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EST 2021



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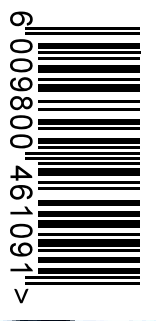
ISSUE 4, VOL 2

1 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2022

Christian Digital Magazine

Living by Faith, Not by Sight

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Singing the Gospel, Transforming lives

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Editorial Note



What's the time?

Since the catastrophic outbreak, swift spread of Covid-19 from Wuhan, China and massive loss of lives globally, late 2019 hitherto today, corresponding imposition of lockdowns, closure of physical gatherings and related varying restrictions that were set by our respective governments in attempts to curb the pandemic, our social, economic and almost all other aspects of life were severely affected.

As if that has not been bad enough, some of us faced deadly natural disasters in different parts of the world. As the Church, our individual, family, denominational and ecumenical fellowships were disrupted.

Across all areas of life, we got derailed and, at times, stopped from the course and pace of our life-bearing commitments. Eventually, our focus on certain engagements

was shifted. Consequently, many of us have completely neglected certain pursuits.

When dust blurs our paths, we are usually forced to slow down, step aside or stop. As soon as it clears off, it will be time to get back on track and move on.

Keeping aside, on standstills should not be forever!

When Covid-19 infections decreased, lockdowns were



loosened. Similarly, when cyclones and related natural calamities ended, resultant

disturbances also cleared off. It's time to shake off the dust of tragedies and move on!

Behold, tragedies teach innumerable lessons – such as the fragility and vulnerability of human life; the sovereignty of God and need for our total submission to Him; the uncertainty of tomorrow, importance and urgency of prioritizing *Missio Dei* (the mission of God) without procrastination.

Accordingly, it is commendable for us to apply what we learnt from our encounters, attend and accomplish our missions “while it is day, for night comes when nobody can work” (John 9:4). That means we should give due attention to the mission of God, and our important issues today, because tomorrow is not guaranteed – now, while we can, because next time we may not be able.

Letter to the Editor

*By Ben Chikazaza in Cambridge,
United Kingdom*

Writings have informed us about many things throughout history as it preserves our experiences and memories.

Our values and beliefs define us and what we stand for and these should be passed on for future generations to build upon as stepping stones towards the desired future and should aim to promote the common good for all to benefit.

The Bible books are old and yet have impacted generations for good than any other writings I know of. Holy men of old, inspired by the Spirit wrote these stories in the pages of scripture and today many of us have had our lives transformed and shaped by these writings and are proud of it.

Unfortunately, most Christians keep things to themselves and don't share them. It has been said that the richest place on earth is the graveyard. There lies dreams never fulfilled, ideas never implemented, desires, wishes and hopes never fulfilled and wealth never used.

May I encourage fellow readers to stir up our God-given gifts. If we can write, let us write something for the benefit of others to the glory of God. I am proud of Ecclesia Today as an open medium that we can write through and edify each other.



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Gospel Review

Living by faith, Not by sight

*By Rev. Tichavaka Hlomayi, in
Masvingo, Zimbabwe*

Key Scriptures:

- *Habakkuk 2:4, KJV, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith".*
- *Romans 1:17, KJV, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith".*
- *Hebrews 11:3, KJV, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear".*

Introduction

- The call to Christianity is a call to living a life of faith
- Faith therefore in simple layman's language is:

~ Trusting in the ability of God

That is being assured of the capabilities of God by, His track record, His consistency or faithfulness, His integrity.

A believer must know that God is *"not a man that he should lie nor is he a son of man that he should change his mind"* ... Numbers 23:19

~ Believing even without tangible proof that what we want or need will be supplied by the Lord.

We should never look for some kind of clue to start believing in the power of God

• Faith is not abdicating our responsibility, but it is partnering with God in accomplishing our assignments and tasks in the earth.

~ Many people are lazy and will want to see things happen on their own.

~ Faith therefore is doing our part as we allow God to do the rest.



We find that today many have a delusion of believing that we have nothing to do in faith. They put away the small contribution they must make to partner with God to allow His (God) power to be seen through our faith in Him.

• Faith is a force

~ One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the gift of faith

1 Corinthians 12:9 KJV

To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; Faith is required to move certain things. It is a force.

What it means to live by faith

1. Trusting God even when things are chaotic – We see

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Living by faith, Not by sight

in the book of Hebrews 11 that the Bible says; by faith we understand that the ages, worlds, universe and the elements were framed and formed from nothing.

•God demonstrated to us his people that we should never look for some material things or signs to make us believe

2.Believing the word of God – Anything we call faith that is not based on the word of God is superstition.

•Faith comes by hearing the word of God.
His word is our anchor and is the producer of our faith
• Now men do not live on food alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

3.Taking risks – Faith involves launching into the unknown future or adventure.

•Abraham the father of faith, left his country, his people and went trusting God to begin a generation and a nation in a placed yet unknown to him.
•Sometimes we have to prove our faith by stepping out.
Never say I have faith until you want to prove it by your corresponding effort.
Hebrews 11:8-10 KJV
By faith Abraham, when he has called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. [9] By faith he sojourned

into the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: [10] For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

4.It is cooperating with God – Faith is proven when we agree and cooperate with what God is doing.

•Jesus always told people of his time during his earthly ministry, especially Pharisees that they were a faithless generation.
They were always opposite to what God was doing.
Paul says we are workers together with Christ.
2 Corinthians 6:1 KJV
We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.
Jesus said I do what I see my father do.
He cooperated with the father.

Faith therefore demands that we work together with Christ.

5.Believing in the Supernatural – Faith is supernatural and therefore living by it relates to believing in the super human activities.

Beyond what is humanly possible, there is a force called faith that brings things from the invisible into existence.
God called light out of darkness.
He called the land out of many waters.

Conclusion

We are called to live by faith which is our righteousness. If we walk by sight, we limit ourselves to the natural, but if we live by faith, we will see great and marvellous things we do not know yet.
God bless us as we walk and live by faith and not by sight.

Tichavaka Hlomayi is a Reverend with Harvest House International church under the leadership of Bishop Dr. C. and Senior Reverend Dr. S. Nyathi. He is a passionate preacher, teacher of God's word and an author who desires to see people rising up to their God-ordained destinies. He flows in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is mightily used in the area of healing, miracles, signs and wonders. His evangelistic thrust has seen him do gospel crusades and planting many churches. He is married to Sandra Hlomayi. Together, they are blessed with three children and are expecting one more.

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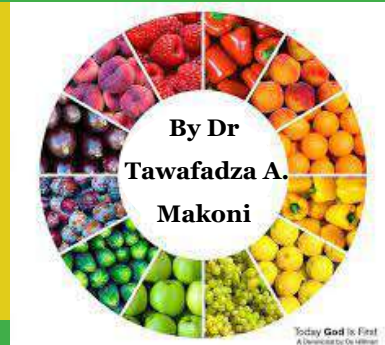
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Dr Tawafadza A. Makoni is a seasoned theologian, dentist, business man, author and long serving senior pastor, currently leading Celebration Church in Johannesburg, South Africa



The Discipline of Giving: First fruits Offerings

Joana was in her final year in veterinary school and having met the love of her life John, wanted to wed a week after her final examinations.

While the parents were excited about her plans to marry, they objected to the wedding date vehemently.

Initially she could not understand the logic of her parents' objection until she visited her aunt. The aunt explained that the objection was based on two reasons namely: i) she could not get married before she had at least worked as a single lady and ii) the father wanted at least to see her daughter recognized as a doctor in her maiden name first before the name-change effected by the wedding.

The aunt explained that the primary reason was that within the Shona culture when a person starts working they either give their first full salary or a portion of it to their parents as an act of gratitude and also to formally inform them that one is now employed.

In some cases one was required to buy some clothing item and present

it to the people who helped rear him. So the father was concerned that this would be affected by the marriage. Even if the amount given is just a token, the tradition is closely respected. This is a rudimentary version of the concept of first-fruits. First-fruits are evident in various forms in different cultures and traditions.

First-fruits offerings are an interesting concept from the Old Testament that has powerful New Testament implications. Deuschle (2011:22) contends that the "pattern of first-fruits is found in the Old Testament, with its principles reflected in the New." We will start by discussing some scriptures that touch on this in New Testament before investigating the Old Testament roots. Finally we will work out some applications for the New Testament believer of this often misunderstood concept.

Definitions

The first-fruits, or the first sheaf of ripe grain was required to be offered to the Lord, and was waved before him by the priest, as expressing the

sense of gratitude by the farmer, and his recognition of the fact that God had a right to all that he had. (Lev 23:10-14). The word (reshiyth #H7225), therefore, comes to have two meanings:

(i) That which is "first," the beginning, or that which has the priority of time; i.e. first in place, time, order or rank and,

(ii) That which is apart and portion of the whole which is to follow, and which is the earnest or pledge of that; as the "first" sheaf of ripe grain was not only the first in order of time, but was the earnest or pledge of the entire harvest which was soon to succeed. It refers to first in dignity, the first of its kind and first fruits with regard to time

First-fruit (απαρχη, aparche #563) denotes the firstling of fruit or grain which was separated from the mass and presented as an offering to God. The Jews were required to present such a portion of their harvest to God, as an expression of gratitude and of their sense of dependence. (Num 15:19-21). Until this was done, it was not lawful to partake of

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the harvest.

Practical Working Definition: First-fruits is the first portion of any increase, harvest or new source of income given to God as an offering to acknowledge that He has first priority in our lives and that He is the owner and source of our fruitfulness and increase. It demonstrates gratitude for the harvest and guarantees the full harvest.

One has to think from an agricultural perspective to understand first fruits. The Jews were farmers who took days or often weeks to plant their crops due to low technology. Consequently when the crops would ripen they would do so in stages over weeks. The first crop to ripen would be the early portion out of which a small portion was taken and presented to God as first-fruits. This would be before the rest of the harvest ripened. The first-fruits offering attracts God's blessing upon the rest of the harvest. It is a demonstration of our faith that God is the one who will guarantee our full harvest. Alcorn (2003:176) correctly states that "The nature of first-fruits requires it be taken 'off the top'. It's both the best and the first. As soon as it is harvested or received it's given to the Lord"

Scriptural Survey on the concept of First-fruits in the New Testament

Romans 11:16 declares that "For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump (the whole, the rest) is also holy; and if the root is holy, also the branches." The Scripture demonstrates that

once the first fruit is dedicated representatively on behalf of the whole harvest, consequently the rest is considered holy and blessed. Put simply: Once the first fruits were given, it rendered the rest of the harvest holy, that is, it was lawful then to partake of it. The first-fruits were the best portions of the harvest; so that it can be the best expression of their thanksgiving. Some have erroneously implied that the first-fruits are the full first income. But the truth is that first-fruits are just a representative of the first ripe harvest and NOT the full first harvest. Similarly first-fruits do not mean the bigger portion but simply refers to the quality and preciousness of the first ripe crop. In fact it refers to the small portion of dough or kneaded meal that was offered to God; and then the mass or lump (φύραμα) was left for the use of him who made the offering. (Num 15:20-21). Clearly in the Jewish mindset the firstfruits were a very small portion which thwarts the attempts by some to make firstfruits the whole income.

The Jews were the first-fruits of the nations of the world who will be saved. Jesus Christ becomes the first-fruits of those who would be raised from the dead. As consecrating the first-fruits to God was the means of drawing down his blessing upon the rest, so the conversion of Abraham to the faith, and the several Jews who have now embraced Christianity, are pledges that God will, in process of time, admit the whole Jewish nation into his favor again, so that they shall constitute a part of the visible

Church of Christ.

If the root be holy, so are the branches can be implied to mean that if the root of a tree is the source of nutritious juices necessary for its growth, and gives its character to the tree, is sound, then we expect the same of the branches. If the leadership (first-fruits) is offered to God the whole church will be blessed. As goes the leaders so goes the church.

First-fruits are a thanksgiving offering to God for the expected full harvest that enable the rest of the harvest to be guaranteed and blessed by God. So first-fruits produce a blessing on the anticipated harvest or income.

I Cor 15:20-23

"But now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who slept. For since death is through man, the resurrection of the dead also is through a Man. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruit, and afterward they who are Christ's at His coming (the harvest)"

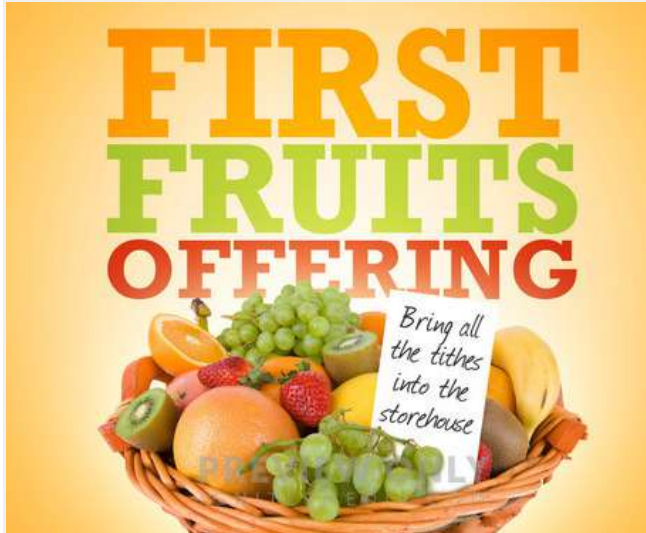
Jesus Christ is declared the first-fruits of those who slept. Just as the first-fruits were what first sprung out of the earth, were first to ripen, and were first reaped and gathered in, and then offered unto the Lord; so Christ first rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, and presented himself to God; as the representative of his people. The first-fruits were the best, and most valuable. Christ rose as the first in dignity, as well as in time. He rose as the head of the body, the firstborn, the beginning, that in all things he might have, and appear to have, as he ought to have, the pre-eminence. As Deuschle (2011:54) observes, "The first-fruit, therefore comprised

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of the best and first of their increase.”

Christ by lying in the grave, and rising out of it, sanctified it for his people, and in his resurrection represented them; they rose with him, and in him; and their resurrection is secured by his; because he lives, they shall live also. Christ is the firstborn from the dead, with respect to the many brethren. His resurrection has been demonstrated, and our resurrection necessarily follows; as sure as the first fruits are the proof that there is a harvest, so surely the resurrection of Christ is a proof of ours.

The first-fruits, i) sanctify the rest of the harvest, ii) represent the whole, iii) give right to the ingathering of it, and iv) ensure it. The first-fruits are proof and demonstration that the harvest will happen even as Christ's resurrection ensures and guarantees the general resurrection of the saints.

The Jewish Understanding of Firstfruits

The whole land's produce was consecrated to God by the consecration of the first-fruits, just as the whole nation by that of the firstborn. The law required that;

(i) The feast of Tabernacles be held as an acknowledgment that the fruits of the harvest were from the Lord (Exo 34:22).

(ii) Every individual, was also required to consecrate to God a portion of the first-fruits of the land (Exo 23:19) for the benefit of the priests, his representatives. (Num 18:11-13).

(iii) The law enjoined that no fruit was to be gathered from newly-planted fruit-trees for the first three years as they were regarded as uncircumcised and profane, and that the first-fruits of the fourth year were to be consecrated and devoted to the Lord (Lev 19:23-25). Lev 19:23 states that when we give the first fruits then “in this way your harvest will be increased.”

In acknowledgment of the fact that the land and all its products were God's gift to Israel, and in thankfulness for His bounty, all the first-fruits were offered to Him. While first-fruits find their fulfillment in Christ, I believe that the underlying principle of first fruits is not abolished but is transferable to the New Testament.

Deuschle (2011:87) postulates that giving “firstfruits to God was a covenantal declaration of submission to Him; the outcome of which was the Lord's favour on the remainder.”

Who Receives Firstfruits and Why?

Deut 18:1-8 says “The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them. And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him. For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons forever. And if a Levite come from any of thy gates out of all Israel, where he sojourned, and come with all the desire of his mind unto the place which the LORD shall choose; Then he shall minister in the name of the LORD his God, as all his brethren the Levites do, which stand there before the LORD. They shall have like portions to eat, beside that which cometh of the sale of his patrimony.”

It is clear that within the Old Testament the priests received the firstfruits. We should be careful to avoid taking Old Testament models and patterns rigidly and

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instead take the patterns and formulate principles through the modification of the patterns to enable applicability to New Testament context. For example it is strenuous to make direct application between High Priests and Levites AND apostles and pastors respectively.

We should remember that while principles are universal, applications vary according to various situations and church models. Ezekiel 44:30 declares "The best of all the first-fruits and of all your special gifts will belong to the priests. You are to give them the first portion of your ground meal so that a blessing may rest on your household". From this Scripture Deuschle (2011:98-99) provides an application that the priest in this case refers to pastors in function and so one can bring his firstfruits to a pastor. The minister of the word, who partakes of the firstfruits, and is comfortably provided for and supported, may pray to the Lord for such who liberally contribute to him; that a blessing may come and abide upon them and their families, and prosperity and success may attend them in their secular business and employments of life; as well as they and theirs may be blessed with all spiritual blessings, with grace here, and glory hereafter. So the firstfruits are meant for the man of God. The purpose of a firstfruits offering is for the man of God to pray a blessing over your ventures or your finances or business.

The testimony of the Early Church gives credence to this principle and shows that it was applicable to the New Testament. This application clearly supports Pst Tom Deuschle's interpretation of the pastor as the equivalent of the priest as regards receiving firstfruits. It should be pointed out that this is an application of principle and not a reinstitution of the levitical priesthood. Deuschle and I fully adhere to the priesthood of all believers.

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (sometimes called The Didache), applies the firstfruits to the Church. "Every firstfruit of the produce of the wine-vat and of the threshing-floor, of cattle and flocks, you will take

and give as the firstfruit to your prophets; for they are your chief priests. If you prepare food, take and give the firstfruit according to the commandment. Likewise, when you open a jar of wine or oil, take and give the firstfruit to the prophets. Take also the firstfruit of money and clothing and every possession, as it may seem right to you, and give according to the commandment." It further states: "If, however, you have no prophet [minister of the gospel], give [the first fruits] to the poor" (13:4). Finally, 13:7 says to take the first fruits of "money and clothing and whatever [else] you own as you think best and give them according to the commandment."

Deuschle (2011:110-112) having discussed the concept of set man ventures to provide a potential modern day application of the various kinds of offerings as follows: i) firstfruits are given to apostolic leaders with governmental church leadership as spiritual fathers of

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church movements just like the priest of old, ii) tithes contribute to the remuneration of the pastoral assistants, staff of the apostolic leader and the overall running expenses of the ministry, iii) freewill offerings will fund outreaches, building projects and other projects while iv) almsgiving is targeted at the needy, poor and vulnerable. This is a great model but is still to be proven as to its effectiveness and practicality especially considering that research has shown that firstfruits consist of just about 1% of total giving in Southern African Churches. Despite the foregoing discomfort, this is the best model I have seen to date. However more work needs to be carried out to make it more effective.

My recommendation is that it may be prudent to have firstfruits paid directly to the Church into an Apostolic Fund which can be used to plant churches or the work of the apostolic leadership and not to the leadership itself as income. A separate contractual or structural arrangement for the remuneration of the apostolic leadership could be put in place. This would remove the potential impediment to this kind of giving and hence allow the membership and church to benefit from it.

Quantum of First fruits

The Law ordered, in general, that the first of all ripe fruits and of wine, or the first of first-fruits, should be offered in God's house. It was an act of allegiance to God, as the giver of all. No exact quantity was commanded, but it was left to the spiritual and moral sense of each

individual. It is however clear that it was just a small portion. Some Jewish rabbis prescribed either a fortieth or a sixtieth of the whole. But this is extrabiblical teaching. The main thing is that it shows that it was a small amount. Put simply there is no set portion. Some may give a percentage others may give the whole of the first fruit. Unlike in a tithe where the quantum is predetermined, the firstfruits allow for you to be led by the Spirit in determining the portion. The firstfruits differ from the tithe because their amount is not prescribed but determined by the giver in the same manner as the freewill offering.

How to Give Firstfruits?

Deuschle(2011)whileunderstanding the African custom already alluded to earlier, states "The first portion belongs to the Lord. A portion of first paycheck would be the first fruit and it should be given to God. This does not preclude giving a portion of your first income to your parents either." The firstfruits are given out of the first harvest before the full harvest has been gathered. So if one has an increase they take a portion out of that increase on the first salary and give it. Or if one has gotten a new business or project, he can separate a portion of that first income and separate it as firstfruits. On the other hand the tithe is taken out of the full harvest when it can now be quantified. So the firstfruits offering is a portion of the very first income in order to have the rest blessed. While the tithe is given after the full harvest because then one can compute the tithe or ten percent of

the full harvest. Let me illustrate the difference: When I acquire a new business or start a new production line, I take a portion out of the first product and offer it as firstfruits even though I do not know what the full production would be. When the business is now running or the project is completed I can now compute the full gross profit from the generated revenue on the project or business and then pay my tithe out of that gross profit. So firstfruits are taken upfront on the production while tithing is calculated at the back end of the production.

Firstfruits may be given out of new job, out of new business opportunity or out of new harvest opportunity or out of a significant income stream.


Summary


Firstfruits are presented to God from the earliest harvest, as an act of gratitude and dependence on God for harvest. They were required before one would eat of his harvest. Once the best portion of the first is given to God the whole harvest is blessed and sanctified. The offering of firstfruits would cause a drawdown of blessing on the rest of the harvest. The firstfruits are a representative of the whole harvest or revenue stream. The firstfruits sanctify the rest of the harvest, represent the whole, give right to the ingathering of it, and ensure and guarantee it. The firstfruits are a pledge that the whole harvest will come through. The firstfruits where for the benefit of the priests or ministers of the Gospel. Firstfruits are a powerful strategic tool for drawing God's blessings.


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Let's mature from manna mindset

*By Stacey Huish, in Brisbane,
Queensland, Australia*

Stacey Huish is a transformational business woman, author and philanthropist in Australia. We can contact her @ Stacey.freespirit@gmail.com



As followers of Christ, we should partner with God to live in our promised land. God called us into a promised land. There is a divine plan and promise for our lives.

There are 2.3 billion Christians in the world, and yet most of them still live in poverty. People living in first world countries like Australia are still living from pay check to pay check. It just takes one financial disaster and they are doomed.

How can we see a greater reflection of God in our daily lives? When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He encouraged them to ask, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). So, we know God's will is for the culture of heaven to invade earth. We should therefore partner with God to make that prayer a reality.

Unfortunately, I think the lack of global Christian influence indicates that we've misinterpreted how to

follow the will of God for our lives. Again, there are many ways we have done this— "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

In this article, I focus on how Christians have misinterpreted God's intention for their finances, specifically in their giving. First, we will discuss what a manna mindset is in the context of the Israelites and the Promised Land. Then, we will discuss two types of money—devotional and transactional—and the negative impact the latter has made in developing countries. Lastly, you will learn how to use your transactional money to make a sustainable difference for the Kingdom of God with the 7 mountains of influence.

Manna Mindset

We can learn a lot about God's will for our lives from studying the Israelites' journey into the Promised Land in the Old Testament. The

Book of Exodus details how God miraculously rescued the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt. Just a few days into their journey, however, the Israelites got hungry and focused on the negative: "And the whole congregation of the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill the whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:2-3)

God was angered by their complaining. In his kindness, He proved how faithful, kind, and trustworthy He was by raining down bread from heaven that tasted like wafers with honey. They called it manna. This happened every day (except the Sabbath) that the Israelites were in the wilderness for

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the entire 40 years!

The manna was undoubtedly a miracle. However, I don't think it represented the full measure of His plans for His people. It was a stepping stone to something greater. For a God who created every food in existence, manna was the minor leagues. Can you imagine surviving off of wafer crackers for 40 years?

However, God in all His wisdom knew that manna was what the Israelites needed at the time. I don't think they were equipped in their mindset to handle a bigger blessing yet. Their journey to the Promised Land was a time where God refined their trust and obedience. He had to 'get the Egypt out of them,' so to speak—a little hunger made them wish they were slaves again! (Before you judge them, how often do we crave the captivity of comfort over God's will for our lives?)

So, a manna mindset is based on spiritual immaturity. Someone with a manna mindset constantly asks, "Are you there, God? If so, prove it!" It's okay to start here. We all do. However, we all reflect the image of God, our Provider, too. As we grow in spiritual maturity, He moves us out of a manna mentality so we can provide for others like He does. When you move out of a manna mentality, you become a producer, not just a consumer. In the following passage, you will see how the Israelites underwent this process.

The Produce of the Land

"While the people of Israel were

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encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes, and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate the produce of the land. There was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." (Joshua 5:10-12)

This passage shows revelation. The Israelites' 40-year journey through the wilderness and into the Promised Land was over. They made it. Their new season was initiated by eating produce from their new home. Now they didn't eat crackers that tasted like honey—they built houses in a land that was flowing with it! (Deut. 31:20)

The meal signified two things: the fulfillment of God's promise, and the Israelites spiritual growth.

After a time of testing in the wilderness, God had brought the Israelites to a point of spiritual maturity. Now, they were ready to build something with Him rather than solely receiving. Now that they were in the Promised Land, they didn't need manna anymore. They could cultivate their own gardens, raise their own livestock, and serve

at their own tables. Getting the Israelites to the Promised Land wasn't the end of the story—it was just the beginning.

The Promised Land

God has called us into a Promised Land. There is a divine plan and promise for our lives, and just like the Israelites, there will be a time of testing and wandering as well. While we seek out God's calling for our lives, we need to wait and develop our characters. There will be seasons where we are more dependent on God's daily provision than others. However, God's will for our lives is for us to graduate beyond manna—that we would learn to obey and trust Him in the wilderness so that we can prosper in the land that He has for us.

Getting to the Promised Land is essential for receiving the promise. However, we can't continue to wander and feel entitled to manna as our birthright. The manna isn't the birthright, it's an appetizer. The land is the inheritance—the main course. When Jesus said, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," (Matthew 4:17) it meant that part of our inheritance is activated now.

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Being saved and redeemed in Christ means that we get to share in the vision God has for the world and partner as His stewards and representatives.

God dropping gifts onto our laps is not the extent of heavenly wealth. We are called to create environments that serve as an invitation for others to taste and see that the Lord is good. We are commissioned to do as God did. Not only to reap from the harvest of our work, but to plant and feed God's sheep—the people God loves, whether they know Him yet or not.

It's nice to receive financial miracles. They build our faith and give us confidence that God is a good Provider who is invested in our lives. However, at some point wouldn't you like to be the one God uses to bestow financial miracles?

Devotional and Transactional Money

Many Christians stay stuck in a manna mindset their whole lives. They see God as a provider who rains down the occasional timely blessing rather than a provider who wants to partner with them to build something sustainable. Their view of their financial relationship with God trickles into their giving. Instead of using their generosity to build something sustainable, they use their generosity for sporadic rather than strategic giving. Then, the recipients of those blessings

get stuck in a manna mindset as well—commonly known as a welfare mentality. Our giving doesn't empower others because we don't feel empowered by God. We can't give what we haven't received.

(It is important to note that this is a general overview of how finances typically work in Churches and ministries. I definitely support giving and tithing as the Holy Spirit leads. However, I want to provide a different roadmap as Christians grow in their capacity to give.)

Another way of describing this trickle-down effect is through examining the two types of money people use for their giving: devotional and transactional money.

Devotional Money: The tithes, offerings, and donations that are freely given and received.

Transactional Money: Money you earn or create through your job or passive income.

One of the biggest structural issues in the Church today is that people don't understand how money comes to them. This is true for a lot of church leaders who struggle to build the finances of their organization, but it's true for a lot of congregants, too. Many people think that the devotional money they give will come back to them devotionally. However, I've found that God typically returns the devotional money we give back to us through transactional money. Let me explain.

There's a common belief among the Christian faith about seed giving. To sum it up, when people give a seed faith offering, they believe God will multiply their money and return it to them. Preachers who call for a seed faith offering often quote from the parable of the Sower: "But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold," (Mark 4:20.) The first issue with this is that the verse isn't necessarily referring to a financial return. Jesus is talking about spiritual fruitfulness. However, many people think that after they give, their money will come back to them devotionally. In other words, they think someone will randomly hand them \$100 or they'll receive an anonymous check in the mail.

Sometimes we expect a harvest without doing the hard work of tilling the soil. The reality is that we have to work the land that God has given us if we want a return! God often blesses us transactionally through the work He has called us to do. It could be a bonus at work or the growth of our business. As in, we sow into someone else's Kingdom work with our giving and then God blesses the Kingdom work we do, too, so there is a continual flow between the Body of redeeming and perfection God's world.

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How This Mindset Affects Missions

In the past, there has been too much devotional money poured into overseas missions that has crippled economies. In her book, 'Dead Aid', Dambisa Moyo, Ph.D., reveals that over US\$1 trillion in developmental-related aid has been transferred from rich countries to Africa. She writes, "In fact, the recipients of this aid are worse off; much worse off. Aid has helped make the poor poorer, and growth slower. Yet aid remains a centrepiece of today's development policy and one of the biggest ideas of our time."

People have given billions of dollars, but they haven't created an equivalent number of systems to sustain and direct that money. People often throw \$100 to missions they know nothing about. That's why it's so powerful when a Christian becomes financially free. When you learn how to build wealth through consistent passive income, not only do you have an abundance of resources to give away—you have enough to substantially change the systems that cause poverty, pain, and injustice. Because financial freedom provides you with enough income to quit your job if you'd like, you have an abundance of time to allocate towards developing your

strategy as well.

A Sustainable Solution

God showed me what He wants all of us to do. God gave me the message to bring to you. Everybody can have passive income. All you need to do is to open an account, put money in, and receive 5% ROI every week. Then you can leave money in there or take money out. The choice is yours. God wants us to help create a better financial system for all people. An automated system to give you the life you have always wanted. To get you to the Promised Land. GOD wants us to empower people to build wealth and businesses that residually provide a positive impact to their communities.

It's the same concept as teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish. This is especially powerful when whole congregations participate. And for Christians, they are able to give back to their communities through transactional money as well. It's the transactional money that has a truly transformational impact.

7 Mountains of Influence

Every country has needs. There are systems that need to be reformed and marginalized people that need

help. At the mention of this, a specific cause probably comes to your mind or pulls on your heartstrings. If you're following God, He will share His dreams with you. He will speak to you about the world He wants to create, and He will show you what role you play in that grand design. Then, He will give you people to run with and wisdom to see the vision through. It's a wonderful partnership. I believe this is how we bring God's Kingdom to Earth in a tangible way like Matthew 6:10 says. I was drawn to reform business, but there are several other spheres of influence in society that may speak to you. The 7 Mountains of Influence is a paradigm for thinking about how we can partner with God to bring heaven to earth. Essentially, the 7 Mountains of Influence are the main areas that impact culture: government, business, education, family, media, religion, and arts. Money is a necessity in every mountain. Redeeming society isn't cheap, and there are spiritual forces of darkness that are trying to keep Christian influence out of culture (Ephesians 6:12). The cost includes money, but it goes beyond that as well (after all, Jesus died on the cross for it.) We honour His sacrifice and live in His example by dying to our own self and dedicating our time, energy, and finances. You're not going to drift to the top of the mountain. You have to be intentional about what God wants to do in your life.

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**So how do you climb the mountain?**

1. First: By investing in ourselves and learning how to build wealth. Learn everything you can, spend deep time with the Lord, and ask Him to help you discern the path He has for your life.
2. Second: You have to get into the game. Start investing your time into the areas God has called you to. Begin to build wealth through

investing your finances and building passive income.

3. Third: Learn how to give out of your wealth rather than your income. In other words, give more than 10%. Once you build enough passive income to pay for your cost of living, you'll be financially free. At this point, you can give 100% of your excess away.
4. Forth: Enter into your Promised Land. Use your wealth, experience, and time to climb to the top of

the mountain God has called you to reform. At this stage, you partner with people who are on a similar mission. You're able to use your transactional money to produce transactional money for the Kingdom. The result will be transformational; a system that produces spiritual fruit over and over again. Imagine what the world will look like in the coming generations if Christians start thinking this way!

Do you want to learn more about how to practically prepare for God's will for your life? Are you curious about how to create a Kingdom culture through sustainable systems? Do you want to learn how to build wealth for the Kingdom? If you answered yes to any of those questions, then get in contact with me and I will show you what GOD showed me. What's your Promised Land? How has God broken you out of a manna mindset? I'd love to hear more about your journey in your feedback through letters to the editor.

Church, Economics & Development

Dealing with Poverty, Empowering the Church

By Rev. Godfrey Simon Mkolo in Australia

Godfrey Simon Mkolo is a pastor, passionate of Church and Development, facilitating some developmental work in Hwange, writing from Australia.

Dear readers, on my last article I spoke of the need to take advantage of the time we are in. God blessed us with abundance of rain and I hope with the land at our disposal especially in rural set up we have done something about it and we await testimonies of practical implementations.

My father once told me that 'I have preached the gospel, but one thing remains to be eradicated among the people, that thing is poverty. Please help me son. We can do something about it'.

Thus, this time I decided to look at poverty. Generally what does it mean? According to Oxford dictionary: the state of being extremely poor, conditions of extreme/object poverty.

What is the difference between being poor, and in poverty?

A person can be called poor when they earn an income that does not fully cover all their necessities. A person in poverty is someone who is merely trying to survive. People in poverty may not even have the very basic necessities in life, including food, clothing and shelter.

My question is obvious but I chose to ask for the sake of putting our minds together so we can engage on this subject as we look at Church Development and empowerment. Do we have people who fit such description in our families and Church? The truth is that we will always have these situations and people fitting this description among us.

I believe that most of us have one time or the other been in that situation. I recall as a son of a Pastor, some situations we experienced which have never left my mind but thank God, the Lord turned my heart from having a negative attitude I had developed towards ministry and being a servant of the Lord to loving ministry and serve.

As a family we came across times when survival was by faith in the Lord and see God's provision come through. Someday I will give my testimony of the miracle I experienced of God's provision in my childhood.

The Church will never be exempt from having people living in poverty, but it has been equipped through the scriptures to confront



such situations and eradicate them. Coming from Binga/Hwange, I still experience first hand descriptions of extreme poverty.

Jesus said these words to his disciples in Matthew 26:11-You will always have the poor with you.

Dear reader, what comes to my mind is what causes poverty. The reasons may vary from one community to the other. I listed the following;

1. Unemployment, the shortage of jobs and when the jobs are available but they cannot pay a wage to sustain the family.

2. Lack of education, this might be caused by few schools, or long distances to education centres, people cannot afford to pay school fees, gender discrimination

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where mostly girls get to be disadvantaged.

3. Lack of skills, can be caused by a lack of basic education.

4. Lack of food and water, when all you do is spend time looking for food and travel long distances to get water. Time to concentrate on doing other things is consumed. Hunger can lead to sickness and disease.

5. Lack of good health facilities can also lead to poverty, when your health deteriorates and you don't have good support systems to restore your health so that you can be active and work.

6. High cost of commodities can lead to poverty. When you can no longer afford the basics and you cut on some essentials

7. As I conclude I chose to see

what the bible says are the causes of some poverty;

Proverbs 20:13, "Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread".

Proverbs 24:33-34, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man".

Proverbs 19:15, "Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless go hungry".

The writer of the book of Proverbs describes above some of the causes of poverty. Laziness being at the top. In addition, poverty can also be a spiritual stronghold, it can run in the family and can also run in Churches and nations; whatever you try to do does not show any success.

My question is; do we find these causes of poverty in our families and Church? Can the Church do something about it?

Yes I believe the Church has the ability to change the lives of those who walk in that building so that as they walk out of the building every week, every month and every year they are being transformed and changed to have a better testimony both spiritually and physically. Please let's not miss the next edition as we attempt to answer more of those questions.

In conclusion, when congregants get empowered, they will reciprocally empower the Church and development is realized mutually.

Theological Perspective

Reconciling Theology and Herbalism



Archibald Gandah is the founder of White Lotus foundation, a social enterprise that provides spiritual, moral teachings and mentoring for youth and children. He has a Master's degree in Science and Religion from the University of Edinburgh, BA in Theology & Religious Studies from Zimbabwe Open University through Domboshawa Theological College and is passionate about the interface of Science and Religion as a vital paradigm in the search for knowledge about God and the world we live in.

By Archibald Gandah, in Harare, Zimbabwe

Traditional medicine has long been a source of pride for most Africans, and Zimbabwe is no exception.

According to statistics, fifty percent of the population in Africa utilizes alternative medicines on a regular basis, with natural herbs being the most popular. The fact that the majority of medication is found in close proximity to the African population makes it particularly appealing, user-friendly, cost-effective, and adaptable to the dynamics of current social trends.

While certain complementary

and alternative therapies may legitimately become a part of conventional medicine in the future, each method must be examined medically and biblically. Is it scientifically supported? Is it effective? Is it safe? What are its religious underpinnings? Are there any spiritual dangers?

Herbal medications contain compounds derived from plants and are often offered as over-the-counter drugs that are not strictly regulated. Some beneficial medicines have been found, purified, analysed for risk/benefit, and finally synthesized from plants. These include digitalis (foxglove), aspirin (willow bark), morphine (poppy), quinine (cinchona bark) and antibiotics

such as penicillin.

The potency of some traditional medicines has been appropriated by University professors in academic institutions in university curricula. However, the effectiveness of the majority of herbal medicines is still unknown and worries regarding toxicity and drug interactions are legitimate.

Additionally, the history of the numerous forms of herbal therapy and their current practices demonstrate that they are based in and continue to be linked with non-Christian belief systems.

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therefore exercise caution when it comes to herbs, both from a religious and medical perspective.

Definitions

When I use the term herbs, I am referring to plants and their constituents including roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds, and in the case of trees, bark. Herbal treatments are easily classified as over-the-counter products since they are not tightly regulated and are available without a particular diagnosis or prescription from a health expert from pharmacies and health food shops.

Herbalism (herbal medicine) is described as the use of plants or compounds derived from them in the treatment of sickness, typically by medicinal herbalists and traditional healers (n'anga) who lack conventional medical training. Prior to the relatively recent use of scientific methods to diagnosis and treatment, the majority of traditional medicines were herbal. Such medicines have proved a strong force to reckon with in Zimbabwe.

They have continued to flourish in various forms at market places, immunity enhancement centres, herbal gardens and even in pharmacies.

Origins

Plants have given not just food,

cosmetics, and embalming ointments from the beginning of time, but also a variety of readily available treatments for mankind's illnesses, whether through accident, inspiration, or desperation.

Treatments based on plants emerged all around the world, usually with significant religious connotations.

Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine is based on Taoism and the principle of balancing chi, the universal life force or energy; Ayurvedic Indian medicine has strong Hindu associations involving chakras (energy centres); and North American Indian traditional medicine was practiced by Shamans and was linked to spiritism. South American civilisations (the Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas) had herbal medicinal and religious traditions that were inextricably linked. English herbal medicine has strong astrological ties, at least when practiced by Culpeper, the modern pioneer of Western herbalism.

Over the following centuries, scientific research and development advanced significantly, resulting in more precise treatment understanding and evidence-based medicine. There are currently university-level phytotherapy courses that lead to a BSc in herbal medicine. However, there is still a significant gap between herbalism and conventional therapies.

Medical checklist

Does it work?

This is really tough to evaluate. While many active chemical ingredients may be found, standardization of unprocessed plant remedies is challenging, making scientific assessment and clinical trials problematic.

Due to the admixture of techniques, rituals, medicines, and belief systems involved in various therapies, it has been argued that standard forms of investigation and clinical trials cannot be applied to herbal medicines.

Although reference books are available to advise us on efficacy and safety, there is little credible scientific evidence. The potent placebo effect must always be taken into account.

Is it safe?

It is often assumed that all herbal medications and natural ingredients used as cures must be safe by definition. However, brief references of the toxicity of various plants (for example, Deadly Nightshade, some fungi, and berries) demonstrate that this is a fallacy. Interactions with other medicines can be hazardous as well.

A five-year investigation conducted by the Medical Toxicology Unit at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in London, the UK, revealed probable

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linkages between several herbal medications and adverse reactions. The World Health Organization issued a warning earlier this year against the uncontrolled and often dangerous use of alternative medicines, including herbal medications and nutritional supplements.

Christian checklist

Are herbal medicines trustworthy enough to recommend? So far, research into the great majority of these products has yielded little evidence of benefit while raising several safety concerns. Furthermore, the history of the origins and present practices of the many varieties of herbal medicine indicate that they are rooted in and still associated with non-Christian belief systems.

Are there spiritual dangers?

Many, if not the majority, of the resources accessible to learn herbalism contain influences and references that faithful Christians cannot incorporate into their everyday lives. For example, I've read books that advise herbalists to seek permission from the plant's "spirit" before harvesting it. Other publications advocate mixing ancestor worship and other non-Christian ideas into one's herbalism practice. Obviously, these are things that Christians cannot do.

There are further key concerns from a Christian standpoint. Some therapies have clear roots in Eastern religious ideas, such as Taoist acupuncture and Hindu yoga. It is debatable whether these roots are vital, but the Bible plainly states that they are: 'A good tree cannot yield bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit' (Matthew 7:18). Some Christian pastors and counsellors have observed spiritual ill health' in persons who become associated with these therapies or therapists (expressed as worry, sadness, fear, loss of Christian confidence, and interference with prayer life and Bible reading). There might be signs of demonic persecution as well. While herbs may have no special spiritual impact, the practitioner's religious views (particularly New Age therapies) can be spiritually detrimental.

Conclusion

Belief in the healing abilities of plants, which are part of God's creation, is naturally appealing to Christians, but we must not disregard experience and reason. There is nothing wrong with using plants for food or medicine. We are, however, cautioned to also use the common sense that God has given to us. A plant's active ingredient that has been scientifically evaluated is unquestionably safer than the unprocessed original formulation. There are only two

types of medicines, those that have been scientifically tested and those that are not, medicines that work and medicines that don't work. As Marcia Angell says, "assertions, speculation and testimonials do not substitute for evidence".

Although many herbal remedies include therapeutically active components, these are too varied to be utilized with confidence, and unpleasant side effects are well documented. Herbs and spices are almost exclusively mentioned in the Bible for their usage in meal preparation, anointing, and embalming, rather than for their medicinal abilities. When faced with such choices as Christians as to whether we should use herbs or encourage others to use them, we would do well to answer with truth, honesty, basing on biblical principles. All true healing comes from God the Father. He has provided healing medicines and knowledgeable people to work as His hands and feet, but our faith should ultimately rest in Him and His sovereignty.

"Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things...and the God of peace shall be with you". (Philippians 4:8;9 KJV)

Theological Perspective

The Business of Mission and Mission of Business



Dr. Cleopas Taguma Neuso is a pastor, professional counselor, and lecturer from the Baptist Convention of Zimbabwe. He is the founder and director of Tabgha Foundation which cares for the less privileged and vulnerable people in the society. For more information about his philanthropic work please visit <http://www.tbghafoundation.org/>

By Dr. Cleopas Taguma Neuso, in Harare, Zimbabwe

“Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)

The current socio-economic challenges that are ravaging Zimbabwe haven't spared the Church. The economic challenges that our country is currently facing are demanding that the Church be proactive instead of being reactive. One dimension of being proactive is for the Church to integrate her mission with business. The following is the simplest way of defining Church/Christian mission: the vocation or calling of a religious organization, especially a Christian one, to go out into the world and spread faith. Considering the

current prevailing economic situation in Zimbabwe, most churches and para-church organizations have struggled to fulfill their great commission.

Most congregants are no longer faithful in tithing and the donor community is no longer supportive as before and this has crippled the operations of the Church.

Some scrupulous church leaders have put struggling church members under intense pressure to keep on paying tithes.

As much as I subscribe to the notion of tithing because the tither receives blessings both spiritually and materially, the church leaders should be considerate and empathetic towards their followers because most people are struggling to have a decent meal in their homes.

This pressure on church members can be lessened if the church leaders generate other consistent sources of income from “tent making” and other income generating projects instead of relying on tithes and offerings.

In fact, gone are the days of looking

up to the East or West but upward to God. As much as we look up to God through prayer, pastors need to do away with the spirit of indolence or laziness and embrace apostle Paul's hardworking spirit shown up in the theme verse as well what he tells us here, “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:34-35).

Pastors should encourage each other and congregants to work hard especially with our own hands in our depressed economy rather encouraging the deformed theology of receiving without working. Surely God being God, he will bless the efforts of our hands. This lack of financial support from the traditional sources has impacted negatively on the operations of the church. From my own experience of running Tabgha Foundation, a para-church organization that strives

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to meet the basic needs of the less privileged and vulnerable people in society, it takes a lot of resources to run a ministry or to embark on missionary work.

Having said that, I strongly believe that the Church should be encouraged to reconcile her missionary work with commerce. The Church should engage in some businesses to generate extra income to sustain herself, sustain the work of the Gospel, welfare of pastors and that of human resources who work in different Church institutions, and give to the needy.

The Church needs to adopt a new paradigm shift when it comes to church and business. There is no way the Church can propagate and advance God's mission on earth without strong financial backup. It's high time the Church should come up with some of forms of businesses that are run professionally to sustain the operations of the Church. The money issue should be an active agenda of the Church or else it becomes agenda of the world. Once that becomes the case, it means the Church will be at the mercy of the world of which that's not God's plan. The world or state

is supposed to come to Church for financial support for the Word of God says, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalms 24:1). The Church has to reconcile the business of mission and the mission of business. What am I saying by this reconciliation is that Church missions should not be divorced from being funded by the church's income generating projects.

Funding Church missions should be the top priority when embarking on these economic entrepreneurial ventures. The modern day Church should play an active role in the economic development of the country and also create employment by building primary and high schools, sports facilities, recreational facilities hospitals, vocational training schools or come up with any other venture as long it supports the work of God. These entrepreneurial ventures should be profit making organizations. Part of the profit should be channeled towards the Church missions. Let me caution those who are involved in commercial ventures or who want to venture into them, to be wary of the challenges that arises

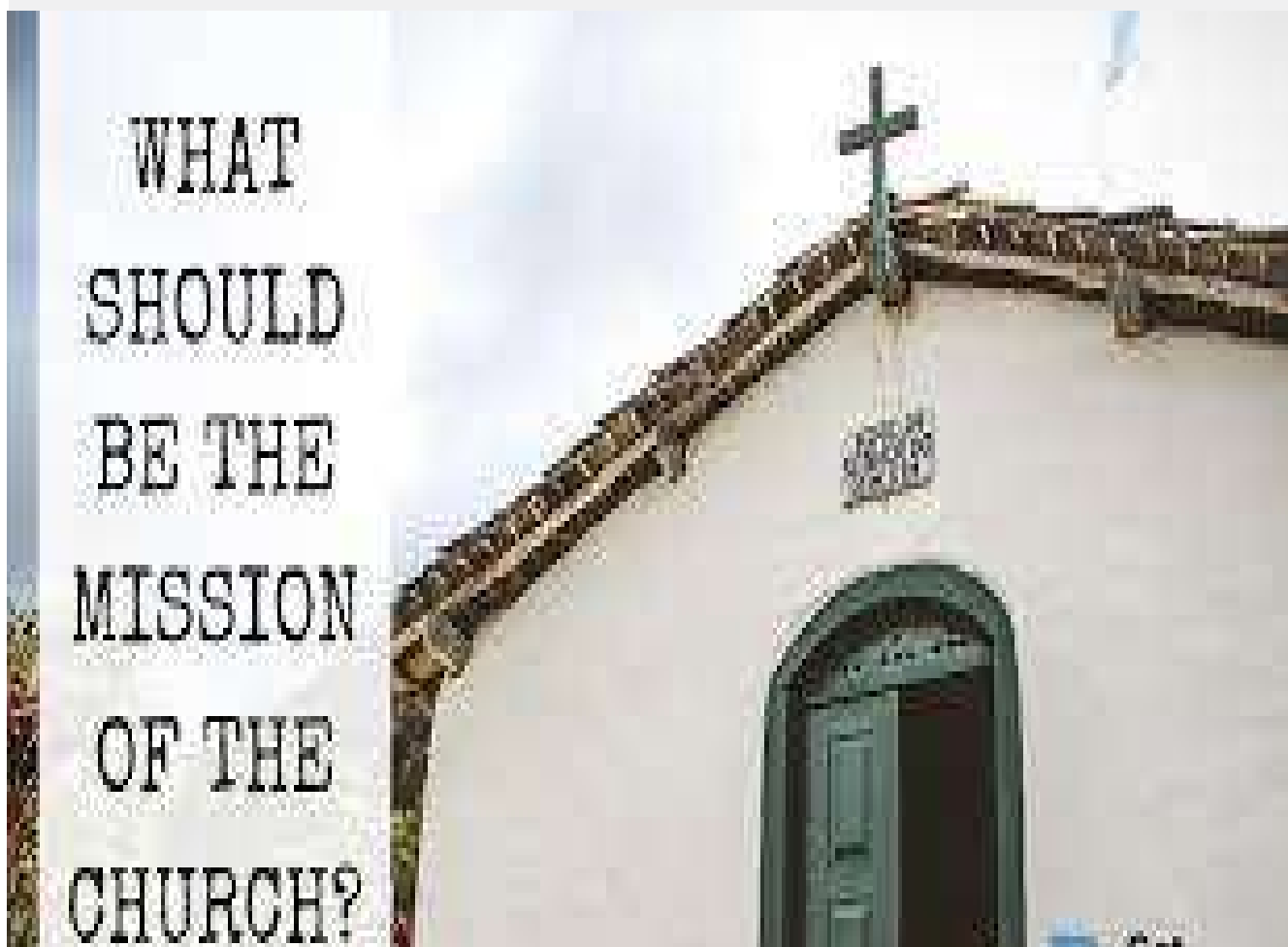
from running them and sharing of dividends. Many denominations have split because of greediness and corruption, for money is the root of evil. In coming up with these entrepreneurial ventures people need to keep in mind the following words of Jesus Christ, "Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). It's not only about acquiring lots of properties and financial wealth at the expense of having right relationship with God. That's our first calling (right relationship with God) as human beings. These fights and splits can be avoided if church businesses are directed professionally and upholding good corporate governance.

We now need effective and visionary Church leaders who reflect on embracing business as a mission or calling, since through business, the Church can advance the Gospel in the marketplace, and use business proceeds to advance the Gospel everywhere by resourcing missions. If you have a vision, if you have a plan for a business, a ministry, or a financial endeavor, I guarantee you that not only will you maximize your own wealth but also for the Church, you will also begin to receive more. Money will come to support your vision. Let me clarify something here, I am not talking of a man's vision but God's vision through the Church leaders (pastors). Churches should be very wealthy. It's simple

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The Business of Mission and Mission of Business

to be wealthy as Church for the Word of God says, “It is he who is giving you power to make wealth.” The next phrase is vitally important: “that he may confirm his covenant” (Deuteronomy 8vs18). The Church’s income generating projects should be directed professionally by qualified and competent human resources. Good corporate governance should be upheld so that these businesses will make profit, survive, grow and be secure. The Church should not look up to the secular world for professionalism instead it should be the other way

around. All the personnel who work in various Church institutions that are to economically sustain the operations of the Church must understand fundamental business management principles. This must be a must for everyone who is employed at the Church. Gone are the days of employing mediocre employees in Churches. It’s upon the Church leaders and top level management of economic ventures to impact their vision statement and mission statement on their followers, otherwise these income generating projects won’t survive.

The Church should take the leading role on economic development. In conclusion, there is a strong link between the business of mission (Missio Dei) and the mission of business (income generating projects of the church). In whatever entrepreneurial ventures the Church will venture into, the following key principles of good corporate governance, which are transparency, accountability and independence should be adhered to. In all this, the Church should not forget its great commission.

Health Education

Losing weight, Gaining health

Ephert Bhobho is a nutritionist dietitian with vast experience in dietary management of Non Communicable Diseases and various nutrition related conditions in both public and private health systems. He is also into Nutrition Consultancy for corporates and private schools. He is passionate about events catering. Ephert Bhobho is an elder in the Assemblies of God (BTG church). He can be contacted at ephertbhobho3@gmail.com



**By Elder Ephert Bhobho in
Mutare, Zimbabwe**

Defining a healthy body weight

People are becoming more and more conscious of their weight largely because of more access to health services, more information about medical conditions associated with increased body weight, cosmetic reasons (having an appealing body shape and size) for both males and females and generally feeling good about one's body and weight.

How much an individual should weigh? How an individual knows if his/her weight is appropriate for their height and age? The knowledge of how one's weight is exposing him/her to illnesses? Such questions which might seem to have a straight forward answers might not be as easy as perceived. The most referred to way of defining the optimum weight is the Body Mass Index (BMI), which in

simple terms is the relationship between one's weight and his or her height. Very huge weights exert a lot of strain and stress to the body causing a wide variety of Non Communicable Diseases that include hypertension or high blood pressure, Diabetes, Heart Failure, Osteoarthritis, abdominal Hernias, some Cancers, Varicose veins, Gout, Gallbladder disease, Kidney stones and Breathing problems.

There is a simple way of calculating your BMI that almost anyone can do if they know their weight and height. The formula is as follows; $(\text{Weight (kg)})/(\text{height (m)}^2)$

The values you get can be measured from the table below.

BMI Range	Classification
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5- 24.9	Normal/Optimum weight
25.0- 29.9	Overweight
30.0- 34.9	Moderately Obese/ Obese class 1
35.0- 39.9	Obese class 2
Above 40	Morbid obesity/ Obese class 3

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In as much as the BMI is a very useful tool to evaluate the optimum weight, it has some aspects it lacks to fully define exposure to illnesses. The BMI values are most accurate in assessing degrees of obesity and are less useful for evaluating non obese people's body fatness.

It does not reveal how much of the weight is fat, where the fat is located and how much is lean muscle mass. Excess fat stores is our greatest challenge in Non-Communicable diseases.

The distribution of fat on the body is very important to evaluate, as it

influences total health and wellbeing of an individual. Fat that is stored deep within the central abdominal area of the body is referred to as central obesity. Research indicates that central obesity significantly contributes to heart disease, cancers and diabetes onset and progression.

Excess weight contributes to up to half of all cases of hypertension, thereby increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Obesity on its own raises blood pressure and often weight loss alone can normalize the blood pressure of an overweight person.



So what should I do?

There is need for maintenance of healthy energy balance. If you want to lose weight so that it falls within the normal or optimum range, you need to reduce the energy input (the amount of food intake) and increase the energy output (physical activity).

If you are underweight you need to increase energy intake and reduce energy output and if you want to maintain a healthy weight keep an equilibrium on the energy input and energy output.

Because of genetics, some people have a higher metabolic rate than others, that is, the rate at which the body expends energy for these life-sustaining activities. This rate varies from person to person and may vary for an individual with a change in circumstance like age, pregnancy, emotional stress, fasting and starvation.

A slower metabolic rate encourages weight gain. It is most common in shorter people than taller individuals. The metabolic rate is slowest when a person is sleeping undisturbed, hence the encouragement for people to take smaller meals in the evening than for breakfast and lunch.

The metabolic rate tends to get slower with age, this explains why even if an individual reduces the amount of food that they were consuming when they were younger, they may increase weight. The consciousness of your metabolic rate should help to make necessary adjustment in terms of your food intake and physical activity, and

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not take it as an excuse to relax and accept a poor weight status.

Everyone has capacity to maintain a healthy weight.

Pregnancy tends to pose a big challenge for the females gaining a lot of weight that will not be easy to shed off after pregnancy. The ideal weight gain from the time of conception to the time of delivery should be 10kg, but more often than not women go beyond these limits.

Since weight gain or loss is associated with energy input and output, for individuals, especially those who work less active work jobs or office work there is need to have physical exercise plans. People who have sedentary lives (mostly sitting, watching television, use a car to go for shopping, going to work or doing various errands) there is need to commit to a physical exercise routine that is consistently maintained. A 30-45minutes physical activity 3-5 times a week will achieve much.

For individuals with medical conditions that may affect the choice of exercises please consult your physiotherapist or your doctor.



Losing weight is a journey that needs commitment, it is not an event. One should decide the right time to embark on a weight lose plan. The will power and discipline to make the right choice is of paramount importance, you stay on track and stay motivated. 'Magic' diets and intense crash diet may deliver temporal results, but most probably are not sustainable. When one gets back to normal routines and eating habits would rather gain more weight than the initial. Magic diet are less effective but rather lifestyle changes, for example; gradual reduction in food intake, taking whole grains

instead of super refined grains, less fatty diets, fruits and vegetables rich diets.

A healthy plate is one that has all the nutrient components in the right amounts, no nutrient is more important than the other. A quarter of the plate should be non-refined grains/ starches, another quarter protein and half of it vegetables and fruits. Variety should exist in your diet. Cooking methods that use low cooking oil are ideal, add low or minimum sugar or salt to meals. The importance of water can never be overemphasised, at least 6-8 glasses of water is friendly to your body.

Monitoring your weight is something that needs consistency and high level of discipline. In these times where there is more cheaper processed foods in the market, there is also more investment on marketing processed food promoting consumption of less healthier foods. With development and technological advancement, the use of gadgets and over reliance to the cars is not helping either in maintaining healthy weights.



Health Education



Tooth Decay

Let's take care of our teeth

Cynthia Xoliswa April is a Zimbabwean qualified dental therapist. She is currently working in the Middle East, and can be contacted through musuthu@yahoo.com

By Cynthia Xoliswa April, in the Middle East

Good oral health will save us money as prevention is better and cheaper than treatment. God-given natural teeth are the best. Let us do all we can to preserve our teeth. The benefits of healthy teeth affect more than our smile.

What happens when we do not look after our teeth?

Stage 1 and 2.

If we do not brush our teeth, we get plaque buildup which breaks down our teeth, and they start to decay. In the picture stage 1 and 2 the teeth do not hurt. The decay looks like a discoloration. The decay is in enamel which is the crown we see in our mouth. Everything starts small, if left untreated the decay gets bigger and may start to feel sensitive to sweet or sour foods, hot or cold even as we breathe in through the mouth.

Stage 3 Decay in dentin

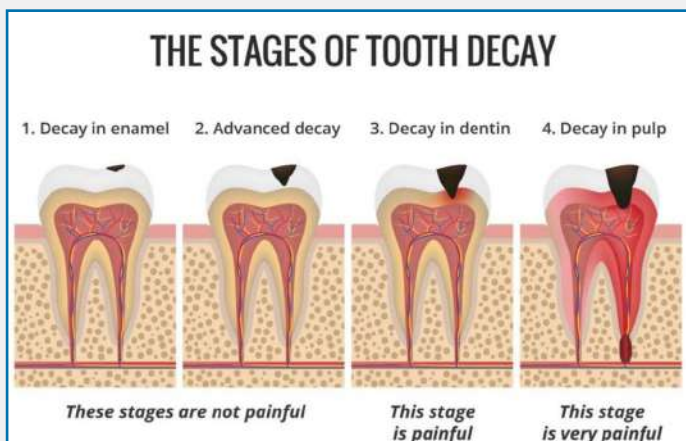
If at stage 1 and 2 nothing is done the decay gets bigger and the tooth start to hurt. Dentin is softer

than enamel, so the decay progresses faster than in enamel. Dentine has tubes that lead to pulp- which is the living part of the tooth. At this stage when the dentin and pulp start to communicate there is pain. It is time to get to your dental practitioner as quickly as possible, the tooth will be save d by putting a tooth filling

Stage 4. Decay in pulp

When decay gets to the pulp there is pain that occurs without apparent cause, mild to sharp pain when eating or biting and there is a visible hole in your tooth. Depending on your symptoms at this stage the tooth may need a root canal or extraction

We all do not want to lose any part of our body. Let us continue to look after all our teeth even babies' teeth!





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Relationships & Marriage

Overcoming premarital sexual temptations

Pastor Linda Dhliwayo currently pastors United Denominations Highfield branch, which originated from Lighthouse Group of churches founded by Bishop Dag Heward Mills. She is the national director of Books Ministry under the same organisation where she holds Loyalty Book Conferences and ministers to pastors and church leaders. She is the incumbent provincial chairperson of EFZ Women's Desk for Harare – Chitungwiza. She is a graduate of Anagkazo Bible Seminary, Ghana; holds BSc Hons degree in Science Education, founder and principal of Lighthouse Christian Mission School.



1 Peter 4:1-2, "Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise in the same mind; for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; That he no longer should have the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God".

**By Pastor Linda Dhliwayo, in
Harare, Zimbabwe**

Jesus Christ died to destroy sin. He actually cheerfully submitted himself to the worst sufferings, but he never gave way to the least sin.

Thus, temptations can only prevail over us when we allow them because of our corruption; but when true, we can let the will of God to rule our lives and actions.

When one is truly converted, he/she encounters a marvelous transformation. His/her mind, judgment, affections and conversations get changed.

This is what helps us to put off the old man with its lusts (Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9), then begins to desire the sincere milk of God's word (1 Peter 2:2).

Feeding on the word washes off the evil tendencies and brings about renewal in the spirit of the mind and strength in the inner man by the spirit. The word of God is Spirit and life (John 6:63).

But if we do not read the word regularly and observe it, we continue to live like unbelievers. For unbelievers, overcoming temptations is difficult.

To 'flee' youthful lusts requires spiritual strength, so unbelievers are like babies who are not able to flee. That is why Ephesians 6:12 says '...be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'.

True conversion makes sin grievous. It is our duty as Christians, not only to keep away from gross wickedness, but from anything that leads to sin or appears evil.

Fornication results from a series of

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Overcoming premarital sexual temptations

behaviors which do not appear evil in themselves, but those who fall prey to it do not take heed to avoid such behaviors.

My advice to the youth who love the Lord is to avoid relationships which are not aimed at marriage. Two people must define their relationship from day one, which is why most church structures allow for people to begin their courtship with the knowledge of their pastors and leaders, so that they receive all the advice they will need as they walk on this road.

As the Bible says that 'in the multitude of counsellors there is safety', those who follow Church structures seldom become casualties of fornication.

Unfortunately, most youths avoid ecclesial pathways that lead to righteousness. Most youths prefer secretive relationships, not knowing that in so doing they make themselves prey to wolves in sheep clothing.

Sadly, girls suffer the most at the end of the day.

In a nutshell, once your relationship is defined with the intention of marriage, walk it with counsellors and do not prolong it unnecessarily. Minimize time spent alone together in secluded places, as well as clubs where evil

spirits dwell.

Let the fear of God guide you. Allow the flesh to suffer for that season until you reach your goal of marriage. You will be forever grateful that you waited.

Exercise your faith that you will reach that goal by feeding yourself with God's word and putting the flesh under subjection through seasons of fasting. The more you pray and fast, the less pressure you have from the flesh.

Therefore, to overcome premarital sexual temptations, one needs to have a made-up mind. Decide that you will be a virgin when you marry, regardless of your gender. Decide that, even if you have failed before, you are no longer going to make the same mistake again. It is very possible. Your choices and the responses you make to God's word are the determinants of your destiny. Jesus Christ, our Savior was tempted at all points, yet without sin because he had a made-up mind to do the will of his Father. And we too, ought to do the same.

In the book of Romans 12:9, Paul instructs believers to 'abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good'. Job is one character who brings out the truth of this admonition. In Job 1:1, it says Job 'was blameless and upright, and one who feared

God and shunned evil'. Job must have made-up his mind long before he became the man that he was, that he would cleave to what is good, hate evil and stay on the narrow path.

There will be many more temptations on the road of life. If you have not decided to abhor what is evil, you'll always be tripping at each of them and thereby fail to grow to full maturity as expected of us by God.

The devil will continually come to your door, enjoying the fact that you are not submitted to God and therefore you don't have the strength to resist him. Failing to overcome premarital sexual temptations can lead many to fall into adultery, and so the chain of sin continues.

A lot of immorality is caused by peer pressure. Evil has increased so much that it is more acceptable than righteousness. It is the power of a made-up mind that can help someone to 'come out from amongst them and be separate' 2 Corinthians 6:17. This means choosing to be unpopular and not to be liked by everyone. This is what makes the way of righteousness the narrow path. Let there be no friendships between light and darkness.

Relationships & Marriage



Beyond Honeymoon; Building up marriage

Pastor Tsatsawani T. Mutungamiri leads Oasis Family church in Harare, together with her husband, Dr. T.D. Mutungamiri. She is a pharmacist by profession, and a qualified Christian counsellor. We can listen to her sermons on Oasis Family church Facebook page, and You Tube channel.

**By Pastor Tsatsawani Tanatswa
Mutungamiri, in Harare, Zimbabwe**

Man, (by man I mean mankind) was created in a unique and different way from any other of God's creation. Genesis 1:26 states that we were created in God's image, to look, act and dominate like Him. We were created and fashioned for a very special purpose, as God's representatives and His only creature with the capacity to connect and fellowship with Him. I like to imagine it this way, in our make-up we are a spirit with a soul, living in a body.

When God created Adam and Eve, somewhere within that make up He placed a compartment that was specifically created to contain God's presence. God's presence, His glory in Adam and Eve was His idea of a complete man. Before the fall Adam had the privilege to walk in the fullness of this mystery, where God filled mankind. Adam had the rare privilege of feeling completely secure, loved, wanted, valued, unique, significant, special

and precious. When Adam and Eve sinned they lost the fullness of God. That God compartment they previously had was now empty and void.

And this is the sad story of mankind, we are born into this world totally empty and void. The attributes that Adam and Eve walked in; of feeling loved, wanted, unique and all, are now alien to us and have become needs that we are all born with. The pain of the fallen nature of man includes sin, the foolishness of thinking we can live without God and an obsession with trying to fill the God vacuum in our lives using our own strategies.

Many times we do that without depending on God. Jeremiah 2:13, 'For My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.' The fallen nature of man rebels against God by trying to live independent of God. There are many strategies we use

consciously or subconsciously to try and fill the voids in our lives; people pleasing, worldly success, beauty, and of course relationships.

God chose marriage to reflect His love towards us. Maybe that's why it's an area we often try to use to meet our deep needs. Sometimes people enter marriage for the wrong reason, hoping their partner meets their deep needs. We are all broken, imperfect people; born empty in a fallen world. It is foolishness to imagine that another empty person could possibly fill the deep needs in our lives like God can.

Building a healthy, affair-and-divorce-proof marriage requires us to recognize that we are born empty and must turn to God to meet our deep needs. This is a game changer in a marriage. This empowers one to stop demanding that their spouse be the cistern where they can drink from, recognising that their spouse is also fighting to have their needs met. One reason people have affairs is because they are trying to quench their thirst and to have their deep

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Beyond Honeymoon; Building up marriage

needs met. A consistent intimate relationship with God ensures that our deep needs are being met, allowing one to give lovingly into their relationship, thus deepening the intimacy in the marriage.

For me the development of marriage begins as magical and glamorous. Firstly, the honeymoon stage where I would feel butterflies when I saw my husband walk into the room. The way he said goodnight to me when we would part ways felt magical. I would feel like I was floating up the stairs. We got along on everything and were both extremely polite. I was convinced like many at this stage that this was my happily ever after. After the honeymoon stage came the reality check. I was worried, as my butterfly expectations were rattled by irritation, frustration and annoyance. I was noticing those annoying habits which seemed to threaten my happily ever after. My mind was finally catching up to the reality that my partner was imperfect.

Many people give up on their marriage after the honeymoon stage, when reality checks in and there is the visible reality that one's spouse is imperfect and unable to meet their deep needs. At this point we try to recreate the honeymoon stage sometimes through starting an affair. However, starting an affair repeats the same cycle we described, and often leads to multiple affairs that hurt and sometimes destroy the marriage. Unfortunately, most couples conclude that they no longer love their spouses.

Eros or romantic love is only a small part of love. It is vital but not enough to sustain a marriage, but we often define love by it. Phileo, another type of love, is an emotional connection of friendship and companionship. This very important aspect of marriage is not necessarily erotic. Another shocking discovery for me was realizing that friendship with my husband didn't just happen. Many couples feel discouraged when they struggle to connect with their spouses. A common excuse for having extra marital affairs is 'you just don't understand me, we are not friends, we can't connect'. Yet once upon a time one felt strongly that they could never live without the other. This is so sad because there isn't anyone else we are as vulnerable to as our spouses; we live, sleep with them and they see us even in our nakedness. What I learnt is that friendship and companionship need work, commitment and time. We can't demand that we be friends, we have to intentionally work on it. There are a few things which can help with this.

1. Start with the end in mind. Have a vision for your marriage. When I got married I didn't have a written down vision of what I wanted my marriage to look like. Proverbs 29:18, 'where there is no vision, the people perish.' A picture of what you want your marriage to look like helps you to keep in mind where you are going, and to realize what you need to put into your marriage for you to achieve

your desire. Many people want to be happy, but what will it take to have a healthy marriage?

2. Once you both take time to articulate each other's desires for what a happy marriage looks like, it's important to combine both perspectives and come up with a combined vision for your life. This process requires that one honours their spouse and respects them by valuing how they feel, and emphatically listening to their point of view.

3. It then becomes important to come up with an achievable action plan to input towards the vision. Periodic monitoring and evaluating of this action plan helps the couple to assess how they are doing, identify areas of strength and weakness and remain focused as they grow. These action plans may include planned dating, common activities, counselling and marriage enhancing seminars amongst other things.

Marriage should not be entered wantonly, it requires commitment, work, forgiveness and a growing relationship with God. When a couple survives the reality stage they get to experience something more glorious than the honeymoon stage; growing love, intimacy, connection, fulfilment and friendship. It's not a different spouse that one needs, just a fresh understanding of what marriage is and a different approach to it.

Life Skills & Development

Harnessing talents for self-sustainability

Pastor Gerald Chimwanda is a pastor with the Alliance church in Zimbabwe. He is currently pastoring Alliance church branch in Chipinge, Zimbabwe.

By Pastor Gerald Chimwanda, in Chipinge, Zimbabwe



In every person on this earth, God packaged a gift that has been in existence since birth. A talent is a natural ability or skill. Most people have focused on a profession and neglected talent, leaving it dormant for the greater part of their lives.

To harness, by dictionary definition, is to “capture, control or put to use”. The reason why God gives talents to men is that they may be put them to use for the benefit of the gifted and those in and beyond their areas of influence.

It is important for each person to discover their talents, harness them and benefit from them.

Most notable people have made names for themselves by discovering and utilizing their gifting. Great and content are people who have developed their natural gifts to become their profession. This is mostly because such people enjoy every moment of going to work.

How does one know his/

her talents? Most times talents manifest as hobbies or interests. That thing that you always find yourself interested in and willing to explore. There is always a something in a person that one never gets tired of and can spend hours on it.

When you sleep, you cannot wait for another day to continue with your interest. Someone has an interest in keeping journals and most of their journal entries are in poetry form. They also love writing short stories and now have many diaries with short stories stored under their beds. A hobby may be that love one has for the cartoon section in the daily newspaper from their community. You get the paper and can't wait to open the comic section, you have a book in which you have reproduced your favorite comic characters by means of drawing and you have concepts and ideas of how certain episodes should turn out.

Some people are gifted musically and they bless their church with their voice every Sunday. All these

are examples of hobbies – talents that God has invested in them.

Your talent can also be discovered by means of mentorship. Someone has lived with an uncle or aunt and they displayed certain gifts that you were interested in. That interest pushed you to learn from them. Seeing them do and excel with their gifts can ignite a flame in you. The flame that is kindled is your inactive gift finding life from seeing someone manifesting the same gift. Sometimes we discover our purposes in life by meeting others who are walking the road we are destined to walk in.

The challenge with many of us is that they do not know that for every interest or hobby, there is a community of people that share the same interests. Paul in Galatians 6:10 talks of “...community of faith”. For every belief, conviction, interest or hobby, there is a people who

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share the same interests. That group of people is your community. Most gifts die when they are in isolation and they thrive when they are exposed in the right company.

There are a lot of people in life who have neglected their gifts because the community they were in thought pursuing such interest was a waste of time or an abomination. Social media proves to that effect, there are groups for every interest be it farming, beauty and make up, etcetera.

It is therefore encouraged to find a people of the same interests as you. When in a wrong company, you will likely feel abnormal whereas you are just in the 'wrong type of normal'. The definition of 'normal' has been stereotyped but it is important to define your own normal for the survival of your talents and gifts.

A lot of notable names have grown from developing their gifts. Walt Disney, famous for the Mickey Mouse brand and the Disney comics was just a boy in love with cartoons. He got a job as a cartoonist at 18 years. He later went on to create one of the biggest cartoon companies as of 2020, Disney was worth over US200 billion.

Colonel Sanders, the founder of the KFC brand rose by commercializing

his chicken recipe. From his own kitchen at home to being one of the biggest names in the fast food business. That favorite recipe that your family members love for Christmas dinner is a world class restaurant in the making.

If you love bikes, then the name Harley Davidson rings a bell. It was started by three friends – William S Harley and Authur and Walter Davidson who had a love for working on reviving old bikes. A lot of big names in business have begun from hobbies developed to empires. Big online companies like Amazon and Ebay, Microsoft were just hobbies that the owners loved doing.

Life can change when you can monetize your gift. Gifts are solutions to a problem existing in a society. Inspiringly, for every problem solved, people are willing to pay. It is often said that business is bringing a solution to a problem for a fee. What problem are you solving with your gift(s)? Seek ideas on how you can get money from your gifts. If your family loves your baking or cooking, one from your family can share your cooking with his/her workmates and arrange for you to supply lunch packs to their office building.

More-so, your perspective matters when you seek to monetize a gift. It's also pivotal to see your community as a pool of clients. A young lady who grew up with a guardian who runs a hairdressing business from home has been unofficially learning how to do people's hair. If the young lady goes to college, the gift of doing people's hair can be developed. She can do people's hair part time and supplement her school fees and other expenses while pursuing studies, or eventually commit herself to hairdo full time. That young lady has to see her fellows at school and in society as a pool of clients.

Conclusively, any gift that you possess can contribute to your economic sustainability if taken with the right attitude. As Proverbs 18:16 says, "a man's gift opens room for him and it brings him before great men". Some doors can open for our lives once we focus on our God-given talents.

It is highly commendable for us to focus on our gifts and perfect our crafts. Greatness will be our portion as King Solomon advises, "... see a man skilled in his dealings? He will stand before kings, he will not stand before ordinary men" Proverbs 22:29.

Promotional Feature

Singing the Gospel, Transforming lives

A young Afro-fusion gospel music star, Theophilus Tinashe Chamburuka, an Aeronautical Engineering student at the University of Zimbabwe who is affectionately known as 'TheoNashe' is ministering the gospel for the transformation of lives through music. Ecclesia Today caught up with him. Below are excerpts of the interview.



1. What's your full name?

My stage name is TheoNashe (Birth Name: Theophilus Tinashe Chamburuka)

2. When were you born?

22 March 1999.

3. Where were you born?

I was born in Harare at Harare Hospital

4. What's your marital status?

Single

5. Which church do you attend?

Methodist Revival Church

6. Where did you attend your formal education?

'O' level: Sandringham High School. 'A' level: Mount Pleasant High School

7. What inspired you to become a gospel musician?

My Parents, who are both Pastors.

8. Why do you sing (What's your mission in music)?

- To praise the glory of God
- To install hope to the Nation
- To provide helpful insights about life
- To uplift gospel music towards all generations (Old and Young)

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Singing the Gospel, Transforming lives



9. What's your vision (Where do you intend to get your music to)?

I intent to become an International Afro-fusion Gospel Artist

10. Which albums and tracks have you produced so far?

• I have 2 singles :

- 1) He is Worthy and
- 2) Unity

• 1 Album (with 11 songs) called Komborera

• Track list :

- 1) Vabereki
- 2) Vovhuna

3) I de give You (ft L-Tee)

4) Ndopemberera

5) Ndinewe Iwe

6) Tarira Kumberi

7) Hold On To You

8) Kamuitiro Kake

9) Ropa Regwayana

10) Mirairo Yake

11) Rumbidzwai

• Therefore All together I have 13 tracks

11. Who is your role model?

• My parents are my role models

• In the music industry I am inspired by Jah Prayzah

12. What else are you currently pursuing besides music?

Aeronautical Engineering at

University of Zimbabwe.

13. How has Covid-19 affected your music career?

Covid-19 disrupted the organisation of concerts and shows as lockdown restrictions were imposed to curb it.

14. How are you overcoming the effects of Covid-19 to your music?

I have adapted the Online Approach where I post my music online using TheoNashe as my brand name on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube.

15. What's most important that you wish the world to know about you?

• I am an innovative, dedicated and focused young man.

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Special feature

Understanding stewardship for church sustainability



Dr. Nigel Chanakira is an economist, investment banker, award winning business man and success facilitator for leaders, entrepreneurs, managers and kids. He sits on and chairs several for-profit and non-profit boards including Celebration Ministries International, Success Motivation Institute (SMI), Leadership Management Institute (LMI) & Family Motivation Institute (FMI) in Zimbabwe, Riskflow (RSA), LaFrica Energy, Celebration Impact, Junior Achievement Zimbabwe, Network 58 and he is the current president of the Zimbabwe Economics Society. Nigel is keen sportsman, an avid Liverpool FC, Dynamos fan and a family man.

**By Dr. Nigel MK Chanakira,
in Harare, Zimbabwe**

The earliest archeologically identified Christian church is a house church ('domus ecclesiae'), the Dura-Europos church, in Syria and interestingly it has the oldest surviving church building in the world.

It was founded between 233 and 256 AD. Jerusalem was the centre of the Christian movement, at least until its destruction by Roman armies in AD 70, but from this centre, Christianity radiated to other cities and towns in Palestine and beyond.

In the second half of the 3rd century AD, the first purpose-built halls for Christian worship ('aula ecclesiae') began to be constructed and subsequently in its different denominations e.g. Protestants,

Independents, Anglican, Catholics, Orthodox, Marginal, Unaffiliated, "the Church" has grown and been sustained till now on the world's six continents.

It takes a great sense of stewardship and sustainability to have been able to perpetuate this great institution for centuries. The church is therefore one of the oldest institutions in the world and how it has been sustained and maintained should be a subject of great interest to us.

My pastor, Tom Deuschle, founder of Celebration Ministries International (founded in Harare, Zimbabwe) who chairs the board that I have had the privilege to serve for the past decade, has often remarked that "it is easy to build a church building but it is more difficult to maintain it." There have been and are still various local and global forces that are militating

against the sustenance of the Church but in light of the great commission contained in Mark 16:15, the discipling challenge in Matthew 28:18-20, the teaching challenge of Luke 24, the mission challenge of John 20:21 and the global challenge of Acts 1:8, we have to be extremely careful to be stewards of His Church to not only sustain but grow it until Jesus Christ returns.

Let me begin by making a couple of definitions on the subject at hand before I share my research, experiences, reflections and conclude from these. Stewardship is "the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care." It is the conducting, supervising, or managing of something valuable. A steward owns nothing but manages

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everything. We truly are all stewards here on earth because His Word (the Bible) states “the earth is the Lord’s and all it contains.” Therefore, in the context of the Church, He owns it and we are here to manage it as stewards. But a more crucial issue to be considered is, “are we doing a good job with managing His Church?” The Church’s sustenance and strength judged by its growth and fulfilment of its mandate would be probably be the best way to make a judgement call. Sustainability is most often defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

I have had the privilege of having been ministered to around two broad categories of churches, namely the big old traditional western churches (namely Roman Catholic Church) and the new emerging evangelical churches. These two broad categories of churches offer interesting contrasts in terms of the stewardship and sustenance. I will begin with looking at the impressive and seemingly sustainable Roman Catholic Church (RCC) model and compare it with the smaller emerging local evangelical and Pentecostal churches that I am more familiar within my beloved nation of Zimbabwe. Hopefully we can learn something from this exercise.

I was born in 1966 in a Zimbabwean Methodist home where we keenly attended church and my parents were active members involved in supporting the Church. I then attended Roman Catholic Church (RCC) nursery, primary and secondary schools in the 70’s and 80’s where I took my religious studies carefully and even served in church albeit, I never was baptised as a Catholic. I then was exposed to the Anglican Church through visiting relatives and friends across cities in beautiful Zimbabwe and I was exposed to the majestic Catholic and Anglican cathedrals. I was always awed and overwhelmed by the wealth reflected by the colourful glass windows glimmering in the sunshine and the regal artworks of these traditional western churches.

My curious financial mind often questioned how these churches and cathedrals had come to be built and how they would be sustained given their very western roots post our 1980 Independence and its leaning to communism and the East. Clearly some of these churches continued to receive some form of support and subsidies from the parent churches overseas I assumed. I can also testify to witnessing some of the new local traditional Methodist, Catholic and Anglican churches being built with local funds that were subsidized by donations from overseas. The older I grew up and as a professional investment banker I often wondered “how did the RCC for example become such significant owners of magnificent properties?”

Take where I grew up in the 1960’s as an example of how the RCC has accumulated asset worth. My neighbourhood was a blue collar workers township enclave in the city of Harare. People weren’t poverty stricken but certainly were a long way from being wealthy. My Catholic nursery school was allocated land within the township which the RCC paid for over time

and they built the school and a small cathedral. A hundred years ago the land was cheap but now the land upon which it sits is worth several hundred thousand dollars. This scenario is repeated everywhere in Zimbabwe at the primary and secondary schools that I attended. In both instances farmland was acquired about a century ago and this is commonplace elsewhere in the world. The Church just had to stay in a place for long enough and its properties just kept growing in value. This of course is not a lot of use unless they need a loan and put a property up for collateral. The Church often can’t sell the property because it needs them for ongoing purposes, and there is nowhere else to go (which is why property values keep climbing). Also, worldwide the RCC has accumulated gifts that weren’t expensive when given, are now collector’s items and worth a lot of money. This classic model remains the same today for churches to acquire land from local authorities through time, build facilities and in the course of time these appreciate in value thereby increasing the net worth of churches.

From a global viewpoint, the RCC is the oldest contiguous Christian community in the world. It currently has in excess of 1.3 billion adherents bearing in mind that the earth has a population of 7 Billion occupants. The RCC has been around for at least 1500 years as a social institution since the fall of the Roman Empire. In that time period it has received endowments from deceased estates which it used to build hospitals, schools, aged care facilities & churches, and allowed this Church to finance missions throughout the world and no doubt that Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) was one such

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a beneficiary. As a consequence the RCC is said to be asset rich but liquidity poor (little cash). The RCC will normally state that it isn't rich and self-sustaining as such, it just has a lot of ancient assets that are on paper worth a lot of money, but realistically, because they are still in use, can't be sold and can't be readily replaced.

From various sources on the internet, I learned that the RCC is the richest religious organization in the world, followed by the Mormon Church. The RCC is divided into; Catholic Church Vatican, Catholic Church Australia and Catholic church Germany. All the sub-branches independently make it to our list of top ten wealthiest churches in the world. The total net worth of the Catholic churches is the sum of all worth from the above-mentioned countries. I learnt that in different nations globally they have church-owned properties, including churches, presbyteries, schools, nursing homes, hospitals, offices, tennis courts, art collections, gold and even mobile phone towers. But beyond real estate, there was superannuation funds, telecommunications investments, Catholic Church Insurance and Catholic Development Funds, which serve as an internal treasury for their sustenance. The RCC also gets its money much the same way that any other church gets money i.e. from parishioners, rents, and investments. Catholics for Renewal's, Peter Johnstone, a corporate governance consultant, said most Catholics would have no idea about the extent of the church's assets because they tend to be conservatively valued at historical costs and are rarely ever marked to market. There is no doubt, however, that between the church's priceless art, land, gold and investments

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across the globe, it is one of the wealthiest institutions on Earth.

Since 313 A.D., when Catholicism became the official religion of the Roman Empire, its power has been in near-constant growth. Bankers' best guesses about the Vatican's wealth put it at US\$10 billion to US\$15 billion (bn). Of this wealth, Italian stockholdings alone run to US\$1.6 bn, 15% of the value of listed shares on the Italian market. The Vatican has big investments in banking e.g. Vatican Bank valued at US\$3, 2 bn, insurance, chemicals, steel, construction, & real estate. The Vatican is one of the most religious and richest states around the world. The place is a pilgrimage for Roman Catholics, which makes it the cynosure of wealth and riches. It is difficult to estimate its worth, but statistics suggest that the state is worth around US\$15 bn. It is astonishing for such a small state with this low population to hike up to that magnificent worth. The city-state owns valuable assets, which make it the centre of attraction for tourists and add up to its value. The venerable church attracts more people than the city-state itself. The magnificent infrastructure of various churches and chapels in the state is nowhere else to be found. The St. Peter's Basilica is the world's largest basilica. It forms the centrepiece of the Vatican, where St. Peter was buried. Moreover, the Sistine Chapel, built by Pope Sixtus IV in 1473-84, augments the beauty of the state. Moreover, the Vatican holds valuable artwork by

revered artists like Michelangelo and Raphael. The price of the artwork increases with time. Hence, the worth of the Vatican is on an unimpeded growth. Some of these works are considered "priceless." Ironically, they add up the most to the value.

Additionally, the Vatican City has a number of investments from foreign and native investors. It owns shares worth billions. Some of the investment giants are Gulf oil, Shell, General Electric, etc. This makes it a significant hub for business along with its divine aroma, which results in a meteoric increase in wealth. The wealth of the Catholic Church includes valuable items such gold – often found in ceremonial items, church furnishings and artworks – is something that was amassed through the efforts of religious individuals and clergy who built cathedrals and churches, furnished them, and dedicated it all to the glorification of God.

Obviously depending on the RCC religious order and country, Diocesan priests may draw a taxable salary (at times required by labour laws in various countries). Those involved in charitable institutions (hospitals, schools aged care etc.) are generally exempt from labour laws, and usually don't receive a salary, just a stipend as mentioned. Its clergy do not receive a salary per se, often just a room to sleep in, food in the belly and a small stipend to buy essential personal items. This has been so over centuries as this

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church maintains that it has got just enough cash flow (money) to support its millions of clergy and upkeep its buildings and charities.

The RCC gives more than anyone to feed world hunger regardless of their religion, it is the largest charitable organization in the world. They house the homeless, have Pantries, and shelters. Catholic Charities have provided food, clothing, shelter and a network of support services to people of all ages and from all walks of life and religious backgrounds. St. Jude's, and America's Second Harvest alone total US\$5.57bn which is greater than number one on the list for America. Keep going down the list and you find Father Flanagan's homes, Catholic Medical Mission Board, Covenant House, and more. Add the thousands of other charities, from Missionaries to the Poor, Amigos for Christ, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, to religious orders (like Missionaries of Charity) and thousands upon thousands of individual parishes across the globe who often do their work in anonymity, and you will see some of the charitable works of the Catholic Church. Catholic Priests in the US live very modest lives making \$ 25,000–\$30,000 a year, and live in parish rectories. Compared to the Mormon Church who state they have no paid clergy, general authorities' salaries increased from \$116,400 to \$120,000. In 1996, with homes in the US\$1 million dollar range. Some religions feed only their own hungry, the Catholic Church feeds all of the hungry regardless of their religion. And that's exactly how

God will separate the sheep from the goats, by the love that they have for their fellow mankind, God's sheep feed everyone especially the unbelievers in hopes a few may follow, where the goats were selfish and fed only their own. I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me (Matthew 25:45)

I also took an interest in the Church of England from whence came our former colonial masters in Zimbabwe as its church was quite prevalent where I grew up. This church is also asset rich but is facing a decline in active church members, an attendant decrease in income, while the costs stay the same or rise. Solution strategies focus on improving the occupancy rate of the buildings through multifunctional use or finding alternative housing, taking the current church building out of service. Overseas hundreds of their clergy are in financial hardship, with some resorting to credit cards or even a high-interest payday lender, despite the Church of England sitting on a multibillion-pound investment fund. Some vicars are tens of thousands of pounds in debt, with many struggling to survive – especially those supporting families – and relying on charity hand-outs to make ends meet, the Guardian has learned. The Clergy Support Trust – a centuries-old charity which supports “destitute Anglican vicars, assistant or associate priests, curates-in-training and chaplains gave £1.8m worth of grants to 459 clergy in 2018 for example.

Analysis in 2018 year found that 217 individuals who had applied to the charity for help had personal unsecured debts of £5,000 or more, totalling nearly £3m. The figures, based on a combination of grant application data over a 20-month period, do not include mortgages or student loans. Of the 217, 41% had debts of between £5,000 and £10,000, 44% between £10,000 and £20,000, and 15% over £20,000. Four applicants had debts in excess of £50,000.” (Source <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/14/attendance-church-of-england-sunday-services-falls-again>)

These lingering and increasing issues raise questions over whether the Canterbury of England should be doing more to help impoverished vicars given that it has an investment fund worth £8.3bn and is paying asset management executives six-figure sums, including one who earned more than £530,000 last year. The archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby – who has two grace-and-favour homes including Lambeth Palace – is paid £83,400 and last year attacked Amazon for not paying a living wage and railed against poverty. The bishop of Buckingham, the Right Rev Alan Wilson, told the Guardian “there's always more to be done” to help financially struggling clergy. “Clergy people's circumstances and the stresses of ministry are becoming more complex and diverse all the time,” he said. “Often people are kind and there is help out there, but there are holes in what's available.” (Source <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/14/attendance-church-of-england-sunday-services-falls-again>)

Owen-Jones, who was a stipendiary priest earlier in his career, added:

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“What’s happening is that the church is increasingly relying on what they call ‘self-supporting’ ministers and ‘house-for-duty’ priests. “Essentially, non-stipendiary priests, self-supporting priests are subsidising that institution [the Church of England] as things currently stand. At the moment I believe it’s been happening under the counter. We need to have a frank and open discussion about whether the church can afford to maintain its working apparatus or whether there needs to be root-and-branch reform, given the declining number of people that are going to church in England and given the expectations that are placed upon the church by the state. At the moment it’s not adding up.”

The financial statements of 112 dioceses of the Church of England surveyed in 2018 for example showed that they—along with the churches and schools they operate—collected at least \$1.5 billion in Paycheck Protection Funds, even though, the AP reports, most of those dioceses had enough cash reserves to operate for six months with no revenue coming in at all. The fact that the market quickly recovered—and then grew—meant that many of the dioceses relying on investment vehicles likely made money on the pandemic. The Archdiocese of Chicago, for example, had more than \$1 billion in cash and investments as of May, yet its affiliated institutions collected \$77 million in Paycheck Protection Funds.

I would like to close off my reflections on the subject matter on the subject of emerging evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe and their sustainability. Interestingly Dr Judith Mwenje, a

prolific researcher in the area in one of her papers states “Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are growing at a fast rate and [their] growth strategies are of paramount importance. A number of strategies are employed by individual churches at a different rate. The rate at which a certain strategy is used determines the growth of the church in terms of numerical growth, financial growth and spiritual growth. The main growth strategy that Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe use is that of evangelism, healing and care ministry.” As a result we have seen rapid growth of these churches at rates that have surpassed the traditional churches of western origin. The biggest such church for example has managed to establish three schools, a hospital and a private university and this is most commendable considering the number of years of existence. Such churches reflect that the African churches have been fast learners of sustainable practices together with the steady accumulation of assets and growing membership.

Rebecca Simon-Peter is credited with coming up with a “Five P’s small church sustainability model” which resonates with what I personally witnessed during the growth of the two Pentecostal churches that I have been involved with; them namely, people, prayer, provision, partnership and presence. Quoting from her works:

Firstly on people she says that the most important feature of a small congregation is its people. There are three factors to consider when evaluating how many people make for a sustainable congregation. First, churches with fewer than 20 committed members or participants of average income will have a

hard time staying afloat or being in ministry to others. Second, congregations need at least three generations—not counting the pastor and the parsonage family—to be sustainable. Third, consider the culture of the people. Are people closed off or caring?

The Second most important factor is prayer. Without a spiritual foundation, your church is not sustainable, no matter the size or the budget. In addition to having a prayer chain, do you begin meetings with prayer, pray for guidance during decision-making time, and then follow the guidance? Prayer is the key to cooperation with God, as well as to sorting through the many choices that are before you. Your congregation must be firmly grounded in prayer to succeed.

Thirdly, she states that provision is key for small churches support themselves financially, often through a combination of tithing, memorial gifts, endowments, special funds, and fundraisers. Beware a few pitfalls. First, big givers should contribute no more than 25% of the congregation’s budget for long-term sustainability. Your large givers will eventually move or die. Second, endowments should not fund more than 25% of the church budget. Endowments relieve the urgency for attendees to become givers or to give sacrificially. Third, don’t rely on in-person giving only; this dynamic undermines sustainability. Instead encourage people to set up automatic “stop-order” donations to the church or other forms of online giving.

Fourth she identifies partnerships as being key. Churches with people, prayer, and provision need to form

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community partnerships to ensure sustainability. As you transition out of the pandemic, create ways for your building to become multiuse. Some common ways are to rent space to a pre-school, a school, a local non-profit, and/or one or more 12-step groups. But first don't forget to clean out the closets, reconfigure storage space, and let go of items that have fallen out of use. This will create more space for your partners.

Finally, the last one being presence. Now that you have people, prayer, provision, and partnership, it's time to amplify your community presence. Establish and keep up a Facebook page as well as a website. But if the website can't be maintained, better not to have it. Don't forget small town newspapers, radio stations, and grocery store bulletin boards. The more you show up in the community, the more people will know where to turn when they need you."

If ever the Church has been tested it has been during the COVID-19 era. I am aware that a couple of small churches literally failed to sustain themselves in Zimbabwe and closed down. Some if not most churches, both large and small resorted to online church during the peak of the pandemic in 2020 till 2021. As restrictions began to be eased the small churches settled for the church at home model is similar to a home school model. Small congregations that never stopped meeting or continued to meet for the most part against regulations paid special attention to protecting at-risk populations e.g. folks who are unvaccinated and this made them more sustainable. People were asked to mask, to sit six or more feet apart during worship, and were compelled to use hand sanitizer. The value of meeting together, even under these conditions, cannot be over emphasized. People-to-people contact, worshipping in community, and the joy of seeing familiar faces — while keeping safety practices in place — boosted the spirit and made glad hearts speaking to the essence of sustaining the churches because they were able to receive offerings albeit in reduced amounts due to the tough economic conditions.

As the restrictions began to be done away with in Zimbabwe (and indeed elsewhere), it has been evident within both big and small churches that some congregants have not returned posing some serious challenges to their incomes. Congregants may have opted out either because of safety concerns or because they just got out of the habit of going to church. This is within itself a dangerous precedent as we saw that this has ruined churches sustainability overseas. Under the circumstances, developing a hybrid model of church and some education may be the best bet for sustenance. Mailing offering envelopes or giving people an opportunity to give online is now an option that has to be weighed seriously. Whatever model of church one is using, there is one challenge that must be avoided; that is the tendency of many churches to under-communicate when facing challenges. Churches that under-communicate assume that everyone already knows what is happening. This dangerous assumption ensures that you will leave people out as you make changes. When you lose contact with your congregation, you weaken the bonds that will bring people back when it's safe. Instead, regular communication allows you to stay connected with your people and to implement the worship and Christian education tips outlined above. Church growth, spiritual development of congregants and financial sustainability through prudent stewardship over the church are imperative for us to sustain the church.

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Ecclesia Today, 1 April
to 30 June 2022



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Christian Digital Magazine