom announced that it was providing special data bundles to universities and public schools across the country to facilitate easy access to online information for free via stipulated portals. Vodacom South Africa donated 20,000 smartphones plus 100 terabytes of data and 10 million voice call minutes to the National Department of Health to facilitate real time collection and transmission of data for planning purposes. The company entered into a partnership with Discovery Health, the country's largest administrator of medical schemes, to offer the general public free virtual consultations with doctors to alleviate pressure on the country's healthcare system.

- On 30 April 2020, Naspers announced R1,5 billion rand in emergency aid for South Africans. The donations consisted of the shipment of PPE in two consignments, the first consisting of 3,5 million face masks and 2,7 million surgical masks for healthcare workers across South Africa, and the second consignment brought its PPE relief aid to more than 13 million PPE units.

- On 4 May 2020, Massmart announced the donation of 230 tons of food for distribution to vulnerable communities. The donation was funded through a waiver of a portion of its Board and Executive Committee members' remuneration. Furthermore, Walmart International donated a further 230 tons of food through the same funding model, bringing the combined contribution to 460 tons of food over three months, translating to about 1,85 million meals. In addition, Massmart made available protective face visors to front line health workers and hazmat suits to COVID-19 drive-through and triage testing facilities operated by an NGO.

- On 14 May 2020, Nestlé announced a R5 million donation to the Solidarity Fund and over R10 million to the International Federation of Red Cross Societies in South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania on COVID-19 relief interventions at country level.

- On 31 July 2020, Discovery and Vodacom announced a joint partnership to deliver an online healthcare platform providing free access to reliable information, risk screening and, when necessary, free online medical consultations.

Investec (n.d) announced that their focus was on five key areas with the biggest impact, i.e., food security, healthcare, education, economic continuity, and GBV. These are described in more detail below.

- Food security: monthly food provision and healthcare items to vulnerable beneficiaries (i.e., orphans, aged, disabled, unemployed, school children and students and families)
- Healthcare: made four buildings available to government to use as quarantine or testing centres. Partnered with multiple hotel groups to offer healthcare workers a safe place to stay, so they could safely isolate without putting their loved ones and others at risk.
- Education: launched Promaths Online to facilitate and sustain free (no data cost) mathematics and science lessons for learners. Investec carried the cost of data usage through a reverse billing arrangement with South Africa's major network providers.
- Economic continuity: donated R5,7 million to the Solidarity Fund and also supported several community Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) initiatives.
- GBV: contributed R2,3 million to GBV organisations whose social workers were working on the front line to address GBV.

- The Solidarity Fund was established on 23 March 2020 as a public benefit organisation working closely with government and business but independently of both of them. The fund was created as a rapid response vehicle to the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa. By May 2021, the Solidarity Fund had received 324,950 donations (6,279 anonymous, 15,517 individuals, 300,155 fundraising

partners, 2,999 corporates/trusts). These are summarised in Figure 2-3 below. In total, over R3,4 billion was raised to fund high-impact and legacy initiatives in three key focus areas:

- Health Response – to support and upscale the national health system response to the COVID-19 crisis as well as supporting and protecting frontline health workers.
- Humanitarian Effort – to provide humanitarian support to the most vulnerable households and communities.
- Solidarity Campaign – to unite South Africans in the fight against COVID-19 through a campaign that focused on generating awareness, encouraging behaviour change in communities, and supporting the national vaccine roll-out campaigns.

The details of the Solidarity Fund, its key focus areas, and donations received and disbursed, are summarised in Figure 2-3 blow:

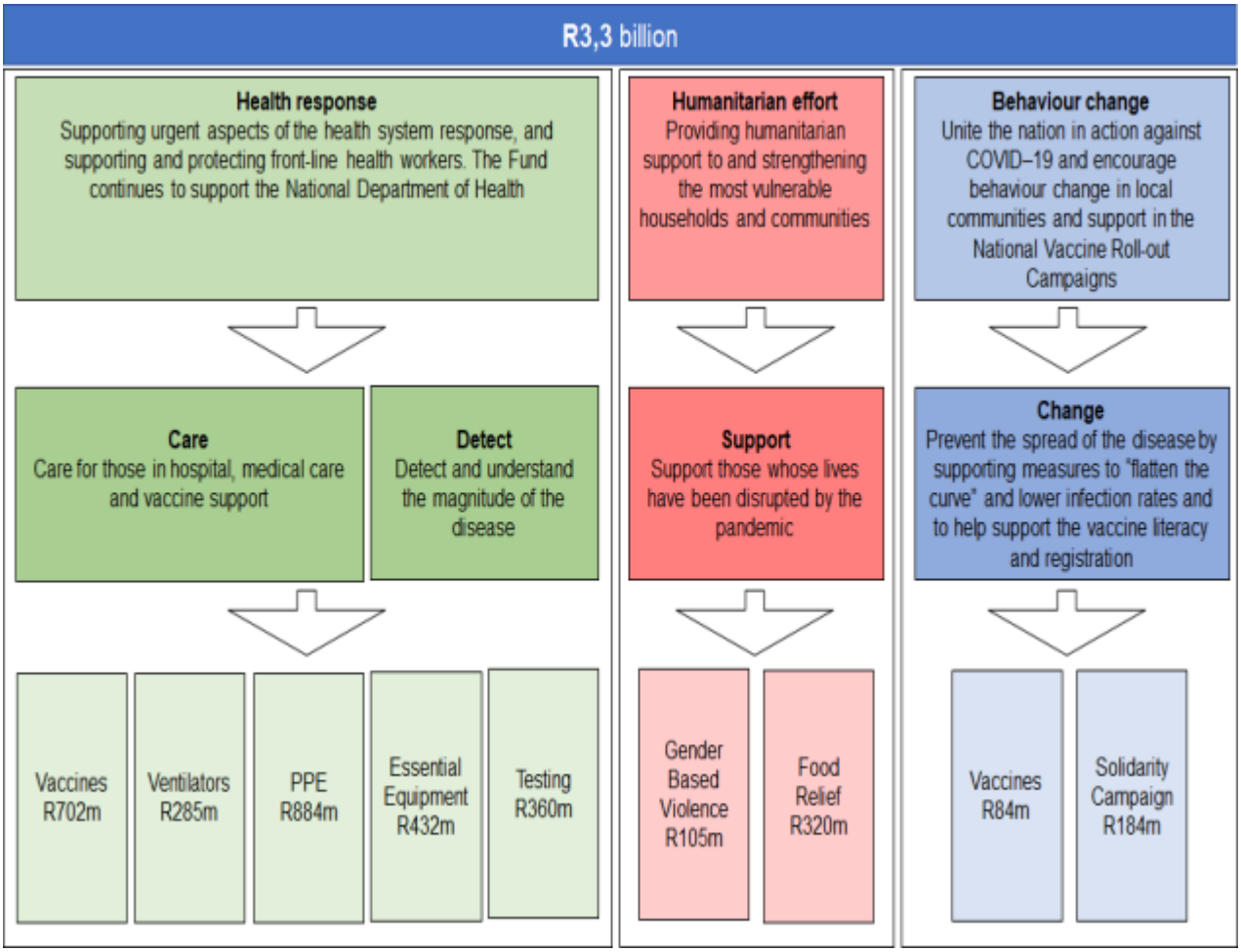

Figure 2-3: Solidarity Fund programmes and allocation (May 2021)

(Source: Solidarity Fund 2021)

The Solidarity Fund contributed significantly towards reducing the impact of the coronavirus in society through initiatives that helped reduce infection and mortality rates as well as ensure the overall well-being of society, especially the marginalised, poor and underserviced.

2.7 SOUTH AFRICA'S CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

NGOs abound in South Africa, with over 220,000 registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD). As not for profit organisations, most of these NGOs rely heavily on donor funding from local and foreign government and private sector funders. However, donors are also affected by the economic downturn rendering them unable to maintain their usual social investment programmes and this has serious implications for NGOs, communities, and projects they support. The following

summary emerged when, in May 2020, four NGOs, namely The Solidarity Fund, Red Cross Society, FoodForward South Africa, and Gift of the Givers, briefed a joint virtual meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Social Development and Select Committee on Health and Social Services on their COVID-19 response programmes:[2]

- Solidarity Fund mentioned that their primarily focus was augmenting the work done by other NGOs in support of the health sector. Their secondary focus was on addressing food security.

- The South African Red Cross Society stated that they provided training to volunteers who were then sent out to educate communities about hygiene and to also dispel myths about COVID-19. Nurses were sent out for screening and testing, and food parcels, where needed most, were distributed.

- FoodForward SA's specialty is on collection, storage, and redistribution of edible surplus food collected throughout the food supply chain in South Africa to address poverty and hunger in poor communities. In certain instances, they link beneficiary organisations virtually to retail outlets for the collection of surplus food directly from businesses and farmers.

- Gift of the Givers COVID-19 strategy was to strengthen the National Health Department. Gift of the Givers provided PPE to frontline healthcare workers and 30 triage tents placed outside various hospitals throughout the country for those with COVID-19 symptoms to be treated separately from the general hospital population.

As government and business collaborated on the establishment of the Solidarity Fund, an NGO called C19 People's Coalition was established as a civil society collective advocating for social justice, openness, transparency, and fairness in the COVID-19 response. The Coalition's primary task was to ensure that response to the virus was

[2] Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2020, *COVID-19 NGO food distribution; SRD R350 grant; with Ministry*, viewed 9 February 2021, from https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/30339/

effective, just, equitable, and met the needs of the marginalised in society. The C19 People's Coalition is an alliance of social movements, trade unions, community organisations, NGOs, and FBOs united by the Programme of Action, and on 24 March 2020, the coalition called for social solidarity on the following areas:[3]

- Income security for all – advocates for continued payment of salaries for all employees whilst being restricted to their homes. Where full salaries are not possible, government is to step in and provide financial relief to those affected. There should be a moratorium on retrenchments during the lockdown period and defaults on mortgages and debt repayment should be non-consequential.

- All households, residential institutions, the homeless and the informally housed must have easy access to sanitation, especially water and safe ablution facilities – advocates for uninterrupted supply to clean water during the crisis period, especially in overcrowded informal settlements and remote rural areas. There should be mass distribution of safe ablution facilities; soap and or sanitisers should be made available at these points to ensure effective hygiene practices by all regardless of their social status. There should be effective provision of ablution facilities, and soap and or sanitiser should be provided free of charge in these areas.

- All households, residential institutions, the homeless and the informally housed must have access to food – advocates for emergency procurement and provision of food parcels to all needy communities and school feeding scheme dependent children, who no longer had access to food due to the closure of schools under lockdown regulations.

- Essential private facilities must be appropriated for public use to provide a unified and fair distribution of essential goods and services to all – advocates for the identification and temporal conversion of private facilities like venues, factories, and other production places to be used for essential public services

[3] C19Admin, 2020, *A programme of action in the time of COVID-19,* viewed 2 April 2022, from https://c19peoplescoalition.org.za/poa/.

such as health centres, food storage and distributions centres, water and sanitation provision, ventilators, and other medical facilities. Included in this category is the prioritisation of locally produced food for local consumption over export.

- Community self-organisation and local action is critical, as is our representation in national coordination – calls for a coordinated national programme involving government, business, and all civil society structures at local level in planning and coordinating responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Calls for a national response plan to unite South Africans against COVID-19, encouraging them as individuals and communities to play their part to in combatting the coronavirus.

- Community Health Workers must be insourced trained and supported and, along with other frontline health and emergency services workers, must have access to the resources necessary to safely and effectively contain the virus – for health workers to provide the level of service that is expected of them, they need to be provided relevant real-time information, adequate protective equipment, and mental and psychological support to ensure they are well prepared and mentally focused to fight the pandemic.

- We must identify strategies to calm tensions and divert violence in our homes – advocates for easy access to helplines for domestic violence, mental health, as well as simply referral systems to shelters that are open, functional, and safe.

- Communication must be free, open, and democratised – calls for regular accurate information dissemination about the virus and prevention measures. For this to be effective, ease of access to data should be prioritised as a basic necessity for people to keep contact with their loved ones isolated in hospital with no visitation allowed

- The inequalities within our educational services need to be carefully considered, and mitigated, when moving to remote learning – it is common

knowledge that the majority of South Africans in townships, informal settlements and deep rural areas do not have easy access to e-learning portals. Provision of free data must be prioritised so that the e-learning environment does not perpetuate education inequalities in South Africa

- We must prevent a nationalist, authoritarian and security-focused approach in containing the virus – advocates for responsible deployment of law enforcement personnel must guard against abuse and oppressive tendencies that were seen in certain quarters.

These are a few examples of the good work done by the government, business sector and civil society (NGOs) in line with the aim of this chapter to highlight some of the good deeds by various players in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis was done with a view to determining and comparing the church's response and how it contributed or collaborated with other stakeholders in efforts to alleviate the stress and suffering experienced by individuals and households during the lockdown periods. The details of this investigation are the focus of the next chapter (Chapter 3).

2.8 THE CHURCH'S EARLY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In a snapshot survey of the responses of churches to COVID-19 in selected countries in Africa, Wild-Wood, Grant, Adedibu, Barnard, Ojore and Way (2021:78) noted:

> During the early stages of Covid-19 churches changed meeting styles for teaching and fellowship. They developed particular meetings which might meet the needs of groups whose mental health could be impacted, for example, developing an innovative teenage ministry online. Faith communities brought together finances to support caregivers and donated facemasks and PPE to those who work with homeless people; they sought to provide food to buffer food insecurity, and to encourage and keep a watchful caring eye on the elderly or those self-isolating who could potentially be at risk. Churches and charities in Cape Town have tried to engage imaginatively in their response to Covid-19, identifying an immediate need and responding to it. New community centres of collaboration support the use of digital technologies, to enable donations, communication and worship, working in conjunction with other agencies on the delivery of food. However, there have been a number of barriers that churches

> have faced in their response to Covid-19, including a lack of guidelines on how faith communities can offer support and a lack of information about the place and scale and the specifics of need. Churches and charities are aware that the most vulnerable to Covid-19 remain largely invisible yet are doubly affected by the impact of the Covid-prevention strategies on their lives and livelihoods.

Other than encouraging members to adhere to government and WHO guidelines like the regular washing of hands, adherence to physical distancing, abstaining from the imposition of hands, and the avoidance of large gatherings of more than 50 people, early indications are that the Christian church in South Africa did not appear to be in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. It is also notable that when the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, addressed the National Assembly in July 2020, the Minister made no mention of the church (bar the Church of Christ of the Latter-Day Saints) as a key member and partner with the government and other role players in dealing with the challenges of COVID-19. It is not the intention of this research to downplay the role played by the church; the hypothesis, however, is that whilst the church's presence as a visible church appeared limited 'above-the-line', the reality could be that its presence 'below-the-line' as an invisible church could be extensive. (This point is discussed further in Chapter 3).

In Wells' (2017) theology of being with, the Christian life comes in three parts, namely: discipleship, ministry, and mission. Wells' (2017:14) defines 'discipleship' as *being with God,* shaped by one's relationship with oneself, one's community of faith and the wider creation; 'ministry' as *being with the church,* everything that is done to help build up the church; and 'mission' as *being with the world.* However, as imperfect beings living in an imperfect world, Wells' theology of 'being with' would work well where unity of the church is sacrosanct, where there is one church, one voice, one people, or even one culture. This line of logic is not to be understood to mean one denomination or one culture, but should be seen as pointing to a need for a united church voice and action encompassing all Christian church formations. The question one may pose, in addition to Wells', is what does it look like for the church to *be with*, to embody faithful presence, when the very church is divided along racial lines both in structure and worship? When the church is divided between those who have and those who have not. When the church's political influence becomes important only when it is used by

political leaders for 'vote buying' during elections, depending of course on who the leadership of the church align with at that time. When the church is so marginalised that its presence and connection to place is hardly felt? These are indications of a church that has lost its identity and its place attachment. To the contrary, Sparks *et al.* (2014:38) recalls the Early Church as one that:

> [U]nderstood itself as in its place … Christians' primary allegiance was not to any particular vision of the economy, not to a political system or party, not even to their family, but to the reign of God manifested within their local context.

The fact that there are so many churches in South Africa, not speaking with one voice and not driving a united 'church' agenda is a problem. The church is divided (by race, culture, and ideology) though there are pockets of unity (multi-racial and cross-cultural churches) that have emerged in the last 20 years. The church is fragmented (by denomination, affiliation, and doctrine) and marginalised (South Africa is a secular state), and politicised (aligns itself with factions of political parties). Sparks *et al.* (2014:36) warn that "when the church pursues power, political or economic influence, or even mission as an end in itself, its faithful presence is compromised". Is the missional church in South Africa increasingly losing its place and relevance as a sign, instrument and foretaste of God's kingdom? It is not uncommon to find people attending Sunday worship services for personal salvation; it is not so much about helping others in need or growing one another in Christ. This is the problem whenever the church is seen as an institution instead of a movement. When the church is seen as an institution, the responsibility to do 'good' rests on the institutional church (pastors and elected leaders) who give direction on programmes to implement. Without their involvement, very little, if anything, gets done in these churches.

The divisions in the church in South Africa mirror those in other spheres of public life. The havoc created by the more than 40 plus years of apartheid rule in South Africa that prevented the majority black population from full participation in economic activities, quality education, etc., still lingers on (Meiring, Kaninemeyer & Potgieter 2018:5-6). We also know that some church leaders have exploited members for personal gain, becoming instant millionaires through the misuse of the church system

and members' faith. As long as the church continues to drive someone's agenda, whether political or personal greed, it will remain a vehicle for that agenda and less of a means for the manifestation of God's kingdom. Such a church is not with the people in their contexts and places. We have seen numerous examples of this where church leaders are accused of rape, extortion, money laundering, and other despicable crimes. This assertion does not in any manner undermine the good work the church has done and continues to do. To the contrary, it reinforces the church's responsibility to be present in the public sphere, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, who are not afforded the space to tell their stories. The church's responsibility is to advocate for social justice and shape public discourse in a manner that translates into policies for adoption and implementation by the state (cf. Bentley 2013:n.p.). The church should not shy away from holding false prophets and false teachers to account for mis-shepherding the flock of God. A divided, fragmented, marginalised, and politicised church can hardly rise to this occasion. For such a church, the incarnational mission train is long gone, leaving the church miles behind.

Our faith in Jesus Christ, as Langmead (2004:62) puts it, only makes sense if we are liberated from sin and the injustices of this world whilst also helping those we share our world with to be freed from sin and its consequences. God, in the person of Jesus, became flesh and lived among us (Jn 1:14) – not for one person, but for all nations to be liberated. In this way, Langmead argues that incarnational mission is much more than a vague commitment to loving a neighbour.

We do not have evidence in Scripture of Christ ever turning a blind eye to the sick or quarantining himself from those infected with a deadly contagion, but we have evidence of him gracefully tending to a leper in Matthew 8. Thus, to speak of the incarnation missionally is about linking Jesus' words, actions, and deed in one event that defines what it means to Christian (Guder 2005). Thus, it is not only the ordained pastors and elected lay members who execute mission on behalf of the church; rather it is the entire body, what the Apostle Paul refers to as the 'priesthood of all believers', that participates in God's mission, which in turn is the mission of the church. Mission is a way of being with neighbours and acquaintances in real-time, witnessing to Christ

in their local context (Van Aarde 2017:2). This defines the church's meaningful presence in communities it is serving, in other words, *being with*.

Based on the above discussion, some concluding remarks follow next to wrap up the chapter.

2.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS: WHAT THEN SHOULD A MISSIONAL CONVERSATION BE?

The seemingly silent competition between denominations and congregations as to who is doing the most for a community is misrepresenting the gospel; it only serves to satisfy individual and institutional egos whilst pushing the boundaries of segregation even further. There should be no such division and no such competition in the church of Christ (Ac 4:32). Where dividing boundaries exist between congregations and denominations, between ordained ministry and laity, they should be dismantled. The missional calling is for every believer to participate actively in the continuation of God's mission in the world. Whilst unity of the church is a prerequisite for God's blessing in any spiritual journey, as Acts 2:46 clearly illustrates, equally importantly is participation and collaboration with other institutions outside the church that become a living testimony and demonstration of God's kingdom that has come nearer (Mt 10:7) (Bevans & Schroeder 2004:10; Hooker 2009). COVID-19 has taught us that we might not always be able to gather as a church in a building anymore, but we can still meet one another across the fence and physically be with neighbours in their contexts. In the article 'Being a church in times of crisis', Marynovych (2015:59) recalls the words of Maximus the Confessor: "The church dedicates itself to the same activities as God himself", and concluded by saying:

> This is particularly noticeable in times of crisis because this is when epochs and paradigms change, when the omega of the old becomes the alpha of the new. And this, as we know, is the time of the Lord (Rev 22: 13). This is why the Church must do everything in its power to ensure that this time of the Lord also becomes the time of the Church.'

The church is God's people, and as we go into the next pandemic, just because you can't gather on a Sunday morning does not mean that the church is closed. The church is active, it is vibrant, it is alive, it is praying, and it is walking out to feed poor. The church is people – the priesthood of all believers – and people engaging all their gifts to bring glory to fulfil God's mission on earth.

CHAPTER 3
DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH'S PRESENCE DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapters 1 and 2 mission was understood to mean presence – the presence of God amid his people, and the presence of the church as God's agent in the world. Such presence was understood to exist in a 'thrown' state, as human beings (and the church) are thrown into the world, living side-by-side with other living and non-living organisms. Early childhood geography taught us the functioning of an ecosystem – a complex biological community of organisms – living and non-living in their physical environments, interacting as a system. Every living organism depends on and interacts with other living and non-living organisms to stay alive. Mission works in a similar way in that the church, as the body made up of different parts each playing its role and supporting other parts, continually reads, interprets, and interacts with the environment in the context of who God is, what God wants and is doing in and for the world. The church's basic task is to be a living expression of God's love in the world. Chapter 2 explained that God pursues this mission with or without the church. Whether the church plays a part or not, meaningful, or otherwise, God is always present; his activities are not limited to the church or through the church alone, but the world. We learnt that the theology of mission as being with is deeply rooted in the life of the Trinity, where the three persons of the Trinity are one – equally divine persons – working together in all God's work. Thus, when our faith is in Christ, God gives us the Holy Spirit who dwells with and in us (Jn 14:16-17). This was demonstrated when explaining how the South African Government, civil society, and the business community fought the COVID-19 pandemic and associated challenges without the church's participation (the visible church) in certain areas. Indeed, God is present in good and bad times and millions of lives were saved. Fitch (2016:468) sums up the role of the church as follows:

> The church is God's agency in the world. The primary location of God's activity is not in the church, but in the world ... The church is to understand itself in the

world as the creation of God by the Spirit, and to cooperate with God and his mission in the world.

As God's agency in the world, a missional church, rooted in every aspect of its ministry in the character of God, is a living testimony of his kingdom here now and in the future. This means that in our personal capacity as followers and believers in Christ, and in our assembly as local congregations, our care for one another in our communities is deeply authentic. Our love for one another has one motive – to liberate each other from the sins and injustices of the world and to demonstrate the nearness of the kingdom of God. This care is often expressed in terms of the basic task of the church as found in Scripture: to do good to everyone (Gl 6:10); to live in harmony with one another (Rm 12:16); to encourage one another and build each other up (1 Th 5:11); to pray for one another, that you may be healed (Ja 5:16). The church is not a service, it is not a Sunday morning event but a movement of followers of Jesus on a mission with him in the world. Thus, the church in the middle of a pandemic cannot rely on streamed worship services to people's homes, via digital devices, as an indicator of its faithful presence. Advancing the gospel of the kingdom is above and beyond digital streaming of worship services – sick people must be visited, prayed for, and encouraged; mourners must be supported and consoled; the dead must be attended to and buried; the hungry must be fed; and the naked and homeless provided with clothing and shelter.

This summary introduction lays the foundation for the main purpose of this study; the investigation of the church's presence during COVID-19 lockdown (alert levels 5 – 1) in South Africa. The presence of the church was investigated in two stages:

1) First, through the analysis of the language and meaning church leaders, as mission practitioners, used to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa.

2) Second, through the analysis of the language and meaning civil society groups such as FBOs, Not for Profit Organisations (NPOs) and NGOs, as mission

beneficiaries, used to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

The impact of the lockdown on the church's mission was investigated through the following research questions:
If being with is 'the heart of mission' and the telos of all our action as Wells' (2017:25) asserts, what does it look like for the church to be with – to embody faithful presence – in its locality, when being with as a form of social presence is prohibited? The aim is to investigate what presence means when all forms of social contact and physical assembly are prohibited and Christians risk spreading the disease if social distancing is not observed.

1) What does it mean to 'be with' when almost all forms of social contact are reduced to remote digital and online platforms? The aim is to investigate whether the Internet and 'new media' are effective ways of being with.

2) Is faithful presence in absentia a possibility? If so, what shape and form does it take? If not, what are the implications for the church's mission? The aim is to understand mission praxis in mediated environments where practitioners and beneficiaries do not meet face-to-face. Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? If they are not present in the flesh, will they be perceived to be absent by the communities they are trying to reach out to? Can the ministry of being with be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other?

3) Since COVID-19 has changed the way we engage with one another and the world around us, whilst the church's mission of making disciples and caring for one another has not changed, what capabilities does the church need to possess for the mission of being with to be authentic? The aim is to investigate and identify key elements and dimensions that will help build capacity and thus empower the church to respond better in future pandemics.

3.2 METHOD

This section describes the study's participants; data sources; as well as method of data collection and analysis that were utilised in this study.

3.2.1 Participants

This research utilised *criterion sampling*, a purposive sampling strategy that requires the researcher to predetermine the criteria each participant must possess to be included in the sample. Such an approach enables the researcher to narrow his or her focus on those participants from whom the information extracted is both in-depth and generalisable to a wider population (Creswell 1998:118). The criterion for this research is that study participants participate in mission either as mission practitioners (belonging to a church) or as mission beneficiaries (belonging to a NGO, FBO, or NPO). In the end, nine interviews were conducted as shown in Table 3-1 below. The choice of nine participants was not predetermined but arrived at when the researcher realised that no new information was coming to the fore and that data saturation had been reached.

Table 3-1: Interview respondents

Respondent 1:	Church leader
Respondent 2:	Church leader
Respondent 3:	Church leader
Respondent 4:	Church leader
Respondent 5:	Church leader
Respondent 6:	Church leader & NGO representative
Respondent 7:	Church leader & NGO representative
Respondent 8:	NGO representative
Respondent 9:	NGO representative

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, Zoom was the preferred method for conducting the interviews compared to in-person, telephone, or other platforms. Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey and Lawless (2019:4) reported the following points as key

advantages of using Zoom for qualitative interviewing: (1) *rapport* – the ability to see the researcher and respondent builds interpersonal connection and allows both to respond to non-verbal gestures that would otherwise not be possible when using the telephone; (2) *convenience* – Zoom allows easy access to geographically remote participants, at the participant's most convenient and relaxed time; and (3) *simplicity* and user-friendliness – anyone with a smartphone can connect via Zoom, the registration process user functionality is simple and straightforward with minimal or no cost at all for the service. At the time of this research, two participants could stay in a meeting for up to 24 hours at no charge, with the only cost incurred by either party being the cost of data.

3.2.2 Data sources

The interview method was utilised to collect qualitative data from the participants. The method applied allowed for additional probing questions following the participants' responses; it also enabled the participants to recommend important sources of information for the researcher to consult to further understand the phenomenon under study. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher requested the participants to agree to a follow-up consultation to confirm the accuracy of the interpretation of the data, or to allow follow-up questions that might have arisen from new insights gained during the data analysis.

3.2.3 Data collection & analysis

This research, consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006), used thematic analysis to investigate how participants experienced the impact the COVID-19 lockdown has had on the church's mission. Data collection and data analysis included audio recording the interviews with the participants' consent; followed by transcribing the interviews, reviewing the interview data, and noting emerging themes. Where sources of additional information were referenced or recommended by the participants, these were consulted and used in the interpretation to understand the phenomenon.

The phases of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) allow for a systematic way of processing qualitative information using 'coding'. The six steps of the thematic analysis used in this research are described below:

- *Familiarizing yourself with your data:* 'Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). Major experiences, definitions, and participant's observations were highlighted and written down for each transcript.
- *Generating initial codes:* 'Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). While transcribing, major comments, statements or participants observations were coded as a phrase or keyword representing a specific idea/theme.
- *Searching for themes:* 'Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). The data were read and re-read more than once to narrow down the number of codes and categorized them into identifiable themes (section 3,5; Fig 3,1).
- *Reviewing themes:* 'Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts at the fist level and the entire data set at the second level, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). The data analysis revealed many interrelated themes, as well as the nature of the relationship of the themes to one another. Recurring themes were noted and conceptualized early in the data collection process.
- *Defining and naming themes:* 'Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87).
- *Producing the report:* 'The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis' (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). The report is presented in detail the section below and summarized in the final chapter of this research.

3.3 DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

The investigation revealed varying responses by church leaders depending on how one views mission. Reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, Chapter 1 verse 12 where the Apostle says: "what has happened to me has actually served to advance

the gospel", can also be asked of the church regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, if what has happened to the nations has served to advance the gospel. In his context, the Apostle was talking about his arrest and incarceration in Rome. In the context of the church, advancing the gospel is the mission – pre-, during, and post pandemic – it does not matter, the mission of the church remains unchanged. The method may change but the purpose, that of advancing the gospel, does not change. Respondent 9 put it this way:

> *"The strategy is to envision and equip and empower people who call themselves Christ followers as lifelong disciple makers who are living with gospel centred intentionality"*.

How this translates to action on the ground may differ for each Christian person, local church, or denomination, but advancing the gospel remains the purpose for all, all the time. Respondent 7 had this to say:

> *"The church is a body of Christ, you breathe in, come to church; and you breathe out, you go into the world and effect change and be involved in mission and be involved in everything that God called us to be involved in; with the poor, with widows, and orphans".*

This is so because Jesus's healing is holistic; it spans all aspects of human life – emotional, physical, and mental health – and it also goes into social justice and community upliftment. Jesus is not only concerned about healing of diseases but the holistic healing of all – preaching of the gospel and healing of diseases. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus taught his listeners in synagogues (Mk 1:21-28; Lk 4:16-37), preached on mountain tops (Mt 5-7), proclaimed the good news of the kingdom on dirt roads from valley to valley, healing diseases and sickness on those encounters (Mk 1:29-45; Lk 17:12-19) as a demonstration of love and concern for the well-being of individuals and communities. Such is holistic healing brought by the gospel.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world almost came to a standstill; businesses shut, shops closed, people could not venture outside except for essential workers delivering essential services, church buildings closed, and people could

neither gather nor assembly in any large numbers. Almost all forms of communication changed from in-person to digital and online, and churches that did not engage online may have missed the kingdom opportunity as those who adapted quickly reached communities they would never have reached without going online. On the downside, it is quite difficult if not entirely impossible to build culture online; the kingdom culture or Christian culture online, you've got to be together as people. Respondent 5 put it this way:

> *"I just don't know if the church is reaching people who are unchurched as in never went to church in their lives … that makes me wonder about the effectiveness of digitalisation"*.

Nonetheless, social media and online was a great help, information moved fast, and most churches put it out on social media that they were there during difficult moments. Respondent 9 concurred:

> *"Technology has served amazingly well where pastors have used platforms like WhatsApp and other low data usage channels to communicate, to serve and to have impact on people's lives, but there is no doubt this has been difficult"*.

The challenge initially had to do with connectivity coupled with energy disruptions (power outage due to load-shedding), such that for some churches, particularly in the deep rural areas where there is no fibre, presence was difficult because it had to be virtual and online – a view echoed by other church leaders. Without the opportunity to gather to worship and praise God, and meet face-to-face to extend a helping hand toward one another, Respondent 9 recalled:

> *"The audience had to be taught about the ongoing presence of God; the fact that God is not surprised by this reality* [COVID-19] *... Jesus himself said 'I'm with you always to the very end of the age' and we do have a theology of the presence of God that He says 'I will not leave you as orphans but I'll give you the Holy Spirit, … [to] help you and lead you'.* [This is] *God's word that guides us as we go".*

However, people still want to have contact. A handshake; pat on the back; caress of the arms; as well as kind and open smile one shows towards friends, visitors, and acquaintances are all fundamental to human bonding, communication, psychological well-being and health (Heatley Tejada *et al.* 2020:294). Dacher Keltner (2010) explains how a simple touch signals safety and trust, triggering a compassionate response. So, when we gather on a Sunday morning to worship together, the satisfaction derived from singing in unison, extending a hand to greet a fellow congregant, or close friend you may not have seen or spoken to for the entire week, or a simple hug to show compassion to one another, is what attracts most of us to these gatherings over and above the prescribed liturgy and sermons. Online, it is impossible to show or feel such compassion, hence the human born need for physical presence and togetherness. Respondent 8 asserted:

> *"I think what we need to do is think differently about we might not be able to gather as a church in a building anymore, but we can still meet one another across the fence with my neighbour … the contact is needed because we are human, we need that human contact ... I do not see that totally going out. If a group of young people are playing soccer, we are going to play soccer with them … we still going to do sport, … do all these other things, so the church needs to think differently and anew in the community of how they get to do it. Even young person still want[s] to have contact; they still want to have that one-on-one contact, and that's why we have to have counselling centres – because those kids are crying out for just somebody to listen to them and not have somebody send them a message, they have to listen for an hour long and it doesn't really connect to their soul. We still need to get together, that's very true".*

However, as already indicated above, church is not only church when gathered in a local building. Church is ordinary Christians scattered wherever they may be carrying on with their daily tasks in a Christlike manner, such as being 'neighbourly' across the fence or street. In the early church days, there was no such thing as online virtual gatherings; thus, to gather clearly was physical – in person – but times have since

changed significantly, and will continue changing as long as humans live. Pastor Ronald Giese of Desert Springs Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, raises an important question, "[D]oes this necessarily mean that, as time and technology progress, no other ways of gathering can be allowed?" (Giese 2020:350). The opportunities presented by new technologies will be unpacked in detail in Chapter 5.

The first five weeks of the hard lockdown were the most difficult for the church, especially pastors, because they could not visit even their own members in person. Even though the church had made an appeal to government for pastors to be regarded as 'essential workers', that appeal fell on deaf ears (Respondents 1 and 6 claimed). As a result, and as alluded to by the other respondents, the church had to resort to social media and online platforms to reach out to those in need. Christians could not visit members who were hospitalised, or those who were sick at home, until much later when the lockdown rules were relaxed; but in the main, the church's presence was felt during the time of funerals. Respondent 3 mentioned that COVID-19 made the ministry of presence a '*hit and run'* in the sense that, as a pastor, he would go in and out as quickly as he could without affording time to sit, reflect, and journey with the family and understand their pain and frustrations, especially during bereavement. Respondent 6 lamented:

> *"The frequency of the trauma became traumatic for our pastors, and the fact that* [they] *could not do proper memorials was really hard and there was nothing they could do about it. You had to speak to people on the phone or Zoom, but we all know that that is not the same"*.

With the mortality rate climbing amid tight government controls, a lot of people did not have the opportunity to grieve their lost ones, especially those who succumbed to COVID-19. According to Respondent 1, "*Sometimes when we meet with them you realise in the exchange that these people did not find closure at all".* The impact of the lockdown was felt not just outside the church but also from within. Even when the rules were relaxed slightly to allow for a limited number of people congregating inside buildings, church ministries and activities had to be changed or halted completely to prevent any form of physical contact. Rituals such as the dedication of children, laying

on of hands, baptism, and the Eucharist, etc., had to be halted or offered in a manner that was unusual and could easily be seen as distant and aloof. In the main, COVID-19 has shown that if the church is to be effective with mission, how the church goes about doing it must change. We need to reimagine how we do church; we need to think differently; we can't keep doing the same thing over and over. Recollecting a prior engagement with a church leader, Respondent 8 recalled:

> *"My leader who is an area director, I had quite a few arguments with him in the sense he kept on saying after the first month* [of COVID] *everything is going to go normal, and I kept on saying no we have* [to] *think differently because things are not going back to normal. We are going to have a new normal. It's only now, a year and a half later, that he is starting to realise that we need to tweak some of our stuff, we can't do it the same way ... So, in that sense, I think that the church needs to be more spiritual entrepreneurs, needs to think differently about how church will be done".*

The ministry of presence calls on all those who view themselves as Christ followers to be where people are, to reach out to churches and Christian organisations in their areas to see how they could work together in partnership with others to serve and save lives. Regarding the Sunday morning event and what to do with it, Respondent 9 said:

> *"The Scripture says do not forsake the gathering of the saints. We need to ask ourselves when is church a church and how does the Sunday moment reflect that, but one of the things that we have been challenged by is that the traditional model has always been a 'come and see' model. In other words, come to us, bring your unsaved friends, bring everybody to a gathering and see what we do as we worship God, as we preach the gospel, as we do communities … what we need to do is bring back the old, the Early Church expression of go and show the world who Jesus is and how do we engage with brokenness, bringing the love of Jesus into those situations … We saw the brokenness that COVID-19 brought to our society and the church has had an incredible opportunity to*

show the love of Jesus where people are, rather than trying to draw people out of and into a parallel universe".

In the context of COVID-19, the immediate need was food security, but what followed soon became a massive issue as people became unemployed and individuals and families started to struggle – the church had to respond quickly. Inspired by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA), the SACC's Local Ecumenical Action Network (LEANs), Gauteng Alliance, and many other national and regional alliances, the church by and large succeeded in this endeavour. One of the more prominent responses was the creation of LEANs in communities through which churches responded by providing and facilitating the distribution of food parcels, PPE, poverty alleviation initiatives, local community empowerment initiatives, pastoral care of people, trauma support, and rebuilding lives that had fallen apart because of COVID-19 related issues. These are just some of the initiatives cited by church leaders and representatives of NGOs as indicators of the church's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The LEAN strategy was adopted by many denominations across the spectrum. Respondent 6 concurred:

"In our area, the drive was to ensure that no congregation should operate on their own, they should rather facilitate and bring people together as quickly as possible in their local community to form a LEAN and within 3 weeks of that process we did quick research and 75% of our congregations reported that they had engaged in networks. Encouraging ecumenical networks was on the table before COVID, but COVID-19 absolutely launched it; it's not even strong enough the word, it accelerated the whole process with great success.

Respondent 9 summed it up this way:

"We started to work together to raise funds and at the same time to begin to engage with people on the ground, particularly in the township settings who are and were already in contact with households that were in need … so we started to get a bit of a network and then started distributing food either via e-vouchers or via physical food parcels. We were not the only group in our area that was

doing this, there are other big churches that are city wide that just have the ability and the resources to be able to really work on their own and do amazing work, they have done incredible work. And then there are regional churches and community churches. I think every city needs all different types of churches at different sort of levels of size and existence and resource base, etc., to be able to do the work collectively. So, what turned out is that the number of community level churches, neighbourhood churches, and NGOs started to work together, and by the end of November [2020], *we had served at least 10,000 unique situations through emergency relief which was a drop in the ocean compared to what needed to be done. But if you just gather all the data, churches generally were able to really serve the community in that very practical way during this time of need. But we did of course realise that emergency relief is not stainable … we knew that that we needed to transition from emergency relief to community rehabilitation, [and] ultimately community development, and so as a LEAN we started having conversations about that.*

3.3.1 Vision-based leadership and the missional church

Visions generally are about the ability to see the future, the most ideal future state of an individual, group, or organisation, and putting processes in place for the attainment of that future position. Visions are both aspirational and inspirational in that a clearly defined and articulated vision inspires everyone involved to work in unison to achieve that vision. Visions are aspirational in that they present a future state that is quite different from today, stretching the current organisation to work harder knowing what the goal is in years or time to come. Visions therefore are about hope, dreams, and aspiration (Kouzes & Posner 2002:125), but hope based on reality instead of wishful thinking. Without a clear vision for a future state, when the going gets tough, people may give up on hope, thinking whatever they have embarked on is impossible to achieve (Sellon, Smith & Grossman 2002:42). A clear vision therefore serves as motivation for current actions and programmes knowing well what the future holds if we do not give up (Nichols 2007:23). Respondent 5 agreed:

The only reason we as a church perhaps were better placed is because our vision already was community focused. If we did not know our community, if we

> *didn't know the people in the local clinic, the local police station, if we didn't know our ward councillor … because of partnerships we were part of before COVID, we were going to struggle … we were not working alone, we partnered with about 10 other churches, sharing information, sharing contacts, and sharing exactly how we were succeeding in terms of other aspects … We want to be part of seeing better environment and we were in the forefront of that based also on the Book of* Matthew *in the Bible, Jesus says 'I was hungry you fed me. I was thirsty you gave me something to drink, I was in prison you visited me, I was naked, and you clothed me' … But there were those pastors who when asked to come up with a list of people in their community you find that they did not know where to start.*

Being a vision-based leader does not necessarily mean that the leader sets the vision for the church. Åkerlund (2016:3) argues that "since leaders cannot assume upfront what God wants to do", they can't really set the vision for the church or their churches, but can use their vision-rich leadership capability to create awareness of what God is doing in a local setting and, as disciples of Christ and agents of God, how can they imagine themselves as being at the centre of God's activities in their local setting. And by so doing, they open up for the participation of the community. Without visionary leaders and pastors, most churches would struggle.

3.3.2 Values-based leadership and the missional church

Values are the deeply held principles of an organisation which are largely invisible. They form the core foundation of the culture of an organisation. The importance of values lies in the fact that through observable behaviours and practices, the culture of an organisation becomes visible to all. Malphurs (2004:13) proposes ten reasons values are so crucial for Christian ministry; these are summarised as follows:

- **Values determine ministry distinctiveness** – a ministry based on clearly defined values separates the organisation or church from others, giving it a solid theological foundation of what the ministry is all about, the stipulated programme of action, and clear boundaries of what can be done and how it should be done**.** Since congregations operate in the unique contexts and

cultures, it makes sense that the value system that drives each congregation is fully immersed in a particular culture which differs for each congregational situation. Malphurs says: 'the most important ingredient in any cultural recipe is a value system' (Malphurs 2004:14).

- **Values dictate personal involvement** – in the early days, leadership was about power and followership. Nowadays leadership is more about an alignment between organisational and personal values. If the values of the church match those of the Christian person, the latter will involve themselves more in the activities of the church and last longer in the ministry. Unlike in Paul's time when there was a single church in a city, nowadays there are several local churches in a neighbourhood and people have a wider choice to choose from. It therefore helps the church to clearly spell out its core values, what it stands for, and the reason it is where it is. This enables members to make informed decision as to which local church they will frequent. Gone are the days when denominational membership was determined by where one grew up or the church one's parents belonged to. With urbanisation and the mass movement of people to cities and between cities, this traditional model of church belonging is dying.

- **Values communicate what is important** – while every ministry has a set of values, not all the values, whether personal or organisational, are of equal importance; hence it is important to rank them in order of their importance. If one finds oneself in a situation where a difficult decision must be made, to join or not to join, to leave or not to leave, or faced with a choice between equally desirable (or equally undesirable) courses of action, it helps to have one's values ranked in order of importance or priority. Without this ranking one may find it difficult to decide what course of action to take. The importance of ranking, says Malphurs (2004:18), is threefold: First, those who find themselves in difficult situations often ask themselves if it is time to leave or move on. Second, every organisation must have a commitment to values that matter to avoid being bogged down in a quagmire of disarray, clutter, and

ineffectiveness. Third, the primary values help everyone to know and focus energy on what is truly important to the ministry.

- **Values embrace positive change** – one thing that is certain in life is change. As the innovation in technologies continue to gain speed, and with the 4IR already on our doorsteps, decisions about how church is 'done' become more important than ever before. For Malphurs, the important questions for Christian ministries are: "[H]ow can we know what to change and what not to change? How can we know what is good or bad change? A wrong move could prove costly or even deadly to the ministry. The only sacred cows in the ministry are its vision, its core values, and its doctrinal beliefs as based on Scripture, acting as glue that hold ministry together amid transition" (2004:19).

- **Values influence overall behaviour** – A congregation that clearly expressed its values, when faced with a declining membership, for example, will not abandon its belief system as it chases new members. Instead, it will stay true to its priorities and try to find ways to do what it is supposed to do better and more effectively, and by so doing, the congregation might just be correcting its own mistakes that led to a declining membership. Values provide the foundation for decision-making.

- **Values inspire people to action** – no matter how much you encourage congregants to participate in ministries to uplift their communities, or ridding their neighbourhoods of litter, or taking care of the homeless and hungry, or even cleaning church premises as unpaid volunteers, to mention some, nothing much will happen – they remain in their passive pew position without any active participation. According to Malphurs, the missing link is 'shared' values. Shared biblical values give a greater sense of meaning. If what is deemed important to an individual aligns with what is important in ministry, people commit voluntarily for something worth their while, something that gives meaning in their lives (2004:21).

- **Values enhance credible leadership** – leaders shape people's values, and they instil these values more through what they do than what they say (Malphurs 2004:23). The Bible says, "you will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16). If they make you drink petrol or eat grass or snakes (ENCA 2014), but they don't eat it themselves, then you know you are being taken for a ride; get up and leave.

- **Values shape ministry character** – a person's character is the direct descendent of his or her values. People of poor character cut corners to accomplish their goals. Those of good character are always honest, moral and upright. This is also true for ministry organisations. Its core values are character defining, determining how it conducts its ministry (Malphurs 2004:25). Malphurs gives an example of two contrasting church properties – one that has its facilities well-kept and attractive, portraying its character positively, and the other that is rundown and in desperate need of repair, portraying a negative character.

- **Values contribute to ministry success** – having clearly articulated values help define the church's identity and its calling – who are they and what are they called for or to do. If a church, for example, is winning lost people without sacrificing its core values, that counts as a successful mission. Such a church is able to bring back the lost, bring in new converts whilst also retaining existing membership. The value system helps keep the church or ministry focused on its mission and vision.

- **Values affect strategic planning** – if in ministry we all share the same values, passion, and purpose, then planning becomes easy because we are all working toward one common goal. Core values affect the entire strategic planning process (Malphurs 2004:26).

Malphurs' assertion on values is supported by Respondent 5, who said:

> *"We have always considered ourselves a church in a community, in fact having a reputation that says if there is anything happening in the community people will be told go to that church you will get help. It's basically because we look at the holistic needs of our community, we've had partnerships with Department of Home Affairs in the past where they would bring their mobile van here so people can register for birth certificates, death certificates, and things like that. We would have workshops with the Department of Social Development just to give people information regarding what access do they have to certain basic needs, and we also have partnerships with the Department of Health and run annual health days, testing for HIV and AIDS, blood pressure, and any other health related matter. We would look at the WHO awareness calendar and try aligning certain months and say this is what WHO is looking at in this month, how do we talk about TB [tuberculosis], how do we talk about diabetes, so that's kind of the context of the church that I serve – not just open on a Sunday but on average, we would be open four days a week for different programmes. We also help with career guidance so young people would come; there is a team that help them put together their CVs [curricula vitae]; we also have homework assistance for children from primary school, from Grade 1 until Grade 7. At times we become more of an after care because even when they don't have homework, they would come because some of their parents come home late or some of them just enjoy being in our place where they could read or be given attention. So that's a bit of what we have … Our welfare department is the one that spearheads most of the projects and then all the other departments also follow suit as part of our vision to serve, love, grow and lead. Those are our four core values that basically filters into all ministries. The youth is programmed in such a way that what they plan … it's in an outreach format, it's in an empowerment format. Even women in our church, if they plan something for women, it will be like a holistic programme all to the glory of our Lord and Saviour and to build a healthier community.*

However, this seems to have not been the case for all churches, as Respondent 8 lamented,

> *"I felt the church moved too slow. We are not geared to think ahead, we only start acting when something goes wrong and I felt that we need to be proactive, we need to have at the church a kind of place where you have everything ready so if there's a pandemic or whatever happens, or somebody's house burns down we need to react because we've got 1- 2- 3 already".*

However, being slow to react may not necessarily be a bad thing after all, especially if the time taken is utilised for devising a response plan that fits the church's vision, values, and resource capabilities, including the formation of critical partnerships wherever possible. A considered reaction is sometimes necessary and better than an immediate, knee-jerk response.

3.4 LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPERIENCE

The coronavirus pandemic of 2020 forced churches worldwide to temporarily close their physical doors. Depending on each church's resources and capability, some moved their services fully online, others defied lockdown regulations and continued to operate, and some shut their doors and services completely during the lockdown period. When restrictions were lifted months later, many churches resumed physical services and discontinued their online services, but others continued with both offline and online services. Commenting on the successes of the church during the lockdown period, Respondent 9 said,

> *"Lessons that we've learned is that we look for what holds us together and if we can agree that Jesus Christ is Lord, if we can agree that we can do so much better together than we can on our own, and if we can agree that the generosity, not only financial generosity, but our time generosity, our talent generosity, and other resource generosity, if we can agree to that, we can do an incredible amount of good for society … If we just let go of our territory and our control over what we would consider holding dear for whatever that looks like, we begin to collaborate around a centred set, the gospel, Jesus being Lord that we agreed to the effectiveness of togetherness and generosity towards one another. We've seen the impact of that, and we just need to see that more, so we're going to learn from that".*

Collaboration, especially in uncharted times, becomes more important than ever. Collaboration is what makes teamwork successful when a group of people or entities come together and contribute their expertise and resources for the benefit of a shared objective or mission. In such settings, people begin to live life together and do more as a collective than if they were to live as individual households. Without others to feed our ideas or bounce ideas off, agility and creativity can suffer, significantly reducing the speed and effectiveness of our efforts. Sparks *et al.* (2014:12) refer to this collaboration with others in the neighbourhood as the new parish – the relational network in which groups share encouragement, offer resources, and collaborate across places.

Respondent 7 noted:

> *"We have learned that church is not just a Sunday morning. For too long the church has seen Sunday mornings as the final, everything is geared towards the Sunday morning, all your money, resources, all your people, is geared towards this event on a Sunday morning and that's not the body of Christ … We need to look outward, use our facilities as resource bases where people can come and be trained and be equipped and can be blessed seven days a week. I don't believe [the] church should be a mausoleum that just get[s] used on a Sunday morning … The lesson to take away from this is that the church is not the building; the church is God's people, and as we go into the next pandemic, just because you can't gather on a Sunday morning, does not mean that the church is closed. The church is active, is vibrant, is alive, is praying, is walking out, is feeding the poor. The church is people, [it] is the priesthood of all believers, and is people engaging all their gifts to bring glory and fulfil God's mission on this earth".*

Respondent 8 added:

> *"The one thing I have learnt is that church is not in the four walls of the church. It is not there anymore. Church is to be out there where the people are. It's going to be a challenge for a lot of mainline churches to change that thought".*

Hooker (2009) contends that the church is a community of called-out ones equipped by God to go out into the world following the example of Jesus Christ and testifying through Word and deed to his work. People can go to church once or twice a week to worship together – any church, regardless of location or distance from their place of residence. There is no problem with this. Sparks *et al.* (2014:76) say it becomes a problem only if people think "this is what it means to be church". To be church means participating with others in our communities, whether Christians or non-Christians, believers or non-believers, in life situations in our neighbourhoods. This way, we may win non-believers to Christianity though this is not our primary focus.

Respondent 9 provided the following summary of what the church is:

> *"The good that we take away from this is that God has shown us that we must be a church that goes to the people and how that works itself out we need to still work it out. The cities are so complex; we organise and arrange ourselves so differently and that is constantly changing, and we just need to keep asking the question what it will take to win the city and what does it look like to go and show the love of Jesus by going to people … How do we redeem our spaces by being a going people, because I see that in the Scriptures the Early Church was a going people, and we need to learn that again because we are living in a culture that I think is becoming fast post-Christian in South Africa? In other parts of the world, it is definitely post-Christian if you consider the social issues that are definitely not biblical anymore, so I think that's it, we've seen the fruit of that".*

In 1 Peter 4:10 we are told to use all the gifts we have to serve others. While we may not know whether Paul was talking about spiritual gifts or material gifts such as talents and skills we possess, the truth of the exhortation is that everything we are blessed with should be of service to others. The trick is identifying who we have in our church

with specialised skill sets who would love to use them to serve others. They could be leaders of top companies, lawyers, bankers, doctors, educators, plumbers, technicians, etc. We need to identify these members and match up their talents with the church's programme in the communities.

According to Respondent 1:

> *"It would be necessary as we move forward to accept that the church would have to bring together a pool of skills that when you think of a church you are not only thinking of a pastor and members but that within the church there would be a pool of skills, economists, scientists, and so on. We would need to do some audit of these skills to find out who is in our benches because some of the people in the pews are highly skilled, somehow when they come to church, they don't think that their skill might be useful. So, we would need to pull together these skills so that we are not taken for granted; so that we check with our doctors, check with other people, what is it that we can do, and our businesspeople in the light of this huge unemployment that has affected particularly the young people, what is it that together we can do to generate hope amongst our people. Unfortunately, it can't be done by pastors and congregants [alone] so we will have to have these skills and then move ahead so that the church can be a powerful partner alongside the government. At this point in time, we are not a powerful partner because we have not put together these skills so that we are able to talk from a position of strength … but such skills would work well if it were not just for a particular church but together with other churches in an ecumenical format".*

The following summary captures the sentiments very well.

> *"In the beginning there are no best practices in unknown times like these, it was unprecedented circumstances, but we spoke about emerging practices in that time when we reflected on them, but now I think we are at a point that we can start looking back inside these as best practices that developed from COVID-*

19. We do not want to go back; we want to build further on this" (Respondent 6).

"I'm not sure what the church has learnt, I think what we learnt is to be flexible, I read something the other day that I'm still very pondering on. It talks about that we need to be spiritual entrepreneurs. This guy specifically talked about Paul, Timothy, all of them being spiritual entrepreneurs, and that we lost it and became pastors instead of entrepreneurs, and that's the one thing that I learnt. I had to keep on saying, 'guys we need to think about it differently'" (Respondent 8).

It can be concluded that the respondents were echoing Jesus' words in Mark 16:15 where he says to his disciples: *"*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*".* That is where the change can take place, and that is where the kingdom gospel can move fastest.

3.5 THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM THE STUDY

The data analysis revealed many interrelated themes, as well as the nature of the relationship of the themes to one another. The themes were explored, and the framework below (Figure 3-1) was developed to illustrate a model for *mission as being with*.

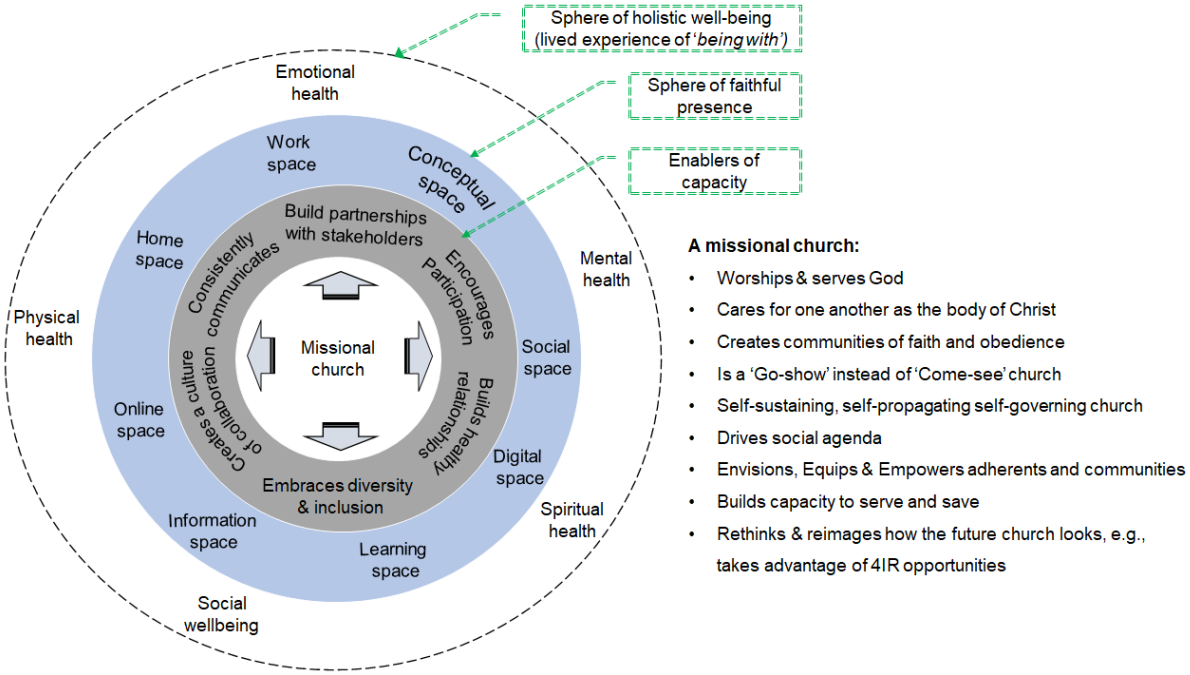

Figure 3-1: Church Management Framework: building capacity for presence

The framework points to the following characteristics of mission as *being with*:

- A missional church creates a culture of collaboration, builds strong and healthy relationships, and embraces diversity and inclusion.
- A missional church maintains a holistic presence where people are, in their circumstances, and ensures there is no space where its presence is not felt.
- A missional church advances the kingdom gospel of holistic healing – emotional healing, mental healing, physical healing, spiritual healing, and social well-being.
- A missional church always maintains a holistic presence for a holistic healing.
- A missional church worships and serves God, creates communities of faith and obedience, cares for one another as the body of Christ, self-regulates to ensure accountable leadership, drives social agenda, equips and empowers the mission field to self-sustain, builds capacity to serve others, and is a 'going and sending' church instead of a 'come and see what we do here' church.
- A missional church persistently rethinks and reimages how the future looks.

How the framework works is that, as the church we start self-assessment from the outer space and work our way toward the innermost space at the centre. Start by

thoroughly and honestly assessing your church's external environment in all areas. The model points to the outer space, noting that this space is never static; it is dynamic, it oscillates, and is infinite. When applying the framework, do not start from the centre and work your way outward because by doing so, you will be starting on the presumption that you already are a church holistically present in all spheres of life. Approaching the model this way will reduce the remaining steps to nothing other than giving you a false sense of holistic presence. The elements and dimensions of the inner circle, i.e., collaboration, healthy relationships, diversity, and inclusion, collectively represent the church's internal capabilities arising from the church's identity and culture.

The middle space (middle circle) contains those elements that represent the church's field of care – channels and platforms through which the church reaches out to the world, where people are, in their situations. Here reference is made to learning, home, work, online, social, digital, conceptual, and information spaces. These spaces indicate the church's external capabilities. A church that does not create a conducive culture of collaborating with others (law makers, NGOs, communities, other churches, etc.), nor believes in building strong and healthy relationships with government, the business community, and civil society groups; or a church that believes in going it alone without participating with others in the community, will find it hard to play effectively in all the spaces the framework suggests.

The inner and middle circles together form the indicators of the church's holistic presence. A church that covers all these areas and plays in all the spaces indicated, is a church that can safely claim to be present holistically. A church that does not fully cover all the spaces and dimensions of the inner circle, my still be present but its presence is not holistic – it does not cover all aspects of life in all areas or spaces where its audiences are. A combination of internal and external capabilities ensures the church's holistic presence for a holistic healing, healing that covers all the aspects of health as defined by the WHO (emotional, mental, physical), but also including social well-being as an extension of healing. This model therefore suggests that without social well-being, human healing is not complete. If we are to move towards

this direction as the church, we would be able to respond better when we have the next pandemic.

The following sequence of self-questioning or self-discovery will help guide the church as it applies the model to assess its capabilities, weaknesses, and opportunities for a mission of being with. Starting from the outer space and moving inward towards the centre, the church can adopt the following sequence of questioning:

Table 3-1: Questions to ask regarding the church's relationship with the world

Questions to ask – church's relationship with the world	**If NO, then …**
Are we a church that cares for one another (inside and outside) as the body of Christ?	
Are we a church that worships and serves God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God? (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)	
Are we a 'go and show' instead of a 'come and see' church? (Matthew 28:19-20)	
Are we a church that creates communities of faith and obedience? (James 2:14-26)	
Are we a church that continuously rethinks and reimages how the future church looks?	
Are we a church with capacity to holistically serve and save lives?	
Are we a church equipping and empowering disciples of Christ?	
Are we a church that drives social agenda in our community?	
Are we a self-sustaining, self-propagating and self-correcting church with accountable leadership?	

Next is determining the kind of presence the church currently occupies in all critical spaces.

Table 3-2: Questions to ask regarding the church's presence

Questions to ask – space presence	**No presence**	**Weak presence**	**Strong presence**
Do we have presence in home spaces?			
Do we have presence in workspaces?			
Do we have presence in social/public spaces?			
Do we have presence in online spaces?			
Do we have presence in learning spaces?			
Do we have presence in information spaces?			
Do we have presence in conceptual spaces?			

Table 3-3: Questions to ask regarding the church's orientation and culture

Questions to ask – identity and culture	**If NO, then …**
Are we a church that thrives on diversity and inclusion?	
Are we a church that strongly believes in forming and maintaining healthy relationships? Or are we a go it alone church?	
Are we a church that believes in collaborating with others in our community?	
Are we a church that is deeply involved (active participation) in the lives of local communities?	
Do we have a clear structure for communicating? (To help us organise and remember our ideas and tasks and to make it easy for our communities to follow and stay focused).	

Every Christian church needs to have all the capabilities mentioned in all the dimensions indicated for a mission of *being with* to be authentic. We have our home spaces, our workspaces, our play spaces, but we also have our online spaces and learning spaces. How do we engage with our fellow human beings in those respective spaces in a way that enables us to continue to be effective in advancing the gospel?

3.5.1 Holistic healing: Theological justification

Before delving straight into the spaces of presence, it is important to start by examining the meaning of healing and presence from a theological perspective. The church is the Body of Christ, and the members of the body must care for each other. 'Body of Christ' is a phrase that captures the uniqueness and functioning of the church of Christ. Christ is the head (Rm 12:5) and the church is the body. Different parts of the body perform different functions all geared toward the survival of the body, which is its main function. The church too, as an agent of Christ in the world is composed of different parts, each with its own capability, performing different functions for the church, as the body of all believers, whose main function is to witness to the kingdom of God in words and deeds; proclaiming the gospel to all nations and caring for each other in love and prayer. This theology is based on several passages in the Bible, including Romans 12:15 and 1 Corinthians 12:12.

The call for the members of the body to care for each other means that the church should take care of its people, inside the church, whilst also equally reaching out with the love of Christ to those outside the church. When it comes to holistic health (or healing), the church looks beyond the physical body and addresses other aspects of health such as emotional, spiritual, mental, and general well-being. Combined, these aspects enable a person to live the healthiest and happiest life possible. If one area is compromised, most likely other areas will be as well. Dolson (1983:18) says, "[T]he goal is not health for health's sake, but sanctification and restoration of the entire being—spirit, soul, and body, to the image of God". This means that the church has an important role to play in society, working with health care professionals and authorities to promote healthy living – physical and mental (Simundson 1982:331).

3.5.2 Holistic presence: The theological perspective

Hunter (2010:243) describes faithful presence as meaning three things, namely:

First, it means that God is faithfully present with us, in all we do in his name. God loves us, hence he descended from heaven to earth in the person of Jesus to be with us and amongst us. He loved us so much that he sacrificed his only Son so that through him (the Son) we may have a good, obedient, and everlasting life. Jesus' whole earthly

life was a sacrifice till the end when he sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity. God's love for us did not end with the death of Jesus on the cross; when Christ ascended to heaven, God and the Son gave us the Holy Spirt for God so loved us, he would not leave us alone. Thus, being with, or presence, is deeply rooted in the life of the Trinity.

Second, it means that in return for his constant presence with us, we are to be faithfully present to God. Having created Adam, God realised that it is not good for a man to be alone, and he gave him a companion (Gn 2:18). In Chapter 2 of this study, it was explained how *being with* and *being in* the world are inseparable, as human beings dwelling in the world, we share the Word with others of our kind regardless of race, colour, creed, or social standing. In return for the love God has shown us, we are to love those we share our spaces with, in our neighbourhoods, where we work, play, or socialise, including through online and digital platforms.

Third, it means that if we are faithfully present to God, we understand and identify with his mission. The mission of God is to save humanity from sin and restore his good creation marred by sin. Saving human beings from sin means that as disciples of Christ, we preach and practice the gospel in all our encounters, in our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and public space. To work with and alongside God in the restoration of his creation means that we are to take care of the environment and all that is in it. God gave us dominion over everything in the sea, in the sky, and on earth, and commanded us to look after what we have dominion over with responsibility by taking good care of it (Gn 2:15). This means that everything we do in our environments pertaining to our neighbours and those around us, including to plants or animals, we must do as if we are working for the Lord himself and not earthly masters (Col 3:23).

Respondent 9 summed it up well as follows:

> *"The conversations I'm having now with a group of people is how do we do ministry in the complexity of the city. The difference between a complex system, the complicated system, and a simple system [is that] cities are complex*

> *systems where people organise themselves very differently to a rural setting or a more homogeneous setting, and I think, in a city setting like Johannesburg, the complexity created a particular culture that requires a certain kind of engagement. So, we have our home spaces, we have our workspaces, we have our place spaces, but we also have our online spaces and learning spaces. How do we then engage with our fellow man in those respective spaces in a way that we continue to be effective with channels for the gospel. We believe in the principle that the gospel moves fastest in natural social networks, and we need to try and work out what that looks like for us in the future, and we haven't cracked the code yet".*

Holistic presence, or faithful presence, demands for us to give attention to the detail in our environments, reading the signs of desperation or cries for help even when no one has come forward asking for assistance. Holistic presence demands that we read the context beyond what we see with our naked eyes and try understanding the situation behind the person, placing ourselves in that situation. In so doing, we are able to say: 'if this was me, this is how I would react'. Holistic presence demands that we always be in the lives of people we share our world with no matter how big or small the world is. For the purpose of this study, space as a concept can be defined at two levels, namely: real or physical, and imaginary. Presence, or space presence to be precise, follows the same logic, i.e., presence in all spaces mentioned above (learning space, social space, work space, home space, online space, etc.) and the type of presence perceived or experienced in each space setting. Benyon (2014:30) says it is the people interacting in those spaces that produce the sense of place and being.

3.5.3 The concept of space and place

In their article 'Re-Place-ing Space', Harrison and Dourish (1996:68) argue that a place is a space with something added to it to give it meaning. A house is a place in as far as it is a physical structure that provides shelter. A home is a space as soon as it is given meaning to indicate a place where one lives. "We are located in *space* but act in *place*" (1996:68). This view aligns with Tuan's (1977) assertion two decades earlier that "place is security and space is freedom – we are attached to one and long for the other". Massey (1994) says space and place are so intertwined that one should

not attempt to treat them as two distinct concepts, and Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space as a social product is based on the idea of a dialectical process of production involving three fundamental dimensions: the 'perceived space', 'conceived space', and 'lived space':

> Firstly, *perceived space*, represents "the practical basis of the perception of the outside world" (Lefebvre 1991:40). It is what we visualise of the world out there – the physical and abstract space.
>
> Secondly, *conceived space* is the space for architects, engineers, researchers, clergy, and theologians. This is where participants exercise power and influence and manipulate those who exist within them (Lefebvre 1991:222).
>
> Thirdly, the *lived space* is the space of social interaction which happens as a result of the first two, that is perceived and conceived spaces. It is the space were social relations take place. They are beyond or outside of the home and workspaces, where as a people we meet and relate, such as coffee shops, bars, barbershops, and recreation centres, according to Oldenburg and Brissett (1982). People here share stories of common interest, crack jokes, gossip about what has happened or is happening around them in the community and here where they are, whilst also observing others in the vicinity or watching television, or just a casual conversation. It is also possible for some to engage on work related matters with colleagues or acquaintances but the spirit of the engagement is aways casual, out the home (Jeffres, Bracken, Jian and Casey 2009).

Lefebvre (1991) prefers 'perceived space', 'conceived space', and 'lived space' terminology while Soja (1998) uses 'firstspace', 'secondspace', and 'thirdspace' to refer to the same concepts.

While Oldenburg's (cited by Memarovic, Fels Anacleto, Calderon, Gobbo & Carroll 2014:n.p.) characterisation of third spaces is sound and widely acknowledged, it was however outlined long before the Internet and new media became as advanced and

entrenched in community life as they are today, post Internet and globalisation. Social media, including chat platforms like WhatsApp, have become part and parcel of today's life, such that the mobile device is almost always in the hand as in the pocket. It was this observation that motivated Memarovic *et al.* (2014) to conduct research to ascertain the role of information and communication technologies in third spaces. Oldenburg identified eight characteristics that third places share. These are summarised in the Table 3-4 below:

Table 3-4: Oldenburg's characteristics of third spaces

Property	**Natural ground**
Characteristics:	Places have to provide neutral ground for people to socialise
Oldenburg's explanations:	People are free to come and go as they please. There are no time requirements or invitations needed. Much of our lives in first places and second places are structured, but not so in third places.
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Distinct roles between the occupants, e.g., who is watching and who is being watched. People watching provide enough material for conversations.

Property	**Leveller**
Characteristics:	Social distinctions are not important in third places
Oldenburg's explanations:	People from all walks of life gather in third places. There are no social or economic status barriers.
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Not everyone has access to the Internet

Property	**Conversation**
Characteristics:	Conversation is the main activity
Oldenburg's explanations:	The talk is lively, stimulating, colourful, and engaging
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Not only conversation but observing other people, and enjoying leisure activities, and interacting online

Property	**Accessibility and accommodation**
Characteristics:	Places are easy to access, both geographically and socially
Oldenburg's explanations:	They tend to be conveniently located, often within walking distance of one's home.
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	For the physical counterpart this is true. However, similar to the 'leveller', property places did not offer free Internet access, limiting access to their online counterpart

Property	**Having regulars**
Characteristics:	Regulars shape the 'tone' of a place
Oldenburg's explanations:	It is easy to recognise that many patrons are regulars at the establishment. But unlike other places, newcomers are welcomed into the group.
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Staff members and themes can equally make the 'tone' of a place

Property	**Low profile**
Characteristics:	Third places have a moderate style where 'pretentiousness' is avoided
Oldenburg's explanations:	As a physical structure, they are typically plain and unimpressive in appearance
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Most of the third places heavily advertised their online presence, thus shifting from the notion of having a low profile

Property	**The mood is playful**
Characteristics:	The conversation in the third place is light
Oldenburg's explanations:	With food, drink, games, and conversation present, the mood is light and playful. The mood encourages people to stay longer and to come back repeatedly.

Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	There are different moods and different levels of moods

Property	**A home away from home**
Characteristics:	Third places should provide an out-of-home environment with the same feeling as home
Oldenburg's explanations:	At their core, they are places where people feel at home. They feel like they belong there, and typically have a sense of ownership.
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	The introduction of ICT started to change this as now third places can observe their patrons, and vice versa. This creates a hostile environment for a home away from home due to power imbalance. Also, with today's ICT, a third place becomes emergent property that can happen online but also in non-third places like public corners.

Property	**Discovering a third place in advance**
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	With today's ICT, people can peek into a third place and discover without the need to enter

Memarovic *et al.* (2014) added the following new characteristics introduced by ICT:

Property	**Declaring type of supported social activity**
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	Third places can declare and advertise the type of social activities they stimulate and support

Property	**Extending engagement with/within a third place**
Memarovic *et al.'s* observations:	People can extend engagement with/within a third place, e.g., by liking it on Facebook

What this presents are unlimited opportunities for the church to engage in daily conversations outside of the home, workplace, and church, as outlined in the table above. Without trying to be prescriptive, the church needs to take these spaces seriously – all eleven characteristics – and try work out how it can be part of the conversation without bringing the Bible into these spaces. As patrons visit and partake in these spaces, how do we as the church prepare and encourage fellow Christians to spread the gospel, not by quoting Bible text but focusing more on Christian ethics and showing empathy to one another without spoiling someone's fun? This is the challenge for the church; the gospel does not have 'no go' areas. The gospel is not limited to homes and religious gatherings. The gospel is part and parcel of our daily activities. In these spaces, Christian people meet and connect with new people. Thus, in a sense, a church, not physical structures only but also the church universal or invisible, whether gathered out of home or out of church, is itself a third space indicative of opportunities for missionally minded people to portray the presence of God's kingdom in these spaces.

Knott (2015:3) invites us 'to reflect about space as a medium in which religion is situated', not only considering spaces that are 'sacred,' but mapping the presence of religion in everyday spaces. From this perspective, the church's missional focus should be the creation of spaces for interaction and experience, or the utilisation of existing spaces for interaction and experience the way of Jesus. Interaction is not only verbal, but also non-verbal, for example, through our bodily gestures or the things we do with our hands, and the signals we send out such as not answering a phone call or a text message. This research identified some of the most important spaces for interaction, activity, and experience, which will be discussed in detail below.

The church *visible* is a sacred space in that the church building was constructed specifically for religious purposes, in this case, Christian gathering. The church *invisible*, also called universal, is also a sacred space in that all the activities, engagements, and behaviours taking place are of a religious nature. Objects, characters, and players in this space perform their tasks in a Christlike manner, whether it is individuals doing their daily tasks or groups of people or communities engaging physically or through mediated platforms, encouraging one another or

sharing their stories of success or soliciting advice on issues pertinent to their lives and society – the behaviour is religious, making the space sacred. However, sacred space does not exclude nonsacred space, for the same place or space may be both sacred and nonsacred in different respects or circumstances. A sacred place comes into being when it is interpreted as a sacred place (Encyclopedia.com n.d.). Sacred spaces are places of communication with divinity and about divinity, thus, from a theological perspective, spaces of engagement that this study identified, i.e., home spaces, online spaces, learning spaces, social spaces, workspaces, digital spaces, etc., are at times sacred spaces when used in a religious manner for kingdom advancement purposes.

Any reference to the church (be it online or offline), implies some form of interaction between the church, its adherents, and the world, i.e., the church on the one side, and the world or the mission field on the other side. In-between are the spaces of interaction between the church and the world, which is the subject of this chapter. The make-up of these spaces and how they are or can be used by either party in the engagement process is detailed in the next section below. It is important to highlight that these spaces, instead of being one dimensional, are in fact two-dimensional, in that they provide the platform for either part to receive and respond to information or initiate a conversation that encompasses the initiator, responder, medium and the environment. It is up to the church to optimise the use of these spaces such that the benefit derived accrues not only to one party but both. From the church's point of view, the focus is evangelising and mission. From the perspective of those who are witnessed, it is freedom to engage and be engaged which matters. In a complex interactive web of interactions, the church becomes a medium between God and people as well as between people themselves. The church creates spaces of interaction and engagement and brings these spaces closer to the people whilst always listening and being aware of what God is doing in the world. As this happens, Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn (2015:2) assert that the church may also be 'read' and 'interpreted' by others both inside and outside the church.

The Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) defines 'interaction' as "mutual or reciprocal action or influence", and adds, "communication or direct involvement with someone or

something". Interaction thus refers to action or activity between two or more persons, entities, or objects where one responds to the action, activity, or the presence of the other. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d. - c) defines 'communication' as "a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour", which further implies the use of a medium (singular) or media (plural), such as television, when it is used as a medium for gospel messages, or the church when it is used as a medium for political campaigning. In a similar manner, O'Neill (2008:10) defines a 'medium' as "the physical elements and attributes of our relationships to the world that allow us to embed our thoughts and ideas in them in order to make them manifest", explaining that the medium is something we use to communicate with, something that sits between the parties in a communicative mode. The latter includes our bodies and the gestures we make, both audible and non-audible.

One of the most important developments in the recent history of cognitive science is the recognition that knowing, thinking, and feeling is embodied in people (Benyon 2014:19). What we think and feel is a consequence of our physical bodies and the world around us. It is the only way we experience our whole-body system and is the only way of being human, there is no other way. On the one side, the world around us influences the way we think; on the other side, the fact that we have bodies and live in this world, also influences the way we think and feel. Thus, embodiment is the way we live and experience the world around us through our bodies. Such lived experience of the world made possible by the fact that we have physical bodies in a physical and cultural world shape our perceptions, emotions, and language, and thus, how we relate to others. Embodiment also means being situated within the world, and being affected by social, cultural, political, and historic forces (Wilde 1999:27). As embodied beings, we know the world through shared understandings (Wilde 1999:28).

Tim Ingold (2000) argues that we must not see the world as surrounding people, but rather as people moving through paths through rich cultural contexts. His argument is in contrast with Heidegger's notion of people dwelling in the world. Ingold sees Heidegger's proposition as meaning people are enclosed in the world and argues that in reality, people inhabit the world with the skies above and earth below, and in their

continuous exploration of the world, they form a horizon of perception which continually changes as they move. He says, “It is at this surface—conceived as an interface not just between the solid substance of the earth and its gaseous atmosphere but between matter and mind, and between sensation and cognition—that all knowledge is constituted” (Ingold 2000:212-214).

3.5.3.1 Presence in online spaces

The church wants to be seen, heard, known, and trusted; but COVID-19 changed the way we do this and how we relate to one another by creating physical distance between people – between those who witness and those who are witnessed – between practitioners and beneficiaries of mission. To be seen, heard, known, and trusted, it is important for the church to adapt to modern ways of doing church, reorganising church processes and activities around digital technologies, creating communities of faith and obedience through digital and online platforms. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

3.5.3.2 Presence in digital spaces

The digital space concerns the use of digital technology and devices to communicate. It is the world of virtual reality, Facebook, databases, artificial intelligence, Internet, videos, etc., which utilises devices such as cameras, computers, television sets, cell phones, projectors, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. Individuals, groups, and businesses use these channels and devices to communicate with one another, and the speed of such communication can be at the speed of light depending on the device and Internet connectivity. In the early church days, the Apostle Paul would write letters to congregations exhorting them to continue ministering the gospel and we imagine his message would take days or weeks if not months to reach the intended audiences, but for us today, it is a matter of a phone call or email any time of the day. This is relevant, especially in the era of lockdowns, as it would be erroneous for Christians to blame their lack of caring for one another on lockdown or the closure of church gatherings. The presence of the church in digital spaces is no longer an option but a requisite. Digital religion is discussed further in Chapter 5.

3.5.3.3 Presence in home spaces

With or without a pandemic, church remains church. We are still being called to advance the kingdom of God, to serve and save lives. We can do this from anywhere in the world, even from our homes, reaching out to our neighbours and unbelievers in our lives – the people we have relationships with, calling to check if all is well with them, caring in practical ways. The church needs to equip and empower households for this important task, so that it is executed with confidence and love. Respondent 5 had this to say:

> *"Ask yourself what you were teaching before lockdown, what you were focusing on when you had a congregation before lockdown. I say that because you think about how you teach people based on the fact that perhaps you are going to see them next Sunday and if now you are not going to see them for six, eight months or a year, how do you know if what you taught them was adequate? … That's what always lingers [on] in my mind … people who are away, did you teach them survival in terms of spiritual growth, total reliance on the Lord; not on a church building; not on the pastor per se but how did you equip people to know how to rely on the Lord when they can't run anywhere? I think for me, that was my biggest thing of trying to think about were people taught adequately. That [is] my biggest reflection … one of the things I did when churches started being allowed 50 people attending is the Bible study … I said to myself, if this was me and I was just a congregant, do I feel that I would have been adequately taught?"*

<u>*Question for the church:*</u> How do we equip and empower our members for this important task, so that it is ingrained in each family's daily life?

3.5.3.4 Presence in workspaces

Traeger and Gilbert (2014) challenge us to discern God's activity at work by asking: what difference does it make in my workplace that I am a Christian? Do I open up against unfair treatment of colleagues by management and fellow employees, or do I say it's none of my business? Those who are struggling with their work, do I sacrifice my own time to assist them, even if it means putting on a few extra hours? What about

those in emotional distress, how do I encourage them not to give up? How do I discipline nonperformers under my supervision? For Traeger and Gilbert (2014), being a Christian means your life has been changed and transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel should work itself out in every detail of your life, including your job. Sharing the gospel at work by being part of someone's journey to faith in Jesus could begin with something as simple as having a cup of coffee with a colleague – the conversation doesn't have to be explicitly spiritual; it can be normal, interesting, and fun. Sharing the gospel at work could also involve encouraging a co-worker who has had a rough time at work or home, or offering a helping hand to someone in need. The workplace is where the work we do every day does not only contribute to human flourishing, but also gives living proof that the kingdom gospel is alive and good news.

Question for the church: How do we equip and empower our members for this important task, so that it is executed with confidence?

3.5.3.5 Presence in social spaces/public sphere

Fung (2009) challenges us to discern God's activity in the public sphere by asking: 'Who in the community is working on behalf of infants so they will not die of hunger and malnutrition or lack of access to basic health care? Or who is working on behalf of women whose voice and rights are suppressed in their own homes by abusive husbands and spouses, such that if they open up about their situations, they face death or punishment? Who is working on behalf of the orphans, the disabled, and the handicapped who are excluded from the normal societal life enjoyed by the rest of the population? Who is the voice of millions of underage children exposed to alcohol and drugs in our communities where laws are hardly respected and police presence is close to none? For Fung, this is a starting place for witnessing the gospel in the public sphere where people come and go as they wish, discuss issues of common concern, and agree or agree to disagree. It is the space where everyone is welcome and where public perception and discourse of politics are developed. There will always be dominant, neutral, and opposing views in the public sphere and the church, if it is to make an impact, one cannot shy away from being a conversation starter in such

spaces. It is up to the church to shape the tone of the conversation which ultimately is determined by how the church engages in these spaces.

Question for the church: What technologies can be used to provide a sense of presence for those who are at a physical distance from one another? And how do we equip and empower our members for this important task, so that it is executed with confidence and love whilst respecting other's freedom?

3.5.3.6 Presence in learning spaces

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d. – a) defines 'learning' as the activity or process of gaining knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, being taught, or experiencing something. The Macmillan Dictionary defines 'learning experience' as a situation in which you learn something about yourself, other people, or life in general. Learning about Christ can take many forms; it can happen formally in a classroom, as is the case with Sunday school, confirmation, and baptism classes for parents and adult converts. It can also happen less formally in a family setting where parents and children habitually engage in conversations about Christ, what it means to be a Christian for individuals and families. It can also happen through sermons delivered in a physical setting like a congregation, or virtually online, or television. It is up to the church to identify all potential spaces of learning and rank them in terms of reach and popularity as well as the implications for participation. Christian education is all about being Christlike in everything we do and say. It introduces the youth to the demands of Christianity and its way of life; it teaches adults the demands of true discipleship amid the chaotic world of today; and it also introduces Christianity to those who have not heard of Christ before or whose knowledge of Christ is flimsy. Christian education is not a once off learning expedition. Unlike formal education where you attend classes for a set period, and if you pass, you get a qualification and it's the end of learning. With Christian education, the only qualification is self-examination of one's quality of life. Learning how to live under the rule of Jesus and how to live by the rules of his kingdom equips and empowers every Christian person in their endeavours to advance the authority and power of Jesus and his kingdom into the hearts and lives of others.

Question for the church: How do we equip and empower teachers, trainers, educators, or volunteer laity for this important task, so that it is executed with precision across all age groups, young and the old?

3.5.3.7 Presence in information spaces

Information space is where people go for more information regarding a specific matter or activity. If, for example, one wants to tour the world, and he/she is not sure where to start, one may decide to go online and search various websites, or go to a travel agency (physical visit), or visit the World Wide Web (www) to get the necessary information. Thus, it helps for a local congregation to understand all information needs of local people and the sources they consult, notwithstanding that the congregation itself can be a source of useful information. Participating in information sources could be through partnerships where the church provides complementary information to that already provided by the primary source. Where the church is a sponsor of some activity, it is able to provide church specific information as an entitlement benefit of being a sponsor. Information spaces can be databases, signs, or symbols. Benyon (2014:45) gives an example of a train timetable that is created to provide information to help people undertake the activity of traveling by train. Wilde (1999:28) makes an example of vehicle drivers following instructions of the satnav, road markings and signs, thus reacting according to these whilst retaining the freedom to change direction should such a need arise, either because the initial input was incorrect or there has been a change of plans. Either way, the engagement with the environment continues unabated. For Christians, God's doing are the signs they look for. For example, the Bible speaks of the signs of the time as events that were prophesied to take place in the latter days before the Second Coming of Christ. Wars and conflicts in Mark 13:7-8, and men posing as Jesus trying to deceive people in the last days in Matthew 24:23-24, are the signs of occurrences in time, portending future events.

Question for the church: In times of crisis and uncertainty, where do people look for information, guidance, and support? How do we equip the church as an institution and Christian persons generally with the resources and platforms such that they become reliable sources of gospel centred information?

3.5.3.8 Presence in conceptual spaces

The conceptual space is where people understand things. It is the space behind idea generation; for example, a stage play starts with a concept, what is in the producer's mind, what he or she wants to communicate and the desired effect on audiences. It is the same with a music rendition, its starts with an idea, what the lyrics are trying to convey, and who the intended audience is, and the intended take-away message after the performance.

Benyon (2014:53) adds:

> The conceptual space is not simply in people's heads – people will need to think about things in their heads, but they will use the objects that are in the world, the design of the physical space and interactions with the digital, informational and the physical in order to conceptualise things.

Question for the church: Where in the church is the engine room, a change hub of some sort, or to use business language 'The Research and Development Centre' where new ideas are generated, tested, and developed into full programmes? Where in the church lies 4IR technologies? And what is being done to take advantage of the opportunities presented by these technologies, or to guard against the threats they pose on humanity?

The self-evaluation process, outlined by the questions for the church raised above, help the church determine its current strengths and weaknesses whilst also laying the foundation for building and strengthening its capacity to serve.

3.6 CAPACITY BUILDING

For the church to be truly present and a means for healing hearts and bodies, there are fundamental elements (building blocks) that must be recognised. The church is called the body of Christ, and as members of the body, we are called to do the work of Christ. Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cared for the poor, and taught us to love God and to love our neighbour. Jesus satisfied both sick hearts and sick bodies. Thus, preaching and ministering to the needs of the people was central to

Jesus's ministry on earth; it is equally central to the church's mission. To minister effectively, a missional church needs to create unity among its own disciples as a sent people; to collaborate with others from outside, including people of other faiths as a sending and participating church; and to build healthy relationships with government, business, and civil society organisations whilst embracing a diversity of views (cross-religious and cross-cultural), without sacrificing the theological or ideological identity of the church.

Table 3-5: The six dimension of capacity building

Dimension	
1	Collaboration
2	Relationships
3	Partnership
4	Diversity and inclusion
5	Communication
6	Participation

Each dimension of capacity building, as shown in Table 3-5 above, namely *collaboration, relationships, partnership, diversity and inclusion, communication,* and *participation*, is explained in more detail below under its own respective sub-heading. These are not presented in any specific order.

3.6.1 Collaboration

The first dimension of capacity building discussed is 'collaboration'. In the Scriptures, the church is equated with the body of Christ – Romans 12:5 "one body in Christ"; 1 Corinthians 12:27 "the body of Christ"; Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:24 "his body". As one body, collaboration between members is important as it reflects the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This comes alive in relations we, the Christian community, formulate with other churches; people of other faiths; NGOs; and government, business, and community organisations – mission is expressed in relationships of love, as the Father loved the world and sent his only Son as our Saviour. The Father and Son in turn loved us so much that they would not leave us alone, and so sent the Holy Spirit to be our helper and comforter in times of

uncertainty. The very nature of collaboration begins with a foundation of relationships, recognising that no one person or one entity can achieve what two or more can, as Halford Luccock cited in Crean (2022:3) said: “No one can whistle a symphony; it takes a whole orchestra to play it”. Respondent 6 recalled the role of the church as follows:

> *“The role of the church is relational; the church creates spaces for collaboration, bringing people together, not necessarily to have all the resources and skills themselves but as a catalyst for action and the interdependency of communities”.*

This is in agreement with Niemandt's (2019a:27) assertion that mission is a “relational commitment: the engendering of a new family of faith, to be a blessing for all” (Balia & Kim 2010:21) and “God created humans as relational beings because God exists as a relational being” (Breedt & Niemandt 2013:2). Niemandt’s (2015:92) argument is that “mission, beginning in the heart of the Triune God, is relational, done in communion with others in mutual love and dialogue”. Breedt and Niemandt (2013:2) argue that “If God engages the world in a loving and caring relationship through the Son, then that is the only acceptable way the church should engage the world”. Thus, collaboration from a missional perspective is a relational concept. Respondent 9 had this to say about church collaboration:

> *“Every city needs different levels of church. Cities need the cathedral type churches, the large churches that see the city and have a vision for the entire city and the resource to serve the whole city. But often those big churches are so resourced that they don’t feel the need to work alongside others. Then you’ve got the regional churches that look at a particular area as a region and have a vision for this. Often, they are also resourced enough to take on the region on their own but where the magic lies, is in the neighbourhood churches, the community churches who realise that they need each other … it’s amazing when we recognise our need for one another how we can pull together, how possible that is. Of course, you get specialist churches that specialise in particular area of ministry like the bikers’ church, but every city needs that variety for us to have an impact on every level of society”.*

The relational understanding of the church is affirmed in ecumenical documents where Edinburgh (2010) states, "[W]e are challenged to welcome one another in our diversity, affirm our membership through baptism in the One Body of Christ, and recognise our need for mutuality, partnership, collaboration, and networking in mission, so that the world might believe". As the church, we can only learn and grow our faith by being around others and engaging with them in our daily life activities. In any case, we are in the world and being in the world means living with others in proximity.

3.6.2 Relationships

The second dimension of capacity building discussed is 'relationships'. Relationships are "the way in which two or more people or things are connected or the state of being connected" (Stafford 2019:n.p.). It also means "the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave towards each other" (Stafford 2019:n.p.). Jesus told his followers not to go out alone but in pairs to share the good news of God's peace (Lk 10:1-2). Although Luke does not give reasons why Jesus sent them in pairs, instead of one sending them alone, it could be that, using the metaphor of the body of Christ once again, Jesus wanted them to work together; support each other; encourage one another when they encounter challenges; correct each other's mistakes; have a relationship; and learn to work in teams. Jesus knew that the mission cannot be accomplished by one person alone. Strong and healthy relationships build solid foundations for effective collaboration.

Respondent 6 emphasised this point:

> *"It's one thing to say form networks. Communities that build local relationships before the pandemic had a head start. They were ready for something deeper. If you had to start right from scratch, if there were no relationships, if there wasn't strong fraternal in a town, in a community, before the pandemic it was almost not impossible, but it was harder. So, the lesson that we learnt is that relationship is everything and being part of the body is everything. If you isolate*

yourself in your community and if you are building your own little kingdom somewhere you will stay behind … you need to build relationships all the time".

Ross (2010:145) says in relationships we are looking for love, for mutuality, for understanding, for compassion, and sometimes for forgiveness. In God we experience love, compassion, and forgiveness. If we abide in him and by his rules, his love would flow unto us unconditionally. In return for this love of God unto us, we are to love those we share our world with. Thus, our collaboration with others, groups, or entities, is driven primarily by love and eagerness to see everyone having a decent life humanly possible. When people know one another well and respect each other, they are much more likely to work well together. This could lead to better solutions, better planning, and more effective implementation as each member values the input and ideas of others.

3.6.3 Partnership

The third dimension of capacity building discussed is 'partnerships'. Partnership means being able to do more together by joining up in the same work. Thus, partnership is more than simply working together; it is collaborating on something both parties care about and can't do alone. The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic required that all sectors of society – government, business, the church, civil society, and individuals – work together in partnerships to alleviate the pain and suffering of those who were on the receiving end of the pandemic. Partnership is also biblical – Ecclesiastes 4.9-12 speaks of two being better than one, and in Luke 10 Jesus sends disciples out in groups of two confirming the biblical justification of partnership. According to Ross (2010:145), partnership is constituted of three factors, namely, the acceptance of: (1) genuine involvement, (2) genuine responsibility, and (3) trust. This means that (i) parties in a partnership must trust each other's commitment to the deliverables and success of the partnership; (ii) be committed to serve the interest of the partnership over individual/self-interest, and (iii) be willing to pay the price of the partnership, accepting all liabilities that may arise. A partnership formed on the basis of this understanding and commitment is built on a solid foundation and will easily navigate challenges the partnership encounters. Involvement, Ross (2010:146) argues, means listening attentively, listening more that

talking. Good listening requires humility, patience, and attention. A good listener sends signs that say I am here for you, I am at your service, I am listening, I am available. Good practitioners are those who listen attentively and do not rush to comment, even when blamed. To be a good listener means to be willing to share in the lives of others (2010:146). Put simply, involvement is the first step toward *being with*.

Ross' (2010) theology of partnership centres on three core ideas, namely: 1) the Trinitarian understanding of God; 2) God's relationship with humanity; and 3) the true relationship between human beings. This means that, first, in our relationship with others around us we experience God. In our encounters with the homeless, those displaced by violence and wars, the victims of sexual abuse and GBV, and those who have nothing to feed their empty stomachs, we experience God. Each person of the Trinity has his own divine nature expressed in relation to the other persons of the Trinity, existing as three persons in one. Similarly, our relationship with others in our neighbourhoods takes a cue from the life of the Trinity. Second, in the incarnation of Jesus, God became flesh and came to live with us and among us. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God reveals himself and communicates himself to us. This is the natures of the relationship we have with God trough the person of Jesus. Third, partnership indicates the true relationship between human beings. Partnership starts with one's relationship with God as a God fearing and loving individual, honouring, and respecting God the Creator. Once that solid foundation is established amongst Christians, the bond that is formed between Christian people witnessing to Christ's work in their communities manifests externally to a life of sharing, caring, and loving one another. Thus, what any organisation can achieve on its own is limited. Working with partners lends to greater credibility and broadens the scope of what projects and programmes can achieve as financial, human, and other resources are pooled together for the attainment of one common goal.

3.6.4 Diversity and inclusion

The fourth dimension of capacity building discusses is 'diversity and inclusion'. Ross's foundational theology of partnership in Christian mission rests on two important themes: unity and diversity – not only that God is a community of three diverse persons but also that God is one God. The theme of unity abounds in Scripture. When Jesus

prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, he prayed for unity among his followers that resembles the unity between the Father and Son (Jn 17:21-23). Following Jesus's example, Paul appealed for unity among Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 1:10). The church functions in unity, caring and loving one another as members of the one body called the church, extending this love and care to the world externally in such a way that the church lives in harmony with everyone (Rm 12:16). The theme of diversity is equally present in Scripture from Genesis 1:27 indicating diversity in gender – male and female, from whom came the people who were scattered over the earth (Gn 9:19). In the New Testament, the unity of humanity is mentioned in Acts 17:26. Church collaboration ignites potential when it embraces the spirit of inclusion and diversity.

> *"I just feel like the church during this time has really got over their insecurities to a large degree and people across denominational boundaries or borders are beginning to work together so beautifully, so wonderfully. There is a thing called the Gauteng Alliance that has being birthed during lockdown, with evangelical churches mostly just collaborating around the gospel and saying we have our differences on several fronts, but we can do so much more together than we can on our own. COVID has helped us with this tremendously"* (Respondent 9).

Respondent 1 had this to say:

> *"As a matter of fact, the pandemic drew us closer to each other. There were members of ecumenical bodies that became the voice when it came to issues, for example, the consideration of pastors as essential workers. However, I would have felt that if we were able as a church to express that unity in a particular way, we would be able to consolidate ourselves so that we come as a very strong force … if we were more consolidated. So, unity yes, it's there but we should have had a more consolidated unity so that our engagement with government would yield results. Unfortunately, we have not been able to do that".*

Respondent 2 continued:

> *"I think more and more through ecumenism efforts we are moving closer and closer together. That is done deliberately to say what is it that puts us together, what is it that is common to all of us as Christians, what are the issues that are biting the society and those things that affect all of us regardless of your denomination. Therefore, you put the doctrine and dogma aside at least on those things that we agree to fight together. I think it is happening, but it will take a very long time, but it does happen".*

Inclusion is an organisational practice where people from different backgrounds are culturally and socially welcomed into the organisation or group and are given space to participate fully and freely, rendering their expertise or contributing their views in an environment that promotes equality, respect, and fairness for all. In inclusive settings there is no 'us' and 'them', my idea becomes our idea that requires all of us to work together for ideas to be fully accomplished (Stafford 2019)

According to Respondent 9, at the core of diversity and inclusion is dialogue:

> "*I think it is a case of looking over the fence and recognising your neighbour, and moving towards them and saying, come on, how could we join hands, what can we do, what is it that God calls us to. I believe we are all in the same race, God has given us different names to run on and so are expressions, our unique kingdom contribution looks different, but it doesn't mean that we've got to stand against each other. Our battle isn't against flesh and blood, it is against the dark forces at war against the advance of God's kingdom, but Jesus said, 'the gates of hell will not prevail as the kingdom of God advances'. So there's wonderful promises in Scripture that if we love each other the world will know that we are the Lords disciples*".

Therefore, for a church in mission, diversity, being the act of containing many distinct elements or qualities existing within a group, place, or a specific setting, cannot be separated from inclusion which is the act of including people that may be otherwise excluded, side-lined, or marginalised, so that they become or are made part of a group, place or setting. Diversity and inclusion are two sides of the same coin.

3.6.5 Communication

The fifth dimension of capacity building discussed in 'communication'. It was stated in the beginning of this chapter that mission is contextual – it is an ecosystem. Understanding the context is governed by one's closeness to the context (are you here or over there?); one's reading of the context (assumptions, suppositions, perceptions, and meaning-making); and one's perception of objects involved in the situation. In this complex interplay between contexts, objects (instruments), and users (agents), contextual reality gaps arise from a lack of shared understanding; hence, for the church, the importance of structured and ongoing communication is key.

Respondent 6, echoing this sentiment, said:

> *"During COVID-19 we had regulations. The viewpoint that we took was to say we are law abiding and we are aligning with the regulations that our government puts down. There were ridiculous regulations at times, but it remains for us, even if we think it's ridiculous, to abide. So, what we did is we said to ourselves communication is very important, we need to communicate frequently, and we need to communicate clearly on the regulations and where we, as leadership of the church, stand in terms of that regulation, and we could only make an appeal on our congregations to abide as well".*

In this day and age, people can organise and form social groups with ease. In almost every neighbourhood there is a WhatsApp chat group. In corporations too, business unit employees or departmental staff form chat groups that have enhanced the ability of participants to share important information, raise awareness to issues pertinent in their environments, or ask and respond to queries, or give general updates and feedback on matters. In churches too, members of various leagues, organisations or cell groups have organised themselves into online chat groups. In these chats, anything from well wishes and words of encouragement to security issues, jokes, or general information, sharing the gospel, information about births and deaths of members, etc., is disseminated. Also shared are enquiries and advice regarding databases and sources of information. While in earlier days one would rely on a

telephone directory book for information on services and contact details, nowadays it is easy and quicker to search online, or even better, ask a group of friends or acquaintances via a chat group such as WhatsApp. Online chat groups via various applications or the Internet have become an important channel of communication which the church cannot ignore. The advantage of these platforms is that the message sent can be shared multiple times by members and non-members, extending their reach beyond the initial contact list. However, De Vita *et al.* (2001:9) caution that whilst useful for information and connections, these platforms can create an environment where human interaction is limited which may lead to the creation of division and differences between people, especially between the tech-savvy and the not so tech-savvy.

Communicating is not as easy as it might seem. Effective communication relies on a clearly articulated message; a clearly defined target audience; addresses a specific need, opportunity, or problem; is time, culture, and context sensitive; and relies on clearly thought through communication platforms and channels that reach as wide an audience as intended. Thus, if the church wants to have a voice, it has to be clear and intentional in its communication. Enlisting the services of a strategic communication partner, even at a fee, might benefit the church in its communication endeavours. After all, evangelism is about communication, in written or spoken word or by personal witness. Thus, there can be no evangelism without communication. Doing good deeds is only half the story if not accompanied by the preaching and spreading of the gospel. To complete the story, spreading the Word and doing good deeds is the only way of showing faithfulness to the Trinity. Thus, the church needs to have a clear communication plan and system if it is to succeed in what it is doing.

3.6.6 Community participation

The sixth dimension of capacity building discussed is 'community participation'. The term 'community participation' entails active citizen involvement in projects to solve their own problems. It demands openness, transparency, clear communication, and unity. The consequence of this implication is that the church's mission should not be executed by the church for the community without their involvement. Instead, the church's mission should be executed together with the community. The community

needs to have a say in decision-making on matters affecting their lives, whether aid or not. Thus, the six pillars of capacity building discussed above, namely: *collaboration, relationships, partnership, diversity and inclusion, communication,* and *participation* are all different parts of the same body, performing different but related and dependant functions for the functioning of the whole body called the church.

Some concluding remarks follow next to bring the chapter to a close.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated the church's presence during the COVID-19 lockdown (alert levels 5 – 1). Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the study's participants. Recurring themes were noted and conceptualised early in the data collection process. Themes were used to develop the model for a mission of being with, which the church at any stage in its life cycle can use to self-assess and plan accordingly. The model suggests two key dimensions for the church's mission to be *fully with* – 'holistic presence' and 'holistic healing'. For healing to be complete, it needs to cover all aspects of a person's life – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Presence (some may want to call this faithful presence) in all the spaces identified – home, work, social, learning, digital, online, information, and conceptual spaces – contributing to and affecting the person's life is thus a prerequisite. Presence that focuses on only one aspect of human life will not result in holistic healing. The next chapter will investigate the requirements for developing sustainable capacity that will enable the church to deliver effectively on its God given mandate and be *with* communities all the time.

CHAPTER 4
BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Greg Ogden (2010), in *Unfinished Business*, proposes that pastors should be visionary leaders who build other leaders, reimage the church's vision, culture and structure, while staying firmly focused on mission and evangelism (Kidder 2009). Working in such complex roles as leaders, managers, and implementers, pastors and church leaders find themselves inadequately equipped for these tasks (Elliot 2013).

Respondent 5 captured this sentiment very well:

> *"If you are called pastor in your community, you are called to come and assist in emergencies that there is no textbook you were ever given with the kind of emergency that you must go and resolve. That's why I am saying that having more of pastoral training that helps you to see how you become a community leader, how you get to identify partners in your community, will make your role as pastor even more effective".*

In this chapter, the primary objective is to consider the aspect of capacity building that deals with human and institutional development of which the church is an integral component. By capacity building is meant a wide range of processes and plans intended to improve and sustain the well-being of individuals, communities, and institutions (Crisp, Swerissen & Duckett 2000:99). According to Schuftan (1996:261):

> Capacity building can be characterized as the approach to community development that raises people's knowledge, awareness, and skills to use their own capacity and that from available support systems, to resolve the more underlying causes of maldevelopment. Capacity building helps them better understand the decision-making process; to communicate more effectively at different levels; and to take decisions, eventually instilling in them a sense of confidence to manage their own destinies.

The argument advanced in this chapter is that mission is about the church's capability; in other words, the church's capacity to deliver its mandate now and in the future, requiring the church not only to build its own capacity to serve, but also the capacity of those who are served, so that they can be self-sustained. Indeed, some of the church's mission work may address short-term humanitarian emergencies such as starvation, shelter, and other life-sustaining measures, while development and upliftment are long-term mission initiatives requiring collaborating with others, good planning, and execution. According to the National Council of Non-profits (n.d.), capacity building is whatever is needed to bring a non-profit to the next level of organisational maturity. It meticulously builds its people, improves its processes, and adopts game changing technologies for future performance improvements. Capacity building therefore is not a once off process that is short-term focused but a continuous and persistent effort undertaken with a clear vision for the future. The process requires a thorough understanding of the current operating environment, a good estimate or prediction of a future state based on the external forces of change, such as economic, technological, political, and socio-cultural environments. Coupled with the organisation's current weakness, you are then able to map the organisation's current status with long-term projections and start building for a future not yet realised.

In the context of COVID-19, the inability of the church, or any institution, to deliver its mandate may not always be blamed on the pandemic but perhaps on the lack of capacity in one way or the other. This chapter is important in that it identifies the elements necessary for church capacity development that, in the main, will empower the church both as an institution and a movement of Christian persons to deliver its mandate effectively.

4.2 CHURCH CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

'Church capacity building' refers to activities that improve the church's "ability to fulfil its mission over time and enhances its ability to have a significant positive impact on lives and communities" (Lifelong Faith n.d.). The process of capacity building may involve the building of capacity for an institution, individual, or both. Any process that involves increasing the capability to perform a task, or produce a product, or offer a

service simpler, better, and more efficiently, is considered capacity building. This could involve training employees to improve their intellectual capability or resourcing an institution with sustainable human capital, production, warehousing, and distribution facilities as well as selling and service capacity.

The Urban Capacity Building Network (n.d.) defines capacity building as a process that includes:

- *Human resource development* – the process of equipping, training and empowering individuals with skills, knowledge, and tools they require to perform their duties effectively. Human resource development requires a thorough analysis and understanding of each person's level of readiness versus the duties the person is expected to perform, thus identifying individual and organisational gaps that may hinder an individual to perform at his or her full potential. This is then followed by putting in place all the necessary plans to close those gaps.
- *Organisational development* – the process of refining managerial structures and systems including operational procedures and policies. The process needs to ensure that the organisation has all the resources needed so that they can be deployed to individuals and teams within it to benefit the organisation, enabling it to attain its goals. Organisational development includes promoting the right culture to ensure unity in understanding the deliverables so that everyone inside works toward a common goal
- *Institutional and legal development* – seeks to establish rules of engagement withing a particular sector or sectors. This is usually the role of the state, the market, civil society organisations such as NGOs and churches, or multilateral organisations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), UN, and World WHO, to name a few.

Respondent 5 agreed:

> *"In an ever-changing world you can't just study something five or ten years ago and then you still supposed to remember and fit into the context that you are living in from when you left Bible college. If you ask me about what I learnt when*

> *I was doing theology, I don't think what we learned was adequate. You have pastoral counselling as a module in what I was studying but I think that only having it as a module for a single semester is not adequate, perhaps that should be a big focus that should be from year one to year three … More emphasis on social welfare would be more helpful, and counselling, spiritual counselling, even on issues of gender-based violence for example, and issues of substance abuse, because those are programmes that we have in the church".*

A similar sentiment was echoed by Respondent 9:

> *"We are looking at this purely from a kingdom perspective – how can we support and help, and I think that's one of the wonderful things because I've been in Christian ministry for over 20 years, and I've seen everything. I've seen territorial; I've seen kingdom building; I've seen a wonderful collaboration working together. I just feel like the church during this time has really got over their insecurities to a large degree and people across denominational boundaries or borders are beginning to work together so beautifully, so wonderfully … with churches just collaborating around the gospel and saying we do have our differences on a number of fronts, but we can do so much more together than we can on our own. We've realised this and I think COVID-19 has helped us with this tremendously".*

Capacity is also defined by the ability to predict and influence the future, make the right decisions at the right times, and organise resources so that when the future change materialises, the individual or organisation is not caught unprepared. This was the case with many institutions when COVID-19 hit the world; most countries had to scramble to put together response plans, instituting lockdowns to buy time for their response mechanisms. The key deliverable of this study is the building of a framework of systems and programmes to help empower the church to respond better in future disasters, acknowledging that with COVID-19, the church was caught unprepared. If the church fails to imagine how the future is likely to look for both the church and society, then the church is not able to equip itself for future dynamics. Similarly, a church that cannot amass resources from the environment such as local community

support, government and private sector aid, new technologies, etc., is incapable of rationally handling the resources at its disposal (De Vita *et al.* 2001:7). If capacity includes the ability to anticipate and influence change, then there needs to be ongoing assessment of what the organisation is doing (Honadle 1981:577). Insights gained from such an assessment can then be used to improve future performance.

In health care, Crisp *et al.* (2000:100) specify four main approaches to capacity building, namely: *bottom-up, top-down, partnership*, and *community organising* approaches. Within each of these are a range of strategies that have the potential for capacity building. These can be broadly explained as follows:

- Bottom-up

A bottom-up organisational approach might begin with changing agency policies or practices. This is the practice of training and empowering internal resources to perform critical skills inside organisations. This reduces dependency on external consultants, and therefore builds sustainability over the long term, even when external support systems are no longer available.

- Top-down

A *top-down organisational approach* involves building and sustaining organisational capacity and the expertise of individuals:

  – through training programmes that build the capacity of individuals to perform at their peak whilst encouraging teamwork and collaboration between personnel and departments
  – through organising and coordination resources necessary for the attainment of organisational goals. This could include human resource, financial resources, equipment, and facilities resources. If these are not adequately resourced and managed, they may be squandered or left underutilised with severe consequences for the organisation
  – quality assurance systems to determine whether the organisation is performing optimally and taking corrective measures where gaps are identified

- Partnership

A partnership approach involves creating and strengthening relations three dimensionally – Upstream with owners and providers of resources; Midstream with NGOs, volunteers, FBOs, and other faith formations; and Downstream with NGOs, community leaders, regulatory authorities, and other local organisations. This way, the partnership will benefit wisely through the sharing of knowledge and expert skills from a wide range of participants from different cultures and education background

- Community

A *community organising approach* is where individuals or groups in local communities are drawn into existing organisations or encouraged to form new ones. The idea behind this practice is the transformation of community members from being passive recipients of services to being active participants in projects and programmes meant for the upliftment of their communities. Scholars agree that where members of local communities are involved in a project, from planning to execution, chances of success are greatly enhanced. However, Goodman, Steckler, Hoover and Schwartz (1993:216) caution that this approach may not work especially in health disasters, such as COVID-19, which would require community members to have expert knowledge in planning and rolling out a health care programme. Such skills are acquired through formal education and training, and there may not be many local people with such skills, and those who have might not be available due to commitments in clinics and hospitals.

De Vita *et al.* (2001) suggest a framework for analysing the capacity needs of organisations, a framework consisting of five components found in all organisations and inter-organisational task or project teams. The five components include: (1) the *mission and vision* of the organisations or task teams; (2) *leadership philosophy* in both organisations; (3) *tangible and intangible resources* on hand; (4) the *outreach programmes* of all participating organisations; and (5) *products and services* that form the core purpose of the organisation's reason for existence. Figure 4-1 shows that all five factors are interrelated as can be seen by the direction of the arrows. In addition to supporting and complementing each other, they can be possible touchpoints for capacity building interventions.

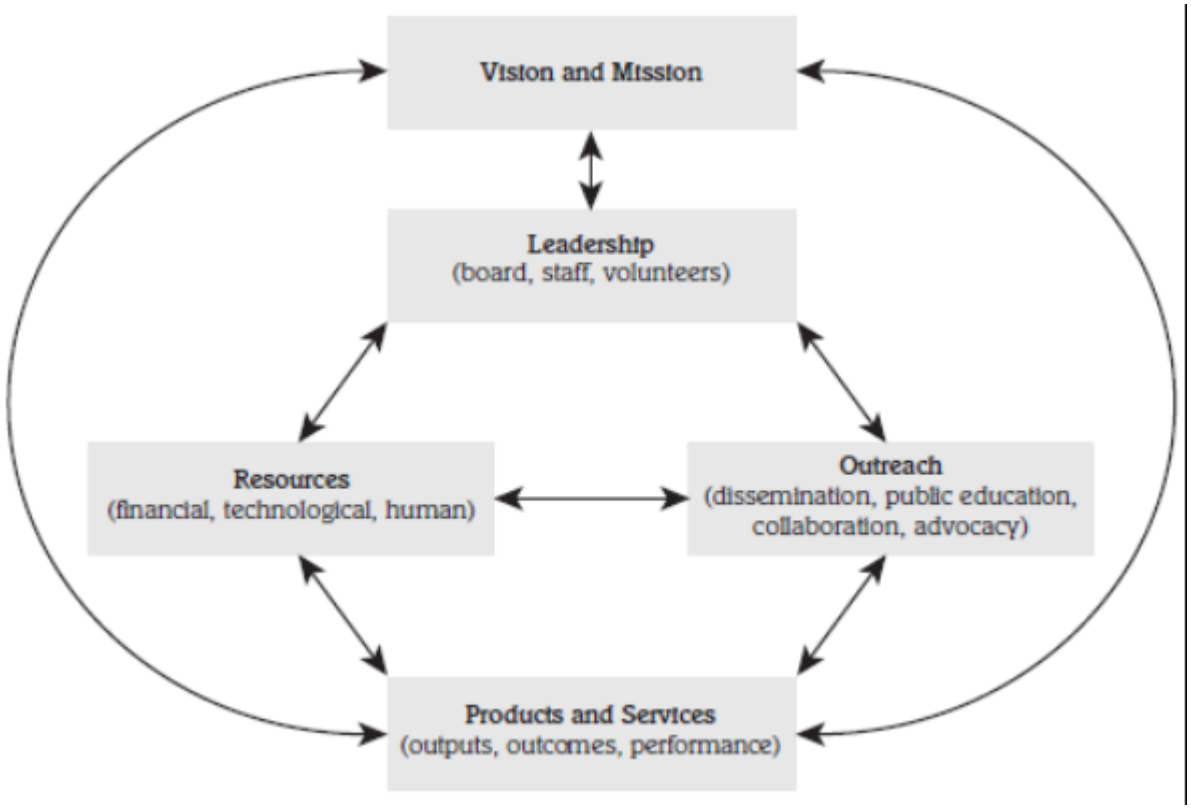

Figure 4-1: A framework for addressing non-profit capacity building
(Source: De Vita *et al.* 2001:17)

The five components of the suggested framework (De Vita *et al.* 2001) for analysing the capacity needs of organisations are described in more detail below:

1) Vision & Mission: The mission of the church is the mission of God, what God is calling the church to, as his agent in the world. The church's mission is its *raison d'être* – it defines its essence and substance. Vision is grounded in the mission, and it is that to which God is calling the church to advance the mission. Vision is the church's imagined and hoped-for future state. Without a clearly articulated vision, people will never know where the church is going and where it is leading them to. Those who don't know where the church is going will diverge. They will not be successful in fulfilling the mission of the church (Watt 2014:135), and additionally, the church's

capacity to deliver its mission will be severely compromised. According to *De Vita et al.* (2001:16), one way of discovering God's vision for the church comes by asking: "Given the mission of the church and the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, lawlessness, violent crime, joblessness and poverty in South Africa, what is it that God is most calling his church to do next?" Getting an answer to such a question would require a clear understanding of what has happened before, what is currently happening, and a clear vision of the future, all guided by the church's mission.

2) Leadership: The ability of individuals or organisations to guide or influence others and lead them to success. It should be acknowledged here that there are two types of leaders, good and bad. Good leaders lead their teams and organisations to prosperity measured by the organisation's ability to attain set goals and their vision. On the other hand, there are bad leaders, those people capable of leading their followers astray, hence the Bible in Matthew 7:15 warns us to be very careful of these people – not all leaders are true shepherds. The Scriptures give men the authority to lead and be led in accordance with God's purpose (Dn 2:37-38; Rm 13:1; 1 Pt 2:13). Therefore, leaders are not supposed to be working to satisfy their egos and greed; they are anointed by God to shepherd his flock so that all the people may harvest the fruits of the kingdom. If the church is an agent of God in the world, then church leadership is the channel of God's grace as it helps people discern what God is requiring of them and helps them on that journey to servanthood. De Vita *et al.* (2001:19) name two factors that must be considered in order to build capacity in the leadership component of the church, namely: (1) *enhancing existing leadership*, e.g., training existing personnel; and (2) *developing new leadership*, i.e., mentoring the next generation of leaders.

3) Resource management: Bringing organisational capacity up to scale for effective delivery of goals is one of the pressing challenges of the non-profit sector. The mere provision of resources is not a guarantee for success for any individual, team, or organisation. Resources must be attracted, deployed, and managed. Attraction includes recruiting the right people into managerial positions – people whose values align with those of the organisation they are working for. Management refers to the correct application and utilisation of these resources, ensuring that they are deployed

in adequate quantities and qualities in the right places and that there are adequate and appropriate tools for the utilisation of these resources. Resource management requires proper management systems (tools and upskilling techniques) to be in place, and that the culture inside the organisation encourages teamwork, high work rate, and does not tolerate poor or non-performance. From a missional perspective, the Harvestime International Institute (2001:6) defines management as "a process of accomplishing God's purposes and plans through the proper use of human, material, and spiritual resources". It is another word for *stewardship* (White & Acheampong 2017:2).

4) Outreach: All Christians are called to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20) and to love their neighbour as themselves (Mt 22:27-40; 25:37-40). On the ground, this is often expressed through a wide variety of outreach ministries looking beyond oneself to the people around and sharing the love of Christ as you serve and connect with those around – from home spaces to workspaces, learning spaces, online spaces, and social spaces. According to the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation cited by De Vita, Fleming and Twombly (2001:21):

> For capacity approaches to truly achieve their potential, attention must be given to the web of connections affecting all the persons, organisations, groups, and communities involved. This strategy in part is building social capital, but it also is good management practice

5) Products and Services (outcomes): As Christians we are also called to help others in need. We do all this with one goal in mind – to advance the kingdom to everyone in our communities. God is calling the church to one and only purpose – to advance the kingdom in our midst, to bring heaven to earth, and align all our doings in words and actions with God's promises here and now. At its most basic level, church capacity building means empowering the church with tools and resources necessary to deliver none other than this basic task – advancing the kingdom in our midst.

Respondent 5 agreed:

> *"Our welfare department is the one that spearheads most of the projects, other departments follow suit as part of our vision to serve, love, grow, and lead. Those are our four core values that basically filter into all ministries. Even though there is a social welfare department, the youth is programmed in such a way that when they plan programmes for the youth, it's in an outreach format, it's in an empowerment format. Even women, if they plan something for women, it will be like a holistic programme all to the glory of our Lord and Saviour and also to build healthier community. We want to be part of seeing [a] better environment, and we are in the forefront of that based on also the Book of Matthew in the Bible where Jesus says, 'I was hungry you fed me, I was thirsty you gave me something to drink, I was in prison you visited me, I was naked, and you clothed me'. So that's on our wall … that's the first thing you see … it's our four values".*

Organisational capability is more than the collective output of individuals working together; it is the value that gets added because of the qualities of the people (human capital) that are there, the work processes (organisational capital) in place, and the effectiveness of the ways they work together (social capital) (Guthrie 2008:3). Guthrie groups these resources in three categories: *tangible* (cash and cash equivalents, machines, land, and buildings), *intangible* (reputation and culture), and *human* (experience, skills, and expertise of personnel as they interact, communicate, and share knowledge). When building its capacity, the enterprise or organisation builds enough resources and capabilities inside the organisation such that even when key personnel leave the organisation, or there are significant changes in production methods or technologies employed, the organisation continues to perform as if not much has changed. The same principle applies to churches, capacity must be built such that mission programmes and partnerships are not built around a particular person, such as a pastor or any leader of the church. Mission continues unabated regardless of the change in high-ranking personnel because capacity in finances, human, and material resources were built early enough to enable the church to fulfil its mission regardless of who the individuals in leadership are. Capacity building enables programme execution independent of changes of personalities, technologies, social structures, and resource crises, i.e., it implies developing sustainable and robust

systems. Thus, capacity building is something that is built over time, with the right ingredients and a vision for the future. It is something that grows out of past and current experience, today's challenges, and opportunities (vision) for the future, according to Potter and Brough (2004:337).

Respondent 5 articulated the church's limitation as follows:

> *"I am in a church where there are systems that just run themselves; when I talk about systems I mean people, the elders, and the deacons. They lead in such a way that everybody knows what to do when this and that has happened, for example, when there is death in the parish. The challenge we had is that the age of that machinery was the vulnerable age during [COVID-19] lockdown. So, we found that from having an eldership of fifteen, only four of those leaders could be available to bury, to do bereavement counselling, etc. In the beginning of the lockdown there was still a bit of energy so we would rotate among four people, and as the lockdown prolonged, we found that we were experiencing fatigue".*

Whilst it may be argued that the church above may have considered itself well capacitated, it is important to note that this would have been at a given point in time. As evidenced by the remarks of Respondent 5, a particular area of the church was not well attended to in terms of (1) absolute numbers, and (2) diversity, i.e., age distribution. The church did not anticipate future dynamics of an aging eldership. In this instance, diversity regarding age distribution in terms of empowering congregants in all activities of the church (instead of limiting empowerment to the elected eldership) could have averted challenges experienced when the aged membership was no more. To understand how capacity building translates to tangible action for the church, please refer back to Figure 3-1 (in Chapter 3) for the Management Framework for church capacity building which is useful here.

4.3 BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY THROUGH COLLABORATION (COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY)

Collaboration implies a sense of partnership and equal contribution, although leadership and management (what is often referred to as the Steering Committee in large and strategic projects) may be needed to direct collaborative efforts to their desired conclusion. Internally, collaboration tends to be about individuals, teams, or parties working together to reach a specified organisational goal. Externally, collaboration tends to be about interorganisational teams working together to reach an interorganisational goal.

Watt (2014:136) says:

> Church leaders will benefit from more collaboration and less competitiveness because collaboration is a win/win approach to human interaction … the intention is to work together, not against each other, so everyone gains something they value – all parties win. A good outcome results when leadership motivates others to harmoniously work together to accomplish the mission and goals of the Church.

Respondent 6 said:

> *"The lessons that we've learned is that the role of the church is very relational; the church creates spaces for collaboration, bringing people together, not necessarily have all the resources and skills themselves but as a catalyst for action and the interdependency of communities".*

Collaborative capacity is the ability of an organisation to enter into a collaborative relationship/s with like-minded organisation/s for the purpose of achieving common goals (Hocevar 2010:2). "The benefits of developing such capabilities include: cost saving through the sharing of best practice, human, financial and other material resources; as well as innovative ideas from a diverse team from different backgrounds" (Hansen & Nohria 2004:23). Collaboration is most beneficial when organisations are interdependent and rely on each other to achieve a common goal or task (Thomas, Hocevar & Jansen 2006:2).

Respondent 9 said:

> *"If we just let go of our territory and our control over what we would consider holding dear for whatever that looks like, we begin to collaborate around a centred set, the gospel, Jesus being Lord that we agreed to, the effectiveness of togetherness and generosity towards one another. We've seen the impact of that, and we just need to see that more and more, so we're going to learn from that".*

Identifying the barriers to successful collaboration is usually the first step in removing any hurdles and driving better collaboration that has more impact. These barriers can be internal such as understaffing or lack of infrastructure, or external such as a lack of coordination among organisations (Nishimura, Sampath, Sheikh and Valenzuela *et al*. 2020:32). Gabriel-Petit (2007) outlines nine organisational, cultural, and interpersonal barriers to effective collaboration, namely:

1) *Lack of respect and trust* – when two teams or organisations collaborate on a task but do not fully trust each other's commitment to the collaboration and have doubts if the other party will engage openly and honestly in execution of the task, the created mistrust becomes a barrier to collaboration. The barrier of lack of respect and trust becomes a foundation for many other barriers to collaboration.
2) *Different mindsets* – different ideologies or belief system pose a risk to effective collaboration. These differences can engender resistance and anger by either part, thus becoming a barrier to collaboration.
3) *Poor listening skills* – when one person or party does not take time to listen to the other party and rushes to conclusions, or pushes their own viewpoints disregarding the views of the other party, collaboration suffers. Collaboration works best when each party is afforded space and time to put forth their views, and to engage each other's viewpoints. This is tantamount to respecting each other – disrespect forms a barrier to collaboration.

4) *Knowledge deficits* – where gaps exist in knowledge about the task at hand, be it the mechanics of achieving the set goal, or rules of engagement, it does not bode well for collaboration. If the task requires specialised skill and none of the parties in the collaboration possess such skill, it is recommended that they look outside for external support to assist with task accomplishment. If this is overlooked and rules are not clarified, task attainment may be difficult.
5) *A lack of alignment around goals* – two parties in a collaboration that have a different understanding of what the end goal is and, as a result, they do not fully agree with each other on the best course of action. This poses the risk of weakening the collaborative effort and thus the attainment of the intended outcome.
6) *Internal competitiveness* – internal competition creates tension and leads to the withholding of information. Competition is good if it leads to creative ideas and high performance. It is bad where it leads to team fragmentation, backstabbing, and working in silos. This is prevalent where individual success is valued more than team success. Cooperation reduces duplication of effort while competition leads to redundancy.
7) *Information hoarding* – when individual success is valued more than team success, some members may hoard valuable information that would benefit the entire team for them to be seen as most knowledgeable of all team members.
8) *Organisational silos* – when teams in a collaborative arrangement work in isolation from each, they deprive themselves of the opportunity for new ideas and continue to reinforce their narrow beliefs.
9) *Physical separation* – it is quite difficult to build and sustain relationships from a distance. Where two teams are in collaboration but separated physically over a period of time, they end up spending more time with those nearby instead of those they are supposed to be collaborating with.

If not carefully planned and executed, collaboration is likely to fail with damaging consequences. In education, for example, Paul Armstrong (2015:5) explains that there are common barriers to collaboration between schools such as threats to school autonomy; perceived power imbalances between schools; additional workload associated with the collaborative activity; and difficulties in establishing shared

objectives and common goals. These can potentially lead to weak collaborations and create conflict between the partners and stakeholders involved. These barriers can be addressed if the rules of engagement or terms of reference are carefully constructed, and the collaboration is well supported by all parties involved.

Thomas *et al*. (2006) identified key factors that explain enablers (driving forces) and barriers (restraining forces) to interagency collaboration. Driving forces are the factors contributing most to successful interagency collaboration, while restraining forces are those impeding collaboration. To increase its collaborative capacity, the organisation must create conditions where the driving forces are stronger than the restraining forces; in other words, conditions that enable the strengthening of 'driving forces' and/or the weakening or complete removal of 'restraining forces'. The desired outcome is collaborative capacity that leads to high performance. These two types of factors (Hocevar 2010:4) are described in more detail below.

Driving forces for building collaborative capacity

- *Purpose and strategy* – driven by the desire to a achieve common goal or repel common risks or threats. As a result, both parties may feel the need to collaborate.
- *Structure* – power, authority, and role clarification of those engaged in interorganisational collaboration; if these are well-defined and the processes (meeting, deadlines, etc) well formalised, this will facilitate effective collaboration.
- *Lateral processes* – effective communication within and between teams; if silos and the dangers of physical separation between teams are eliminated, this will contribute to successful collaboration.
- *Incentives and reward systems* – interorganisational collaboration works well where collaboration is a prerequisite for obtaining funding, critical resources, or technical expertise. This prerequisite works as an incentive or reward for organisations to collaborate.
- *People practices* – respect for other party's interests, expertise, roles, and perspectives leads to effective collaboration.

Restraining forces for building collaborative capacity

- *Purpose and strategy* – when goals are divergent, and parties focus on their own organisation's interest at the expense of common goals, barriers to collaboration are created.
- *Structure* – lack of role clarification and clearly defined processes become a barrier to collaboration. Not having adequate authority to engage and make decisions on behalf of their organisation is another barrier that hinders collaborative effort.
- *Lateral processes* – inadequate information sharing due to purposeful hoarding, silos between teams representing their organisations, or physical separation and inadequate engagement between teams, hinders collaboration.
- *Incentives and reward systems* – if organisations in collaboration end up competing instead of collaborating, tension raises distrust and lack of respect between them creeps in, thereby hindering effective collaboration.
- *People practices* – incompetency by either side or arrogance and lack of appreciation of others perspective destroys the benefits of collaboration (Hocevar 2010:5).

The point that is being made here is that collaboration is not just one church collaborating with potential funders and beneficiary communities. Churches need to collaborate with one another in each place. Pastors need to collaborate cross-denominationally and cross-religiously if they are to make a positive contribution in their communities. Two local churches coming together to form local ministry teams are more powerful than each church doing it alone, resulting in duplicated efforts with no added advantage overall. Local churches need to collaborate with other NPOs, businesses, and government agencies. At the end of it all, national interest far outweighs individual and institutional interest. Also, according to Paul's Letter to the Philippians 2:3-4, instruction is given to the believers to value others above themselves and to look out for the interests of others. When believers act this way, Christians are of one mind, and everyone is cared for. No one entity or church can do it all alone.

Thomas *et al.* (2006:6) identified critical conditions which must be met for effective interagency collaboration. These conditions, referred to as 'dynamic interactions', occur in at least three domains. For collaboration to be effective, the strategy, structure, incentives, lateral mechanisms, and people for each collaborating organisation must align, (1) within the organisation or team; (2) across organisations and/or teams; and (3) within and between the task team established to design and execute the collaborative efforts on behalf of the participating entities.

It was explained above that the relationship between providers and recipients of resources (those who witness and those who are witnessed) is at the core of successful collaboration between two or more entities. The church's involvement is usually at one of two levels: (1) the church as an intermediary between donor organisation and beneficiary community; or (2) the church as the sole/main donor itself. Regardless of the status of the church's involvement in the relationship, the church's primary focus is two-fold: on the one hand, the church focuses on building its own capacity to sustain the delivery of its mission; and on the other hand, it is also focused on the building capacity of beneficiary communities to self-sustain in the future. This is illustrated in Figure 4-2 below:

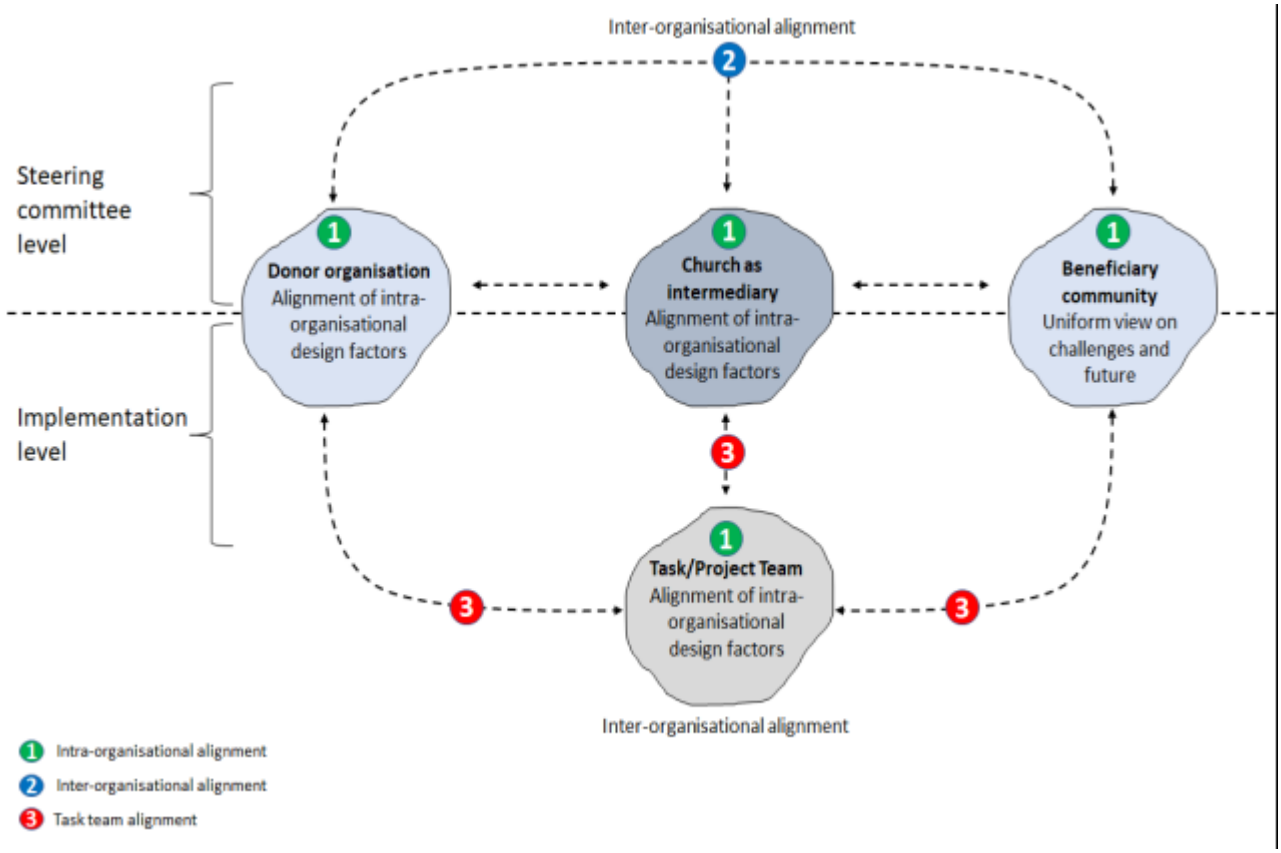

Figure 4-2: Church design dynamics to improve collaborative capacity where the church is the receiver and provider of resources

Where the church acts as an intermediary between donor organisations and beneficiary communities, the dynamic interactions occur in the following three domains:

- First, collaborative capacity requires that the church's vision and mission, leadership style, material and non-material resources, outreach ministry, and performance indicators, align with each other and that all systems work toward a common goal (intra-organisational alignment marked 1 in Figure 4-2).
- Alignment also needs to occur among the system elements with other churches, other NPOs, government agencies, and businesses in the same community the church is working with (inter-organisational alignment marked 2 in Figure 4-2).
- The implementation team (sometimes called Task Team or Project Team) be it temporary or permanent, which is established to better enable the collaborative response to the common problem, must align with the donor organisation, the

church, and beneficiary communities (inter-organisational alignment marked 3 in Figure 4-2).

In cases where the church is the sole or main provider of resources (Figure 4-3), interactions follow the same logic, in three specific domains:

- The church's five system elements must be aligned with each other. The priorities and desires of the church and those of the beneficiary community must also align (intra-organisational alignment marked 1 in Figure 4-3).
- Alignment also needs to occur among the system elements across organisations (inter-organisational alignment marked 2 in Figure 4-3).

Finally, the Task Team must align with the donor organisation, the church, and beneficiary communities (inter-organisational alignment marked 3 in Figure 4-3).

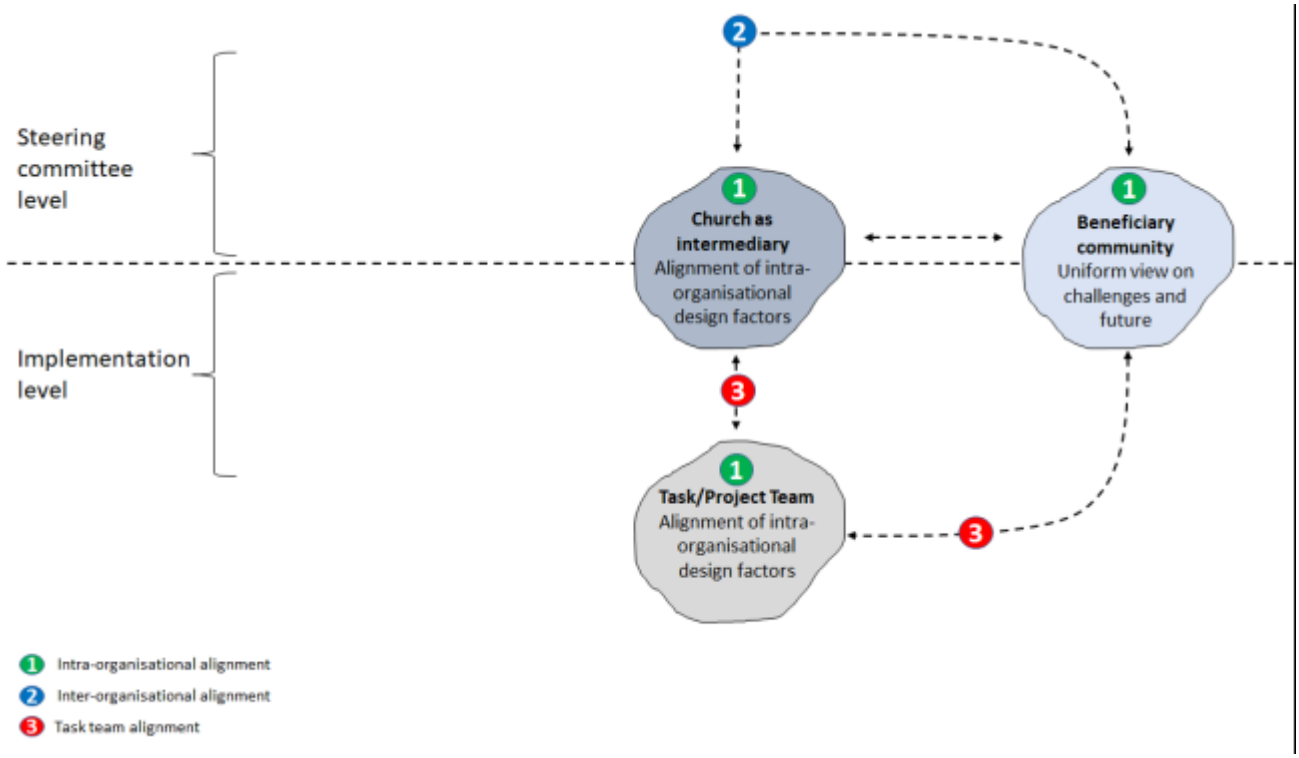

Figure 4-3: Church design dynamics to improve collaborative capacity where church is the only provider of resources

Two critical processes of collaboration are proposed by the design in Figures 4-2 and 4-3 above: (1) the Steering Committee level, and (2) the Task Team level:

The Steering Committee gives the joint initiative direction and support. It also is responsible for final approval of the joint initiatives and should, on set intervals or ad hoc where necessary, be kept apprised on the developments, progress, or issues likely to derail the initiative. The Steering Committee provides input (strategy and direction), approves project plans, budget and timelines, monitors risks and may also be responsible for the final review of the initiative post implementation. The Committee can be set up entirely by the donor organisation, although it is recommended that it comprises members from all participating entities. For a community-focused initiative, it helps to have one or two influential members of the community included in the Steering Committee as this helps ensure that the initiative is correctly targeted and receives community support.

- The Task Team, composed of members from all participating entities, is responsible for project planning, milestone identification, adherence to budget, timelines, and project deliverables. It is also responsible for keeping the Steering Committee up to date with initiative progress. Where change of direction (road map) is deemed necessary for reasons previously unforeseen, approval for such change must be obtained from the Steering Committee. The Task Team provides technical expertise in developing and executing the initiatives in line with the broader strategic objective outlined by the Steering Committee. It is also responsible for process and system design which will ensure that all expenditure is within approved limits. Where deviations occur, they must be reported upfront to and approved by the Steering Committee.

The importance of collaboration was highlighted by Respondent 5 as follows:

“I am in an assembly that predominantly has a strong community focus even pre- pandemic. We have always considered ourselves a church in a community; in fact, having a reputation that says if there is anything happening

in the community people will be told go to that church you will get help. It's basically because we look at the holistic needs of our community, we've had partnerships with Department of Home Affairs in the past where they would bring their mobile van here so people can register for birth certificates, death certificates, and things like that. We would have workshops with the Department of Social Development just to give people information regarding access to certain basic needs and we also have partnerships with the Department of Health and run annual health days and have testing for HIV and AIDS, blood pressure and any other health related matters. We would look at the WHO awareness calendar and try aligning certain months and say this is what WHO is looking at in this month, how do we talk about tuberculosis, how do we talk about diabetes, so that's kind of the context of the church that I serve, not just open on a Sunday but on average post pandemic we would be open four days a week for different programmes in the church".

South African citizens face many challenges, one of them being the very poor level of service delivery in the form of blocked drains, leaking sewage, broken infrastructure, energy disruptions, and litter. Most of these are caused by corrupt practices where jobs and tenders are allocated to friends and politically aligned individuals who in most cases do not possess adequate skills and experience required for these positions. Also frustrating citizens is the high crime rate, most of which is executed violently, as well as racial inequality which is creating racial tension – the so-called 'Rainbow Nation' is still to be fully realised. The church's role is to mitigate all these negatives in collaboration with other players (government, business, and community representatives) to effect change and bring the kingdom alive in these communities. In summary, building collaborative capacity in the church involves ensuring that:

- The church is equipped for the proclamation of the gospel, caring for and sharing in the local community.
- The church has adequate resources in the right places at the right time to serve local needs and reach everyone with the gospel.
- The church's capabilities are combined with those of other local churches and local institutions to collaboratively accomplish the well-being of local community.

- Everyone is involved in decision-making and no decisions are made for people when they are not part of the decision-making process (Morgan 2015).

4.4 BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS (RELATIONAL CAPACITY)

People don't work in isolation. We work together, contributing ideas and getting the work done. It is our collective relationships that are the foundation of an organised effort for change (Liebler & Ferri 2004:5). Regarding the importance of strong and healthy relationships in advancing the mission of the church, Respondent 6 said:

> *"It's one thing to say form a network during a crisis but communities that build local relationships before the pandemic had a head-start, they were ready for something deeper. If you had to start right from scratch, if there were no relationships, if there was no strong fraternal in a town, in a community, before the pandemic, it was not impossible, but it was harder. The lesson that we learnt is that relationship is everything; being part of the body is everything. If you isolate yourself in your community and if you are building your own little kingdom somewhere you will stay behind".*

Relationships are built on trust; without trust, relationships cannot stand the test of time. A church that cannot be trusted is of no use to the community. In times of difficulty, people should have confidence that if I go to the church or pastor, or any person belonging to a church (i.e., any Christian person), I will get help, I will be treated with utmost respect and humility, and I will be listened to. This is how trust is built.

Responded 5 noted:

> *"We have always considered ourselves a church in a community; in fact, having a reputation that says if there is anything happening in the community people will be told go to that church you will get help".*

Cummings and Bromiley (cited in Cosner 2009:251) define 'trust' as:

> … an individual's belief or a common belief among a group of individuals that another individual or group (a) makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance any commitments both explicit or implicit, (b) is honest in whatever negotiations preceded such commitments, and (c) does not take excessive advantage of another even when the opportunity is available.

Trusting relationships are essential to creating a foundation where an organisation's strengths and vulnerabilities can be discussed openly (Nishimura, Sampath, Sheikh and Valenzuela 2020:33).

Barker (2018:n.p.) concurs:

> If honesty, integrity, respect and openness were built, practiced, and strengthened in every aspect of the church's life, we would experience the core practices needed for repairing broken trust in our world.

If the church is to be a beacon of hope to the hopeless and in hard times, then the church must be trusted by those inside as well as outside church. If there was trust in the church during the COVID-19 pandemic, then everyone would have looked up to the church as a credible source of information on the pandemic in terms of what to do and where to go if one needs help – spiritual, psychological, or material help. The current researcher is not convinced that the universal church attained this level of trust – there are instances where the church did exceptionally well gaining a lot of credibility and praise, but there are instances where the church failed people dismally. Some examples of these successes and failures have already been cited in Chapters 1 and 2. Findings from the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer (Edelman 2021) support this viewpoint. The survey indicates that South Africans trust businesses more than the government or the church and are looking to company Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), not pastors, to solve societal challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis (see Figures 4-4, 4-5, 4-6, and 4-7 below). This is not surprising according to the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 where many businesses took proactive steps to protect not only their employees but communities too.

Jordan Rittenberry, CEO of Edelman Africa (Edelman 2021:n.p.), noted:

As the pandemic puts trust to the test, business has a clear mandate to help society navigate the Covid-19 storm and take the lead on driving positive change, with private sector organisations expected to fill the void left by government.

The barometer below measures trust as a function of competence (delivering on promises) and ethics (doing the right thing and working to improve society).

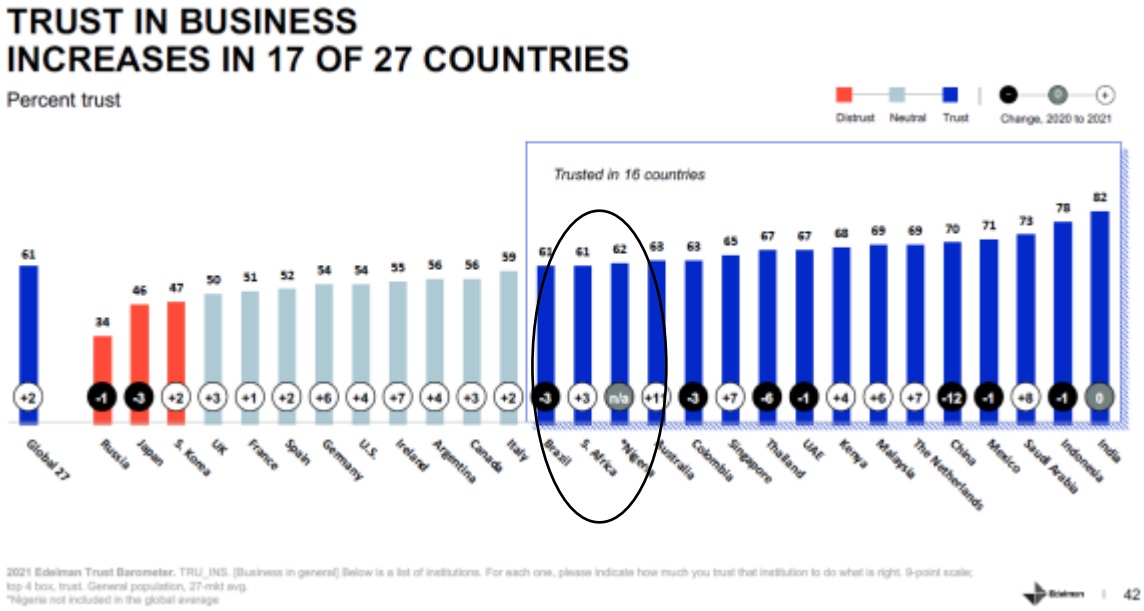

Figure: 4-4: Trust in business

(Source: Edelman 2021:42)

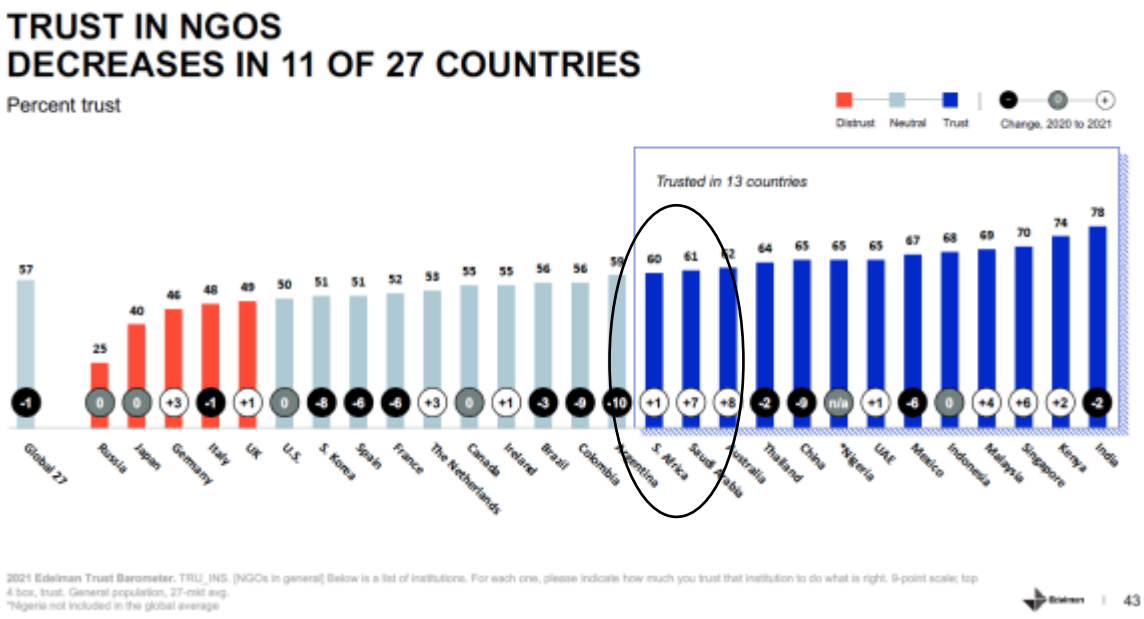

Figure 4-5: Trust in NGOs
(Source: Edelman 2021:43)

The barometer found trust levels of South Africa's NGO and business sectors quite high in the upper half of the global table at 60% and 61%, respectively (Figures 4-4 and 4-5 above), while trust in government was at a crisis level at 27%. In this sense, the South African government is perceived as incompetent and unethical (Figure 4-6 below).

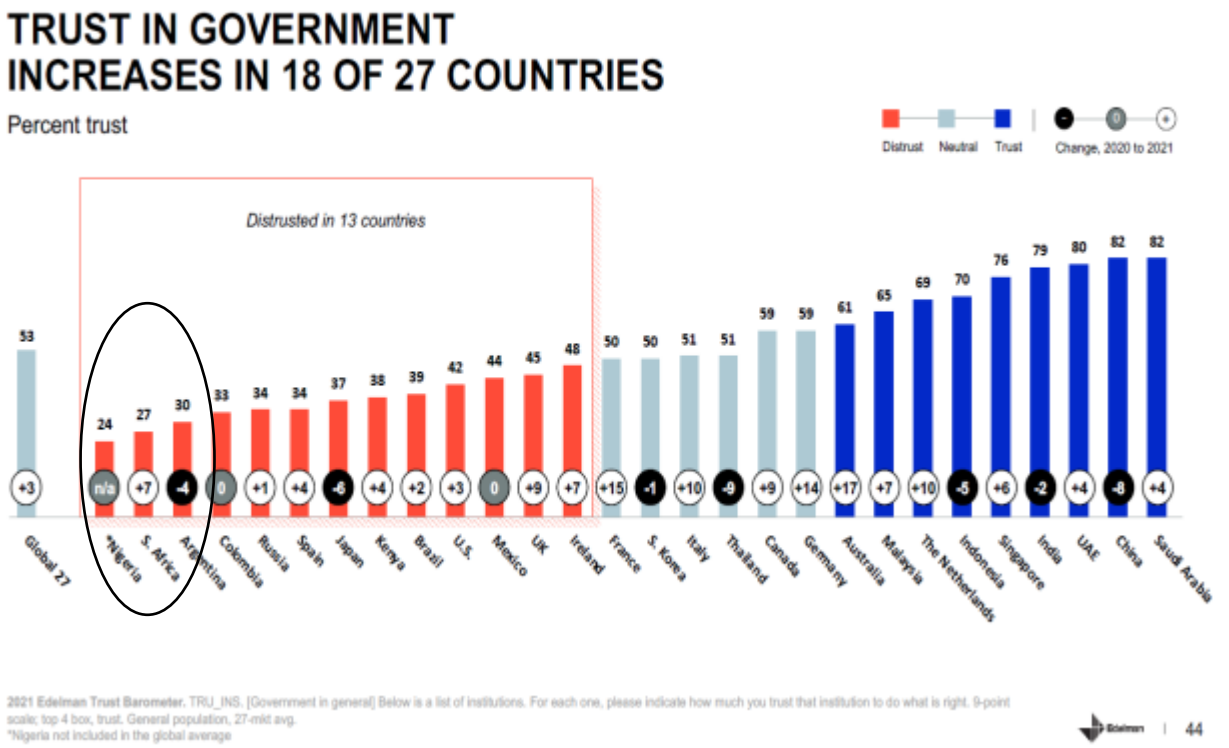

Figure 4-6: Trust in government
(Source: Edelman 2021:44)

Of particular concern is the finding that religious leaders across all nations surveyed are amongst the most distrusted leaders with a trust level of 42%, well below the global average (Figure 4-7).

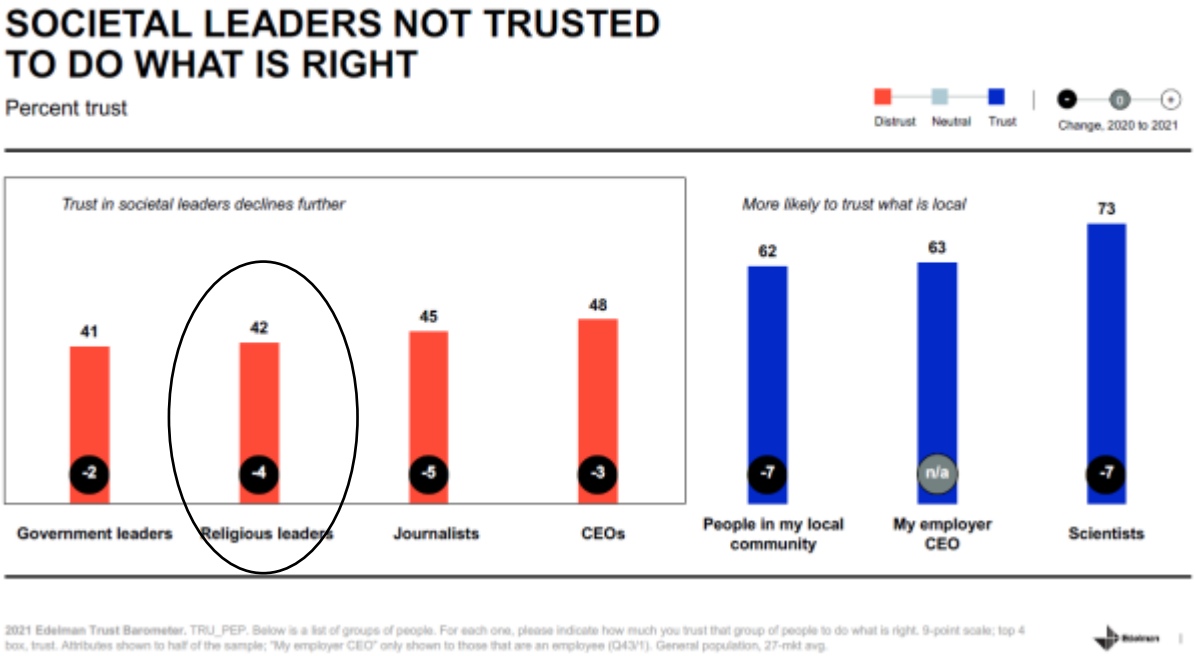

Figure 4-7: Trust in societal leader
(Source: Edelman 2021:19)

This is disturbing when one considers that the church is supposed to be the source of hope to the world. Standing between God and the world, as his agent in mission, the church becomes an extension of God's love in the same way Jesus in Matthew 5:16 commanded his disciples to be the light of the world so their light can shine before others and their good works glorify God in heaven. A church that is not trusted is a church that is not believed, and such a church loses its unique ability to reach out to a hurting world. An example of this brokenness is when some segments of the church advocated for churches to stay open during the hard lockdown of COVID-19, citing financial difficulties as the main reason for the call. In this manner, some church leaders appeared more concerned about their own survival at the expense of members (Mathe 2020). The researcher of this study firmly believes that communities, especially the marginalised, have allowed 'charlatan' pastors to get away with murder. Recorded instances include the widely shared video of Pastor Alph Lukau 'raising' a man from the dead (Levitt 2019); 'Prophet' Penuel Mnguni making congregants eat snakes (Tlhabye 2015); Pastor Lethabo Rabalago spraying congregants with the 'healing powers' of pesticide (Mkhonza 2016); Pastor Lesego Daniel making followers graze like cattle to prove that humans can eat anything provided by God (ENCA 2014); 173

and Pastor Bafomba Willy Emeka who was convicted for raping several followers he lured with the promise to bless and pray for them (Maromo 2021). Trust in the church is a function of character (discipleship integrity and intent) and competence (discipleship skills and capabilities). These qualities of trust occur evenly in three domains – trust in and among leaders (elected lay people and ordained ministry) of the church; trust between leadership and the remainder of membership; and trust between the church as a community and its immediate community in the neighbourhood (Baker 2021). The leader's self-awareness and humility are also one of the most critical aspects of building trust. "When a leader is comfortable enough to acknowledge areas where he or she is not competent and then compensate for that area by sharing or delegating responsibilities, he or she builds trust" (Hurley 2012:6). Trustworthy leadership and embedding trustworthiness in the organisations architecture, i.e., structure, strategy culture, and systems are critical elements to creating a high trust organisation (Hurley 2012).

Respondent 7 put it this way:

> *"My gifting is not psychology and I'm not a counsellor. I can listen, I can have compassion, I can pray, but I'm not I'm not a counsellor – I'm a leader. Strong leaders don't necessarily make great counsellors, so I have five clinical psychologist[s], Christian ones, who work specifically with young people, with women, with men, and they will do online stuff. So, when you get to that place [counselling on psychological matters] I just funnel people to these men and women that could help on a professional level. God gives us gifted people and the church can't be all things to all people, we all have different gifting, and we've got clinical psychologists in the church, [so] why not we use them? Not every pastor is a great teacher, great preacher, great apostle, great counsellor, and whatever. God brings the body of Christ and it's the priesthood of all believers. Why is a Christian psychologist's work in ministry any less valuable than mine? They have such a crucial role to play in the church and they have been busy".*

A trusted church is a church that stands up for what is right without fear or favour; it advocates for social justice and is always on the side of the excluded and marginalised. A church that is trusted does what it preaches without flip flopping for politicians and influential people. A church that is trusted fears no persecution and is found among the people even in the so called 'no go' areas. What the church needs to do to build this kind of trust will be the subject of the last chapter of this study.

Another dimension of trust is collegial, the cultivation of which is central in the capacity building work of the church. *Collegial trust* is a form of trust a person has toward his or her colleague/s that when they say they will do something, they will do it to their utmost best. It is the trust that establishes solid relationships between colleagues in an organisation. Built in this form of trust is knowledge and belief that colleagues are competent to perform their tasks, that their character is such that they can be trusted and believed they will do what they are expected to do and what they have committed themselves to. Collegial trust is like faith, in that it is believing and trusting in something that is still to happen based on past experiences and evidence of integrity in the person or persons trusted.

When a colleague or a congregant who, after behaving unethically or commits a sin apologises and asks for forgiveness, as Christian persons, we need to be able to accept them at their word. We need to have confidence that they are deeply sorry and trust their word when they say none of the same transgression will happen again. We need to practice what we pray every time, 'forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us'. In nursing for example, when a nurse performs clinical handover of a patient, colleagues taking over need to have confidence that the information transferred is accurate and according to prescribed protocols (Jackson 2008:1541). In organisations particularly those involved in partnerships, collegial trust is important. Trust that colleagues in one organisation in the partnership will behave professionally and ethically and perform all tasks in the interest of the partnership instead of individual organisational interests, is key to a successful partnership/collaboration. In projects, if there is no trust between the Steering Committee and project team where one doubts the capability or honesty of the other, the deliverables of the project may be compromised. In church, this form of trust is three dimensional: trust in the leader and

the leadership structure; trust between members and leaders; and finally, trust between the church, its partners, and the community. People abandon their congregations, even their faith in Christ when trust is broken (Jackson 2008:1541) and when this happens (broken trust), the relationship gets ruined. Thus, one way of building church capacity is to cultivate a strong foundation based on trust.

Broadly considered, collegial trust matters to organisations, settings that are ripe with 'critical task interdependencies' that rely on regular interactions, coordination, and cooperation between various members of the organisation for work to be completed and for organisational goals to be attained. Collective action, such as problem solving and decision-making, that requires the contribution of all group members, is more productively addressed when trust exists between members of the collective (Cosner 2009:251). Collegial trust also acts as a support for conflict resolution. When individuals trust one another, conflict resolution is made "easier and more productive" (Lewicki & Wiethoff 2000:101). Jehn (1997:96) concluded that when trust is present and valued, group "members may disagree in ways that are based on intellectual arguments rather than attacking issues on a personal basis". Collegial trust has been found to positively impact certain team and organisational variables including perceived task performance, team satisfaction, and relationship commitment (Costa, Roe & Taillieu, cited in Cosner 2009:252). Collegial trust has also been found to enhance employees' perception of the support they receive from the organisation, thereby increasing employees' emotional attachment to their organisations and reducing employees' desires to leave organisations (Ferres, Connell & Travagglione 2004).

This study has used the word 'trust' no less than 85 times. This shows the importance of trust in individuals, organisations, and societies, and its centrality on issues discussed in this study, whether it is about the individual Christian person in relation to fellow Christians and men and women in the public sphere. Trust is the key word that defines the quality of relationships and performances.

4.5 BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Alongside of the afore-mentioned approaches to capacity building is the relationship between providers and recipients of resources, accepting that the church plays a dual role as provider and recipient. The church may utilise its own resources to improve the well-being of the community; the church can also be the recipient of resources from external sources, e.g., government-initiated Solidarity Fund in South Africa, which the church could further channel to needy communities. In this sense, the church plays a role as both recipient and provider of resources. These are then utilised in the building up of the capacity of beneficiary communities, whilst at the same time the church also builds its own capacity to serve these communities. At the hub of these engagements are four key institutional players: government, business, NPOs, and society (Figure 4-8 below). How these institutions work, and how they relate to one another, is strongly influenced by changing environmental forces such as demographic, economic, political, technological, and cultural forces, as well as the values and norms of society (De Vita *et al.* 2001:13). It is in these ever-changing environmental factors within which capacity-building initiatives, particularly for the church, must operate.

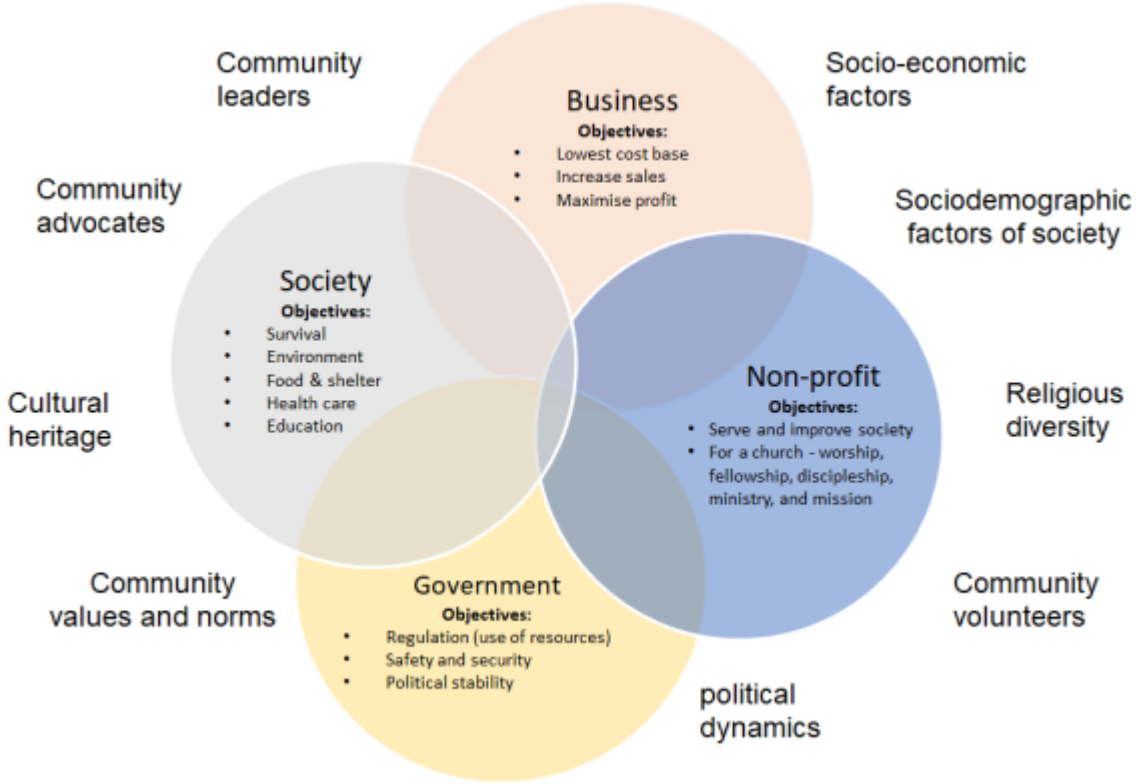

Figure 4-8: Interactions and Influences (Business, Government, Non-profit, and Society)

Government, amongst many of its other functions, protects and maintains religious freedom. The church's role is to make disciples whose functions have been extensively described in this study. Business makes available goods and services which disciples need for the fulfilment of their calling in society. NPOs and the church, cooperating and complementing each other, fill the void left by government and business. This ensures that everyone in society is guaranteed food, shelter, and protection from harm and diseases. All these institutions exist within the confines of society, which is the ultimate decision-making unit for individuals and institutions. Society itself is influenced by external forces from the global environment which are either welcomed or rejected.

Buffett and Eimicke (2018) outline five aspects of effective partnerships that every leader, whether government, business, or non-profit, including church leaders and volunteers, should know:

1) Planning a coordinated and comprehensive process for cross-sector partnerships, embracing the diversity of views and perspectives, and thus drawing on strengths from a diverse skill base.
2) Managing people effectively through decentralised teams across organisations, ensuring that teams are adequately resourced and supported.
3) Integrating stakeholders from across organisations and communities in a given place, understanding stakeholder preferences and priorities, and working collaboratively for long term sustainability of the partnership
4) Developing portfolios of financing to offset risk and achieve greater scale
5) Defining success collaboratively and measure social impact performance

How these can be effected by the church in any given situation, will be discussed in detail in the closing chapter. The church should work towards strengthening its own leadership system with skills and competencies geared toward building relationships of trust and mutual respect with partners and stakeholders. It helps to have a good understanding of key stakeholders in society and those who should be consulted for a particular initiative. Once the initiative is up and running, knowing when and how to cede control, managing and living with power dynamics whilst ultimately working

toward common objectives, is also important. On behalf of a NPO, Respondent 8 put it this way:

> *"We always step up in the gap because there are no churches that are doing what is supposed to be done and I think that everywhere we find the same. The churches were slow to react and [we] stepped in and did something. Sometimes the church takes over from us and we are OK with that. But I think it depends on place to place, it depends on the visionary leadership that we have; like our centres for instance in KwaZulu-Natal, Knysna, and George, they are big centres, they run with things, they see an opportunity. For example, in Knysna two or three years ago when fires were there, [our centres] did excellent work and were far ahead of the church, the churches eventually started working with them and providing for them because they have feet on the ground. That is maybe the thing about us, we have our feet on the ground where the churches are limited to 'I can only serve this group'. If I look at the church here in town, they are white, so they only going to serve white people … but we have changed their minds a lot, … and now they are contributing. It's all about building relationships"*.

Last but not least, Fowler (2000:10) mentions at least six features that contribute to forming successful partnership for NGOs. However, for this study, only three are highlighted:

- *Clarity of purpose* – concerns reasons for joining a partnership, as well as the expected outcome from the partnership. Equally important is clear parameters, what the entity is willing to compromise and the line that cannot be crossed. This will help choose a suitable partner whose purpose is closely aligned to the organisation.
- *Organisational instead of project focus* – partnership is more about relationships between two or more organisations or entities; thus, the focus should be organisational relationship. The project that is executed becomes a vehicle to explore and strengthen the relationship, not the basis of relationships.
- *Own reform* – the purpose of a partnership is not permanent or lifetime aid. The main purpose is to work with the other party, especially the weaker party or

beneficiary such that they become strong enough to move from dependency to independence over a period of time. In this process it is important for the stronger party, the donor, to plan upfront at what point it is willing to cede control and strategy and hand over the reign to the other party.

The benefits of partnerships are plentiful. Some of the commonly realised benefits include risk mitigation, increased access to information, finances, expertise, and the sharing of best practice (Liebler & Ferri 2004:5). Like any organisation, how the church responds and adapts to societal changes, demands, and challenges, and how the church copes in these situations depends almost entirely on its institutional capability as it relates to the present and how the future is envisioned. What has been covered so far in this section is *human-human* partnerships. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, *human-machine* relationships and their relevance to mission studies will be explored in more detail.

4.6 BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY THROUGH DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

South Africa is known as the 'Rainbow Nation', a title that captures the diversity of the country in terms of race, culture, and ethnicity. South Africa is a country of eleven official languages spread across the nine provinces. According to the last national census conducted in 2011, of the total population at the time, 79,6% were Black; 8,9% White; 9% Coloured; and 2,5% Asian. The major cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, and Durban constitute the largest diverse areas in terms of population diversity. The legacy of apartheid the country sustained for over four years of white minority rule has maintained South Africa as the most unequal society in the world according to The World Bank Inequality Lab (Alvaredo 2018:145). Incompetence, corruption, poor education system for the majority, high unemployment, and high crime rate (most of which is violent), has significantly restricted the citizens' right to good quality of life. Added to this is the general lack of reliable service delivery due to lack of capacity at municipal level – a consequence of skills shortage, mismanagement, technical incompetence, and nepotism where jobs are allocated according to friendship and political affiliation, disregarding skills competency. As a result, economic development and growth opportunities in many communities is

severely hindered. Add to this the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, the situation is dire for most South Africans. The challenge facing the church is how to build capacity to make a difference in such a diverse and challenged society with so many development and political issues. The church needs to acknowledge that there is a lot that can be extracted from these diverse groups of people in the form of specialised skill and knowledge and people's proximity to key decision makers in government and business (Smith 2012:2). All in all, if the church is to address the challenges facing communities, it has no choice but to tap into the skill set that already exists in communities.

Traditionally, diversity has been defined in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, education, etc., but scholars have widened the definition to include other characteristics like religious background, socioeconomic status, social and political affiliations, seniority and experience, education and training, and so forth (De Beer & Naidoo 2016:5). There is essentially two kinds of diversity – (i) demographic diversity, which refers to differences in externally apparent differentiators such as race, age, education, ethnicity, etc.; and (ii) cognitive diversity, which is defined in terms of differences in people's beliefs and attitudes (Miller, Burke & Glick 1998:41). Cognitive diversity means embracing this difference by including people with differing viewpoints who can offer unique perspectives because they see the world differently. Considering both demographic and cognitive diversity is useful for the church to understand how they can impact communities and the society at large.

Respondent 6 said:

> *"One of the biggest challenges especially when you are in the metropole, in a city environment, is the fact that our communities are divided. There is division between poverty and rich people. People are suffering, but some suffer more. For us in the city area it will always be a challenge to connect congregations better, to be able to form relationships between different suburban communities. So, we've got a process going, what we call 'twin congregations'. We twin the congregation in Belville northern suburbs [rich neighbourhood] with a congregation in Khayelitsha township [poor neighbourhood]. So building*

relationships over distance between communities – I think that we can still do better with that".

Respondent 8 concurs:

"We are a very diverse group here in town; there are two people groups – the white Afrikaners and the so-called coloured people not working together. If I look at the church here in town, they are white, so they only going to serve white people".

While diversity is the way we differ, and how those differences enable us to learn from other's perspectives, experiences, cultures, and backgrounds to achieve individual or team goals (Davidson & Fielden 2004:60), inclusion, on the other hand, requires that we give others space to contribute effectively and unhindered for the attainment of their personal as well as team goals (Roberson 2006:215). Effectiveness is the extent to which we succeed in delivering the required result.

Explaining an inclusive workforce, Mor Barak (2000:339) wrote:

> [It] values and uses individual and intergroup differences within its work force, cooperates with and contributes to its surrounding community, alleviates the needs of disadvantaged groups in its wider environment, collaborates with individuals, groups, and organisations across national and cultural boundaries.

Respondent 9 said:

"I am really trusting that the Lord is leading us; is helping us set aside our bounded sets, our denominational perspectives, and understandings, and all the rest for the sake of advancing the gospel together. I have seen some of that; I have seen a glimpse of it, and I am ever the optimist; I have seen in our situation where churches have really pulled together and said we can achieve so much more together, and then seeing the fruits of it – the impact of it is wonderfully exciting".

Sivasundaram and Ma (2017) bring the twin principles of unity and diversity to bear on four contexts, namely the individual Christian, the local congregation, the global church, and the church in society:

- Individual Christian – in appreciation of the unity that is one body of Christ, we need to acknowledge our neighbours regardless of their colour or creed, or their standing in society. We need to embrace them as one people, one neighbourhood, one nation. When we seek ideas or embark on missional activity, we should see all as God's people and thus treat them equally.
- Local congregation – granted, we worship differently and may follow diverse doctrines in our congregations and there may be more than one congregation in a particular setting. Cities, for example, attract people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and you find a local congregation caught in this diversity. Rather than choosing to serve a particular language group, the congregation should strive to embrace diversity and serve all languages spoken by locals even if this means dual languages in its worship programme. There should be no isiZulu congregation, or Afrikaans congregation, in a mixed neighbourhood.
- Global church – believers across the globe should see themselves as members of one universal church from multiple nations and backgrounds and must find a way of learning humility when dealing with others.
- Church in society – the church should stand up for the victimised and challenge policies that do not embrace unity and equality of humankind. The church should also cross religious boundaries to work with people of other faiths to change the lives of the underserved, underserviced, poor and marginalised.
- If the mission of the church is the formation of one body out of many parts – one universal church out of many different people (1 Cor 12:12) – then it is within reason to expect that the church would embrace diversity and unity in its practices. Growing in diversity takes intentional effort, but the advantages are well worth the investment. More diverse people from different backgrounds will bring a greater variety of gifts to the church. If the church is to serve diverse communities, it is therefore essential that within its own rank, its leadership

> structure and staff, its vision, doctrine, and worship style, reflect the heterogeneity of the local community. A church in mission must view diversity not as an event but as a process to maximise and explore the richness of its diversity and to see it not as a problem to be solved, but as a blessing to celebrate; not as a cause for rejection of differences, but as a sign of the continuing power and presence of the Spirit at work in drawing men and women from every nation, kindred, tribe, tongue, and people to be part of the redeemed multicultural and diverse community (Douglas 2005:213).

Respondent 9 agreed with the above sentiment:

> *"We don't have to fight for unity. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians that there already is unity, the Father has already ensured that unity exist[s] in the church. All we got to do is protect it and that requires a heart that is open to one another and saying what is it that holds us together and how can we keep being united? Bottom line is love. Jesus said the world will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. We need to just learn how to genuinely love each other unconditionally".*

4.7 BUILDING CHURCH CAPACITY THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

An effective capacity building process must encourage participation by all those involved. By all those involved is not meant the providers of funding only, but also the recipients and beneficiaries of the initiative. A church driven community initiative that relies on donor funding must include the recipients when planning, executing, and managing the initiative. This helps ensure that the initiative is correctly targeted, and that it addresses the needs as they are perceived by those being assisted and not by someone coming from outside assuming that he/she know[s] what the community's needs are. The capacity of the church to effectively deliver its mission depends on being accurately aware of what people need, and addressing that need first instead of deciding for the people what you think their need is.

According to the UNDP (n.d., para 1):

> If stakeholders are involved and share ownership in the process of development, they will feel more responsible for the outcome and sustainability of the development. Engaging stakeholder's who are directly affected by the situation allows for more effective decision-making; it also makes development work more transparent.

De Goyet (1999:27) agrees:

> The myth that the affected population is too shocked and helpless to take responsibility for their own survival is superseded by the reality that on the contrary, many find new strength during an emergency.

Affected populations or communities must not be treated as helpless entities that need to be fed and sheltered but as a people with considerable knowledge, skills, empathy, and pride (Harvey, Baghri & Reed 2002:177). McIntosh (2015:132) distinguishes between communities and societies: The former is found in families and among friends and religious groups where the well-being of others is the bedrock of the relationships. The latter are groups assembled for a specific purpose or goal, such as work colleagues, sports, or social clubs. Voluntary leagues and associations we see in may church groups could very well function as societies (e.g., youth leagues, and men's and women's leagues, etc.) as opposed to true communities – this is so because there are strict constitutional imperatives governing these structures. Therefore, if the church is to create communities of faith, then the church needs a particular presence in all these societies.

However, McIntosh (2015:133) cautions:

> This notion of community is deeply challenged by digital media, where geographical distance is no longer a barrier, updates are instant and friendships are maintained without (or with infrequent) face-to-face contact. The growth in e-churches is challenging the notion of 'church' as a physical gathering of persons, in a particular physical space, that is both the focus of and the means by which community is sustained.

Community participation is a process by which members of the public individually or collectively get actively involved in thinking, planning, implementing, and evaluating programmes meant to improve their community's standard of living. In this process, these community members may start new organisations or join existing organisations which already have a track record. To play such a role, individually or groups would need to possess some capability such as communication skill, community advocate, leadership, or other specialised technical skills. Specifying that involvement must be active means that one does not just join, but actively and proactively contributes and sacrifices personal time and enjoyment for the sake of a wider community. Such a person will contribute ideas and be actively involved in implementation (Richards, Carter & Sherlock 2004:5)

Respondent 8 said:

> *"We are training people in farming God's way. I think in the last six months we trained about two hundred people in our region to plant their own food. It's kind of trying to give the fish and the fishing rod. So absolutely, we still engaging the communities, and those relationships will continue, but we are not specifically going to start another organisation or another NPO because we all are part of the body of Christ – we are good friends, we are kingdom minded people, and we want to see our community changed".*

Respondent 9 echoed the same sentiment:

> *"I speak just from our experience, the relational connection between the suburban churches and the local churches through the respective leaders has strengthened so much. One of the things that's happened with us is that we have started a township leaders training programme to support particularly township local church situations or fellowship situations where guys are just begging for input, support, and everything like that".*

According to Harvey *et al.* (2002:177), community participation can take place during any of the following activities:

- Needs assessment – identifying and prioritising unmet community needs, whether they relate to the provision of services or infrastructure development, or lifestyle issues such as drugs and alcohol abuse, crime, etc. Creating a list, no matter how long or short it is, is an important first step; the list should be a collective effort so that what follows next becomes a community initiative/s.
- Planning – tabling what needs to be done, how it is to be done, by whom and when, and the resources required.
- Mobilising – amassing all necessary resources including wider community buy-in and support, local government where necessary, engaging NGOs, local churches, identifying and approaching potential funders, implementation teams, project timelines, project budgeting, and overall management. Auditing the skill set in the community will also help fill critical gaps if there are people willing and available to participate from the community.
- Training – flowing from the project/programme needs and delivery schedule and the skills audit, necessary training may be conducted.
- Implementing – requires a hands-on approach; and someone willing to get their hands dirty and sacrifice their own time for the betterment of the community without any expectation for remuneration.
- Monitoring and evaluation – it is important that a post implementation review is conducted to identify areas of improvement that then help build more capacity for future projects.

Community participation, particularly for this research, relates mostly to the church recruiting and welcoming members of the public to play a role in church-initiated community programmes. The benefit of this partnership is that local communities first and foremost are recognised and respected for their knowledge of what is happening in their communities. The church does not decide what programmes to initiate and how these should be implemented on behalf of the community, instead the community together with the church has full decision making in identifying, prioritising, and implementing programmes they believe will change their lives. In this way, getting buy-in and active participation by the community becomes much simpler and more effective in delivering the desired outcome.

There is also another form of community participation involving the church playing an active role in community-initiated programmes. The church can do this without sacrificing its belief system or doctrine by carefully selecting to participate in programmes that do not conflict with its teaching. By active participation in these programmes the church gains credibility as a social institution seen as one of 'us' instead of an 'outsider'. In these engagements the church is able to build sustainable relationships with communities while also identifying key influential people in these communities. The church is also able to learn from within the source all issues that matter most to the community, that then become extensions of its mission activity.

Community participation promotes diversity and inclusion as people with different skills and personalities from the same community begin to work together. Narrow stereotypes based on people's gender, age, or ethnicity, for example, can be overcome when people working closely together begin to appreciate each other's contribution and attitude towards life. Negative perception of Christians coming from certain sectors of the community may also be turned into positives as people begin to do things together, sharing knowledge and encouraging teamwork. Decision-making is enhanced as people feel a sense of community and pride when they are involved in defining the problem facing their community whilst also contributing to the solution. Those coming from the community appreciate the recognition and trust accorded to them and their contribution valued. No one will know better than local people what problems exist in their community, how these are ranked in terms of importance, and solutions the community deem appropriate for solving those problems. Once involved, local people take ownership of the project and give it their full support to make it successful. Involving locals does not only benefit the project but also empowers locals through the sharing of skills and exposure, establishing a network of contacts, whilst also opening up opportunities that were not visible before.

Respondent 9 continued:

> *"We started training facilitators and we got a sample group of the households that we began to build a relationship with through local pastors in the townships while we were doing emergency relief [during COVID 19- lockdown] … we have*

got to a point now where we have done ten households as a sample group and we have already had an initial meeting where we have started to connect those households with stakeholders who can decide to partner with or not, but people who could help them address issues. Interestingly, nine out of the ten households highlighted that the need was for financial security and income, and they all are looking to start their own businesses".

To summarise and answer the question of what participation is, it can be said that it is a complex and challenging approach to improving the lives of everyone, particularly the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, in processes that are fully inclusive from planning to decision-making to execution and evaluation. From a missional perspective, participation gives one the chance to be around people at different stages of their faith journey; an opportunity to teach them and, in return, learn from them (Col 3:16); to encourage and build each other up (1 Th 5:11); and to bear their burdens alongside them (Gl 6:2).

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter, based on the data obtained from the qualitative interviews conducted in Chapter 3, investigated the key elements that build church capacity for mission. The Management Framework developed in Chapter 3 was considered the cornerstone for effective church capacity building, bringing together the six key themes for a mission of *being with* that emerged from the interviews, namely: *a church that creates a culture of collaboration; a church that values community participation; a church that builds healthy relationships cross-sectoral; a church that embraces diversity and inclusion; a church that consistently communicates; and a church that believes in forming strong and long-term relationships.* These themes were brought into each of the five elements De Vita *et al*. (2001) suggest for addressing the capacity needs of the church, namely: *vision and mission; leadership; resources; outreach; and products and services*.

Capacity building was said to happen at any of the three levels – *individual, institutional*, and *global*. In the global context, 'capacity' refers to the ability of individuals and institutions to make and implement decisions and perform functions in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner. At the individual level, capacity building

refers to a process of influencing individual's attitude and behaviours such that from being a passive and reactive person one becomes an active and proactive person. At this level, capacity building also helps skill and upskill individuals in a manner that empowers them to perform their tasks better, faster, and simpler, and in new ways never thought of before. At institutional level, capacity building concerns the overall performance of the organisation, such that the organisation's ability to react to changing dynamics with speed, innovation, and excellence is improved, and the entire institution functions as a complete system of individuals, groups, and the organisation itself.

The chapter began with the hypothesis that the church's inability to deliver its mission during the COVID-19 lockdown periods could not be blamed on the pandemic but solely on its lack of capacity. Driving and inhibiting forces of capacity building for each of the six themes and components were highlighted, and some proposals were made on how the church can move forward in each area. Key elements that build the capacity of the church for mission were investigated, and new opportunities and challenges were brought to the fore for the church to consider. It was mentioned that churches which were already in partnerships pre-COVID, and which already had capacity building as an integral component in their strategic thinking and planning, were ahead of those who were ill prepared at the onset of the pandemic. It was also revealed that although not entirely impossible, it was extremely difficult to catch up once the pandemic broke out. The lesson learnt in this chapter is that whilst it might appear too little too late for those sectors of the church that were not ready pre-pandemic to catch up with COVID related challenges, it is never too late to start preparing and readying themselves now for future pandemics and other disasters. Those who do so may just find themselves in pole position compared to those who think they were better than others during COVID-19, and thus fall into complacency.

The focus of the next chapter is on the church and pandemics in the 4IR.

CHAPTER 5
CHURCH AND PANDEMICS IN THE ERA OF THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Six themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis obtained from the interviews in Chapter 3. These themes helped facilitate the development of a framework for mission as *being with.* The pillars of the framework were constructed using the following themes:

1) A church that promotes a culture of **collaboration**
2) A church that builds strong and healthy **relationships**
3) A church that embraces **diversity** and **inclusion**
4) A church that encourages community **participation** and **empowerment**
5) A church that believes in forming strong **partnerships** where all are equal
6) A church that consistently **communicates**, in word and deeds, using modern communication techniques and platforms

A church with these qualities was shown to be faithfully present in life situations and contexts – in spaces occupied and places inhabited by the people in communities. These were said to be *home spaces, workspaces, online spaces, social/public spaces*, *learning spaces, digital spaces, information spaces, and conceptual spaces.*

Chapter 4 demonstrated how the six themes can help build and strengthen church capacity to serve, bringing to life the six characteristics of a missional church described in Chapter 3 as follows: A missional church –

- Creates a culture collaboration, builds strong and healthy relationships, relies on strong partnerships, embraces diversity and inclusion, and encourages community participation and empowerment.
- Maintains a holistic presence where people are, in their circumstances, and ensures there is no space or place where its presence is not felt.
- Advances the kingdom gospel of holistic healing – emotional health, mental health, physical health, spiritual health, and social well-being.

- Always maintains a holistic presence for holistic healing.
- Worships and serves God; creates communities of faith and obedience; cares for one another as the body of Christ; self-regulates to ensure accountable leadership; drives social agenda; equips and empowers its audiences to self-sustain; builds capacity to serve; and is a 'go and show' instead of a 'come and see' church.
- Persistently rethinks and reimages how the future looks.

Chapter 5 takes the capacity building conversation of Chapter 4 a step further, viewing missional conversations through the lens of the 4IR. Two important questions are addressed here: Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? Can the church's presence be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other? To answer these questions, three critical areas of recent developments are considered:

- The 4IR and the future of the church
- The impact of COVID-19 on how we practice Christianity
- Digital religion and the future of the church online and offline

The purpose is not to offer concrete solutions, but to demonstrate how capacity built in Chapter 4 can be applied to innovate church technology that enables effective delivery of the church's mission, even in situations where those who witness and those who are witnessed do not meet face-to-face. The aim is to challenge the church to reimage its future when work and life in general will be filled with human-machine partnerships. The capacity building conversation of Chapter 4 focused almost entirely on human-human interactions. In this chapter, the conversation is taken a step further to include human-machine interactions central to any conversation involving the 4IR.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. Following a brief sketch of the background of this chapter, the 4IR and the future of the church is discussed. Thereafter, the impact of COVID-19 on mission and evangelism is reviewed, along with an explanation of what this all means for the ministry of presence in the subsequent section. Attention then shifts to digital religion and the future of the church online and

offline, as well a discussion of online and offline practices. A short conclusion summarises the chapter.

5.2 CONTEXT OF THIS CHAPTER

In the immediate period following the declaration of the national state of disaster and the institution of lockdown regulations, church leaders and denominations responded differently. Some abruptly shut down gathered worship and adopted a different and new way of reaching their audiences, whilst others opted to defy the lockdown regulation and continued with their usual services gathered in their church buildings. It was not only church leaders who felt betrayed and undermined by government and health authorities, but congregants too felt aggrieved as they could not go to church to revive their spirits or offload whatever burdens they were carrying. To some it was as if the church has left them. Beukes (2020:2) raises an important question, "[I]s a community of faith only a community when together in one building?" Faced with a pandemic such as COVID 19, one could ask: How should the church respond? Does it respond by streaming worship services digitally to people's homes and devices? Is this what is means to be church? Does the church in the era of a pandemic, or any crisis, means moving gathered services to other forms of gathering such as online? Is this what it means to be a community of faith? It is in this context that that the author of this study investigates the opportunities presented by the 4IR, thereby addressing the question of what it means to be church in the era of the 4IR. The question is not so much about what we do in church buildings under the 4IR, but more about the opportunities 4IR technologies present for the church to truly be the church as recorded in Scriptures such as John 8:31-32 where Jesus says: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free", and in Matthew 28:20: "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you". Whatsoever he has commanded us, his Word, and nothing else, we should teach. That, therefore, is the true church. Respondent 9 captures this sentiment as follows:

> *"I'm trying to or steer away from the word congregation. I feel like it can quite easily become a very inward-looking word defining a group of people that are huddled together, congregating together, and battening down the hatches*

waiting for the Lord to return when actually for a community of faith that means we certainly do exist for more than that".

To be missional means joining God in his mission in our localities. It means performing all our tasks in our local communities as if we are working for the Lord, not the earthly master. It also means spreading the good news of the gospel in everything we do, thus demonstrating the nearness of the kingdom to all those we share our lives with. Being missional means as Christian men and women, we live clean and holy lives, and humble ourselves before God as living testimonies of the kingdom. This is what the church is called for – to be the salt and light in the world; in other words, to be the testimony of God's love for the world. This is in agreement with Niemandt's (2019a:2) view of the church as a community of God's people called to participate in the mission of the triune God – the mission of the church on earth is to serve the mission of God.

This summary lays the foundation for the remainder of the chapter. The essence of this introduction is that from the First Industrial Revolution (1IR) to the 4IR, God's mission on earth (the *missio Dei*), and thus the church's mission, remains the truth and nothing more. What might change is the application of mission in today's world where communication tools and application tools continue to evolve. Thus, when we talk about the church in the 4IR, we are not changing the truth about God, or the truth about the church – we are merely exploring new ways of utilising modern technology to continue the teaching of his Word, nothing more.

5.3 THE 4IR AND THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

The 4IR represents a revolutionary change in technologies and industries thus rapidly changing the way we live, work, and relate to each other. As a concept, the argument advanced is that the change we are seeing in the 21st century is more than just efficiency improvements; it represents a significant shift in the manner we do life enabled by advances in technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, gene editing, cloud computing, and the Internet of things (Schwab 2016:7). A significant part of this change is the blurring of the lines between the physical, digital, and biological worlds. Particularly for the church, where mission activities are currently defined in terms of human-human interaction, the future suggests a different scenario where

human-machine interactions will be more dominant drivers of mission. In simple terms, the 4IR refers “to how technologies are merging with humans’ physical lives” (Schulze 2019), enhancing human-machine relationships whilst at the same time unlocking new opportunities for transformation and improvement.

> We are witnessing profound shifts across all industries, marked by the emergence of new business models, the disruption of incumbents and the reshaping of The Fourth Industrial Revolution production, consumption, transportation, and delivery systems. On the societal front, a paradigm shift is underway in how we work and communicate, as well as how we express, inform, and entertain ourselves. Equally, governments and institutions are being reshaped, as are systems of education, healthcare, and transportation, among many others. New ways of using technology to change behaviour and our systems of production and consumption also offer the potential for supporting the regeneration and preservation of natural environments, rather than creating hidden costs in the form of externalities (Schwab 2016:7).

To understand the 4IR better, one may need to go back to the previous three revolutions and see how they progressed from one to the next.

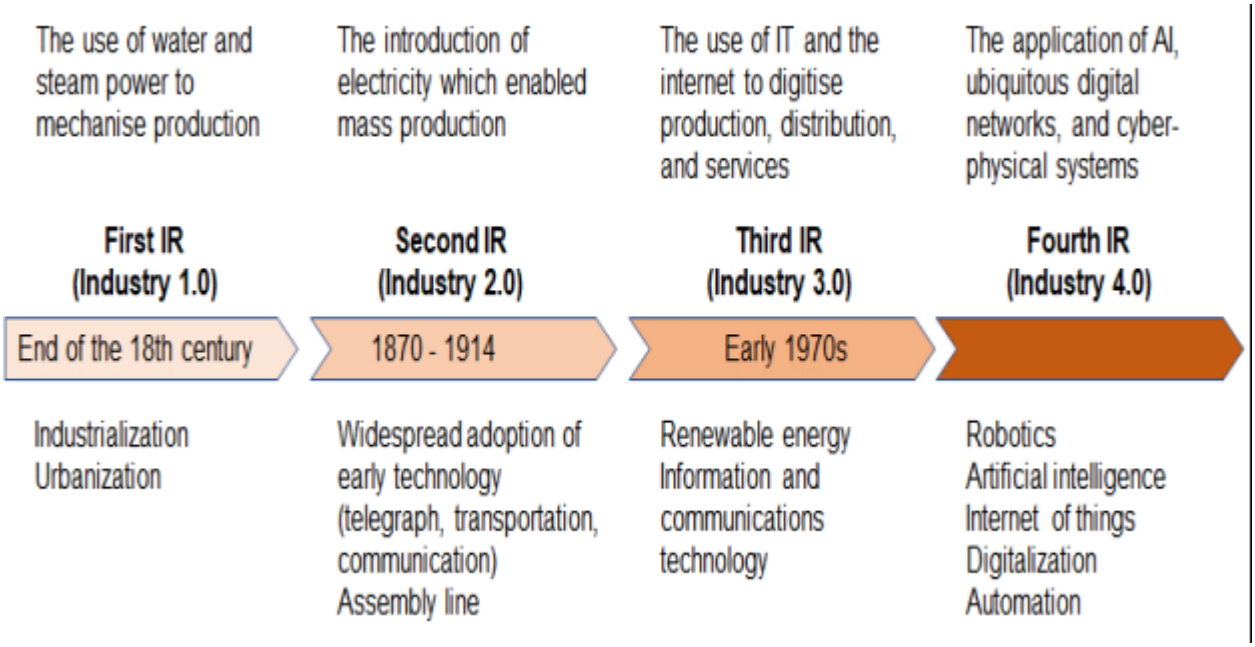

Figure 5-1: Industrial Revolution Timeline
(Source: Adapted from Deloitte 2018:8 and GetSmarter 2021)

The 1IR represents the era of transition (18th century) from small scale manufacturing processes in people's homes and factories using hand tools and manual machines to new manufacturing processes using water and steam power to mechanise production. Hand-made goods were replaced by machine-made produced goods. The Second Industrial Revolution (2IR) (technological revolution) was characterised by rapid scientific discovery and mass production processes replacing water and steam with electricity. Early technology also enabled the automation of this including communication (telephone, typewriter, etc.), mass transportation (rail, internal combustion engines gradually replacing water and steam-powered engines, etc.), household items (refrigeration, dishwashing, etc.). The Third Industrial Revolution (3IR) (digital revolution) saw the emergence of automation and digitisation using electronics and computers to produce goods and services. The 4IR, Klaus Schwab (2016) asserts, is the current era of 'game-changing' technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological worlds.

Baron (2020:2) posits that in the case of missiology we have not adequately responded to the challenges that such a context would pose to the society. How then does the church begin to raise awareness and deeper understanding of opportunities presented by the 4IR, and how does it mobilise resources necessary for planning that takes the church forward to a future that is certain to be very different from today's way of doing life? How does the church in South Africa, a church that finds herself in a society divided between the rich and the poor; between those who have and those who do not have; between different political ideologies regarding the education system, and economic and political programme; a church in a country still lagging behind other nations even on the Industry 3.0. How does the church in such a country mitigate these challenges while taking full advantage of the 4IR? For the church, the 4IR should be seen and understood as an opportunity to take stock of what has worked in the past and be clear about changes necessary to accelerate progress into the future.

The many challenges facing South Africa were discussed broadly in the preceding chapters and will not be repeated here; however, it is suffice to say that there is growing optimism as politics, business, and society are beginning to look at digital

technology to address socio-economic and development issues South Africa as a nation is currently facing. South Africa's President, Cyril Ramaphosa, alluded to this in his State of the Nation address on 16 February 2018 when he announced the establishment of a commission to advise cabinet on opportunities to take advantage of and mitigate the challenges presented by the 4IR. The commission comprised members of all three key sectors of society in South Africa, that is, the government, private sector, and civil society (RSA, South African Government 2018).

Indeed, on 9 April of 2019, this promise was not broken when the President announced the establishment of the Presidential Commission on the 4IR to work alongside government on the actualisation of digital technologies. On 23 October 2020, the Commission's report was gazetted and made public with several recommendations talking to South Africa's developmental agenda premised on the three key areas of historical injustices: poverty, unemployment, and inequality (Report of the Presidential Commission on the 4th Industrial Revolution) (RSA 2020). In another address to the 1st South African Digital Economy Summit, at the Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg, on 5 July 2019, President Ramaphosa outlined critical priorities for all sectors of South African society. These included: transforming the economy so that it benefits all South Africans, especially the previously excluded and marginalised; preserving current jobs whilst also creating new opportunities; improving the quality of education which will result in better skilling of the South African workforce; and mechanisms to improve reliability and quality of basic services. In his speech, the president said: "[T]hese priorities must be our life's mission and we must set about it life by life; family by family; community by community; city by city, and province by province" (RSA: The Presidency, 2019).

While the opportunities presented by the 4IR may sound attractive for a country like South Africa, the socio-economic challenges facing most of the population should not be ignored. For many people the 4IR might be too far-fetched, an aspiration and a dream. The immediate focus for them is poverty and hunger mainly due to the curse of joblessness. The poor look up to those who have, to rescue them from hunger, poverty, and injustice. Those who are poor in spirit look up to God to rescue them from their spiritual poverty. In both instances the church, as God's representative on earth,

shares the same responsibility of rescuing others from their physical and spiritual poverty. How then does a country like South Africa mitigate these urgent basic needs of the majority poor whilst taking full advantage of the 4IR to address current and future challenges? What is the church's role in all of this? This chapter attempts to emphasise the need for the church to engage the 4IR today so that it can shape both its future as the church and how the 4IR technologies engage with humanity without violating God-human relationships. The church has no option but to jump on board and journey with the nations of the world inclusive of government, business, and civil society, to take full advantage of technological developments and prepare for a future guaranteed to be very different from today's way of doing things, including how church is 'done'. Professor Tshilidzi Marwala of the University of Johannesburg, also the Deputy Chair of the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, had this to say about the role of the church in the 4IR:

> As science and technology advances, people will continue to look at religion to make sense of the world. In fact, the data backs the link between religion, science, and technology as the Pew Research Centre has found that the world is becoming more religious as it becomes more interconnected. This is unsurprising when we consider that the relationships between our value systems and principles as well as digital transformation and greater interconnectedness are increasingly becoming complex. This increasing complexity requires us to develop an ethical framework for technologies such as AI and biotechnology. Much of our people's values are obtained from religions and are taught in places of worship. It thus becomes necessary to align technologies such as AI and gene editing to existing human values such as fairness, inclusiveness, reliability and safety, transparency, privacy, security, and accountability (Marwala 2020:n.p.).

Add to this complexity the impact of COVID-19 that has forced organisations to rethink how they do business; societies to rethink how they engage and relate to one another; and the church to rethink what all this means for a life in Christ. However, despite the obvious setbacks, it is not all doom and gloom – the arrival of the 4IR presents new opportunities for government, business, civil society, and the church. Professor Marwala (2020:n.p.) went on to say:

> The technology already interacts closely with religion. In the last few months, we have witnessed the global pandemic and the national lockdown that ensued, the shift to digital ways of living, working, and worship. As religious services switched online, we certainly did not see a wavering in faith. People continued to attend services and often drew on religious teachings as comfort during uncertain times. This close interaction between religion and technology necessarily means that we have to convene religious and technological leaders to make sense of technological advancements and their impact on the faiths.

The advances brought about by the 4IR have important implications for the way societies function. The church in the current era is changing the manner it communicates; we may no longer write letters to Christian followers like the Apostle Paul did in the early church days; we may no longer rely solely on Sunday services to preach the gospel – nowadays the church engages on social media which has a multiplier effect in spreading the message; the church is adopting new ways of digitalisation to practice Christianity and evangelise to all. The emergence of online churches, virtual churches, and hybrid (offline and online) churches, as well as the ability to stream services live, are the most recent examples of the change that digital technologies are capable of. This emerging digital culture is something new to the church, something requiring fresh theological conversations and new approaches.

> The fourth industrial revolution is not only changing what we do but also who we are. It affects our identity and its many related facets – our sense of privacy, our notions of ownership, our consumption patterns, the time we devote to work and leisure, how we develop our careers, cultivate our skills, meet people and nurture relationships (Schwab 2016:92).

For theologists, whilst the 4IR opportunities abound, there are also serious concerns. For example, Peckham (2021:33) argued that the adoption of 4IR technologies is diminishing important aspects of humanity such as:

- Cognitive acuity – Reliance on automation leads to loss of creativity and reasoning power in humans

- Ability to relate to others – Non-human relationships that emerge as we continually engage with and through digital assistants results in diminished human-human relationships.
- Freedom and privacy – Biometric technology leading to the surveillance of citizens by the state, or use of personal data by big businesses for profitability purposes, takes away citizens' right to privacy.
- Moral agency – When we outsource our reasoning to robots, e.g., self-driving cars, or Radio Frequency Identification system, e.g., smart fridges, we effectively give away our God-given right and responsibility to be human.
- Loss of work – Takes away the human right to work and be involved in productive employments.
- What is real – Anthropomorphic robotic sex dolls, for example, promote dehumanisation of gender roles.
- The value of life, life expectancy, mortality – its capability to extend human life expectancy by people trying to play God through technology. In the Bible, mortality is not evitable (Rm 5:12).

Peckham's (2021) concerns about the ethical implications of the 4IR technologies for humanity, particularly AI, does not diminish the importance of, nor discard 4IR for Christianity, but rather challenges the church to engage these technologies from an informed perspective.

5.4 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Dreyer (2015:2) enquires whether "the digital era is the end of the church as we know it, or does it open up new possibilities of being church". The answer to Dreyer's question is both yes and no. YES in the sense that the old way of doing church may soon give way to a new way of doing the same church, and NO, the digital era is not the end of the church. As an agent of God in the world, the church will only end when God has ended, something all of us know will not happen. The challenge for the church is how it represents God in this new era, especially when machines begin to take over the communication function from human beings. The challenge for the church is how does it continue to be church when people no longer believe in big assemblies to worship God, where worshiping takes place in families and social gatherings, when

sacraments such as baptism and the Eucharist lose their personal touch, and when offerings are done through electronic media and no longer in person in a 'church'. Dreyer's question is simply about the adaptability of the church – how to adapt to change and if, in fact, it should change. Taking this a step further Beukes (2020:5) highlights the importance of role clarification for ministers and all believers in the digital age/era. What role do they play and what are they accountable/responsible for in this digital era? Crafting answers to these questions starts with a deep introspection of internal church dynamics and capabilities whilst also looking at external opportunities presented by digital growth. At any point in the journey, the church is guided by the prescripts of Scripture and doctrine.

Adegboyega, Boddie, Dorvie, Bolaji, Adedoyin and Moore (2021:223) posit that "while the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 is widely discussed, its impact on other areas of society, including church as a religious organisation, appears to be ignored". The shift from face-to-face worship to virtual services impacted congregational finances which are primarily driven by individual member donations. The psychological and mental impact of home isolation coupled with massive job losses has exacerbated the situation, potentially undermining the stature of the church in communities.

Respondent 1 recalled:

> *"As this pandemic continued to be with us, our resources ran dry. Quite a number of our churches took a knock on their finances, particularly those in the rural who depend on physical attendance, who do not do tithing and offerings through EFTs* [electronic funds transfer]*. The impact was so severe that we had to put aside some money ourselves to try and assist our pastors; however, because the offerings were dwindling, we were not able to continue with that".*

Churches that did not have strong financial backing at the onset of the pandemic, found it difficult to survive – clergy salaries were affected and outreach programmes severely compromised. Respondent 5 echoed these words in the following way:

> *"We experienced a significant drop of income and had to let go some of the staff in the church. We let go of two staff members from a complement of four, and had to do salary cuts for two others. I am also included in the staff list of the church, so those things affected us during the lockdown. Whatever you were seeing on the media was also because of that strain, that some churches were really struggling to say if we remain closed there will be no bread on the table. It is not because of any kind of greed but it was just because they too have families and responsibilities, children who go to school, and bonds or rent to pay. So I think it was becoming really strenuous for a lot of the churches".*

The shift to 'virtual' services during the outbreak and subsequent lockdown provided the church with an opportunity to seriously reconsider its long-held tradition with regard to geographic locations. All of a sudden people started and ended days as small communities in neighbourhoods. There was neither Lutheran nor Methodist presence, no uniform or regalia parading streets to their favourite congregation. The immediate need for everyone became survival – physical, mental, and spiritual survival. You could not walk into a neighbourhood and identify Anglicans or Dutch Reformed adherents; we were all the same, looking alike, facing the same issues and concerns. This period provided an opportunity for the church to reimagine its presence beyond a specific geographic location and current membership base (Adegboyega *et al.* 2021:227). Through social media and digital technologies, churches were reaching wider audiences, and pastors were able to conduct telephone and video contact services to people in geographic locations they would not have reached in person. John Gardner's (1995:3) timeless approach to innovation attests to this: "[E]very individual, organization or society must mature – what matures is a system or framework within which continuous innovation, renewal and rebirth can occur". Maturity is not doing the same things faster and better whilst sticking to the old ways. In manufacturing and production, this would be tantamount to using the same technology to produce goods at a faster rate by tweaking processes here and there or amassing more resources for the same production system. Dreyer (2015) says such an operation, whether individual, organisation, or society, is headed for the graveyard.

In times of crisis, the church has a history of stepping up as alluded to in Chapter 1 of this study under the heading, 'How the early church dealt with devastating epidemics in history'. In such moments, churches become centres for solidarity, networks of compassion, empathy, healing, and emotional support (Pillay 2020:270). Mission is more than the delivery of goods and services to address current needs and challenges. In times of crisis, people need more than food, they need more than shelter, and they need more than physical healing from diseases – people need hope, hope for a better life, hope for a better future. Evangelism brings that kind of hope; it is an indispensable dimension of the church's mission (Goheen 2000:281). Good works alone without the Word is futile. What we proclaim in words should be seen in what we do in action. In other words, our deeds give meaning to our words. Mission is the work of Christian men and women whose many tasks include that of preaching the gospel, loving and genuinely caring for each, healing the sick, taking care of the orphaned, feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, and being of service to ordinary citizens in their needs regardless of their religious/non-religious affiliation, race, and status in society. It includes the task of prophetic witness in the face of wrong, of declaring the will of God regarding the life of humans both in their personal and domestic affairs, and also no less clearly in their corporate life as nations, in business, in politics, in culture, and in religion (Goheen 2000:276, 282).

The challenge faced by many churches is to be a going church – a church that goes to where people are in their spaces and situations proclaiming the Word and doing good works, making people feel as if they are in 'church' on a Sunday morning. And this is where technology comes in handy through various online and virtual platforms that can deliver a consistent gospel message while at the same time meeting the needs of people in communities. As technology continues to evolve, digital theology calls for a persistent reflection on the digitalisation of society and its implications for Christian faith and practices. According to the SACC (2020:17) statement, the church has moved from the building, to homes, and into the hearts of people. With live streaming, the "congregation is no longer confined to one meeting place; it now exists virtually everywhere".

Adegboyega *et al*. (2021:227) observe:

> Many congregations are beginning to move toward the innovation and renewal necessary to maintain the vitality of their congregations. These congregations let go of their former format to adapt to current circumstances and focus on their future.

COVID-19 has presented the church with new opportunities to be innovative in its operations, whether relating to the spreading of the gospel, reaching out to the needy, or providing spiritual support to individuals and families wherever they are. The 4IR with its likelihood of machines replacing humans in some interactive relationship may pose a challenge for mission as robotics takes over human functions and people begin to develop relationships with machines instead of people.

Thinking ahead some two decades ago, Bill Gates asked:

> What do people do at work? They go to meetings. How do we deal with meetings? What is it about sitting face to face that we need to capture? We need software that makes it possible to hold a meeting with distributed participants – a meeting with interactivity and feeling, such that, in the future, people will prefer being telepresent (Riva, Davide & Usselsteun 2003:9).

Indeed, less than two decades later, a Microsoft collaboration platform that unifies chat, voice, video, and file sharing was launched. The same question could be asked of teachers and students. What do they do at school? If they are learners, they go to school every day to get their education; to meet and make friends; to have relationships with teachers; to make their parents proud if they do well; to participate in sport and other activities; to prepare for their future, and so forth. Other people go to school every day to teach if they are teachers; manage schools if they are principals; answer the telephone and file documents if they are secretaries; take care of the books if they are librarians, and so on. The crucial question in the context of this research regards reasons people go to a local church. They go to church simply to gather for singing, praying, reading of the Scriptures, listening to sermons, celebrating communion and other liturgical events, as well as socialising, to mention a few examples. Granted, these activities facilitate spiritual growth; enhance social connections among people; and may result in strong relational ties and social capital

of a congregation (Adegboyega *et al*. 2021:229), but do we have to rely on face-to-face gatherings for these to be realised? How can the church use 4IR and digitisation to advance the kingdom gospel? Can robots do mission on behalf of humans? How will people experience others through the digital platforms? Van den Berg (2020:3) argues that "missiologists who were only focused on the either/or situation – meaning its either online or physical engagement – will have to deal with the conflation of the two".

In all the scenarios mentioned above, physical presence in the flesh, be it in the church, workplace, or classroom, is not a requisite for the purpose of gathering to be realised. Many of these activities (if not all) can still happen while sitting at home using a computer or a tech gadget, except of course in complex situations such as construction and manufacturing where physical presence is required, or intensive medical care that requires high tech medical equipment. Even in this field of medicine, remote medical consultations and even surgery (telesurgery) enables physicians to treat patients geologically separated from themselves (Haidegger, Sándor & Benyá 2011:682). It could be argued that advances in engineering and technology, robotics, and other areas, many of the functions mentioned above can be performed successfully using technology as the medium. However, with regards to the church, Vosko (2011:90) cautions, "[S]imulcasting of a church service does not seem appropriate in churches that promote interpersonal relationships with God and other human beings". McIntosh (2015:146) concurs:

> No matter how cleverly it employs the latest 3D [three-dimensional] technology, the simple absence of scale that is necessary for the building to appear on a smartphone or computer screen will result in a diminished encounter with the architecture of that building, and in many cases that may mean the loss of awe and wonder that is akin to an experience of the holy, although the technology may be awe-inspiring in a different way.

The digital approach is also not without challenges. Smartphone penetration and the cost of data remain one of the biggest communication challenges in South Africa's poor communities (Figure 5-2 below).

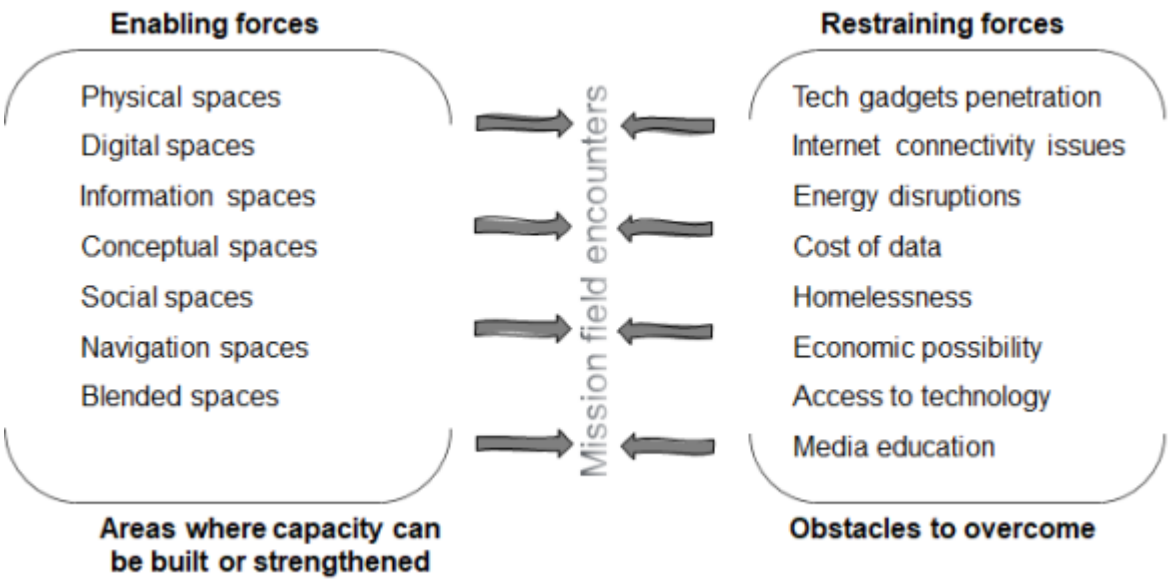

Figure 5-2: 4IR and digitisation: Drivers and blockers of innovative church technology

One positive outcome for the church is that the COVID-19 lockdown made it possible for the church to reach many people who would not normally attend a Sunday event for personal reasons or scheduling challenges. The downside of this is that it has created differences in society between those who are tech-savvy and/or have Internet access and those who do not. Whilst the reach may have increased to include the previously unreached audiences, it is without a doubt that some people were left out of this experience, especially those who could not afford to connect online.

It is in this context and that of the 4IR that the church needs to be clear on how it intends to continue with its mission and ministry in order that it may be present where it matters most. From a missional perspective, the church needs to envision a future where physical bodies might no longer be the main vehicle of its voice and action, where technology would have closed the physical gap between mission practitioners and beneficiaries, where pastoral accompaniment is mediated by technology, and worshiping 'together' happens in a church gathered virtually. Can the future church do all these things without physical bodies congregating in a four-walled structure? How can the church use 4IR and digitisation to advance the kingdom whilst staying true to the gospel?

Respondent 7 agrees:

> *"Church is not the building. The church is God's people, and as we go into the next pandemic, just because you can't gather on a Sunday morning does not mean that the church is closed. The church is active, is vibrant, is alive, is praying, is walking out, is feeding the poor. The church is people, and is the priesthood of all believers and people engaging all their gifts to bring glory and fulfil God's mission on this earth".*

From a theological perspective, the church is defined as *ekklesia* – the gathering of the called-out ones (Adegboyega *et al.* 2021:224). Gathering means the coming together physically of people or objects previously dispersed. As a people we were dispersed from God by sin, and through a life in the Trinity we have been gathered as members of the one body whose head is Christ. We no longer need to be gathered under one roof to show our togetherness in Christ. Wherever we are in large and small groups, we are gathered in Christ. The author of this research contends that gathering in Scriptures is not denoted by numbers. A church gathered in hundreds or thousands as is usually the case with megachurches, has never been the prescript of Scripture. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 18:20 that where two or three gather in his name, he is there with them. Thus, gathering understood from Jesus's words is not restricted to large crowds. Gathering in his name to share the Word can be done in a family setting or a small neighbourhood group. There is no minimum number required to qualify as 'gathered'. In Colossians 2:5 Paul acknowledges his physical absence from the church in Colossae but emphasises that he is still with them through the connection of the Holy Spirit which is more valuable than physical connection. In a 4IR context, notes Baron (2020:6), missiologists should engage their context beyond the physical, and engage the effects of and impacts on 'missiological' issues and its manifestation on digital platforms. It would be a priority for the church to identify all sectors of public life and either send Christ disciples to these places or work with existing contacts from within. Their role is to evangelise in word supported by good deeds and so be examples of a life in the kingdom. The people sent and participating from within should be tasked with exploring ways through which the church can establish and maintain a

faithful presence in those spaces. The list would include education, industry, arts and culture, sport, natural and social sciences, and many more (cf. Goheen 2000:309).

What Newbigin says is that rather than viewing the church as gathered in a building, we should see it as scattered in the field through Christian lay people listening and following God in their engagements with the secular world. Van Rheede van Oudtshoorn (2015:4) agrees:

> The concept of the church as 'community' is linked to the symbolic unity of the church, which is founded on the unity of the triune God. 'Community' points to the corporate structure of the church as the one body of Christ in the world and represents the internal life of the church. This internal community life of the church can also be designated as love.

Of concern to missiologists is the displacement of humans by machines in the 4IR environment. Schwab (2016:n.p.) states,

> As automation substitutes for labour across the entire economy, the displacement of workers by machines might exacerbate the gap between returns to capital and returns to labour.

When this happens ('when' instead of 'if'), as it is almost certain to happen, the issue for missiologists is what this will mean for mission, particularly the human mission agent. What will it mean for mission encounters and interactions? Will it be a combination of both digital beings and human beings, or will one take the driving seat pushing the other to obscurity? From Kritzinger (2008) we may deduce that it is not only the mission agent and the community that will be impacted but the encounter itself. The challenge for the church today is what the future encounters are likely to look like and what implication this will have for mission. From a theological standpoint the question remains: "How do we develop a biblically based technology keeping an eye towards the future without distorting biblical truths?"

Nandram (2019:19) ponders if our ability to make decisions will be diminished in the 4IR as machines take away the thinking function from humans and make important

decisions on their behalf. Should this be the case, what would it mean for future generations? How will their intellectual ability be affected? Decision making is a core human activity, and if this is performed by a machine, what are the biblical implications? Can a machine commit sin on behalf of an individual? Or can it ask for forgiveness for mistakes it makes? These are some of the issues the church may need to deal with as technology continues to evolve at an even faster rate than before.

5.5 WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR THE MINISTRY OF PRESENCE?

When Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:20, “I am with you always, to the very end of the age”, did Jesus mean physical presence in his human body, or did he mean his ever presence in networks and communities the disciples will create, i.e., the church universal? It has been extensively explained in this study that the church is not necessarily a people gathered or congregating in a building, but a people dispersed and incarnated in communities. Through these Christians, the church is incarnated and through them the kingdom is realised. How does the church maintain presence with these networks? How will the gospel experience feel when it transitions from real people in real environments to avatars and mediated environments? For Van den Berg (2020:2), the challenge for missiologists is not so much virtual and physical but more about the blurring of those lines. For centuries churches might have mediated such presence by word and action, proclaiming the good news of Jesus and advocation for social justice and equality through various ministries and missions. Today the church is able to mediate its presence to other places in real time via technology – radio, TV, mobile phones, Internet, etc., and through these mediums we perceive other people's presence in a variety of ways. Thus, as we enter the era of the 4IR, designing the church’s ongoing presence in an ever-changing world will be a matter of science and religion (the church) working together appreciating what has gone before and what has worked, whilst keeping an eye towards the future as we to tackle challenging problems confronting our society.

In the view of Ijsselsteijn and Riva (2003), the feeling of ‘being there’, or presence, is not bound to any specific type of technology – it is a product of the mind. However, Spagnolli, Lombard and Gamberini (2009:7) add that for one to be present, reference

to a place is fundamental otherwise the quality of being present would not mean anything useful. For Lombard and Jones (2015:29) the term 'presence' refers both to phenomena in which technology is not involved (e.g., a face-to-face encounter), and also to phenomena in which technology is specifically involved (telepresence). Hong's (2015) view is that presence is the feeling of being-there and being-with – the effects of connectivity, intimacy, and belonging. Thus, it seems there is a big difference between simply being there (i.e., sharing the same space) and really being there – to be willing and readily available to be a source of comfort and support for others in the face of hardship or suffering. Therefore, in the days to come when another pandemic or any disaster whether natural or man-made becomes a reality, how would the church respond, appreciating what has gone before with COVID-19 experience? It is the researcher's view that the church needs to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the 4IR to reimage itself as a church capable and ready to advance the kingdom in any life situation. This will be discussed again in more detail in the final chapter.

5.6 DIGITAL RELIGION & THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH ONLINE AND OFFLINE

The image below (Figure 5-3) of Pope Francis delivering a special Uribi et Orbi without a crowd in attendance at the usually packed St Peter's Square on 27 March 2020 is a reminder of the disruption of social life caused by the COVID-19 lockdown. With stay-at-home orders implemented at the height of the pandemic in Italy, the Catholic Church adherents could not physically participate in the event leaving the Pontiff with the one option: to spread his Easter message to the world using modern communication platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, radio, television, and livestreaming. The message of the Uribi et Orbi was to pray for the world to survive the pandemic. The image is striking because of the emptiness of St Peter's Square, a place that is usually buzzing with adherents during this time.

Figure 5-3: Pope Francis standing alone at St Peter's Square

(Source: America The Jesuit Review 2020 [CNS photo/Guglielmo Mangiapane, pool via Reuters extracted from America magazine])

The Easter of 2020 was different with stay-at-home orders meaning that people could only watch the Pontiff praying for the end of the pandemic via telecommunication media. The image of the Pontiff standing alone is also remarkable because it marks the beginning of digital mediation merging or substituting the physicality of adherents' presence at the event – it is an astounding reminder of the groundbreaking changes in religious activities brought about by the pandemic. Religious communities around the world had to find new ways of practicing their faiths, for example, from physical to online. However, throughout history, religion and media have always been entangled – as Horsfield (2015) asserts, religion is based on messages diffused through media from sacred texts to new media technologies. According to Evolvi (2021), the Internet has been used for religious purposes since the 1990s.

5.7 ONLINE AND OFFLINE PRACTICES

The onset of COVID-19 saw the emergence of online religion in areas or religious groups that had not adopted this method before, or an increased focus and investment in those instances where it was already established. Christopher Helland (2000) makes a good distinction between 'religion online', and 'online religion'. First, by religion online, Helland refers to those groups or entities that use the Internet to enhance their already existing non-internet religious activities, acknowledging that online religious activity did that start with the onset of the coronavirus. What this study suggests, from the evidence gathered, is that COVID-19 fast-tracked the popularity of religious practices online, but COVID-19 certainly did not establish these practices. Helland's (2000) distinction highlights the importance of the Internet in creating new opportunities and new practices using the ever-changing digital technologies. Opportunities are fourfold including reach, frequency, speed, and impact. The increased rendering of rituals and practices would mean that what would usually happen once or twice a week in a gathered format in synagogues, churches, temples, mosques, etc., can now happen much faster and as frequent as is deemed necessary. The reach achieved through a mediated digital or online platform can be enormous, far exceeding the numbers reached in a gathered assembly. People can tune in from wherever they are whilst carrying on with their daily activities. However, specifically for religious activities, the Internet poses unique advantages and disadvantages. The design and characteristics of the Internet are such that communication is open and instantaneous. If required it allows for two-way flow – interactive flow of information but where desired it can also be one way, as in the provision of doctrinal information specific to the religious group, sermons and exhortations, or it can be both ways allowing users to interact. Another advantage of the Internet is the dissemination of information enabling users to gain a deeper understanding of their religion where information previously held by clergy as privileged sometimes secret, is made available to all. The challenge with religion in the virtual world is that it is difficult to control what is being communicated in posts and responses. It could easily distort the teachings of a particular faith. The language used may also not be appropriate, sometimes offensive, and unhelpful. On the other hand, controlled online platforms could decrease the value of dialogues if not properly managed, as there is no other view tolerated except the official line. Additionally, and potentially more problematic

for religion in the virtual world, is that it could lead to a very casual relation with the deity as it does not require regular commitments that would be the case in offline settings.

Campbell (2012) suggests that instead of being forced into conformity by set rituals, processes, and practices, online religious communities have flexibility to align their religious beliefs and practices with their lifestyle preferences. In this way, they operate as loose social structures instead of bounded structures as would be the case with offline settings. People join online because they are looking for something they cannot get offline, or there is a particular practice in offline churches they do not agree with (2012:6). People create their unique identities online and connect or are invited to connect to a common group to solidify meaning. Identities created are not rigid but tuneable as the experience progresses. The anonymity of online interaction poses a risk in that there may be no control over what is being transmitted, e.g., the teachings of particular religious groups may be in conflict with what offline authorities say vs their online counterparts (2012:10). This concern may be exacerbated by the fact that information or conversations that are usually privileged for institutional administrators may become openly available or discussed online. This may potentially distort the truth, or alternatively empower users in ways never seen offline. This means that the generation of religious capital online becomes a new source of religious authority, as Internet users take advantage of opportunities and positions they do not have in the offline world (2012:12). Online users have access to multiple sources of information, some solidifying current beliefs while others may present a different view. Thus, users online can shape their spiritual journey in a manner not possible offline, where the source of information is centralised and carefully controlled. The Internet thus becomes for many a religious marketplace, encouraging users to seek out preferred information; or establish personalised practices, rather than simply a link to an official religious institution; or mirror set protocols like they might have done in the past (2012:14). Importantly, people can live out their lives online through digital media while also engaging in an embodied life offline (2012:17). Thus, in digital religion, offline and online spaces are deeply intertwined. Different to cyber-religion (for example, utilising virtual reality technologies) or online religion, digital religion entails that online and offline spaces are entangled. Campbell (2012) argues that digital religion does not simply

refer to religion as it is performed and articulated online, but points to how digital media and spaces are shaping and being shaped by religious practice.

The example of Pope Francis standing alone at a deserted St Peter's Square (Figure 5-3) preaching a message of hope amid the pandemic lockdown can be considered an instance of digital religion. Adherents of the Catholic faith could not attend the event in person but were able to watch and listen to the Pontiff via online channels. In this instance, online space was mediated to enhance the offline experience. The event physically took place at the usual St Peter's Square but was delivered to its audiences through media technologies. This therefore shows how media technology creates new conditions for the practice of religion where materiality and space do not disappear but are present in new forms.

5.8 CONCLUSION

Religion is something that is learned, witnessed, believed, and practiced. The activities of teaching and witnessing involve communication. It can also be argued that the activity of practicing could involve some form of communication at the very least. Offline religion involves a direct or indirect in-person exchange of gospel messages and rituals through verbal and written materials, rituals, and practices as determined by a particular religious belief system. Online religion is practiced and experienced through the Internet in real time. Digital religion combines both forms (offline and online) using digital telecommunication tools and methods. Depending on the specific denomination of Christianity, practice may include the Eucharist, prayer, confession, confirmation, burial rites, marriage and the Christian Education of children and adults. Whilst many of these can be performed through the Internet and digital tools without much difficulty, it is doubtful if burial can be done online or digitally unless fully executed by robots – another contentious area where technology (4IR) encroaches Christian ethics and beliefs.

Giese (2020:347) makes a distinction between the 'universal church' (all believers of all time) and 'local churches' in his argument about what is the church, insisting that a local church has officers and formal gatherings. Although it has a building to facilitate gatherings, it is not a building, but people gathered and in-between gatherings. Turning to the present church, Giese recognises that God is present in diverse ways

in different places and different kinds of people. First, God is present everywhere. Second, God dwells in a believer, and third, God dwells among his people. This means that God's presence in a group of worshipers gathered, for example, in a local congregation, is in a unique manner than his presence as each single person worships (2020:355). Taking this a step further, it could also mean that since God gifted humans with skills and abilities, a brain to think about solutions for the present-day challenges, and hands and other means to create solutions, then God is also present when the fruits of his gifting are realised. This means that when humans develop modern ways of addressing today's challenges through technology, God is there, and everything is done with his blessing. On the negative, could this also mean that God is equally present when humans develop weapons of mass destruction or engage in commercial activities that destroy the environment? This is another area theologians may need to clarify as we soldier ahead with 4IR technologies.

Next, the final chapter gives a brief overview of the key findings, presents recommendations based on these, clarifies the limitations of the study, and then closes with a final conclusion.

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This concluding chapter summarises the study, states the contribution of the research, acknowledges the limitations that were encountered, provides recommendations based on the research findings, and makes suggestions for future research. The final section brings the study to a close.

6.2 SUMMARY

This section summarises the methodology that was employed to conduct the research, as well as the chapters, and key findings of the study.

6.2.1 Summary of the methodology

This study made use of a qualitative interview method to discover the meaning of mission as 'being with' in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. To set the boundaries for the sample universe, church leaders from across the South African Christian spectrum, and leaders and representatives of NGOs, were selected for the interviews. Contact details of potential interview respondents were obtained from online databases belonging to a variety of churches (denominations). An additional contact list was obtained directly from the SACC. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. The Zoom platform was selected for its ease of compliance with COVID-19 safety guidelines, as it does not require travel and face-to-face meetings. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed immediately after each interview.

6.2.2. Summary of the chapters

Chapter 1 outlined the history of epidemics and how the Early Church dealt with them. The chapter presented a detailed overview of South Africa's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, with a comparative analysis of the church's response vis-à-vis government and the business sector.

Chapter 2 explored the church's missional presence in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown. The argument advanced is that if the church is not incarnate in communities, in their contexts and places, in hardships and catastrophes, epidemics and disasters, the church's mission could be severely compromised. Relevance of such a discussion is in the context of a pandemic lockdown, that is, how to incarnate or be incarnated when all forms of social contact and assembly are prohibited.

Chapter 3 investigated the lived experience of the church's missional presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period and whether the Internet and 'new media' are alternative ways of *being there* and *being with*. This impact was scrutinised in two stages, namely:

1) First, through an analysis of the language and meaning church leaders (as mission practitioners) use to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa.
2) Second, through an analysis of the language and meaning NGOs (as mission recipients) use to describe their experience of the church's presence during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa.

Chapter 4 introduced the concept of 'capacity building' and the key elements that could help the church strengthen its capacity to engage constructively in mission conversation, action plans, and programmes. The starting hypothesis was that the church's inability to deliver during the COVID-19 lockdown is directly related to its lack of capacity, and therefore the blame should not be put entirely on the pandemic lockdown.

Chapter 5 discussed the future of the church online and offline in the context of the 4IR, arguing that any missional conversation that does not include the 4IR as integral in those conversations are short-sighted and will not advance the effectiveness of the church in the future. Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? Can the church's presence be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other? To answer these questions, three critical areas of recent developments were considered:

- The 4IR and the future of the church
- The impact of COVID-19 on how we practice Christianity
- Digital religion and the future of the church online and offline

Chapter 6, the current chapter, concludes the research with an overview of the challenges and opportunities for 'being with' during lockdown. In addition to summarising the research findings, it also presents recommendations and practical guidelines to assist the church to deal with future encounters of the phenomenon.

6.2.3 Summary of the findings

The primary objective of the research was to investigate the church's missional presence during COVID-19 lockdown; in other words, what mission as '*being with*' means when mission practitioners (the church) and mission beneficiaries (those who are witnessed) face travel and assembly restrictions as well as social distancing restrictions. The study answered four research questions (RQ):

> RQ 1: *"If being with is 'the heart of mission' and the telos of all our action, what does it look like for the church to be with – to embody faithful presence – in its locality when being with as a form of social presence is prohibited?"*
>
> This question aimed to understand the church's incarnational presence in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown, that is, what presence means when all forms of social contact and physical assembly are prohibited and the Christians risk spreading the disease themselves if social distancing is not observed.

The results indicate that during the first five weeks of the March 2020 lockdown in South Africa, **presence was difficult,** especially for pastors, as they could not visit people physically. The church lost several pastors who succumbed to the pandemic in their line of duty particularly when it came to officiating at funerals. In the main, the ministry of presence was done telephonically and people in communities seemed to have understood the situation. The church was still able to care for one another even though physical presence was not possible. The theological justification of such 'online presence' takes a cue from the Apostle Paul who, in his days, could not be physically

present in all congregations, and thus he wrote letters encouraging them to continue ministering the gospel even in his physical absence. In the present day and time, technology has replaced letters and communication via online channels has been made much quicker, better, and more effective.

> RQ2: "*What does it mean to 'be with' when almost all forms of social contact are reduced to remote digital and online platforms?"*
>
> This question aimed to investigate the presence of the church during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa and whether the Internet and 'new media' can, or are in effect, alternative ways of *being there* and *being with*.

The results indicate that during the lockdown period **the church had to resort to social media and online platforms to reach out to those in need.** Technology served well where pastors and church leaders used platforms like WhatsApp and other low data usage platforms to communicate, to serve, and to have an impact on people's lives. The challenge, however, had to do with connectivity coupled with energy disruptions (power outage due to load-shedding). For instance, some churches, particularly in the deep rural areas where there is no fibre, presence was difficult because it had to be virtual and online. The other challenge was that it is almost impossible to show or feel compassion via online platforms, hence the human born need for physical presence and togetherness. However, as an interim measure during lockdown periods, online presence served reasonably well especially during the time of funerals which could not be conducted online. The research concluded that the hybrid expression of ministry is thus the way forward for the foreseeable future, especially in the Third World and developing countries, where full migration to online and digital is not imminent. The challenge for the church is to envision the form and shape of such hybridism and to start working on it now.

> RQ3: *"Is faithful presence in absentia a possibility? If so, what shape and form does it take? If not, what are the implications for the church's mission?"*

The aim of this question was to understand mission in mediated environments where practitioners and beneficiaries do not meet face-to-face. Do Christians need to be present in the flesh to get their story right? If they are not present in the flesh, will they be perceived as absent by the communities they are trying to reach and be part of? Can the mission of being with be mediated by technology where fleshy bodies do not encounter each other?

The results indicate that ***networks work better than individuals.*** Communities that built local relationships before the pandemic had a head start. For those who had to start from scratch it was not impossible, but much harder. The results of the study indicate that:

- Relationships are important; being part of the body is everything; if you are isolated from the community or are building your own little kingdom somewhere, you will stay behind. The local churches that did not know their community, that did not know the people in the local clinic, the people in the local police station, the ward councillor, and which did not have partnerships before COVID-19, struggled at the onset of the pandemic. Those that already were community focused, that had built partnerships and relationships with other churches, the local police, ward councillors, and local clinics, etc., long before the pandemic, had a head start.

- The church in the middle of a lockdown cannot rely on streamed worship services to people's homes, via digital devices, as an indicator of its presence. Advancing the kingdom gospel is above and beyond the digital streaming of worship services – sick people must be visited, prayed for, and encouraged; mourners must be supported and consoled; the dead must be attended to and buried; the hungry must be fed; and the naked and homeless provided with clothing and shelter. However, the situation in South Africa is different. South Africa is a two-worlds country, there are communities in deep rural areas and in informal settlements in urban areas where you can do nothing online or digitally, where everything must be physical because these areas lack Internet connectivity, or their inhabitants are so poor that they cannot afford the data

prices and have no computers or Internet-enabled mobile devices. Thus, the church needs to prepare its disciples for the task of preaching the gospel in these communities, using their skills and network of relationships to be of service to men, women, and children in all their needs. Christian men and women do this in their ordinary daily activities where they live, where they work, where they shop, and where they play or socialise. They do this in their daily engagements as Christians in-between church gatherings.

RQ4: "*Since COVID-19 has changed the way we engage with one another and the world around us, whilst the church's mission of making disciples and caring for one another remains unchanged, what resources does the church need for the mission of being with to be authentic?"*

The primary aim of this question was to investigate and identify key elements/dimensions that build the capacity of the church to effectively deliver its mission. The secondary aim was to flush out capacity building opportunities arising from the COVID-19 lockdown experience to empower the church to respond quicker and better in future pandemics as they manifest.

The results indicate that the ***church is not a building, but a people gathered and in-between gatherings.*** This finding suggests a certain kind of engagement with people in their home spaces, workspaces, online spaces, digital spaces, information spaces, and learning spaces. The challenge for the church is determining how to be effective with the gospel in these spaces such that the 'church' exists 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in all situations and contexts in-between Sunday gatherings.

The research identified six characteristics of a missional church:

1) A missional church creates a culture of collaboration, builds strong and healthy relationships, and embraces diversity and inclusion.
2) A missional church maintains a holistic presence where people are, in their circumstances, and ensures there is no space where its presence is not felt. Missional presence was found to be key in these spaces: home space,

workspace, online space, social space, digital space, conceptual space, navigating space, information space, and learning space.

3) A missional church advances the kingdom gospel of holistic healing – emotional healing, mental healing, physical healing, spiritual healing, and social well-being.
4) A missional church always maintains a holistic presence for a holistic healing.
5) A missional church worships and serves God; creates communities of faith and obedience; cares for one another as the body of Christ; self-regulates to ensure accountable leadership; drives social agenda; equips and empowers those who are witnessed to self-sustain; builds capacity to serve; is a 'sending and going' church instead of a 'come and see what we do here' church.
6) A missional church persistently rethinks and reimages how the future church looks.

6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although there is an abundance of literature on the theology of mission as 'being with' and the theologies of incarnation and faithful presence, there is a dearth of research on what it means *to be with* – to embody faithful presence – when social contact and other forms of public assembly are prohibited because of a pandemic and associated lockdown. This thesis therefore endeavoured to fill the identified knowledge gap.

This study has provided the church with a perfect opportunity to shift from being 'inward-looking' to a church that is community focused – a church that prepares, trains, and equips its adherents for the work of ministry in their own communities, associations, and encounters, such that the work of the ministry continues with or without gatherings.

Furthermore, this study proposes practical applications for the church, namely, how to build and strengthen church capacity to deliver, and the emergency response plan (the Disaster Management Framework [DMF] for the church) as practical tools the church can use to prepare and ready itself for future pandemics and disasters.

The key lesson to take away is that the church's mission is the same pre-, during, and post-pandemic. The church is not the building. The church is God's people, and as we go into the next pandemic, just because we can't gather on a Sunday morning does not mean that the church is closed. The church is vibrant and active; it is out there taking care of the needy. The church is a people – the priesthood of all believers – a people engaging all their gifts to bring glory and fulfil God's mission on this earth.

The contribution this study makes is therefore timely and relevant for the contemporary church, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the period thereafter.

As with all studies, this research was not without its limitations. These are presented next.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research did not investigate the presence of the church as felt and experienced by those who are witnessed to, the destitute and suffering majority, during the pandemic lockdown periods. This is an area that missiologists and theologians could investigate further with a view to preparing the church for future lockdowns considering the 4IR that is currently taking place and the future of the church online and offline.

Even though COVID-19 is still with us in different variants and may be with us for the unforeseeable future in different waves, the focus of this research was on the church's missional response to the effects of lockdown levels 5 to 3, particularly level 5, the hard lockdown, where movement of people was heavily restricted. It is acknowledged that from levels 2 to 1, the church had freedom to do almost entirely whatever it needed, thus the responses and findings are those pertaining to the harder lockdown periods.

Another limitation of the study is that the church in South Africa is divided. There is the White church and the Black church, though there are some that are fully multiracial in their leadership and membership. There is also division between the rich church and poor church. The rich church has resources enabling it to respond quicker and more effectively, while the poor church may find it difficult to be agile. This research did not

investigate differing responses by each type of the church, but instead, the results and findings presented are aggregates of both types. The interview respondents came from all sides – white and black, and denominational and non-denominational churches. This is an area future research may investigate as practical recommendations proposed in this study may find varying levels of relevance and applicability between these church groups.

Based on the insights of this research, the following recommendations are made regarding the practical application of this study.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5.1 Ecumenical relationships

It is recommended for each local church to form relationships in forums where religious leaders from different denominations come together and work out issues in societies. It is through these ecumenical relationships that they can hold one another accountable and enforce existing laws of the land. If you give someone petrol to drink or spray that person with a pesticide, it is assault. If you claim to have raised a person from the dead, it is deception. Selling holy water for R1,000 a bottle its false advertising. The church should encourage and engage law enforcement agencies to apply existing laws to get rid of such criminality within the church's ranks.

6.5.2 Useful partnerships

In times of crisis, no congregation should operate on their own. Congregations are encouraged to form partnerships across denominations and religious affiliations, as well as work with existing community structures and local authorities such as ward councillors, local clinics, local police stations, and other NGOs in their localities. The idiom 'two heads are better than one' simply means it is easier for two people who help each other to solve a problem than it is for one person to solve a problem alone. This holds true for the church, especially in a crisis such as the COVID-19 lockdown.

That there are so many churches in South Africa (local churches, denominations, etc.) not speaking with one voice, and not driving a united

'missional' agenda, presents a challenge for the church. There is no single body representing all churches. Even structures like the SACC do not represent all churches in South Africa. As a result, churches do not approach government as a single unit with one voice; they are scattered, and governments generally do not take small numbers seriously. The church should strive for a more consolidated unity so that its engagement with government would yield better results. Unfortunately, the church has not been able to do this.

6.5.3 Skills audit (inside and outside church)

It is necessary for the church to have proper skills/talent pool databases containing information about persons, or a group of people, including their skills and potential roles they could play in case of a major disaster. This way, the church will not be found wanting when disasters strike, instead the church will have a pool of skilled and qualified personnel who have already indicated their willingness to assist whenever called. Such a list should be created in partnership with other churches and community leaders. When people in communities think of a church, they should not only think of a pastor and members, but that within the church there are economists, scientists, health professionals, and so on. This would enable the church to engage stakeholders, especially government, from a position of strength as it would have consulted with their doctors first to check what can be done in a particular life-threatening situation, or with business leaders around job creation regarding the high unemployment rate in South Africa, as some examples. Through the pooling of skills, the church will be able to determine with some accuracy what is it that in these ecumenical partnerships the church can do to generate hope amongst the people amid despair.

6.5.4 Indigent households' database

It is recommended that the church, in consultation with the local municipalities, conducts an indigent households' identification campaign in specific geographic areas where the church is physically present. Where such a list already exists at municipal level, it is important that the church keeps a copy of its own that it refreshes on a regular basis as new entrants are added or old ones deleted so that when the lockdown hits the country again (in future pandemics or disasters), the church already has a database of who the most vulnerable in the community are.

6.5.5 Training of pastors and the laity

As the church prepares its laity for the work of ministry, training programmes such as *ministering in the context of a pandemic*, or a major disaster, should be carefully considered. How does the church prepare the laity for such an assignment? Equally important are pastoral training programmes. They need to be redesigned to take cognisance of the current era of the 4IR. Programmes to be considered include:

- Ministering to millennials who may not want to attend church every Sunday morning – how do you make disciples through the Internet?
- Mission in the context of the 4IR when human-human interactions are replaced by human-machine interactions

6.5.6 Emergency response plan

The church was slow to react to the COVID-19 crisis. Generally, churches are not geared to think ahead, they only start acting when something goes wrong. The lesson learnt is that the church needs to be proactive, to be a kind of place where you have everything ready so that if there is a pandemic or a major disaster, the response is immediate at the click of a button. The Disaster Management Framework (DMF) below (Figure 6-1) is recommended by the researcher. The DMF is developed based on themes that emerged from the interviews conducted in Chapter 3, the capacity building recommendations in Chapter 4, and the recommendations summarised above in this closing chapter. The DMF proposes a three-phase approach any local or global church can adopt to respond better, quicker, and more efficiently to disasters, regardless of whether they are man-made or natural.

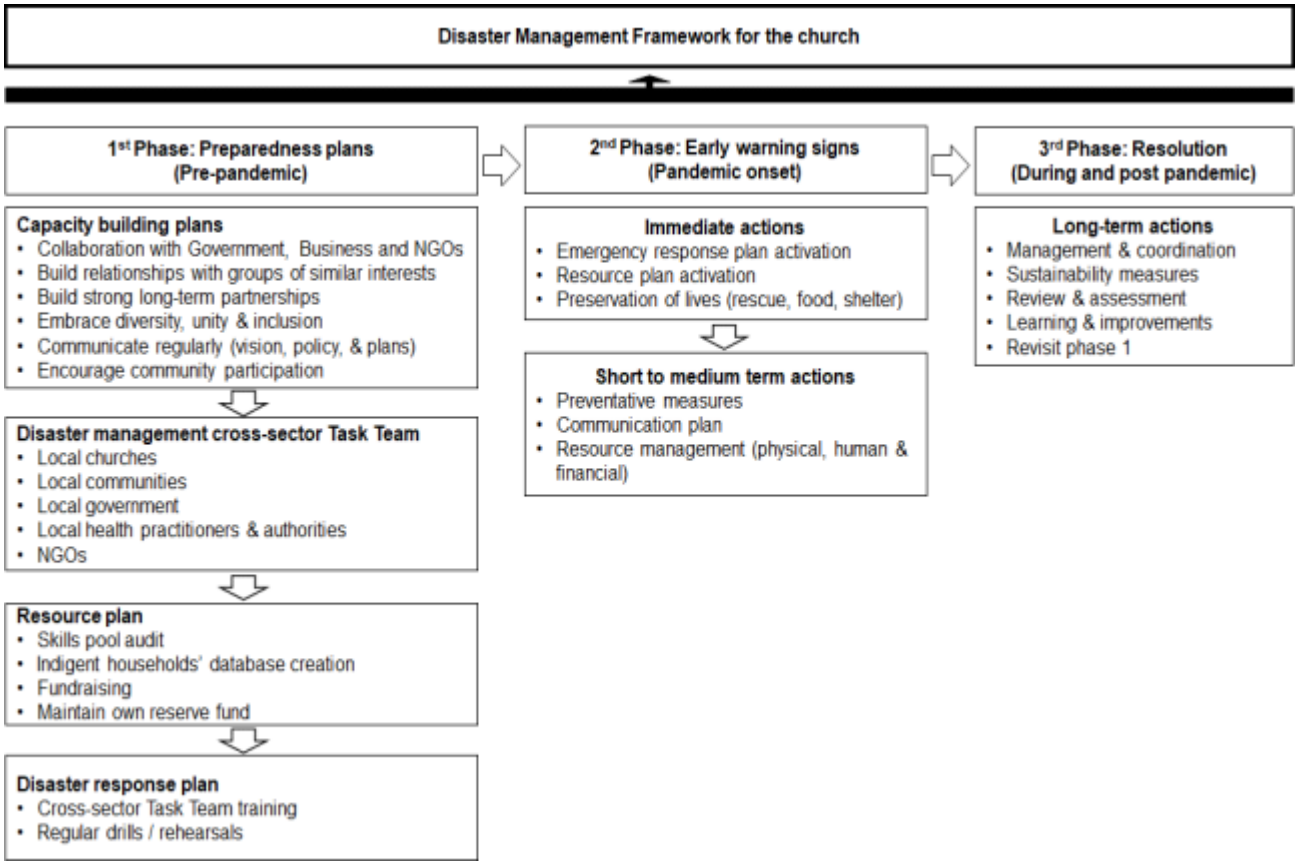

Figure 6-1: Disaster Management Framework (DMF) for the church

6.5.6.1 Proposed DMF response framework

The three phases of the DMF are described in more detail below:

Phase 1: Preparedness plans

The capacity building conversation that has been the subject since Chapter 4 kicks in here in Phase 1. This is to ensure that prior to any disaster happening (be it local or a national disaster), any church, local congregation or national church is not found wanting. There are four critical stages in Phase 1:

Stage 1 comprises capacity building plans, where the church embarks on building its own capacity and that of the local community, as was described in the Church Management Framework in Chapter 3. In this stage, the church ensures that it establishes relationships with government, businesses, local churches, NGOs and, most importantly, local community representatives, and that these relationships are

renewed at regular intervals to ensure that they are kept fresh and updated. Even where there are no disasters, the cross-sector team established to safeguard these relationships should meet at least every quarter to ensure that relationships are sustained.

Once relationships have been established and consensus reached on the common purpose, **Stage 2** kicks in. In this stage, each participating entity or structure nominates people to represent it in the local disaster management cross-sector team comprised of local community representatives, other local churches, local government/ward councilors, and local health authorities and law makers.

Next is **Stage 3** which ensures that the cross-sector task team is well resourced with adequate finances. Where this is not possible at this stage, the cross-sector team guarantees that there are plans in place or commitment from donors that should a disaster happen, they will provide material for task teams to execute their work. Not only is training of team members in disaster management important, but also training in managing finances and budgets, planning, and communication.

Stage 4 of Phase 1 is all about readiness. Disasters strike when no one expects them. Thus, regular rehearsals and refresher courses where necessary, and dry runs or mock practices should be done at least once or twice a year to ensure that the cross-sector team remains equipped and prepared.

Phase 2: Early warning signs

The two stages of Phase 2 in the framework kick in as soon as warning signs of a major disaster are detected.

Stage 1 is all about immediate actions, the preservation of life, and provision of essentials such as food and shelter.

Stage 2 is more long term, involving preventative measures, ongoing communication between the cross-sector team, affected communities, and funders/donors. Communities likely to be affected are identified, and the impact and severity of the disaster estimated even though this may be difficult to correctly predict upfront. Databases can be established on the projections from this exercise; this can be done in conjunction with government offices as they most likely already have a record of who is who in the local community. Regarding 'squatter camps' or informal settlements which do not have proper physical addresses and stand numbers, an estimate of the total population will help.

Phase 3: Resolution (during and post disaster)

Phase 3 kicks in post the disaster as communities return to normality. In this stage, a proper stocktake of what went well, what did not go so well, mistakes made, and gaps noted, are compiled as part of the disaster cross-sector team performance review. Corrective action is instituted, processes are improved, and we go back to Phase 1 where the new cycle repeats itself all over again. It is recommended that new faces be brought in with new ideas, but also to ensure that the wider population gets to play a part and that the initiative is not monopolised or seen to belong to one group. It is the researcher's view that this framework will go a long way to correct mistakes and omissions seen during the COVID-19 outbreak, whilst also strengthening the response mechanism of those churches that outperformed even government and NGOs in their handling of the pandemic situation.

The church was slow to react. Generally, churches are not geared to think ahead, they only start acting when something goes wrong. The lesson learnt is that the church needs to be proactive and the kind of place where you have everything ready, so that in the event of a pandemic outbreak or major disaster, the response is immediate – at the click of a button. The framework presented in Figure 6.1 is recommended by the researcher. The framework is developed based on themes that emerged from the interviews conducted in Chapter 3, the capacity building recommendations in Chapter 4, and the recommendations summarised above in this closing chapter.

Each stage of each phase is unpacked in more detail below:

Phase 1: Preparedness plans

- Capacity building plans
    - **Collaborate with Government, Businesses, and NGOs** – collaboration between individuals, groups, or organisations is very important because it reflects the very nature of the unity between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirt, and the call for us all to become one in the Holy Spirit. For Christians such unity is demonstrated through practical partnering with others inside and outside of the Christian faith without demonstrating discrimination or favouritism of any sort (Primuth & Kaspa 2019). Collaboration is a call for unity. Collaboration begins with a foundation of relationships, recognising that no one person or one entity can achieve what two or more can, as Halford Luccock cited by (Crean 2022:3) said: “No one can whistle a symphony; it takes a whole orchestra to play it”.
    - **Build relationships with groups of similar interests** – Jesus told His followers not to go out alone but in pairs to share the good news of God’s peace (Lk 10:1-2). Although Luke does not give reasons why Jesus sent them in pairs instead of sending them alone, it could be that, using the metaphor of the body of Christ once again, Jesus wanted them to work together, support each other, encourage one another when they encounter challenges, correct each other’s mistakes, have a relationship and learn to work in teams. Jesus knew that the mission cannot be accomplished by one person alone. Strong and healthy relationships build strong foundations for effective collaboration.
    - **Build strong long-term partnerships** – The devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic required that all sectors of society, government, business, the church, civil society, and individuals, work together in partnerships to alleviate the pain and suffering of those who have been on the receiving end of the pandemic. Partnership is also biblical – Ecclesiastes 4.9-12 speaks of two being better than one, and in Luke 10 Jesus sends disciples out in groups of two confirming the biblical justification of partnership. Working with partners lends to greater

credibility and broadens the scope of what projects and programmes can achieve as financial, human, and other resources are pooled together for the attainment of one common goal.

- **Embrace diversity, unity & inclusion** – for a church in mission, diversity – being the act of containing many distinct elements or qualities existing withing a group, place, or a specific setting – cannot be separated from inclusion, which is the act of including people that may otherwise be excluded, side-lined, or marginalised, so that they become or are made part of a group, place, or setting. Diversity and inclusion are two sides of the same coin.
- **Communicate regularly (vision, policy & plans)** – mission is contextual – an ecosystem. Understanding the context is governed by one's closeness to the context (are you here or over there?); one's reading of the context (assumptions, suppositions, perceptions and meaning forming); and one's perception of objects involved in the situation. Given the utmost importance of their messages, it is, therefore, imperative that churches develop plans for all communication, not just sermons. In this complex interplay between contexts, objects (instruments) and users (agents), contextual reality gaps arise from a lack of shared understanding, hence for the church the importance of structured and ongoing communication is key. A communication plan is a blueprint for how, when, and to whom specific information should be given. In addition, it outlines what means of communication will be used to disseminate information. If the church wants to have a voice, it must be clear and intentional in its communication. A strategic communication plan can help you define your audiences, clarify your communication goals, and maximise your outreach.
- **Encourage community participation** – The term 'community participation' entails active citizen involvement in projects to solve their own problems. It demands openness, transparency, clear communication, and unity. The consequence of this implication is that the church's mission should not be executed by the church for the community without their involvement. Instead, the church's mission

should be executed together with the community. The community needs to have a say in decision-making on matters affecting their lives, whether aid or not.

- Disaster management cross-sectional team
    - A multifunctional team brings together the expertise of leadership, project management, financial management, stewardship and fundraising, communication, technology savviness, and partners (local churches, local communities, local government, local health practitioners, current and potential donors, and other partners of strategic importance). The goal is to enable a comprehensive analysis and planning process and to effect readiness in a time of need. Rotation of multifunctional team members is important as it broadens the expertise available and helps avoid overloading certain team members whilst also avoiding complacency.

- Resource plan
    - **Skills pool audit** – the audit is meant to enable the church to identify not only who in their ranks has the skill, but also those willing to assume certain roles in emergency situations.
    - **Indigent households' database creation** – this is important so that when disasters strike, the church already has a database of who the most vulnerable in the community are.
    - **Fundraising** – fundraising is a specialised skill that should not be taken for granted. Part of fundraising includes the identification and solicitation of donors for a specific project/activity. Relationships need to be built and maintained even outside of any donations received such that in times of crises, the church can capitalise on already existing relationships. Thus, donor identification is something that should not wait for the disaster to happen before donors are identified or approached.
    - **Maintain own reserve fund** – The pandemic has underscored the importance of budgeting for a reserve fund and maintaining a reasonable cash reserve that is built over time. Churches depending entirely on

member contributions and tithing were found wanting during the COVID-19 lockdown period. It is therefore important that the church develops and sustains multiple streams of income.

- Disaster response plan
    - **Multifunctional team training** – the multifunctional team should be equipped with basic knowledge, including but not limited to understanding the patterns of settlement in the community, population demographics, long term history of the community, formal leaders (elected) and informal leaders (community activists, business leaders, etc.), the economic situation, community culture, and the social structure and prevailing culture. Such information is important in that it enables the church to develop programmes or response mechanisms that are aligned with the social structure and prevailing culture.
    - **Regular drills/rehearsals** – these drills ensure that the church is always prepared for emergency situations and that should emergencies happen, the response time is improved significantly as people (particularly members of the multi-sector team) already know what to do and how to do it.

Phase 2: Early warning signs

- Immediate actions
- Resource activation – the primary focus is the preservation of lives in the form of rescue efforts, and or the provision of food, water, shelter, and sanitation
- Short-term actions
- Preventative measures that include regular and targeted communication, preventative measures in the case of epidemics, and resource management (physical, human, and financial)

Phase 3: Resolution

- Long-term actions

  These would be, but are not limited to, sustainability measures, as well as management and coordination of the response plan. In the end, assessment

and review of the response plan would be necessary to ensure continuous improvement. It might also be necessary to introduce new members in the multifunctional team to improve team effectiveness and eliminate fatigue that might have occurred.

All the recommendations presented above arise from the findings and analysis of the data collected during the literature review and interviews. The recommendations are directed at all levels of the church in South Africa, be it the local congregations, the local independent church, or the denomination/s. While they are mainly directed at the church, these recommendations may also be applied by NGOs to build up their capacity for the next pandemic or major disaster whenever and wherever it happens.

6.6 IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Available research on COVID-19 in general, and how it has impacted the church's ministry, especially Sunday assembly services, and the new trends that have emerged such as virtual services, abound. However, none so far have investigated the presence of the church as felt and experienced by those who are witnessed to, the destitute and suffering majority, during the pandemic lockdown periods. This is an area that missiologists and theologians could investigate further with a view to preparing the church for future lockdowns considering the 4IR that is currently taking place and the future of the church online and offline. It is therefore recommended that the following areas be considered for further research:

- Ministering in the context of a pandemic
- Ministering to millennials who may not want to attend church every Sunday morning – how do you make disciples through the Internet?
- Mission in the context of the 4IR when human-human relationships are replaced by human-machine relationships

Some concluding remarks follow next to bring this study to a close.

6.7 FINAL CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this research, COVID-19 was still ongoing although the infection rates had dropped significantly, and the strength of the virus had weakened due to natural immunity of those previously infected but also as a result of an aggressive vaccination drive by the government. At the conclusion of the study, South Africa had reported 3,9 million cases; 3,8 million recoveries; and 100 000 deaths. The daily infection rate was hovering at around one thousand cases. The national state of disaster, which had been in place since the onset of the outbreak of the virus (March 2020), was terminated in June 2022. Key lessons learnt are all about preparedness, swift action and collaboration with others in government, business, and civil society. Such collaboration should happen cross-denominationally and across different religious communities.

On the 1st of January 2022 in his New Year's wishes to the world, Pope Francis (2022:para 3) expressed:

> 'We are still living in uncertain and difficult times due to the pandemic' … 'Many are frightened about the future and burdened by social problems, personal problems, dangers stemming from the ecological crisis, injustices and by global economic imbalances'.

This study has therefore responded the crisis and endeavoured to prepare the church for future pandemics and similar catastrophic events, thereby filling the knowledge gap identified earlier in the thesis. The hoped-for outcome of this study is that the insights contained herein, and recommendations proposed, will inform the future practices of the church in South Africa, and facilitate the presence of mission in local communities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Theology and Religion

Research Office
Mrs Daleen Kotzé

NAME:	Mr TE Mkhize
STUDENT NUMBER:	29500096
COURSE:	Doctoral
DATE:	26 March 2021
APPLICATION NUMBER:	T012/21

This letter serves as confirmation that the research proposal of this student was evaluated by:

1) **The Research committee**: This applies to all research proposals
2) **The Research Ethics committee**: This applies only to research that includes people as sources of information

You are hereby notified that your research proposal (including ethical clearance where it is applicable) is approved.

Prof E van Eck
Chairperson: Research committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

Dr T van Wyk
Chairperson: Research Ethics committee: Faculty of Theology and Religion

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Department: Practical Theology & Mission Studies

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Title of the Study:
Mission as 'being with' in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa

Researcher:
The research is conducted by Thabani Mkhize, a PhD student at the University of Pretoria
Email: thabaniemkhize@telkomsa.net

You are hereby cordially invited to participate in an academic research study due to your experience and knowledge in the research area, namely Mission studies. You are requested to read and sign this document before the start of the study.

The purpose of the study is to ascertain the impact the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has/has had on the church's mission, in other words, what mission as being with mean during a pandemic that is accompanied by the government-mandated lockdown. The crucial area this research seeks to explore are the lessons from the COVID-19 lockdown that will prepare the church for future pandemics scientists say are inevitable. The results of the study may be published in an academic journal. You will be provided with a summary of the study's findings on request. No participants' names will be used in the final publication.

The study will be conducted over a period of 2 years and its projected date of completion is August 2022. The study needs to be seen in the context of the basic obligations said to be inherent in the Christian tradition 'to visit the sick, to console the mourners, to attend to the dead, to dower the bride, to escort one's guests to afford them support in all their necessities' (Maimonides in Loewenthal, 1997:173). Interviews will be face-to-face, telephonic, or video call (such as zoom) depending on your availability and preference. All COVID-19 safety guidelines will be adhered to. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed immediately thereafter. Interviews will be conducted in English. During the interview, you will be requested to respond to the questions which will be presented to you by the researcher.

Your participation in this study is important. You may, however, choose not to participate, and you may also stop participating at any time without stating any reasons and without any negative consequences. You may contact the researcher at any time to clarify any issues pertaining to this research.

All information will be kept confidential, and you and your organisation will be kept anonymous. Data gathered is only for the purpose of completing a thesis towards the

degree PhD at the University of Pretoria. The relevant data will be destroyed, should you choose to withdraw.

WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature of this research.
I understand that I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the research. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions.

Respondent
Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher
Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Contact number of the Researcher: **063 249 0086**

E-mail address of the Researcher: **thabaniemkhize@telkomsa.net**