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The challenge of pastoral succession in African independent Pentecostal churches

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Succession is particularly a challenge in African independent Pentecostal churches (AIPCs), because unlike traditional churches, they do not have a rotation system, which transfers ministers from one congregation to the next after a specified period. AIPCs refer to churches that are led by Africans, for Africans, in Africa. Pastors in AIPCs are mostly founders or long-term serving pastors. The only time they will be succeeded is when they retire, die or are removed because of a moral failure or incompetence. Succession by death is most prominent in independent churches, especially in the case of founders. Most founders in AIPCs do not retire even if they fall sick or fall into moral sin; they remain at the helm of the church until their last breath. This makes succession difficult especially after the death of the founder or long-term serving pastor, as a result, succession becomes contentious and ends up tarnishing the image of the congregation when not properly managed. The aim of this article is to highlight the challenges of succession in AIPCs and make recommendations that can help them find solutions to these challenges. Most African independent churches (AICs) in the South African context fall within a category of churches that Anderson calls 'African initiated Churches (AICs)' and the 'Newer Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (NPCs)'. This article will be focusing on those AICs who are Pentecostal in nature, including NPCs. An interpretive pastoral care methodology of describing, interpreting, normative formation and practical application is proposed for this article.

Contribution: This article's contribution is to propose to African independent Pentecostal churches (AIPCs) a pastoral succession model that will enhance a smooth transition from a predecessor to a successor. The model will also benefit other church groups in their pastoral successions, particularly when using the proposed pastoral care approach for practical ministry.

Keywords: Succession; Founder; Long-term serving pastor; Principal leader; Predecessor; Successor; Congregation; African independent Pentecostal churches.

Introduction

Succession is a challenge in any organisation or group whether it is religious or secular. The challenge of succession becomes bigger when the leader is a founder or serving a long term, in an organisation. 'When experienced people leave organisations, they take with them not only the capacity to do the work but also the accumulated wisdom they have acquired' (Rothwell 2005:xviii).

Warren Bird's research, published in *Outreach Magazine*, indicates that 82% of mega churches globally (China, Brazil, Singapore, Korea, United Kingdom and Nigeria), within independent Pentecostal churches, have experienced growth under their current pastoral leaders who have not yet been succeeded (Bird 2016; cf. Bird 2010).

This is also true in the Southern African context where one of the mega-churches amongst African independent Pentecostal churches (AIPCs), called Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), also known as Forward in Faith (FIF), is led by Pastor Ezekiel Guti, who has never been succeeded. Pastor Guti was born in 1923 but he is still an active pastor of FIF (Biri 2014). Another such mega-church amongst NPCs, called Grace Bible church, is led by Bishop Mosa Sono since 1983. The church has experienced a stupendous growth under his leadership and he has never been succeeded. All these churches will have to go through their first major succession. It remains to be seen how these transitions will go. Unfortunately, history has had a negative report of most successions carried out so far within independent Pentecostal churches.

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The battle for leadership succession in South Africa amongst African independent churches (AICs) has been featuring in the public domain in recent years. Anderson notes that there are two types of AICs. There are those AICs who are Pentecostal in expression whilst others are not. The former he names Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (NPCs), whilst the latter he names AICs (Anderson 2002:167). Their independence from any Euro-Western control or oversight is a common feature of the two. They are 'self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting' (Anderson 2002:170). Although some NPCs are influenced by Euro-Western, Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, they remain independent of them (Anderson 2002:169; Asamoah-Gyadu 2020:33; Meyer 2004:413).

Asamoah-Gyadu further elucidates that the acronym AIC can also mean African independent, instituted or initiated churches. These terms are used interchangeably in many instances when referring to churches that have been initiated by Africans, for Africans, in Africa, whether they are indigenous or independent. The NPCs, also known as neo-Pentecostals, are different from classical Pentecostals who have an origin that involved missionaries (Asamoah-Gyadu 2020:33).

Methodology

It is in the light of the above discussion that an empirical research was conducted through interviewing 33 individuals who were purposively chosen from founders, long-term serving pastors, successors and congregants of AIPCs. This research was conducted in Buffalo city in the Eastern Cape.

A qualitative genre on grounded theory was used to process the data collected where eight themes emerged. These are financial security, loss of influence and authority, mistrust of successor, no succession plan, no oversight structure, sudden changes, resistance from the congregation and factions.

The interpretive pastoral care theory of Osmer (2008) was used to describe empirically, interpret wisely, discern the normative and give pragmatic application to the challenges posed by pastoral succession in AIPCs.

Case studies on pastoral succession

The following case studies are a typical example of the process of succession in AICs, whether they are Pentecostal or non-Pentecostal.

On 12 April 2016, a South African national newspaper called *Sowetan LIVE* reported a case of a contentious succession, in an AIC, named, International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC). The battle for succession came as a result of the death of its long serving leader Glayton Modise, who died on 09 February 2016. The legal battle for succession was between Modise's biological son and the church executive committee since 2016. In 2019, the final verdict by the court of law favoured the church executive and declared Michael Sandlana as the new leader of IPHC. The battle over the estate of Glayton Modise still unresolved to date. The estate worth almost R400 million must be shared amongst his first legal wife and children. Sandlana is now making a claim that he is also a biological son of the deceased leader (Mothombeni 2019). Unfortunately, the conflict still ensues at the time of writing this article, as reported by *News24* on 12 July 2020, where a hostage situation by allegedly one of the factions led to the death of five people at the church headquarters in Zuurbekom (Maphanga 2020).

Another contentious case on pastoral succession is an AIC called the Nazarite Baptist Church, also known as the Shembe Church, named after its founder Isaiah Shembe (1867–1935), was reported by a national newspaper called the *Daily News* on 27 November 2017. The succession battles started in 2011 after the death of their long-serving leader Vimbeni Shembe on 28 March 2011. The succession battle that dragged from 2011 until 2016 was between Mduduzi Shembe the son of Vimbeni Shembe and Vela Shembe the cousin of the deceased. Although the verdict given by Judge President Achmat Jappie was in favour of Vela Shembe as the rightful successor, Mduduzi's lawyers had intentions to appeal. There are several factions within the Shembe church that came as a result of succession battles. The biggest of these factions are the one led by Mduduzi Shembe, named Thembezinhle and also the one that was led by the deceased, Vela Shembe, named Ebuhleni. Vela Shembe died on 24 November 2017, a year after winning the case for the leadership position of the church. On 23 June 2020, the *Star* news reported that Mduduzi Shembe lodged an appeal to the constitutional court to repeal the judgement that legitimises Vela Shembe as the rightful successor (Nkosi 2020). This battle for succession has now been continuing for 9 years since 2011. There are numerous examples of such cases of AICs, which do not make the news reports because of lack of prominence as the two cases discussed above. One such case is the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) that also had a challenge of succession after the death of Engenas Lekganyane, the founder of ZCC, who died in 1948. His two sons Edward and Joseph took over the church, out of which two churches were formed in 1949 because they both claimed succession. Joseph called his church St. Engenas ZCC whilst the majority of the members stayed with Edward (Chandomba 2010:50–61). These case studies show how contentious successions in AICs can become such that they may lead to protracted legal battles. This leaves the image of the congregation tarnished because of divisions, factions, splinter groups and even schisms that happen during succession.

Definition of succession

Wesse and Crabtree in their book, *The Elephant in the room*, define succession as the ability for the church or institution to move to the next phase of development, led by a new leader who has the skill to manage the new season and its losses. It is an excellent management of change that does not leave the church bruised and weak (Wesse & Crabtree 2004:6, 13, 41). In AIPCs, successions never get to move smoothly to the next phase of development. The new leader does not have the opportunity to show the skill to manage the transition because of the time spent fighting for recognition and acceptance.

Another word that is used interchangeably with succession is 'transition'. Bridges and Bridges (2016), in their book, *Managing Transition*, define transition as a process that leads to change. They further clarify that there is a difference between change and transition. Change is the by-product of a transition. It is the result of an outcome that is brought about by a transition. Whilst change is mechanical, transition is emotional. It is possible for the structure of the organisation to have a cosmetic change, but still not be able to transition from the old to the new. In transitions, the people's emotional and mental state have not yet moved from the past to the envisaged future (Bridges & Bridges 2016:6–7). The latter is true of most AIPCs who experience change during succession, but find it difficult to transition because of attachment to the past. This is why Mead (2005:60) defines transition as a transformation process or journey, which begins from the moment the departure of the incumbent pastor is announced, to long after the new pastor has been installed. Watkins further develops Mead's (2005:15) definition by stating that this transformation is not possible without 'all parties being active participants in this journey'. Homer gives more details to the latter on who are the parties involved in the succession. He calls them 'stakeholders' and they are the congregation, the governing board, the predecessor, the successor and their families. All stakeholders must understand that transitions are 'unavoidable and are also sometimes unpredictable' (Homer 2016:4). Each stakeholder is affected by the transition and must ensure that they play their role in contributing towards a smooth transition. This article will focus on three stakeholders, namely the predecessor, the congregation and the successor as the main role players before, during and after the succession.

Pre-succession challenges

In pre-succession, the role player is the founder or long-term serving pastor who needs to ensure that necessary preparations are put in place for the succession to be smooth. The terms, founder and long-term serving pastor, will be used interchangeably in this article. This is because both have made a substantial investment in the congregation they are leading. Founders will always have a higher investment as compared with long-term serving pastors by virtue of planting the first congregation. There are, however, cases where long-term serving pastors have made greater investments emotionally, financially, spiritually and intellectually than the founders. They did this to advance the vision of the founder who perhaps died or exited ministry at the early stages of the church. The latter is the case with the current General overseer of the Redeemed Church of God (RCCG), Bishop EA Adeboye. Redeemed Church of God is an independent mega church based in Nigeria with 40 000 branches all over the world. In Bishop Adeboye's website, it states that he joined the church in 1973 under the founder, Reverend Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi, who ordained him as one of his pastors in 1977. In 1981, after the death of Reverend Akindayomi, Adeboye was handed over the baton to be the second general overseer. In his time, the church has had a stupendous growth of 12 million members attending their popular 'Holy Spirit conversion'. At the writing of this article, he is still the current general overseer of the church at the age of 78. A similar example in South Africa is Bishop Mosa Sono of Grace Bible church (Sono 2020). Their website indicates that the church was planted in the early 1980s by Andrae' and Edana Knoetze who were serving under Pastor Ray McCauley of Rhema bible church. The church was handed over to Bishop Mosa Sono in 1983 and he is currently still the senior Pastor and presiding Bishop of the church. The church has also seen amazing growth from humble beginnings of 149 members to well over 10 000 members with several branches all over the country. Both the founder and the long-term serving pastor are principal leaders of the church they are serving. The term, principal leader, will be used in this article to refer to both founders and long-term serving pastors. Findings reveal that principal leaders struggle with the concept of succession and act in denial to the reality that one day they will have to exit ministry, willingly or unwillingly. The following are some of the reasons why principal leaders struggle with succession.

Findings

Financial security

All the principal leaders (100%) interviewed indicated that they were concerned about forfeiting the financial security and benefits that they enjoyed. Although they did not deny the need of succession, they were more concerned about its economic implications for them and their families. Some indicated that they invested their family's resources to ensure that the church was established during the pioneering stage. The latter is what has led them to entertain the possibility of a family dynasty when it comes to succession. This is to ensure that the family resources invested in the church stay within the family. There seems to be a very thin line between ownership and stewardship in doing ministry amongst independent churches.

Vanderbloemen and Bird agree with these findings that the sacrifices that principal leaders made over the years tend to give them an entitlement to the privileges and financial perks the ministry gives them. These material comforts make it difficult for them to prepare for succession, in fear of losing them to the successors (Vanderbloemen & Bird 2014:82).

Loss of influence

Most principal leaders (93.75%) found it hard to imagine a time when they will have no influence on a church that they served the greater part of their lives. They fear to lose the influence and authority they have exercised over all the different facets of the church. All they have known about ministry has been experienced when they were at the helm of the church. The latter is the perspective through which the founders process succession in their minds. This is also what makes them reluctant to entertain succession especially if the successor has not been within the congregation but is an

outsider. An anticipated sense of loss overwhelms principal leaders who have blended their identity with church work. Mitchell and Anderson (1983:39) call this an intrapsychic loss, where an individual loses an image of self because their identity is interwoven in the ministry work.

Mistrust of successor

A high percentage of principal leaders (87.7%) expressed a great distrust of their successors. They were worried that the successor will change the vision and direction of the church. They felt that a successor will not respect their vision, as a result, will most likely change the vision, so as to assert their own authority. Hamman agrees with Mitchell and Anderson regarding this experience of intrapsychic loss by principal leaders. They (Mitchell & Anderson 2005:54) anticipated that the church will abandon their plans, killing their dreams, for a future envisaged by the successor. These pre-succession challenges make it difficult for principal leaders to prepare for succession. We will now turn to the challenges experienced during succession.

Challenges during succession

The role player during this time is the congregation because the principal leader is no more in the picture and the successor has not yet started operating. The congregation finds itself in a difficult position of the sudden absence of their pastor. This poses a challenge to the congregation of having to deal with the shock of the absence of their leader whilst at the same time they have to navigate and manage a new future. The following are the challenges that congregations faced during succession.

No succession plan

All the congregants (100%) interviewed confirmed a lack of a succession plan in their respective congregations. The lack of a succession plan makes it difficult for the congregation to be conclusive on who should be leading the church during this period. It is at this stage where individuals begin to claim successorship. These individuals recruit church members, which results in factions. The contest can be so fierce amongst these factions such that it escalates to a legal battle. These legal battles can be even amongst family members in a family dynasty system.

No oversight structure

A lack of an oversight structure over the congregation is a prominent feature (95%) in independent churches. Although some do have an oversight structure, they have a ceremonial relationship where the oversight structure is recognised by the congregation but does not have the authority to arbitrate. Those oversight structures that have the authority to arbitrate (2%) tend to over-reach their exercise of authority because of a lack of clear demarcated lines of authority. The latter is what makes most principal leaders uncomfortable with having an oversight structure. Principal leaders who are church planters have created an oversight structure for the congregations under their care, where they sit as permanent chairpersons. The problem with the latter is that the oversight structure has no place where it accounts and will still experience its challenges during succession. Long (2001:147) confirms that 'independent groups…may or may not be accountable to any ecclesiastical body other than the local flock which attends their services…'.

Post-succession challenges

The main role player at this time is the successor. The principal leader is no longer available and the congregation is looking to the new leader to show them the direction they must take. The following are the challenges that the successor faces, post succession.

Sudden changes

Most successors (80%) indicated that they did not take the time to understand what was going on during the time of the predecessor but they started to introduce the plans they had for the congregation. They thought that this will help the congregation move forward and not be stuck in the past. They were also trying to show the congregation that they are capable and competent as the predecessor. Watkins warns against this tendency of successors trying too hard and too early to implement their vision because of a pressure to make their mark in the new organisation. This could alienate them from everyone instead of drawing them closer. It is important for them, rather, to take time to firstly learn about the organisation, to ascertain the emotional state of the congregation before implementing any new plans (Watkins 2013:5,6).

Resistance from the congregation

All successors expressed shock when they were met with resistance from the congregation. They could not understand why is it that the congregation was not in full support of all their creative and innovative ideas. There were those in the congregation who were sympathetic towards them but there were also others who were not. They later learnt that those who were resistant had their own choice candidates for succession. Others who were resistant were still loyal to the past. They were loyal to the methods and style of the predecessor. They were suspicious of the successor's intentions as though the successor had come to remove the ancient landmarks that shaped and groomed the congregation over the years. Wesse and Crabtree state that the successors must allow the congregation to carry a bit of the past that they treasured and the new that they desire to perfect. The best way for the successor to accomplish this is to listen and celebrate the achievements of the predecessors as narrated by the congregation. This will settle the fears that the congregation had about the successors (Wesse & Crabtree 2004:17,18).

Factions

Most successors (80%) experienced the unfortunate development of factions in the church, post-succession. Some of these factions were already in existence before the

successor assumed office. The absence of a succession plan precipitated factions in the congregation. When the successor finally took charge, the situation had already been contaminated by these factions. If the successor was from a specific faction, the contestation continued even post-succession. A battle for succession can be so severe that it leads to lawsuits, contesting the legitimacy of the successor. These battles can prolong for several years as demonstrated by the case studies above. Factions can easily lead to schisms when there is no truce. The image of the church suffers greatly during these battles. The congregation can end up losing membership and finances that could have helped in advancing the mission of the church.

One of the root causes for such conflicts in AIPCs is the grief that they are experiencing because of the losses they have suffered because of succession. Hamman (2005) mentioned losses that organisations undergo, which are relationship loss, intrapsychic loss, material loss, systemic loss and role loss. These losses, if not mourned, can keep the organisation in a perpetual state of grief. He further proposes that organisations must learn to do the work of mourning through a process of engaging in a conversation about their losses that will bring catharsis. These conversations will enable the congregation to worship together in communion, which will strengthen their compassion for each other and for the communities they are called to serve.

The process before, during and post-succession, involving the principal leader, the congregation and the successor consecutively, poses a challenge to pastoral succession. We will now explore a methodology that will help us journey with these three stakeholders in responding to the challenges that transpired in succession.

Pastoral care methodology

Osmer (2008) in his book, *Practical Theology: An introduction*, proposes four tasks that practical theologians can use in engaging with the challenges of the ministry. These tasks will assist in describing empirically, interpret wisely, discern the normative and give pragmatic application to the challenges posed in pastoral ministry.

Empirical description implies listening to the stakeholders who are involved and affected by the process of pastoral succession in order to ascertain what is really happening during this process. It is not enough just to ascertain what is happening but there is a need to interpret wisely why it is happening. Literature on succession guides us on the task of normative discernment so as to understand what should be happening. Finally, when all the facts have been gathered and analysed, there has to be a pragmatic application in order to give guidance to the community of faith and its leadership on how to handle pastoral successions. We will now apply Osmer's pastoral care methodology on the challenges faced by the principal leaders, the congregation and successors consecutively.

Principal leader

The first stakeholder in the process of transition is the principal leader. There were three areas that emerged as challenges of principal leaders when it comes to succession. These are financial security, loss of influence and mistrust of successor.

Financial security

The challenges stated above, on financial security, have described the empirical information we needed, in order to ascertain what is going on in pastoral succession. Principal leaders have expressed their fears of losing their material pecks, which they have been enjoying all along. They are particularly concerned about the well-being of their families after their death. Some of the questions they have are whether the church will be able to care for their families in their absence as they did when they were still alive? Can the church afford to cater for two families, theirs and their successors?

In order to resolve the above concerns, Vanderbloemen and Bird (2014) propose that, normatively, principal leaders must set a retirement date when they will be exiting the ministry. Retirement must be clearly on the cards with clear timelines, so that everyone affected may be prepared. The leadership team must ensure that the principal leader is looked after even after retirement. Principal leaders must have a post-exit plan that clearly stipulates what they intend to do after they exit their pastorate. If they do not indicate their post-exit plan, they are likely to linger around and may be tempted to interfere with the successor's responsibility.

In the case of unexpected departures, which are typical in independent churches, there must be an emergency plan that will clearly document what must take place in the case of a sudden termination of service. This plan must cover all the practical needs of the pastor's family, for example insurances for disability, death or sudden termination. There must also be a ministry plan that details who will take over the responsibilities of the ministry once the principal leader is incapacitated and for how long a period before the formal successor is appointed (Vanderbloemen & Bird 2014:33–35).

Succession in independent churches is most likely to follow unexpected departures than expected ones. An emergency exit-plan will, therefore, be a better option than a retirement plan. The exit-plan will have to include a detailed financial security plan for the family in the absence of the principal leader.

Starting a conversation on succession is one pragmatic application that can help resolve succession problems. In AIPCs, however, it is not easy for the subject of succession to be discussed unless it is initiated by the principal leader. Discussion about succession whilst the principal leader is still alive is taken as a bad omen, especially if the discussion is initiated by anyone else other than the principal leader.

Mwenje (2016:8,9) confirms the latter in her empirical research amongst independent Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, where most participants indicated that it is actually considered disrespectful at best and a taboo at worst, to speak about succession whilst the principal leader was still alive. It is, therefore, best for the principal leader to start the conversation of succession where the leadership will listen to the concerns their leader has on financial security after succession and all other matters relating to succession.

Loss of influence

As already stated above how principal leaders were concerned about losing their influence in the church during succession. They do not want their works and service towards the church to be forgotten. They perceive succession, therefore, as a threat to their legacy.

What should be happening is that the principal leader must identify leaders in the congregation who can be trained to espouse their values of the ministry. This equipping of other leaders ensures that the principal leader remains a significant influencer in the congregation. The trained leaders will ensure that the legacy of the principal leader is preserved. Vanderbloemen and Bird (2014) also confirm this apprenticeship approach that:

> [*P*]eople who are skilled with leadership capacity [must be identified] to help the leader make governance decisions. This is done so that there could be other people who are conversant with the reigns of leadership in case of the pastor's sudden departure. (p. 35)

Practically, the principal leaders can write a book, a study guide or produce a training manual, which clearly stipulates their values and ethos of ministry. This will be taught to those who are being trained at various levels of leadership. This literature can, at least, be adopted as part of the official training manual of the congregation. At best, the literature can even shape the liturgy of the church. Furthermore, a pre-requisite can be set for the successor to study the precepts set out in the literature written by the principal leader and ensure that they are incorporated in the church growth plan, post-succession. The latter will guarantee that the influence and authority of the principal leader does not diminish.

Mistrust of successor

The findings above describe the mistrust principal leaders have on their successors' capability to maintain and grow the work of the ministry. They doubt the motives of the successor whether they are really committed to the work or they are just after the benefits or perks that come with succession.

What should be happening is that principal leaders must realise that 'every pastor is an interim pastor' (Vanderbloemen & Bird 2014:9). Chand and Bonner (2008) suggest that principal leaders must appreciate that organisations are like the human body with various systems that make the body to function including the reproductive system. The principal leader must build an innate culture of reproducing leaders in the church. These leaders must be capable of filling any position in the church, in order to ensure continuity. A culture of reproducing leaders follows four progressive steps, called the inward, outward, upward and onward process. The inward step is where the principal leader drives the vision as a pioneer. The outward step is where the principal leader starts involving those who are close, like family and church leadership teams to help drive the vision. The upward step is when the leader and team invest time praying for the vision. The onward and final step is when the principal leader intentionally raises the next generation that will take charge of the church in preparation for the future. The latter is where potential successors can be found (Chand & Bonner 2008:9–11).

The pragmatic application of building trust between the predecessor and the successor is possible through a process of grooming and mentoring done by the principal leader. In order for grooming and mentoring to happen, the successor must be identified. Most principal leaders have indicated their reluctance to identify a successor, in fear of the division it can cause in the church because of unfulfilled expectations by those who may have a different candidate in mind. Others fear that identifying the successor can cause the successor to either behave arrogantly as one who has entitlement or to be fearful and intimidated by the size of the responsibility. Others shared how those they thought could succeed them disappointed them by the way they behaved, morally and administratively. These fears caused the principal leaders to be reluctant to identify a successor.

It is advisable, therefore, that principal leaders must groom not one but several leaders in the church as potential successors without declaring it to them or making any promises. This exercise will give them the opportunity to observe how these protégés behave over time, to know their strengths and weaknesses, so as to make an informed decision. Ultimately, one of the protégés will be identified as the successor from a pool of others. When the identification has been done, the process of grooming and mentoring the successor will begin. We will now turn to the congregation as one of the stakeholders in pastoral transitions.

Congregation

The congregation is the second stakeholder in the process of succession. There were two areas that emerged as challenges of congregations in independent churches when it comes to succession. These are no succession plan and no oversight structure. We will discuss both challenges, using Osmer's pastoral care methodology to find out what is happening with congregations during transition, why it is happening, what should be happening and what practical measures can be implemented?

No succession plan

As discussed above, the findings reveal that congregations find themselves unable to navigate this critical time of

transition because of the absence of a plan that should be guiding the process. Russell and Bucher (2010:50) confirm that very few churches are involved in planning for a transition before the inevitable departure of the incumbent leader happens. It is, therefore, important to find out what is it that causes the congregation not to have a succession plan? The answer to this question has already been discussed above that principal leaders are not keen to initiate a process of writing a succession plan.

Normatively, scholars agree that there is no 'one size fits all' in pastoral successions but there are general principles that can be followed in order to make succession manageable (Chand & Bonner 2008:25; Ozier & Griffith 2016:8; Vanderbloemen & Bird 2014:71). The plan and details of succession must be tailored to suit each situation as it occurs. The same way that one should have a plan for their family's well-being in case of death or incapacitation, there should also be a plan for the well-being of the congregation. 'The transition plan should have a clear set of actions with accountability, timelines and budget' (Wesse & Crabtree 2004:23).

Wesse and Crabtree (2004) suggest a pragmatic strategy that can be incorporated in a succession plan. The first element is to put in place a safety process that will protect the emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of the congregation especially in times of sudden death. The latter can be done by outsourcing counsellors that can give therapeutic services to help the congregation heal from their loss. The second element is to choose a person or persons who will be in charge of the direction of events during the crisis period. The third element is to ensure the continuity of service and the functionality of the congregation. Resource people must be chosen who will serve the congregation in preaching and conducting all other worship and sacramental requirements necessary to help the congregation cope in their time of loss. If the principal leader was also hands on in administration, then all his administrative responsibilities must be given to another who will shoulder that responsibility as an interim strategy, until the church is ready to receive their new pastor. The fourth element is the appointment of a communication manager who understands the culture of the congregation and its policies. The communication manager will be the one in charge of communicating to the staff, lay leaders, congregation, pastors in the area, friends of the church, media and attend to all other communication needs. All these plans must be carried out prior to the succession so that there is broad consultation and understanding of what must happen especially during an emergency succession (Wesse & Crabtree 2004:188–192).

Vanderbloemen and Bird (2014) add that in the case of an expected non-emergency succession, which is very unlikely in independent churches, the emergency plan will form the basis to formulate that plan. Expected successions will always have a few additions relevant to a long-term preparation that will guide on who will constitute a search team, or if there will be a need to outsource a professional search firm (Vanderbloemen & Bird 2014:34). The latter is advisable in the case of churches that need a third party to assist them with the process of transition.

No oversight structure

We have already established in the findings above that the majority of independent churches do not have an oversight structure. This is in essence what makes them to be classified as independent. Why is it that independent churches do not have an oversight body? This question was also partly addressed in the findings above, which shows a lack of a clearly stipulated framework on power relations between the congregation and its oversight. Principal leaders are generally not comfortable with accounting to an outside body. They state that they are accountable to God because he is the one who called them and not an organisation. This position is also upheld by most independent churches.

Normatively, independent churches must be accountable somewhere for protection from doctrinal and ministry praxis errors. Hocken (2009) discusses how some independent churches who are of the Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition, form accountability networks. They identify one particular principal leader whom they recognise as having an apostolic ministry and align with that leader. This alignment leads to a network where more congregations join together in fellowship. Networking is a non-institutional collaboration of like-minded churches led by an unelected principal leader. Some networks are structured with affiliation fees and regular contact session, whilst others are very informal, meeting once or twice a year but have a common purpose. Most of these networks are an alternative to denominationalism, to which most independent churches do not subscribe (Hocken 2009:36–39).

A practical application to resolving this challenge of a lack of an oversight structure is for principal leaders of independent churches to meet together and formulate networks that have the ability to mediate and arbitrate. Seeing that there are various types of independent churches with various styles and philosophy of ministry, the networks formed will be on the basis of similarity of values, ethos and style. It is in these networks that workshops on how to prepare for successions will be taught so that their principal leaders can be equipped in dealing with the challenges that succession presents.

Successor

Successors are the third stakeholders that participated in the empirical research concerning succession. The challenges that emerged from successors were sudden changes, resistance from the congregation and development of factions. We will discuss these challenges using Osmer's pastoral care methodology to find out what is happening with successors in transition, why it is happening, what should be happening and what practical measures can be implemented?

Sudden changes

The findings above indicate that most successors began by implementing immediate changes when they started serving in their new office. The reasons for the latter were also provided.

Watkins (2013) details the normative way that successors must implement when they begin their duties. He states that successors must avoid the temptation of providing solutions to every problem rather than asking the questions and listening for solutions from the team and colleagues. It is important for them to firstly master the intricate cultural and political aspects of their new role, which require them to invest in strategic relationships within the organisation. Most successors tend to focus their energy on mastering the technical aspects of the operations in the organisation, as a result, set unrealistic, unachievable goals, consequently setting them up for failure. Successors must also avoid trying to do everything all at once, rather, they must focus on one thing at a time and channel their resources to achieve that one victory, than to spread themselves too thin and never get to reach any significant achievement (Watkins 2013:5, 6).

Practically, there has to be a training that all pastors should undergo to educate themselves on succession. When this is done during ministry training, it will guarantee that each pastor is informed on the required etiquette when it comes to succession. This will eliminate the mistakes successors do during their time of service in ministry and it will also equip predecessors when they train their protégés on succession.

Resistance from the congregation

The research revealed that all successors were resisted in different measures when they started their service in the congregation and reasons for this were also provided.

Normatively, the congregation must be prepared in advance for receiving a successor. Bridges and Bridges (2016:8) explain the process of transition in three stages, namely endings, the neutral zone and beginnings. Endings are the first logical step in any transitions of life. In order to take hold of the future, one has to disconnect with the past. When one transitions from childhood to adulthood, dependency on parents must end so as to develop self-dependence. The beginning of transitions, therefore, starts with endings.

The neutral zone is the next step in transitions. 'It is a state between the old reality and the new one' (Bridges & Bridges 2016:9). In most cases, the neutral zone can bring a state of confusion where there is partly a desire for the past experience whilst there is also an anticipation of what the future holds. There can also be a sense of despondency in the neutral zone after letting go of the old and having nothing to hold on to, whilst the new is still being formed. The neutral zone can, therefore, be a very difficult time for individuals and organisations (Bridges & Bridges 2016:45–47).

Beginnings are the final step in transition and they are the hardest to deal with. This is because people are still caught up in the past and unwilling to let go; others are in the neutral zone where they feel lost, confused and anxious about the future. Beginnings only happen when people are prepared to commit to the new process of doing things. There is a difference between beginnings and starts. Starts can be scheduled with dates and time of commencement but beginnings do not keep to schedule but they happen when people are ready. Congregants must be ready in their hearts and minds in order to make the emotional shift of committing to a beginning (Bridges & Bridges 2016:66). Endings, the neutral zone and beginnings are processes that congregations must go through before they receive a successor.

Practically, the process of preparation is best done by an interim pastor who is skilled in helping churches through transition. Alternatively, a professional team that is skilled with transitions can be outsourced to come and help the congregation go through the various steps for transition in preparation of the successor. This can be a lengthy process especially if the termination of the predecessor was unexpected. The preparation process can even be much longer if the termination was tragic or traumatic.

Factions

The research revealed that most successors found themselves having to deal with factions. Research also revealed that a lack of a succession plan is one of the major reasons why factions formed and became contentious. The normative in such circumstances is to ensure that there is a functional succession plan that everyone is aware of and endorses. The latter has already been discussed above under succession plan and its practical implementation.

The African perspective

There are indigenous ways by which Africans handled leadership succession. These indigenous ways can be used as theories that can enrich modern Africans and other nationalities in dealing with leadership succession including pastoral succession.

Leadership succession was not arbitrary but had a particular order and plan. Succession was rotating amongst the different houses of the royal family, based on seniority (Makaudze 2017; Sesay 2014). The criteria for choosing a successor was based on wisdom and experience on the side of the successor. The successor had to possess the wisdom and courage to engage the ancestors and God, for them to guarantee peace, security and prosperity for the people, without offending them. A novice would not be able to handle such a sensitive role (Makaudze 2017:217). In some traditions in Africa, there were people called the king makers who were elders assigned to ensure that the rightful king is the one who is set in office and that there is no competition to the throne (Osman 2019).

In the light of the above discussion, AIPCs based on their spiritual background of primal religions, which connects them to African traditions, can glean from how Africans chose successors for leadership (Nel 2019). There was a clear plan that was orderly and systematic, which ensured that there was no monopoly of one house when it comes to leadership. This plan of succession was overseen by qualified elders who were king makers. AIPCs must, therefore, have a succession plan that will be under the oversight of qualified elders of the congregation and other seasoned church leaders in the community who have an outstanding reputation in ministry leadership.

The criteria for the right successor will also be handled by this group of elders who will base their choice on someone who is experienced and has the ability to exercise wisdom in the context of the specific needs of that congregation.

There were, however, contestations for kingship especially after a number of generations of kings had passed, seniority on household is confused. Eligible families would contest for succession to the throne but this contestation was still handled by the well capable council of elders who were arbiters on various disputes in the community and formed a system of gerontocracy that will adjudicate on all governance matters (Odegi-Awuondo 1990:46; Osamba 2001:37). There were various tests that were given to the prospective candidate, which needed courage and survival skills. If the candidate survived, they were accepted as king but if they died, it was a sign that they were not the rightful heirs to the throne (Makaudze 2017:219).

When the elders gave their final word based on the various tests that were made, their word was respected and curses were pronounced upon any who in the future may try to challenge or contradict the decision made. Covenants that seal this decision would be made with the spirit world through rituals of slaughtering cows. It is the spirit world of God and the spirits that are seen as active participants in the life of Africans, which would severely punish a breach of agreement to the decision of the elders, hence everyone cooperated (Mbiti 1969:212; cf. Augsburger 1992:276; Osamba 2001:37; see Makaudze 2017).

AIPCs can also use this indigenous system of sealing the covenant with God and the people, concerning the pronouncements of the elders on pastoral succession. All parties concerned, including the congregation, must be informed about the decision of the elders concerning pastoral succession, after many tests have been carried out to prove the eligibility of the candidate. All parties must be made aware of the curses that await those who breach the decision of the elders. The ceremony of this announcement can be sealed by a Holy communion as a covenant meal done. A special liturgy can be developed to solemnise this important decision.

One of the examples of a gerontocracy that helped to avoid a split of the church when a principal leader died, by the name of Nicholas B.H. Bhengu, has been demonstrated in Bhengu's 'Back to God movement', which was affiliated with the Assemblies of God church, in South Africa (Lephoko 2018:134–137). Arguably, Bhengu falls in the category of a principal leader of an AIPC, although the roots of the church were classical Pentecostal. His independence in how he operated his 'Back to God movement', within the Assemblies of God, is what made him part ways with the missionaries who wanted to impose their governance structure, where they claimed all the fruits that the African preachers laboured for, without giving them due credence (Lephoko 2018; Motshetshane 2015). Bhengu in his succession plan instituted a gerontocracy system, which he named the 'Back to God teaching team' that was responsible to ensure that there will be continuity of his teachings and to protect the integrity of the church-work against opportunists who may want to derail it. This team was also responsible to undergird pastoral successions by ordaining pastors within Bhengu's church, a work they have done successfully over many years since his passing in 1985 (Lephoko 2018:215–221).

Conclusion

This article intended to discuss some of the challenges that exist in pastoral succession based on an empirical research that was done in the Eastern Cape. The intention of this article was not just to highlight the challenges but propose a pastoral care methodology that would journey with the main stakeholders that are involved in succession. Three categories of stakeholders were interviewed and these were the principal leaders, who are soon to be predecessors, the congregants and the successors. Principal leaders were struggling with guarantees of their future financial security and consequently that of their families after succession. They were concerned with losing the power to influence their congregations and were also battling with trusting the motives and capabilities of their successors. Congregants struggled with guidance and direction during succession because of a lack of a succession plan. The absence of an oversight structure, which could have intervened during such times, contributed to the disillusionment of the congregation. The successors who are in most cases inexperienced in matters of succession put themselves under the pressure to prove their worth. They prematurely introduced changes in a congregation that was not ready for transition, as a result, they got resistance from the congregation. They later found themselves having to solve problems of factions in the church that came as a result of succession. An interpretive pastoral care methodology by Osmer was used to analyse the problem and find practical solutions to the challenges presented by each stakeholder. An African perspective on pastoral succession was proposed as an option for AIPCs, which is a perspective that can be more credible to them because of their African roots.

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M.M.M. is the author and M.M. is the supervising professor guiding the author in his writing of this research.

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