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To be or not to be? A missional and practical theological perspective on being Church without walls amidst coronavirus disease 2019: A challenge or an opportunity?

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Author:
Jacques W. Beukes[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Practical Theology and Mission Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Jacques Beukes,
jwbeukes@hotmail.com

The novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to spread globally. The World Health Organization has declared the outbreak to be a global pandemic. Millions of people have been diagnosed globally; and at the time of publishing this article, more than a million people died because of the virus. South Africa reported its first official COVID-19 case on 05 March 2020, and since then the figures dramatically increased. On 15 March 2020 and the week thereafter on 23 March 2020, South Africans were waiting in anticipation as they learned from various (social) media platforms that the President would make a crucial announcement regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the drastic effect it will have on their country. Immediately drastic and tremendous measures were announced to safeguard South Africans and to contain the spread of the virus that was impacting communities of all faiths. Does this situation of crisis and global pandemic pose a challenge or a new opportunity for the church to be church with integrity? This article explores this question by engaging with the missional and practical theological perspectives such as the church being missional, relevant and contextual. This situation both challenges and provides opportunities to revisit and redefine being church outside the traditional walls of the church as missional describes being a missionary everywhere you are. This article engages with the missional perspective that the church is called to be church everywhere as well as being church in a time of the fourth industrial revolution.

Contribution: This research challenges the traditional discourse and believers' current understanding and praxis of being church. This research invites the church to embrace new (old forgotten) ways of being church because of a medical global pandemic (health sciences). It brings together insights from missional ecclesiology and practical theology and engages with social and human sciences.

Keywords: coronavirus; COVID-19; church; being church; missional; practical theology; walls; crisis; Kairos; spiritual disciplines; missio dei; disciple making.

Introduction

According to Khan and McIntosh (2005:223), human coronavirus can be traced back to 1965. 'It was found in human embryonic tracheal organ cultures obtained from the respiratory tract of an adult with a common cold' (Kahn & McIntosh 2005:223). However, since then, substantive research has been conducted and various forms and groups of the coronavirus have been discovered. Since 2003, five new human coronaviruses have been discovered (Kahn & McIntosh 2005:225). Only recently (December 2019) a new outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID) was detected in China. This new coronavirus was officially called SARS-CoV-2 and it caused the disease COVID-19. Since this coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in December 2019, it quickly spread globally, which led to countries taking drastic actions and measures such as travel restrictions and country lockdowns (to name just a few) to control the spread of the virus.

It was always a question of how African countries with fewer resources will react to the outbreak. For example, a country like South Africa where the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection rate is globally one of the highest, with 7.7-million infected individuals living with the illness. People infected with HIV are susceptible and prone to tuberculosis (TB). Tuberculosis is a bacterial infection of lungs. With 60% HIV-positive South Africans being also affected by TB, scientists are uncertain about the effect COVID-19 will have on people with both HIV and TB.

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Scientists are concerned that these people will be at heightened risk of COVID-19 infection. Whilst anyone can contract COVID-19, older people and those with underlying medical conditions, such as lung disease, are at greater risk according to the World Health Organization (WHO). An outbreak of the coronavirus will challenge the South African Healthcare infrastructure immensely.

South Africa reported its first official COVID-19 case on 05 March 2020, whilst globally thousands of people were already diagnosed and had died. Within days since the first case was reported, the figures rapidly increased to 554 positive cases (as reported on 24 March 2020). In South Africa, whilst being threatened with such a serious situation, the President, Cyril Ramaphosa, spoke to the nation on 15 March 2020 and made a national disaster declaration based on the *Disaster Management Act*. Various drastic measures, such as travel sanctions and restrictions, closing of schools, social distancing, self-isolation, etc., were announced. However, because the virus is spread through human contact, the president mandated the people to minimise the threat of spreading the virus by minimising physical and social contact between individuals. 'Gatherings of more than 100 people will be prohibited. Mass celebrations of upcoming national days such as Human Rights Day and other large government events will be cancelled' (Ramaphosa 2020).

In the immediate days following the national announcement by the president, various religious denominations either called off their mass meetings, worship services, religious celebration, events, etc. or found new ways for smaller worship gatherings to minimise the physical and social contacts between people. For a divine worship service to be called off is not something most devoted believers are used to. Therefore, this decision by different denominations did not come without criticism. Some denominations continued their Sunday rituals despite the plea not to gather as groups. Some church leaders refused to obey the newly announced regulations whilst on social media, various people voiced their critique regarding the church's decision to cancel mass services. Consequently, the week thereafter on 23 March 2020, the president announced a 21-day national lockdown that would be implemented on the midnight of 26 March till midnight 17 April 2020.

The various responses by believers and their critique on mass services that need to be cancelled triggered some questions. Is it because we became so used to going to a church building to be church or to conduct church or is it perhaps because it is within this time of crisis that we need God the most and that we need to worship and pray together in the house of God? According to De Gruchy (1986), there were times within the South African historical context where the Sunday celebration of worshipping in church, liturgy and instruction were the reasons why the gospel had never taken hold in society (cf. Forster & Oostenbrink 2015), therefore, the church perhaps over centuries became trapped inside their own four walls and (un)intentionally became busy with social distancing and or self-isolation to the realities outside in the world? Then again who or what is the church and is a community of faith only a community when we are together in one building? Did faith become dependent on buildings

(walls)? Does this situation call for a church revolution to be innovative and think outside the box or is it a call for going back to the roots, being the church without walls as it was portrayed in the Biblical New Testament times? Is it a call to conduct church (worship) services in different ways or a call to *be* the church? Is it a time to preach or hear another sermon or time to embody and live the sermon? Does this situation of crisis and global pandemic post a challenge to the church or is it a new opportunity for the church to be church?

In this following discussion, I critically engage with these questions by firstly reflecting what 'church' means in a time of crisis. Furthermore, I deliberate on both a missional and practical theological perspectives of being church. From this vantage point, I then reflect on some challenges and opportunities for the church to be church in this specific time and context.

Being 'church' in a time of crisis: Breaking down the walls

Although the South African Christian populace is above 85%, the actual attendance at church worship services indicates the opposite (Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:2). It is therefore ironic that the current demand for churches to find alternative ways for being church created such a stir in South Africa. Meylahn (2012:37) argues, that everything changed (and is changing), then the church as an institution will be in a crisis that is demanding radical thinking. A crisis should not be seen as something negative, because a crisis has tremendous potential and will offer new opportunities. Nonetheless, what is church then? The term 'church' is multidimensional and manifests in different ways in society. It also refers to several theological concepts (Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:5). Smit (2007a:265) distinguishes the expression of church between six manifestations of the church as he calls it:

> (1) the church as an ecumenical church (whether global, national, regional or local), (2) the church as a denomination(s), (3) the church as (mostly local) congregations, (4) the church as worshipping communities, (5) the church as individual believers (in the fullness of their personal, private and public lives), (6) the church as believers (individuals or groups) participating in initiatives and actions, together with others.

I find Smit's (2007a) last three (4th, 5th and 6th) manifestations of what church is very valuable for the scope of this article. In recognising the 4th, 5th and 6th expressions of church means that church will continue to be church even though church buildings may be closed.

The Greek term for church is *ekklesia*. It is necessary to accentuate that *ekklesia* does not refer to a construction or building but rather to a gathering of people (Hill 1988). *Ekklesia* means to call out or to summon as it is a word (noun) originated from the verb *ekkaleo* (Magezi 2012:4). Church or the *ekklesia* is the people gathered, rather than the building. In other words, a church without walls. Whilst walls can create comfort zones, they can also trap and or obstruct to go beyond. Correspondingly, Niemandt (2017:1) states the following about walls: 'Walls divide. Walls segregate, preserve and institutionalise. Walls safeguard borders, identities, wealth. Walls are, by nature, static, immovable, stark and dark'.

With the rapid spread of COVID-19, the church is, on the one hand, facing a challenge to be church outside her traditional building (walls). On the other hand, this is a wonderful opportunity for the church to re-evaluate her calling in this paradoxical context. I call it a paradoxical context because whilst the church is asked to be a church outside her walls, the citizens of the country are asked to be inside their buildings to either go in social distancing or go in self-isolation. For many, this is a congregational or church crisis. So what does it mean to be church in our present setting of disaster? Dreyer (2015), also examines what the:

> [R]eal crisis of the church is because clergy, churches and congregations frequently experience a 'crisis' only when church buildings are empty and declining of membership which brings about financial constraints. (p. 1)

A crisis is most of the time restricted to tension which the church as institution experiences when tradition, structures and finances are threatened. However, although the effect of the current global pandemic might pose a real crisis to the church, in actual fact:

> [T]he actual crisis of the church is not only to be found in external circumstances and influences but is primarily a question of the church not being able to 'be church'. (cf. Dreyer 2015:1)

The reawakening of the church in history is not something new. Because of changing societies and contexts, the church has often had to reinvent itself to be relevant and contextual as it was confronted with new opportunities for mission from either changing cultures or varying responses to the gospel. The question, 'what it means to be church in a specific context', has for centuries repeatedly been investigated all over the world by academia, theologians, ministers and church leaders, missionaries, mission strategists, church planters and other evolving church practitioners. Within an environment that is constantly changing our understanding of the 'Sabbath', 'church' and 'ministry' became debatable and contentious. Participation and involvement (or the lack of it) in these areas by both believers or followers and curious churchgoers alike indicate that this is not a mere academic question. For those who worship regularly, it has even greater relevance for themselves and their mission. How to express being the people of God in a constantly changing environment is foundational. What does it mean to be a community of faith or church today? What are the key components? Is it a case of certain things (rituals and beliefs) being essential whilst other just traditional or cultural? How do we decide? What should remain and what might we leave out and at the same time still be an authentic, contextual and relevant expression of being church today?

The outcome of this is continuous exploration for innovative ways of manifesting of the being of the church that discovers ways of how people connect within a constant rapidly changing world. 'As it becomes clearer that the traditional church ministry is not attractive to many people anymore, the need for new ways of being church is becoming very urgent' (cf. Nell & Rudolph 2014:749; Smit 2007b:594).

Being 'church': A missional perspective

According to Roxburgh (2004:2), the term 'missional' has become part of the common language of the church in North America. Likewise, in recent years in South Africa where Nelus Niemandt was a very instrumental voice, 'missional' and 'being missional' became a household term and language in various mainline, charismatic and pentecostal churches:

> Missional or the phrase missional church is used to explain and describe everything from evangelism to reorganisation plans for denominations. Although this new form of common language entered the common conversation of the church and diffused itself across all forms of church-life in a very brief time. It is at the same time still not understood by many people in church leadership. (Roxburgh 2004:2)

In short, the concept 'missional' involves joining God in his mission in the world (the Missio Dei). It means to internalise or to be the good news not just to share it, to express grace in the daily as followers of Jesus into the darkness of the world. This is exactly what the church is called for today in this *Kairos* moment, to be a missional church (in Smit's[i] fourth, fifth and sixth manifestation of church) in our current context of crisis and COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the history of the church, the church started as a missionary society. The community of believers grew daily mainly by the life and speech of its followers attracting those who were outside:

> [T]oday members of the church are scattered all over the world, but they do not carry the church with them in person, they were not organized, they very often do not desire the conversion of those among whom they live, they do not welcome them into the Church. (cf. Nell & Rudolph 2014:764)

Allen (2008:18) believes that '… the Church, as a Church, is not a missionary society enlarging its borders by multiplying local churches; so societies are formed within it to do its work for it'. Therefore, in this *Kairos* moment, the church should be missional (and should serve those who is outside of the church), the church should be contextual (enter the culture of people and listen to them in their specific context and time) and the church should be formational (prioritise discipleship) (cf. Nell & Rudolph 2014:764).

A reduction in church membership in South African mainline churches is getting more and more apparent. The renowned South African missiologist, Bosch (2006:3–5), wrote in his *Magnus Opus* Transforming mission about 'the deepening crisis of the church'. Bosch is mainly concerned about the church's lack of ability to be involved in meaningful missions. The COVID-19 situation provides the church a perfect opportunity to shift from being 'inward-looking' to a community that is formed and equipped by God to partake in God's work in the world (cf. Baron & Maponya 2020:3). This is in agreement with Pillay (2015:1) who postulates that

the church's missional understanding is not about getting more people into the church or making the church entertaining, so that it could attract more people, but it is rather to send the church into the world, to transform and change the world and to portray God's glory.

According to Dreyer (2015:2), the church finds it more and more challenging to be missional in a modern and postmodern society. Regardless of this difficulty, the church remains challenged by the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20). Hence, Dreyer (2015) states:

> [A] crisis in terms of missions translates into a crisis for the church as such, because the church is not doing what it is supposed to do. The church is unfaithful to its own nature and calling. (p. 2)

Thus, according to Niemandt (2012:8, 2019:3):

> [T]he missional church dialogue and the evolving missional ecclesiology offers an alternative way to think about the church as well as an alternative hermeneutic to read the Bible and context (p. 8). … This also impacts ecclesiology. The life of the church as life in the Trinity, and the fundamental importance of the incarnation as a movement towards where people are (place), forms the basis of a missional ecclesiology. (p. 3)

Niemandt (2019) continues this trend and says:

> … [T]he church needs to establish a faithful presence in the commons. Faithful presence means, taking your bodies, your location and your community very seriously, as seriously as God in Christ took them: 'Faithful presence invites you to act on the belief that God is giving you what you need to be formed as disciples within your location'. Faithful presence implies a specific kind of presence in all the places that Christians find themselves – and in such a way that it affirms the integrity of Christian faith. (p. 4)

The current situation offers a new opportunity for families and people living together to read and interpret the Bible. Furthermore, the current situation in South Africa calls on believers to establish a faithful presence in their own homes and their workplaces. The integrity of faith should be affirmed not only inside a church building but in every sphere outside the four walls of the church in particular (cf. Van Niekerk 2014:4).

Being 'church': A practical theological perspective

The practical theologian, Osmer (2008) argues that 'practical theology attends to four tasks along the lines of a hermeneutical spiral or circle'. He calls the four tasks the descriptive–empirical task, interpretive task, normative task and pragmatic task. Osmer explains these four tasks as follows:

> In the Descriptive–empirical task, we deal with the question What is going on? Here, gathering information is important to better understand particular episodes, situations, or contexts. In the Interpretive task, we deal with the question Why is this going

on? In this task, we enter into a dialogue with the social sciences to interpret and explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place. In the third task which Osmer calls, Normative, we deal with the question What ought to be going on? In other words, raising normative questions from the perspectives of theology, ethics and other fields. The final phase is the Pragmatic task and deals with How might we respond? Forming an action plan and undertaking specific responses that seek to shape the episode, situation, or context in desirable directions. (cf. Osmer 2008, 2011:2)

Based on the aforementioned realities and Osmer's explanation, to address the complexities of our time, practical theology 'has to engage with social and human sciences in forging a radically new epistemology and methodology' (Dames 2017:4). Having said that practical theology is about being current, contextual, understanding and pragmatic and can, therefore, make significant contributions to our understanding of being church and ministry without lapsing into the clerical paradigm. Correspondingly, Cahalan (2005:93) states:

> Practical theology can begin by attending to how Christians live and ought to live within the peculiar vagaries of time and place. In this sense, practical theology is first and foremost about wisdom-seeking for all Christians. Only then can it turn to the particular issue of how ministers guide and assist Christians in living such wise and faithful lives. In a certain sense, ministers do not choose their ministry. To a large extent, the conditions, problems, and issues of the local context will determine to whom and what ministers must respond. The problem, as well as the solution, must be locally born. (p. 93)

Dames (2009:86) proposes that the task of practical theology should be 'to guide churches in the shaping and reshaping of their public witness, specifically in a postmodern and secular environment'. I tend to agree with Dames (2009:86) that its work should be grounded in a vigorous life of worship, prayer, proclamation and study of scripture and tradition, but I would further argue that this shouldn't be restricted to a church building (only). If practical theology is to assist the church in revealing the 'pretences of secular value structures and the seductive injustices of capitalist and market economies' and being the church amidst times of crisis, 'then communities of faith have to be grounded deeply in an alternate set of stories and be equipped with an alternate set of virtues' (Dames 2009:86). Dames (2009) makes use of the work of Fowler (1995) who identified the succeeding characteristics as the core of a practical theological approach, namely:

> Praxis-theory-praxis; contextual, local, and stay close to experience; theology habitus; includes, but is not limited to reflective work in the functional areas of ecclesial practices; works in two languages: the 'language behind the wall' and the 'language on the wall'. (Fowler 1995:7–9)

Dames, therefore, proposes that 'Practical theology needs to do its work in two languages: the language of prayer, praise and proclamation 'behind the wall', and the languages of public discourse, on the wall' (cf. Dames 2009:86; Fowler

1995:7–9). I would like to add a third language, namely, the language of witness, discipleship, koinonia and diaconia 'outside the wall'. This *Kairos*-moment calls for deconstruction and reconstruction of walls.

A challenge or opportunity for the church?

The decision for churches to come up with alternative ways of being church does not apply to South Africa only. The spread of COVID-19 and the fact that it is being declared by the WHO as a global pandemic forced various other countries and, as a matter fact, other religious groups to make the same drastic decision. This can either pose a serious challenge to the church or prove to be a wonderful opportunity for the church to be church with integrity.

The fourth to the sixth manifestation of church illustrated by Smit (2007a) is a wonderful opportunity to educate churchgoers about the biblical church concept and that they can still be:

> [T]he church as worshipping communities, the church as individual believers (in the fullness of their personal, private and public lives, and the church as believers (individuals or groups) participating in initiatives and actions, together with others even in their homes. (p. 265)

This Kairos-moment gives churches an opportunity to re-examine what the main task of the church is and what churches were busy with till now. It is during this time that church has an opportunity to reflect honestly to what Dreyer (2019) accentuates, namely:

> The challenge facing the church is to 'be church' and to 'stay church' as the body of Christ, the community of the Spirit and the people of God. To be a church with integrity means 'to be church', to make the invisible visible, to be what God meant it to be. Integrity implies a deep consciousness of the true nature of the church and continual reformation of the church to be what it is. (p. 6)

The current situation gives the church a perfect opportunity to shift from epistemological objective ontology to hermeneutics, from knowing or knowledge to understanding (cf. Meylahn 2012:1–15). This particular situation calls on ministers to facilitate, guide and assist Christians in living faithful, responsible and wise lives. As argued earlier in a certain sense by Cahalan (2005):

> [M]inisters do not choose their ministry but to a large extent, the conditions, problems, and issues of the local context will determine to whom and what ministers must respond. (p. 93)

In this case, ministers must respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by not necessarily preparing sermons for Sundays but also daily devotions for members to follow at home and still grow spiritually. Both the problem and solution must be locally born. However, a lack of innovative and practical ministerial skills for ministry in this new situation may also lead to fear for anything new rather than the traditional, which hinders change, relevancy or flexibility. If this is the case, then Cahalan (2005) proposes the following:

> Minister(s) [*and church leaders*] must be trained to be an interpreter of many texts, which include the sacred scriptures, the tradition of teaching and witness, and the contemporary context. The minister must practice a hermeneutic that embraces the local and particular as well as the universal and global, the contemporary as well as the past. To train for that capacity continues to challenge theological education everywhere. (p. 93)

This *Kairos* moment is therefore also an opportunity for theological training institutes to revisit their curricula as the current time calls for church leaders to be facilitators.

Some may argue that the arrival of the digital era and *homo digitalis* seems to be the final nail in the church's coffin. Dreyer (2019:2) 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?'. In the contribution of Lazenby and Niemandt (2014:1), 'Being a missional church and the social media', they too argued that the significant escalation in using the social media as an interactive communication medium globally produces both an 'opportunity for the church to make a missional difference in favour of God's kingdom on earth but simultaneously it also brings great challenges with it'. The fourth industrial revolution creates unprecedented opportunities in terms of communication. The ability to communicate with millions of people via digital platforms could facilitate the sharing of the gospel. Live-streaming, video recordings, audio recordings, daily devotions, online interactions, etc. are all ways of continuing with church services, thanks to the fourth industrial revolution. It remains to be seen how this current situation will impact and affect the digital church era of the future. The question is whether churches can adapt to changing and fluid realities and, on the other hand, whether they should? (Dreyer 2019:2). Also, how would church look like in the future in a digital age? What role will the minister play and what responsibilities and accountabilities will rest on the shoulders of believers?

Forster and Oostenbrink (2015:3) used the Call42 research, which indicates whilst church leaders and pastors agree that congregants:

> [S]hould be using their skills, network of relationships and location in the marketplace to bring about change and transformation in society, their theological and discipleship focus is most frequently not in that area. (p. 3)

They further state:

> … the research rather shows that members are trained for functions and tasks related to the 'gathered church' such as congregational leadership, prayer ministries, leading groups within the congregation, sacrificial giving, worship and biblical interpretation. However, they are seldom taught how to deal with conflict, pressure, temptation, discernment or ethical dilemmas in their church life. (p. 3)

Although this is a challenge, it is also a new opportunity in which the work of Willard (1991), *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, might enable the church to reconsider the importance of all spiritual

disciplines. Willard (1991) distinguished between two groups (types or clusters) of spiritual disciplines which he calls disciplines of engagements and disciplines of abstinence. The disciplines of engagement comprises celebration, worship, confession, fellowship, guidance, journaling, mourning, meditation, service, prayer and study. With disciplines of abstinence, he refers to as chastity, fasting, frugality, sacrifice, secrecy, solitude, simplicity, silence and submission (Willard 1991). We have become so accustomed to worship, celebration, confession, guidance and prayer that we tend to neglect or even forget that there are various other spiritual disciplines that can assist believers to spiritually mature and grow in Christ. This is, therefore, an opportune time for a renewed attention towards spiritual disciplines and spirituality, and the emphasis on a missional spirituality that supports and nurtures missional life that can be summarised as an appreciation for a life rooted in Christ (cf. Niemandt 2019:1). For Niemandt (2019:1), this even raises the question whether 'missional spirituality is nothing more than a state of mind, an inner experience of faith', which in my opinion would be strengthened by the spiritual disciplines of abstinence and some disciplines of engagements (according to Willards' [1991] classification) which we so often tend to neglect.

Disciple making and discipleship are indispensable in being church. However, Willard (1998) highlighted the importance of making disciples but also emphasised the consequences of neglecting discipleship, and he writes in a very distressing passage:

> For at least several decades the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple to become a Christian, or one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship … So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship is optional. (pp. 2–4)

If one of the main roles of the church is to make disciples, then the opportunities and challenges to help believers to deny themselves, to take the cross and to follow Jesus must be a fundamental part to the daily work the church is engaged in. Jesus demonstrated that disciple making happens outside the walls of a building and not necessarily on a 'Sunday'.

In a similar voice, Forster and Oostenbrink (2015:2) in their article, 'Where is the church on Monday?' argue that the individual believer as church is called to be active outside the church or as they specifically say, 'in the marketplace'. There is an increasing awareness that the great commission (as expressed in Mt 28:18–20) can only be addressed successfully in the spaces where people spend most of their lives (Forster & Oostenbrink 2015:2). Furthermore, the church or believers are not just called to make disciples but also to be agents of change in the world and salt and light in the world (Mt 5:13,14) through whom the kingdom principles such as human dignity, equity, justice, flourishing and human dignity, etc., are to be established in society.

Conclusion

This article discussed the fact that a missional and practical theology perspective of being church comprehends the fact that the church has work and witness that encompasses beyond a specific building or even certain times of the week. The church should be missional, relevant and contextual. Because God was and is still actively involved in every aspect of creation, the missional church should be a participant in the Missio Dei (work of God). Being church in our current context is neither a case of getting rid of the old or tradition nor a case of either/or. Whilst tradition still has value and a real place in the future, precisely because we live with such diversity around us, new situations allow the church to embrace the new (or forgotten old), for instance, family devotions, the spiritual disciplines and disciple making that was neglected. What the current situation taught us because of the COVID-19 global pandemic is to revisit our way of being church outside the four walls as a third language in practical theology. Therefore, it is a new opportunity to re-examine whether we are still busy with what God called us to do. The article further argued that the real crisis of the church is its failure to 'be church' outside the walls of the church building which was demonstrated by the public uproar the current COVID-19 situation created. The 'church' will not be church anymore if church gatherings dilute into meagre human activity or meaningless habits and rituals. Furthermore, no human intervention will prevent the worsening crisis if the church itself is unable to grasp the actual nature of the problem and continually reform to be what it is supposed to be. This signifies the missional imagination that is needed for churches to become what God requires them to be. This new situation once again calls the church to transform and be shaped (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*). To 'be church' needs a strong appreciation of the church's basic character, nature, context, identity, calling and mission.

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